

BUILDING A POSITIVE ADULT CULTURE IN URBAN TURNAROUND SCHOOLS:  
A CASE STUDY ANALYSIS OF TWO SECONDARY SCHOOLS

by

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## APPROVAL

The abstract and dissertation of T. J. Jarchow for the Doctor of Education in Leadership were presented April 2016, and accepted by the examining committee.

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## ABSTRACT

Effective turnaround school leadership is a difficult proposition even for the most skilled leaders, yet is direly needed to support student outcomes in Americas most challenging schools. The scale of the challenge is of epic proportions as 5,000 to 6,000 schools across the country are struggling, as defined by *chronically* low student achievement, and are eligible for school improvement funding. The purpose of this study is to examine turnaround leadership through a people-first, culture-based lens, providing turnaround leaders a potential road map to follow in their journey of doing the cultural work required with their educators in these turnaround schools. To this end, the study was guided by two questions: (1) To what extent do urban school leaders improve school culture for adults in a purposeful and intentional way during the initial stages of the turnaround process; and (2) how and to what degree do turnaround leaders use the accelerators posited in the conceptual framework to guide school turnaround? A qualitative approach, in which the rich story of three turnaround leaders in two schools, is used to answer these questions. Findings articulate that turnaround leaders combine purposefulness with their own unique natural leadership attributes to impact their adult culture in the initial stages of turnaround. Furthermore, the accelerators presented in the framework were each used by turnaround leaders at varying extents depending on the context of their school, the stage of turnaround, and the accelerators they felt matched their own leadership strengths. Additional accelerators, lying outside the conceptual framework, were uncovered for consideration in building a positive adult culture in turnaround. In addition, considerations for turnaround leaders, recommendations for districts, and suggestions for future research involving priming an adult culture ready for turnaround are discussed providing optimism to turnaround leaders.

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## DEDICATION

To my family.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

#### **Background of the Study**

Let me start by saying I have become an optimist with a glass half-full approach who believes **there is hope**. When groups of seemingly ordinary people unite, they can achieve the **extraordinary**. And I believe in not accepting limitations. That it, no matter what it is, **can be accomplished**. Pastor, author, and educator Charles Swindoll is ever so important in exemplifying this line of thought. He states: Life is 10% what happens to you and 90% how you react to it (np). Swindoll is describing having a positive mindset, which for me was a state developed through years of experiences mired by struggles that built resiliency and character. These experiences are like adventures, the collection of which comprise my leadership story. The experiences are also paramount to my belief system, guiding the heart of the work I had the chance to be a part of as a leader in a turnaround school.

A concrete definition of what turnaround is in public school education is somewhat elusive (Hansen & Choi, 2012). In 2009, the U.S. Department of Education defined the lowest five percent of the schools in the United States as needing turnaround, earmarking School Improvement Grants (SIG) for these schools as assistance (Hansen & Choi, 2012; McNeil, 2009). Labeling of schools based on achievement is a common practice that has increased over the last 20-30 years in the United States, as a response aligned with state and federal legislation (Leithwood & Strauss, 2008; Mintrop & Trujillo, 2005). The most notable of these pieces of legislation was at the federal level, the “No Child Left Behind” or NCLB introduced in 2001. According to NCLB, non-improving schools were labeled as failing, and resources in the form of “turnaround funding” were made available to schools to help right the ship (Hoff, 2007; Mintrop

& Trujillo, 2005). Frequently turnaround schools in public education are defined solely by low student achievement scores in mathematics and literacy (Duke, 2006; Hoff, 2007; Leithwood & Strauss, 2008).

The use of very narrow definitions of turnaround could be very misguided in education, leaving out large segments of schools needing improvement. For instance, Hansen & Choi (2012) used student achievement data to identify nearly 15 percent of schools in both Florida and Kentucky, and 30 percent of schools in Texas, as needing turning around. These numbers are much greater than the five percent eligible for SIG turnaround funding from the United States Department of Education. Leithwood and Strauss (2008) argue turnaround occurs in a much broader sense, with different stages marked by declining performance, crisis stabilization, and sustaining and improving. Narrow definitions of turnaround would tend to ignore schools barely averting stages of declining performance, or ones that might be headed back down the pathway of needing turnaround due to failure to sustain improvements (Duke, 2006).

Differences in context from turnaround school to turnaround school also persist, making the imposition of these labels and the resulting corrective actions a point of contention (Mintrop & Trujillo, 2005). Schools differ within districts, states, and regions in terms of student ethnicity, student social economic status, teacher experience, community support, access to professional development, culture, and funding. Comparisons in a one-size fits-all accountability system are murky at best, as it is tough to compare how a predominantly minority urban school with low income students in one district is faring compared to a non-diverse suburban school comprised of high income students in another district.

Complicating matters further, school districts across a state and the nation have varying levels of support (Duke, 2006). Districts seemingly very similar in their makeup can be vastly



different in the amount of funding and community support they are provided (Roza, 2006). For instance, bond programs for capital improvements in a school district are nearly always decided by a local election. In addition, state funding structures for schools often differ from state to state. As an example, Wiener and Pristoop (2006) found that 26 out of 49 states studied underfunded their highest poverty schools. Complicating matters further is the varying structures of state support for education sent by the Federal Government to schools, and various levels of rigor of the accountability systems within each state. In addition, the federal government funding to the highest needs schools is unequal from state to state (Liu, 2006; Wiener & Pristoop, 2006). As an example, federal Title One funding in 2004 for a student in poverty in Wyoming was nearly triple what it was for a student in Texas (Lui, 2006). All of these contrasting variables serve as evidence that unilaterally labeling schools across the United States as failures is an ambiguous process at best.

Regardless of the variables from school to school, any school has room for improvement. This includes schools labeled as failing and in need of turnaround; however, using state accountability ratings as the only means to measure this improvement is an over utilized and unwarranted practice (Hanson & Choi 2012; Kane & Staiger 2001). Often times these turnaround efforts fail only because they do not improve at the rate required by the very same accountability system that labeled them as failing in the first place (Elmore, 2008). Simply put, the schools cannot keep up with state and/or federal accountability thresholds that often times increase to a greater standard each year. On the other hand, turnaround and school improvement is attainable as evidenced each year by schools making the mark and sustaining turnaround (Allen, 2010; Duke, 2004; Duke & Salmonowicz, 2010; Leithwood & Strauss, 2008). Furthermore, while schools labeled low performing often times have very low student

achievement, they also have the greatest opportunity for growth and improvement due to student achievement being substandard. As such, turnaround is important not only in the schools labeled as low performing, but also in those nearly averting negative labels. This study will focus on the broader subset of turnaround schools and what makes them successful.

### **Statement of Problem**

An estimated 48 percent of the schools in the United States did not meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) as defined by No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in 2011 (Usher, 2012). NCLB requires schools to meet AYP in reading and math, or face sanctions. Nearly 5,000-6,000 of these schools across the country are struggling, as defined by *chronically* low student achievement and need restructuring (Mead, 2012; Pallin, 2010). To complicate matters 50 percent of the dropouts in the United States are coming from an estimated 2,000 of these chronically low-performing schools (Allen, 2010; Khadaroo, 2011). Many of these schools in need of turnaround are located in either urban areas or rural areas where students share a low socio-economic status. A majority of the students in these schools are African American or Hispanic (Lachlan-Hache, Naik, & Casserly, 2012).

The obstacles of working with urban students in poverty are well documented and prevalent in an overwhelming majority of these low-performing schools (Achievement Gap, 2011; Jensen, 2009; Reis, Colbert, & Hebert, 2005, Swanson, 2009). Students in poverty fall behind at an early age compared to their more privileged counterparts with over 50 percent of low-income students being deficient in Reading, leading to a vicious cycle of trying to catch up (Musti-Rao & Cartledge, 2007). Out of school obstacles that include not having access to important services such as medical facilities, libraries and books, access to pre-K, and/or academically rich experiences complicate matters further (Jensen, 2009; Kozol, 1995). Scarcity

of funding for essential needs is often a causal factor as to why students in poverty get behind quickly, and lack access to these extra services (Tavernise, 2012). However, students in low-performing schools also face numerous in-school obstacles. For instance, teacher quality and experience are usually lagging for teachers serving students in poverty compared to their more privileged peers (Brearden, 2006). This often results in brand new teachers working with high needs students who are several years behind in reading and/or math. In addition, facilities in urban high poverty areas are usually lagging behind suburban areas, making culture building in low income schools difficult as building school pride in dilapidated facilities can be challenging (Hunter, 2009; Kozol, 1995). While access to technology in poverty-ridden urban schools has increased, gaps still exist especially in teacher readiness to utilize new technologies effectively (Gordon, 2011; Wachira & Keengwe, 2011). These are only a few examples in which the students who need the help most, whether in school or out of school, seemingly get it the least.

Reform movements as a result of NCLB at the national level have provided the means necessary to provide funding to struggling schools to assist in the turnaround efforts. For instance, schools failing to meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) receive federal money that increases based on the number of consecutive years of low performance (Hoff, 2007; Mintrop & Trujillo, 2005), and with these monies schools can begin the work of closing the achievement gap for their students with low socioeconomic backgrounds. Often schools attempt, with various levels of success, to close the gap by using the money for intensive professional development, restructuring, tutoring for students, increasing staff to provide added services or to reduce class size, and/or allowing students access to acceleration opportunities (McNeil, 2009).

A focus on evaluating the use of this money and the leadership in low income schools has become a priority for policy makers and researchers. In reviewing the work on the importance of

leadership in schools, evidence points toward teaching and school leadership as areas having the most in-school influence on student achievement (Hallinger, 2003; Leithwood & Strauss, 2008; Marzano, McNulty, & Waters 2003). For instance, a total of 58 percent of the in-school impact on student learning is attributed to classroom teachers and school leaders, with 33 percent of the impact coming from classroom teachers, and 25 percent coming from principals (Marzano et al., 2003; Whitmire, 2012). In addition, among in-school factors the level of impact of leadership is second only to teaching in a school in affecting student achievement (Leithwood et al., 2004; Branch, Rivkin, & Hanushek, 2013). This evidence suggests the use of the money should be linked to teaching, learning, and leadership.

The impact principals have in a school could be magnified since principals directly affect the work of teachers by guiding their growth and development process. Principal actions that can lead to developing teachers include, but are not limited to: hiring, providing professional development, developing systems, providing feedback, and being sources of motivational guidance. In summary, leadership itself serves as a catalyst for unleashing that which an organization is capable and is a critical component of school turnaround (Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008). Over the course of the last decade, educational researchers have begun to settle on somewhat similar sets of components, common principles, competencies, and/or essential strategies as loosely guided roadmaps to turnaround work (Duke, 2006; Leithwood, 2008; Marzano et al., 2003; Public Impact, 2008).

The common element of needing a positive adult culture within a turnaround school is embedded into these researched-based components. (Copeland & Neeley, 2012; Duke, 2004; Duke, 2006; Leithwood & Sun, 2012; Leithwood & Strauss, 2008). By nature, turnaround work requires leaders to engage in change, and part of the transformation is to build a culture of

change within an organization. While a positive culture is a common theme across each set of components posited by each researcher, policymakers have seemed to yield to the strategies involved in turnaround being more important, than the naming of “culture” itself as an essential component (Lachlan-Hache et al., 2012; McNeil, 2009). Therefore there seems to be a conflicting relationship between research and practices driven by policy. Building a positive adult culture could very well be deserving of more attention as a component taking central stage in a leader’s engagement with turnaround work. Furthermore, policymakers’ focus on systems without a focus on culture could be misguided. Culture, for instance, trumps systems in overall importance for turnaround, yet both are needed for improvement in an organization (Merchant, 2011). More research involving telling the journey and/or process leaders take in moving educators they lead through the re-culturing process in turnaround work is needed in order to continue to fill the gap between research and policy driven practices in turnaround schools.

### **Definition of Key Terms/Phrases Often Associated with Turnaround**

Included in this research are several terms associated with turnaround in which the definition could be considered broad in meaning. These terms are often referred to in the study, but could be considered ambiguous to the reader. The following definitions of the broad based terms are brought forth in order to help provide clarity in the dissertation:

#### **Common Vision**

An idea presented by a turnaround leader articulating the short-term and long-term direction of the organization providing an end in mind goal. When this articulation of vision is genuine, people excel and learn not because they are directed to, but because they want to (Senge, 1990). When coupled with the *why* guidance is provided to the organization.

## **Culture**

A school's culture is representative of the way it does business every day. Culture is comprised of groups of people who come together around a common set of values and beliefs (Sinek, 2009). More complexly, according to Barth (2001), it is the "pattern of norms, attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, values, ceremonies, traditions, and myths deeply ingrained in the very core of the organization (p. 8)".

### **Positive Adult Culture**

A positive adult culture within a school is one in which the educators have reached a tipping point where a majority of adults are moving work forward collaboratively

## **Trust**

Trust can be defined through the lens used by Daly (2009). Daly defines trust as how one engages in a relationship and is willing to be vulnerable to another. Engagement and vulnerability are specifically focused on the interactions and confidence one party has on the other in regards to the values of benevolence, competence, integrity, openness, reliability, and respect as partially described by Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (1999).

## **Turnaround**

Turnaround is a dramatic change as documented by student achievement gains led by the changes in an organization that assist in achieving these gains. Often times this dramatic improvement begins or starts in the area of literacy, as literacy improvements can guide work in other content areas (Duke, 2006).

### **Turnaround Leadership**

Turnaround leadership is being able to serve a group of stakeholders to undertake a central motivating mission, through being effective and efficient in moving the organization

using the mindset of continuous improvement to garner changes in student achievement at a somewhat substantial rate. The word “serve” is the key word in this definition, as turnaround leadership is in itself a relationship built upon the interactions with key stakeholders, enabling these stakeholders to be successful within the context of the motivating mission.

### **Turnaround Schools**

For the purposes of this study, a “turnaround school” is a school designated as making relatively quick improvements in student achievement after consistently struggling predominately in math and/or reading (e.g., Duke, 2006; Hoff, 2007; Leithwood & Strauss, 2008). In addition, these schools are receiving, or were receiving, state and/or federal government funding to accelerate the turnaround.

### **Use of the Word “educators”**

Throughout this study, the word educators will be used to describe those who come in contact with students to move forward a schools’ mission. Although teachers make up the biggest segment of those included in the grouping of educator, there are many more people or “educators” that support kids in addition to teachers. The use of the word educators in this study attempts to break up the divisions created by titles within a school. Simplifying adult cultural building work done in a school to just teachers and principals is unjust due to the magnitude of the work itself.

### **Purpose of Study/Research Questions**

The purpose of this study is to examine turnaround leadership through a people-first, culture-based lens, providing turnaround leaders a potential road map to follow in their journey of doing the culture work required in school turnaround. The study focuses primarily on how leaders galvanize the educators they lead to build a positive culture in turnaround schools. I

combined the conceptual framework presented in the study with the stories of two turnaround schools and their leadership stories to be able to gain a better understanding of various processes used to build a positive adult culture while engaging stakeholders in the change process of school turnaround. More specifically, I sought to understand the extent school leaders consciously or unconsciously use the conceptual framework to build and sustain a positive adult culture in the turnaround process leading to positive outcomes for those that matter most: the students.

To this end, the study was guided by two questions:

- (1) To what extent do urban school leaders improve school culture for adults in a purposeful and intentional way during the initial stages of the turnaround process?
- (2) How and to what degree do turnaround leaders use the accelerators posited in the conceptual framework to guide school turnaround?

### **Significance of the Study**

Turnaround work in schools may be more susceptible to failure than it is prone to success. According to Marzano, Waters, & McNulty (2005), and as supported by Steiner & Hassel (2011), most efforts at school turnaround fail primarily because the “leadership support is not consistent with the order of magnitude required by the innovation (p. 66)”. In addition, one venture to a school improvement conference leads the participant to see the commercialization of packaged programs and improvement ideas labeled as guaranteed to lead to school turnaround. While many of these collective tools could very well be pieces of the greater puzzle for a particular school, the journey a school takes to achieve turnaround differs from school to school, leaving these tools as only potential pieces that would fit in a schools’ turnaround framework. Achievement gaps, struggling schools, and failed reforms persist in school turnaround efforts despite an unprecedented amount of money spent on scripted reform programs (Fullan, 2010).



Due to this problem, great caution should be paid to the local context of the struggling school and a framework of improvement that fits the context, rather than one size fits all magic bullets promoted as fixes for low-performing schools.

Despite these complex realities, new (and potentially unprepared) principals are placed in turnaround schools across the nation at the beginning of every school year (McLester, 2011). The hope is these new principals possess appropriate leadership skills to facilitate turnaround. However, through guidance and education on the topic of building a positive adult culture primed for change in turnaround schools, hope can turn into more certain outcomes for turnaround leaders. This study is significant for this very reason. It seeks to leverage the experiences of three successful turnaround leaders to provide insights to turnaround leaders of the present and the future. In doing so, the study recognizes improvement, and thus turnaround, is a process - not an event (Elmore, 2008).

Guidance for leaders in a turnaround school is paramount to the school and the students the school serves, as leadership within a school has a more profound impact than the programs used to turnaround the school (Leithwood & Strauss, 2008; Marzano et al., 2003; Whitmire, 2012). Competencies and actions of these leaders become more important than the programs they chose to implement (Copeland & Neely, 2012). Furthermore, many problems in schools are people problems, and people-not programs-lead to successful turnaround practices (Whitaker, 2007). The lens used in this study, and described in the conceptual framework, seeks to intertwine the understanding of the importance of leadership with an in-depth understanding of how leaders build a culture that mitigates the people problems in a school thus enhancing the strengths of educators. This makes the significance of this work even greater.

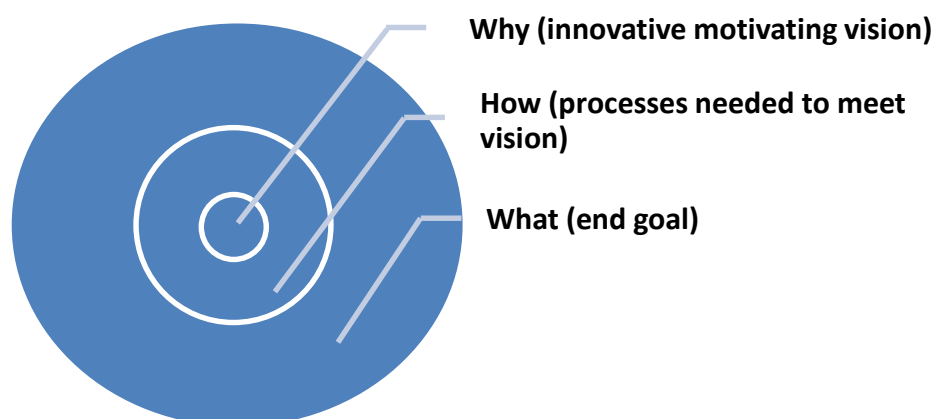
Another reason the study is significant is it will attempt to empower leaders by providing turnaround narratives on how leaders unleashed the potential for educators to improve teaching and learning in their schools. When teaching and learning improves, it has implications for students within a school, including their development and growth. Student growth leads to improved outcomes, and thus leads to students being more college and career ready once they enter society. Since leadership plays such a great role in school turnaround (Duke, 2006; Leithwood, 2008; Marzano et al., 2003; Public Impact, 2008), it has the potential to increase the percentage of engaged employees which in turn increases engagement with their students. This link to improving the long-term success of groups of students through a re-culturing of engaged educators, leading to improved teaching and learning, makes the study very valid and of great importance to the community of public school educators.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Leadership approaches and turnaround leadership have evolved from a focus on the individual as a leader to more of an acceptance of the collaborative nature of leadership within the group (Copland, 2003; Hallinger, 2003; Leithwood, & Jantzi, 2000; Stewart, 2006). These combined ideas are collectively referred to as the evolution of leadership approaches, and provide the foundation of the conceptual framework that informs this study.

A lens with two layers will be utilized in the conceptual framework to compare the six accelerators, or strategies that can speed up the improvement process of building a positive adult culture in a turnaround school, to the actual practices used by identified successful turnaround leaders. As aforementioned, much of the work of turnaround in our schools is “people work,” or work which is highly embedded in the emotional aspects of motivating human capital around a central-guiding vision (Duke, 2006; Leithwood & Strauss, 2006; Kowal & Hassel, 2011). This

“people work” is highly embedded in the conceptual framework. The *first* layer in the conceptual framework utilizes a portion of Sinek’s concept of the “golden circle.” Inside this golden circle is the *why* of an organization, or the clear purpose describing why the organization exists. According to Sinek (2009), leaders who focus on starting with the *why* in the golden circle are more successful, innovative, and garner greater buy-in due to starting with the *why* or the purpose of their organization. This central motivating purpose is clearly communicated to the key stakeholders in an organization rather than the how, what, or when in looking at how the organization operates (Sinek, 2009). Sinek clarifies this concept with the visual below:



**Figure 1. Sinek’s Golden Circle (Sinek, 2009, p. 37)**

Sinek describes the golden circle as one essential element of building a positive culture for those doing the work in an organization, and thus it would theoretically be a key starting point for school leaders. However, I hypothesizes the golden circle should be working simultaneously with several other research-based key elements involved in building a positive adult culture in a turnaround school context. For this framework, my stance is these elements would serve as accelerators for school turnaround. These six culture-based accelerators are not only grounded in sound research practice, but also can assist in providing a road map for school

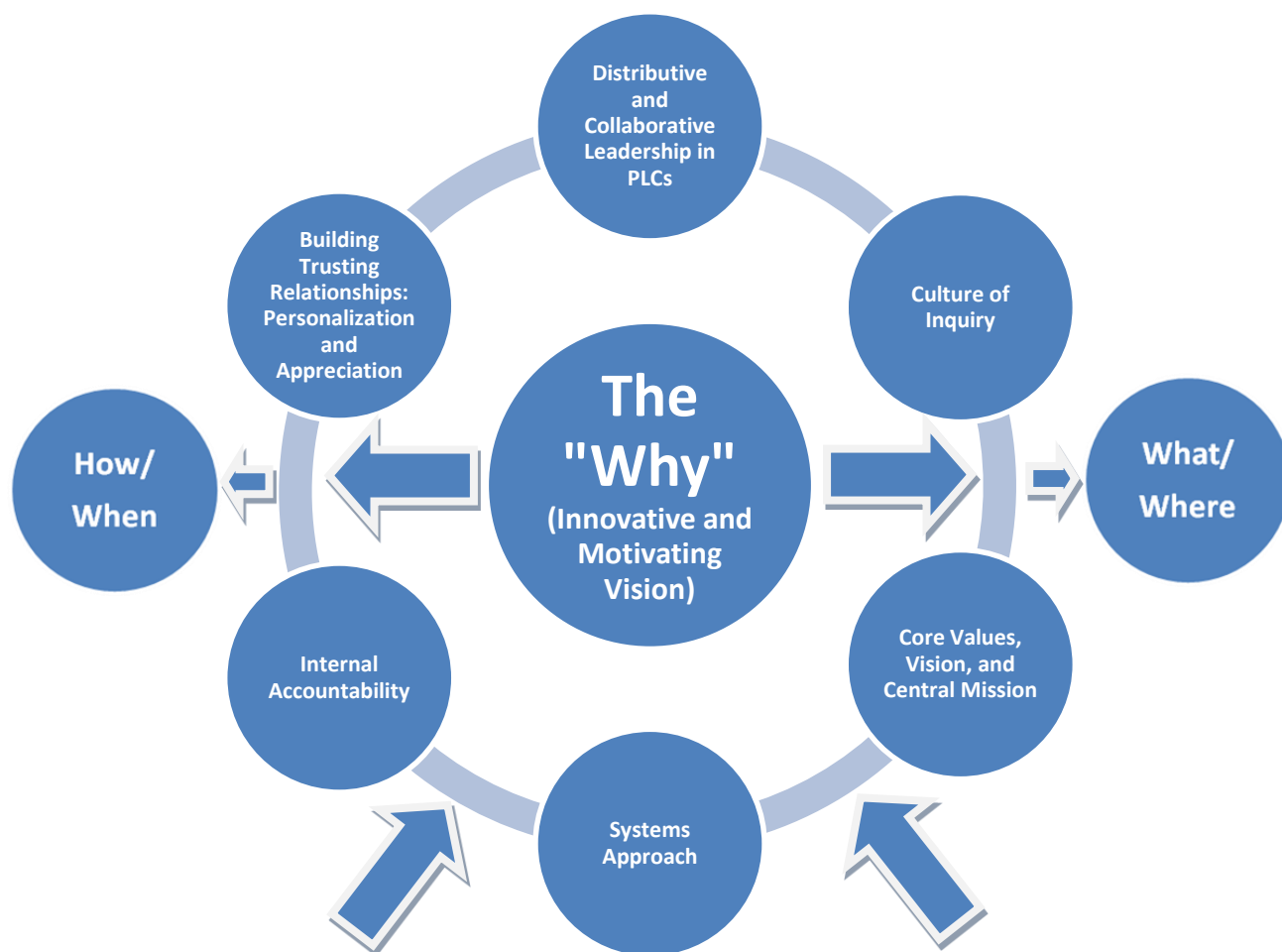
turnaround when appropriately nurtured by leaders. These accelerators serve as the *second* of two layers in the conceptual framework.

The first accelerator, building leadership capacity through a *collaborative and distributive leadership model*, requires professional learning communities (PLCs) to dialogue in promoting the *why* of an organization (Copland, 2003; Hallinger, 2003; Jackson, 2000; Leithwood, & Jantzi, 2008; Senge, 1990). This dialoguing promotes a second essential accelerator, or a *culture of inquiry* in an organization. A *culture of inquiry* allows for an organization to remain focused on how it gets to the *why* through openly discussing such items as data and improving instructional practices (Bennett, 2013; Bernhardt, 2009; Boudett, City, & Murnane, 2005; Earl & Katz, 2006; Lipton & Wellman, 2012; Mason, 2003; Sharatt & Fullan, 2012; Wayman, Jimerson, & Cho, 2012). While all the accelerators are tightly intertwined, distributed leadership and a *culture of inquiry*, may be the closest in alignment. For example, teachers come together to inquire and reflect on data when leadership is distributed to PLCs.

A third essential accelerator, expanding on the *why* through sustaining the focus of the *core values, vision, and a central mission* can lead to a motivational tipping point throughout an organization (Collins, 2001; Heath & Heath, 2010; Shoop & Scott, 1999; Senge, 1990; Quinn, 2010). In addition, core values, visions, and missions can guide the work of the organization. A fourth essential accelerator, using a *systems approach*, allows an organization to uphold time as sacred in a busy work environment making the *why* more attainable (Collins, 2001; Heifetz, & Linsky, 2002; Loehr, & Schwartz, 2004; Marzano et al., 2003; Senge, 1990). For example, schools with structured norms such as job descriptions, protocols for looking at student work, structures to address conflict, and/or methods to observe and share best practices tend to make the most of time within the organization.

A fifth essential accelerator, developing *internal accountability*, allows those in the organization to be accountable to the *why* not through outside organization monitoring, but by accountability being shared within the organization in the form of achieving personal mastery (Elmore, 2008; Senge, 1990; Shoop & Scott, 1999). When a group achieves personal mastery, the group as a collective whole improves. A last accelerator is *building trusting relationships through personalization and appreciation*. Building relationships across an organization through meaningful constructive feedback and showing appreciation is vital in motivating stakeholders to achieve building trust and the *why* (Chapman & White, 2011; Scott, 2002).

The two combined layers thus translate into the conceptual model diagramed below which will serve as basis to guide the qualitative study:



#### Theoretical Foundation: Evolution of Leadership Approaches

**Figure 2. Conceptual Framework (Building a Positive School Culture in Turnaround Schools)**

## Summary

School turnaround is a difficult to attain, but much needed due to the alarming numbers of schools in the category of school improvement especially at the urban school level. Building a positive adult culture in a turnaround school is one of several important pieces of turnaround puzzle facing turnaround leaders (Copeland & Neeley, 2012; Duke, 2004; Duke, 2006; Leithwood & Sun, 2012; Leithwood & Strauss, 2008); yet building this culture is not contextualized in turnaround policies involving school improvement. Hypothetically each of the aforementioned six accelerators can work inter-connectively not only with each other, but also with the innovative motivating mission, or the *why* within the organization to speed up turnaround for leaders. In addition, these accelerators could help fill the culture void that is absent with turnaround policy laying out a potential road map for turnaround schools in the journey of building an adult culture primed for turnaround. The turnaround journey of two schools was utilized in this research to determine the extent urban school leaders improve school culture in a purposeful and intentional way, and how these leaders use the accelerators posited in conceptual framework to guide school turnaround. Literature essential to understanding the concept of school turnaround, leading in a turnaround context, and use of each of the six accelerators is reviewed in chapter 2 of the study.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review will examine turnaround schools and their leadership in an effort to connect how turnaround leaders go about building a positive adult culture in their schools, and the extent these leaders use the accelerators posited in the conceptual framework. I begin by defining turnaround schools including their historical context, and then examine both the challenges and facilitators to improvement in turnaround schools. An overall review of the literature indicates leaders in turnaround contexts have tremendous challenges in improving student achievement which can be overcome by taking actions specific to the contexts (Duke, 2004 & 2008; Leithwood & Strauss, 2008; Public Impact, 2008).

Building a positive working culture is an element common to many of these actions in improving student achievement in turnaround schools (Copeland & Neeley, 2012; Duke, 2004; Duke, 2006; Leithwood & Sun, 2012; Leithwood & Strauss, 2008). Themes on how to build a positive adult culture in a turnaround school were developed into accelerators in the conceptual framework of the study (see Appendix A), with each accelerator being reviewed in depth in this chapter. This review includes the evolution of collaborative leadership approaches in organizations which serves as the foundation of the conceptual framework. In addition, this foundation supports the central theme of the conceptual framework which is the need for a central motivating mission described as the *why*. A comprehensive review of the literature also includes the additional themes which comprise the accelerators of the *why*; which are:

- (1) The use of *distributive and collaborative leadership through PLCs*,
- (2) The building a *culture of inquiry*,
- (3) Utilization of *core values, vision, and a central mission*,

- (4) Utilization of a *systems approach*,
- (5) Developing *internal accountability*, and
- (6) *Building trusting relationships through personalization and appreciation*.

The remainder of this literature review will work to elaborate on the connections between these accelerators and the context of leading in turnaround schools.

### **Turnaround Schools**

Narrowing down an exact definition of a turnaround school in the field of education is problematic (Gewertz, 2009; Hansen & Choi, 2012). Frequently, turnaround schools in public education are defined solely by low student achievement scores in mathematics and literacy (Duke, 2006; Hoff, 2007; Leithwood & Strauss, 2008). In addition to struggling with student achievement, turnaround schools are often defined by being placed on sanctions from a state or federal legislative body. Though these sanctions are often accompanied by funding, this funding is often tied to numerous requirements and mandates, intended to support turnaround (Hoff, 2007; McNeil, 2009). An understanding of the historical development of turnaround schools can begin to provide clarity to the origins of the term “turnaround school.”

### **Historical Development**

Labeling of schools based on achievement is a common practice that has increased over the last 20-30 years in the United States, as mandated by state and federal legislation (Leithwood & Strauss, 2008; Mintrop & Trujillo, 2005). The origins of this labeling began in the 1990’s with the idea of reconstitution of a school, or the action of removing and then replacing a majority of the school’s staff (Peck & Reitzig, 2014). Mintop and Trujillo (2005) present findings chronicling efforts of seven first-generation early-adopter states that set up accountability systems where corrective actions were required for low-performing schools.



These states (California, Florida, Kentucky, New York, Maryland, North Carolina, and Texas) varied in size and began high-stakes school accountability in the 1990's. By the year 2000, forty states had begun using test scores to rate schools (Kane & Staiger 2001).

The use of the phrase “school turnaround” became widely used a few years after the passage of the “No Child Left Behind” [NCLB] in 2001 (Peck & Reitzig, 2014). The federal policy required states to set a baseline for accountability through the formulation of standards and regular testing of these standards (NCLB, 2002). Schools were then held accountable to make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in order to have all students meet the state set standards by 2014 (NCLB, 2002). According to NCLB, non-improving schools were labeled as failing, and resources in the form of “turnaround funding” were made available to schools to help right the ship (Hoff, 2007; Mintrop & Trujillo, 2005). Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) documents using the terminology “turnaround” drastically increased after 2007 (Park & Reitzig, 2014), with only 17 hits for publication year 2005, as opposed to 158 in 2012. This provides evidence that the official idea of turnaround was at least partially connected to NCLB and AYP. Furthermore, the idea of turnaround is often thought to be externally driven by lack of meeting standards which are set by those outside the context of the school (Thielman, 2012).

### **Current Technical Definition of School Turnaround**

External pressures continued to fuel turnaround in 2009 as the federal School Improvement Grant (SIG) program was set up to help assist schools with low academic achievement. In using \$3.5 billion dollars of federal American Recovery and Relief Act (ARRA) funds, the federal government essentially overhauled how school turnaround would be funded (McNeil, 2009). In addition, the federal Race to the Top (RTT) initiative allocated \$4 billion more dollars in competitive funding to states interested in working on school turnaround

(Hansen & Choi, 2012; Herman et al., 2013). Both ARRA funded initiatives were set up to assist the lowest five percent of schools, which totaled nearly 15,000 schools nationwide (Hansen & Choi, 2012; Lachlan-Hache et al., 2012). The federal government not only changed the concept of turnaround by providing a much larger pot of funding, but for the first time provided strong direction on how the funding would be used (Herman et al., 2013; McNeil, 2009).

Four specific turnaround models were promoted by the federal government; turnaround schools were required to adopt one of these in order to accept the grant-based funding. These four models included the turnaround model, restart model, transformation model, and school closure (Klein, 2012; McNeil, 2009; Herman et al., 2013). According to McNeil (2009) the *turnaround model* required the district to hire a new principal for the school and give him/her the ability to re-hire nearly half the staff. In addition, the district was to give the principal much more autonomy over the instructional programs and operational flexibility. The *restart model* included closure of the school, and the subsequent reopening of the school as a charter school. The *transformation model* required the district to replace solely the principal, and required transforming teacher and school leader effectiveness. In addition, comprehensive instructional reforms were required in the transformation model. The last option of *school closure* required the school being closed to re-enroll students in a successful school within the same district. According to Lachlan-Hache et al. (2012) just over 70 percent of participating schools chose the transformation model, while 20 percent chose the turnaround model, and five percent chose the restart model.

## Challenges and Facilitators to Improvement

**Access to grant funds.** One of the current challenges to school improvement is access to grant funds. Both SIG grant funds and RTT funds were intended for the lowest 5 percent of schools, yet in 2011 an estimated 48 percent of the schools in the United States did not meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) as defined by No Child Left Behind (NCLB) (Usher, 2012). Schools that applied for SIG grants fell within three different need based tiers. These tiers ranged from Tier I, or most in need of assistance, to Tier III or least in need of assistance (Lazarin, 2012). Variances occurred in access to funds from state to state, as each state prioritized the need for funds differently (Center on Education Policy, 2012; Larzarin, 2012). For instance, according to Lazarin (2012) only 11 states were awarded money to Tier III schools during the first round of funding in 2011. In addition, only 831 tier I and II schools were awarded funding in 2011, leaving many needed schools untouched (Lachlan-Hache et al., 2012). While access to funding proved to be difficult, funding can lead to improvements in some schools when they have access to increased resources (Duke, 2004, 2006; Klein, 2011; Lachlan-Hache et al., 2012).

**Local context.** Local context of the school, district, or state receiving funds further presents itself as a significant barrier to turnaround in many other ways. For instance, each of the turnaround models requires significant changes to human capital, and/or new teacher evaluation systems (Klein, 2012). Many districts have struggled with the central office capacity needed to ensure large scale staff changes were successful. Even when wholesale changes to staff were completed and effective in some districts, retainment of teachers and leaders in turnaround schools was problematic (Center on Education Policy, 2012; McMurrer, 2012c). Large amounts of SIG money were also used in at least 32 states to hire consultants for

turnaround in order to assist the schools instructional programs; however, districts did not always have the capacity to vet these consultants (Center on Education Policy, 2012; Klein, 2012). Furthermore, school unions vary in power from state to state becoming obstacles to turnaround in several cases, especially in regards to pay for performance measures at the classroom level (McMurrer, 2012a; McNeil, 2009).

**Poverty.** Other challenges to school improvement other than access to grant funds and obstacles with local context exist for turnaround to be successful. Unfortunately, schools most in need of turnaround are in areas where students are struggling to get support due to extreme poverty (Achievement Gap, 2011; Jensen, 2009; Reis et. al., 2005; Swanson, 2009). Nearly 50 percent of schools getting Tier 1 or Tier 2 SIG assistance are located in larger urban areas, and 70 percent of students in all Tier 1 or Tier 2 schools nationwide qualify for meal programs (Lachlan-Hache et al., 2012). Therefore, these students are often not only in a turnaround setting, but also behind on their basic skills and in need of accelerated instruction. For instance, Musti Rao & Cartledge (2007) estimate that over 50 percent of students in schools with high poverty rates have reading deficiencies, which is a rate much higher than in schools with more privileged children.

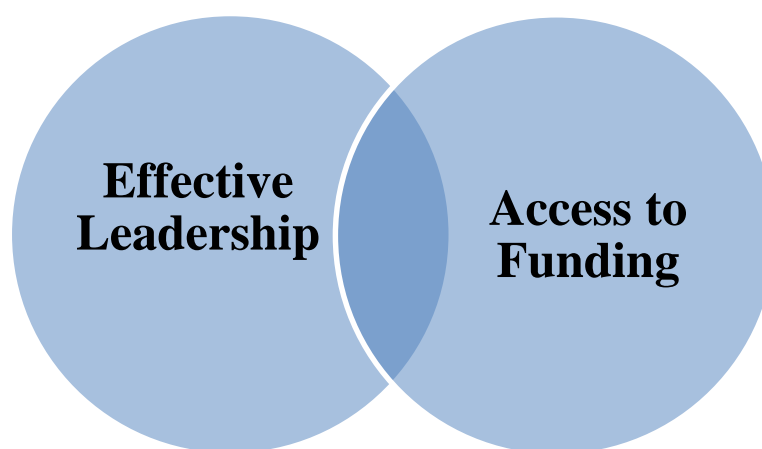
**Increased instructional time.** Other facilitators to school improvement exist, especially as it relates to providing access to improved instruction, and more instructional time in the classroom for at-risk students. Schools in SIG turnaround have reported success with extending student learning time in schools (Klein, 2012, McMurrer, 2012b). Gabrieli (2012) supports this idea by presenting three levels for increased learning time in school which include modifying teacher schedules, increasing partnerships to provide remediation, and the use of adaptive learning software geared toward individualizing instruction. When coupled with professional

development and instructional improvements on campus, the increased amount of class time can be further enhanced. Ruddy and Prusniski (2012) reported schools receiving Title I improvement funding had great success in increasing student achievement when their professional development was focused on the use of data within a community of teaching practitioners to refine practice in the classroom. Similarly, Hord (2004) supports the use of a community of practitioners using data collaboratively to refine and adjust instructional techniques coupled with extended learning opportunities to improve achievement. Ideas involving communities of practitioners increase instructional capacity at a school, and thus improve the chances of sustainability for turnaround. (Leithwood & Strauss, 2008; Walter, 2004)

**School culture.** Creating a school culture and climate primed for turnaround can be another facilitator of school improvement. Walter (2004) describes school culture as including a collaborative shared purpose, rich in success stories, interpersonal connections, and support in order to assist in sustainment of improvement. Similarly, in depth reviews of six SIG schools in Maryland, Michigan, and Idaho revealed teachers and administrators most often reported increased collaboration and an improved culture were leading to success in their schools (McMurrer, 2012a). In addition, successful SIG ARRA schools reported that changing the school culture was essential for quick turnaround to take place, especially when coupled with mass changes in staffing as a turnaround model (Center on Education Policy, 2012). These findings are concurrent with much of the research in the education field which presents specific actions for turnaround, actions that must be supported by a collaborative culture (Copeland & Neeley, 2012; Duke, 2004, 2006; Leithwood & Sun, 2012; Leithwood & Strauss, 2008).

**Leadership and funding.** Effective leadership carries great significance for successful school turnaround and/or school improvement (Duke, 2006; Leithwood & Strauss, 2008;

Marzano et al., 2003; Public Impact, 2008). Center on Education Policy (2012), Herman et al. (2013), and McNeil (2009) all present findings supporting effective school-level leadership being paired with funding as a successful recipe to school improvement as displayed in figure three. However, as aforementioned, access to funding is not always available, making leadership one of the most essential components to school turnaround efforts. Two relevant organizations supporting research on school turnaround echo these sentiments. Virginia's Turnaround Leadership Group supports, with relative certainty, the impact of school level leadership on turnaround with or without monetary assistance (Duke, 2004; Robinson, & Buntrock, 2011; Steiner & Hassel, 2011). In addition, the Canadian Education Association has dug deeply into turnaround leadership presenting findings that core leadership practices encompass most of what is required for turnaround (Leithwood & Strauss, 2008). It seems reasonable school level leadership has the potential to impact turnaround in spite of the obstacles of local context and monetary funding constraints, making leading in turnaround contexts a facilitator that is likely more important than access to funding.



***Figure 3: Keys for School Turnaround: Effective Leadership Paired with Funding***

## Leadership in Turnaround Contexts

Leadership in turnaround contexts presents a unique set of challenges and solutions compared to traditional schools not having to work as urgently toward improvement. In a two-year study of Ontario, Canada turnaround schools, albeit in another country, Leithwood and Strauss (2008) found turnaround leaders faced very predictable challenges, and solutions to these challenges, especially when the reality of declining performance was taking hold of the school. Similar studies in American schools exist. Almanzán (2005) conducted interviews in 18 schools working toward improvement, finding the solutions enacted by leaders toward improvement were somewhat similar from site to site. Duke (2006) conducted site observations at 15 turnaround elementary schools and found some similarity in leadership actions taken for successful turnaround. Each study emphasized the importance of understanding the stage of improvement the school was in, and/or the context of each school. In addition, common challenges and solutions could be contextualized in each study. A summary of the research on leadership in a turnaround context follows.

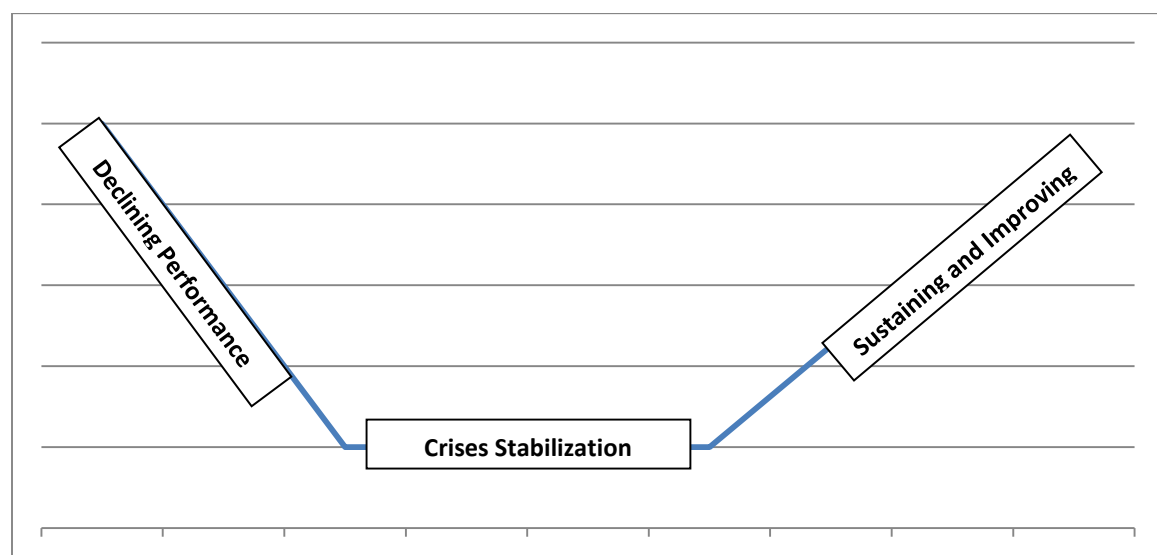
**Suggested competencies of leaders in a turnaround context.** Two relevant strands of research are focused on competencies of leadership in a turnaround context. Leithwood and Strauss (2008) present four essential competencies leaders must have in a turnaround setting including direction setting, developing people, redesigning the organization, and managing instruction. Leithwood and Sun (2012) reinforce these four competencies as being very similar to other turnaround models presented in large bodies of research they reviewed on transformational leadership in schools. Similarly, the University of Virginia Turnaround Leadership Program, started in the early 2000's, supports specific competencies required of turnaround leaders (Kowal et al., 2011). These competencies include leaders *driving for results*

to keep up a push for meeting a long term vision, *influencing for results* requiring leaders to motivate those they lead, *problem solving* to keep the organization moving toward goals, and *showing the confidence to lead* in order to stay the course in face of adversity (Public Impact, 2008).

**Leadership fitting the stages of turnaround.** Different stages of turnaround exist for leadership in turnaround contexts. Leithwood & Strauss (2008) clearly articulate three distinct stages of school turnaround which include declining performance, crises stabilization, and sustaining and improving; arguing leaders must understand the stage in order to pair up effective leadership strategies (see Figure 4) . Leadership actions could change in each of these stages. For instance, Duke and Landahl (2011) present findings that schools in the third year of turnaround must still look to make changes to continue improvement; however, they must not change successful processes initiated at the beginning of the turnaround process. In a study of 15 successful elementary turnaround schools, Duke (2006) found leadership practices varied based on the context of the school engaged in turnaround, and the length of time the school was engaged in the turnaround process. While the three defined tiers (Tier I, Tier II, and Tier III) involved in SIG grants are distinctly different than the stages presented by Leithwood & Strauss, there could be moderate alignment of the tiers to stages. For instance, Tier I SIG schools are often marked by extremely low academic performance with low expectations, low collaboration, and low morale (Scott, 2012) and are most likely in the stage of declining performance. Leithwood and Strauss (2008) present findings echoing these same characteristics in analyzing their three stages of school turnaround, with these characteristics being most prevalent in the declining performance stage. In addition, leadership in each SIG tier could be dependent on



which turnaround model is being used, which SIG tier a turnaround school is in, and how much funding the school receives (Klein, 2012; Lachlan-Hache et al, 2012).



**Figure 4: Stages of School Turnaround [Adapted from Leithwood & Strauss 2008]**

**Actions of turnaround leaders.** There are some common actions turnaround leaders take, or are recommended to take, that were apparent in the research base. Each of these common actions were linked to successful student outcomes in turnaround schools, and are described below.

**Collaborative practices.** One of these common actions is leaders supporting distributed leadership to teacher leaders through the use of collaborative practices (Dufour & Mattos, 2013; Leithwood & Strauss, 2008; Leithwood & Sun, 2012). Duke (2006) found that all 15 turnaround schools he studied increased their teamwork and collaboration. He called collaboration one of the essential skills to turnaround, reminding turnaround leaders they cannot do the work alone. Copeland and Neely (2012) suggest instructional leadership must be promoted beyond the principal in order for turnaround leaders to be successful. Dufour and Mattos (2013) and Hord (2004) advocate for principal support of professional learning communities as a trigger for school improvement. Dufour and Mattos also presented findings that learning communities are

more important for teachers due to their sustainability than less sustainable actions such as incentives for performance or classroom feedback on instruction at the secondary school level. Furthermore, Leithwood and Sun (2012) provide analysis of transformational research where principals setting up collaborative structures in schools have the highest positive effect on school conditions.

**Data use.** The use of data is another common theme in the research on leadership in a turnaround context. Teams of teachers and leaders who use data to provide direction and create plans of action for instruction programs are likely to be better prepped to lead in a turnaround context (Copeland & Neeley, 2012; Public Impact, 2008). Kowal et al. (2011) advocate for data to be used often and frequently by leaders in order to clarify misconceptions and shift from blaming to problem solving in turnaround schools. Examples of schools using data to drive turnaround also exist. Duke (2010) chronicled two Texas high school principals who consistently used data to turnaround urban high schools. Almanzán (2005) reported the use of data were prevalent in the 18 improvement schools she surveyed. In addition, Duke and Salmonowicz (2006) found all 15 turnaround schools they studied used data-informed decision making to drive school turnaround.

**Culture building.** Another common action of turnaround principals is working to build a new culture in the turnaround setting. Leithwood and Strauss (2008) present findings that turnaround schools will not stabilize until educators believe the following three items:

- (1) All students are capable of learning when appropriate instruction is provided,
- (2) Challenging family backgrounds can be compensated for by effective practices in the school, and

- (3) What schools can do to improve achievement is attainable, can be learned, and requires everyone in the school to work toward common goals.

Turnaround leaders can impact culture by promoting a shared vision of high expectations for students by working with their staff to examine their own beliefs (Duke, 2004; Leithwood & Sun, 2012; Salmonowicz, 2009). For instance, both Duke (2006) and Almanzán (2005) conducted studies with turnaround schools finding a majority of the schools studied had a change in their core belief systems. Leaders promoting adherence to a collaborative mission and/or vision can build trust in the turnaround process (Duke, 2004; Leithwood & Sun, 2012; Public Impact, 2008). Duke (2006) also found the common element of leaders promoting a new mission a key factor for 15 elementary school turnarounds, calling it “essential” for turnaround. Duke (2004) further advocates for cultures in turnaround schools to be ones where people feel cared for so they are willing to take the risks associated with turnaround. He then articulates that counseling skills are needed for leaders in a turnaround context to manage a wide range of emotions before, during, and after the turn-around process in order to build a culture of trust.

***Quality professional development.*** Providing quality professional development for educators is another recommended action for turnaround leaders. Salmonowicz (2009) called quality professional development one of seven key strategies for turnaround leaders. Professional development is also needed to extend the capacity of educators to meet students’ needs. Leithwood and Strauss (2008) and Leithwood and Sun (2011) provide evidence that turnaround leaders must provide ample instructional support and model best practices. Duke (2004, 2006) advocates for leaders being able to see what weaknesses a turnaround staff has, and fill gaps with effective professional development directly aligned with needs. Copeland and Neely (2012) believe staff development must be focused directly on the needs of the school, and

instructional conversations amongst teams of practitioners are paramount to school turnaround, especially at secondary schools. Almanzán (2005) studied 18 schools making rapid improvement and found they kept operational business to a minimum when they had collaborative time, in order to maximize time spent on collaborative professional development and problem solving.

**Turnaround principal training and district level support matters.** Turnaround principals need appropriate training and district level support in order for them to be successful leaders in a turnaround context. The importance of this training is increased due to over 70 percent of schools choosing the transformational model of SIG improvement requiring these select schools to replace their principal (Lachlan-Hache et al., 2012, Kowal et al., 2011). Programs such as New Leaders for New Schools, The University of Illinois Urban Education Leadership Program, and the University of Virginia Turnaround Leadership Program were all started in early 2000's to fill the void of available turnaround leaders (McLester, 2011). In addition, two organizations, Education Pioneers and The Broad Residency, have been founded to recruit leaders from outside the education industry to assist in serving turnaround leaders in school districts (Kowal et al., 2011). However, the scope of these programs will likely not be able to produce the number of leaders needed to reach the number of schools in a turnaround context defined by schools qualifying for SIG funds and/or those not meeting AYP.

Schools districts can make up or reduce this gap in training by providing the appropriate district level of support for leaders in turnaround contexts. For instance, giving a turnaround leader complete autonomy over staffing and leadership of a school is recommended (Public Impact, 2008; Robinson & Buntrock, 2011). In addition, Robinson and Buntrock (2011) suggest districts' leaders engage the community to support turnaround, celebrate early wins, provide servant leadership to the school, develop talent pools for school, and hold turnaround leaders

accountable for results. Districts can also ensure they select the right principals to match the turnaround context for the school. For instance, Duke (2004) argues leading in a turnaround context requires leadership much different than either a startup or highly successful school requiring the right principal fit. Robinson and Buntrock (2011) present findings from successful district turnaround models in which these turnaround principals are supported by district level turnaround leaders whose are solely committed to the success of turnaround schools in the district. They further this idea by suggesting districts provide systemic supports to all turnaround schools involving improving instruction and data use. Steiner and Hassel (2011) recommend that districts should provide turnaround leaders with mentors to assist in reaching the weak spots of the turnaround leader.

### **Leading in Turnaround Contexts**

#### **Evolution of Leadership Approaches**

Organizational leadership theories have become more accepting of collaborative styles of leadership moving away from authoritarian approaches over the course of the last five decades. Much of this research over the last 50 years has focused on the advantages of taking a distributed rather than autocratic approach to leadership (Copland, 2003; Sergiovanni, 1984; Senge, 1990). This combined body of research is essential as the foundation of this research study, and thus the conceptual framework of the six accelerators to leading in a turnaround context. Each of the six accelerators function in a collaborative setting, increasing the importance of understanding the evolution of leadership theory from a more singular to a more collaborative approach (see Table 1). This change began outside the public school sector before becoming more widely accepted in public education (Copland, 2003; Crawford, 2012). Turnaround leadership followed a very

similar path of starting in the private sector, and moving to public education at a later date (Leithwood & Strauss, 2008, Murphy, 2008).

The origins of this change began with McGregor (1960) and his description of *theory Y* leaders who lead through people, a concept much different than the *theory X* leaders of the era who led over people in a top down fashion. This theory X style of leadership was prevalent during the 1960's and was based on the idea leaders could not trust those they led, but McGregor's work laid the foundation for the change to a more collaborative style of leadership with leaders viewing those led as honest and industrious (Copland, 2003). Oncken and Wass (1974) further solidified the idea that leaders should empower those they lead by not taking problems, referred to as monkeys, off those they lead in order to protect the leaders' discretionary time. This classic article provided an alternative perspective to the commanding authoritarian type of leadership prevalent at the time.

*Table 1. Evolution of Leadership Approaches*

Researcher/Year	Brief Findings
McGregor (1960)	Organizational theory is dependent upon understanding the difference between Theory X and Theory Y leaders.
Onken/Wass (1974)	Supported the ideas that leaders should not take their subordinates problems from them, but rather allow subordinates to work through the problems. The primary motive for this thinking was to not impact a leader's discretionary time.
Burns/Bass (1978/1987)	Supports Theory Y leaders using transformation leadership or leadership that requires inspiring followers through a greater sense of shared purpose in an organization.
Sergiovanni (1984)	Presented importance of organizational culture combined with building the leadership competencies of the many leaders in a system.
Senge (1990)	Presented the idea that the efforts of the collective whole of an organization are greater than the sum of the individual parts.
Collins (2001)	In his book <i>Good to Great</i> , the metaphorical idea of motivating those in the organization to turn the flywheel in unison as the basis of "being great" is presented.
Sinek (2009)	Presents the idea of stakeholders in a company maintaining intense fidelity to their central motivating mission defined as the <i>why</i> they do business in order to achieve greatness.

The ideas of collaborative leadership became more commonplace in each of the decades following the 1970's. The late 1970's through mid-1980's brought about the idea of applying theory Y leadership through the terminology coined transformational leadership presented by researchers Burns and Bass (Copland, 2003). This type of leader often felt those being led could indeed take initiative when motivated by a collective purpose. In addition, Sergiovanni (1984) presented scholars with the concept of leaders using the creative ideas of those in the organization to work to solve problems, a concept later supported by Senge (1990). On a macro level, Collins (2001) continued to articulate the power of collaboration, expressing the idea of how the power of several stakeholders in an organization all pushing the flywheel in the right direction can build the momentum needed to build a great organization. Most recently, Sinek (2009) reinforced the premise of motivating those inside the organization by focusing on a micro level concept of having a powerful *why*, or central motivating mission, to lead an organization.

### **Evolution of Collaboration as an Essential Component of Turnaround Work**

The ideas of collaborative transformational leadership in education lagged almost 30 years behind other sectors being brought into the educational context in the late 1980's (see Table 2). This change of dynamic in education is highly relevant to providing a perspective of how Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) figure prominently in this study as one of the six accelerators to leading in turnaround contexts. The origins of the movement in education began in 1988, as Joseph Murphy looked at the comprehensive analysis of the literature on distributed leadership from a macro level, noting the vast benefits for instructional leadership in education. His work filled a huge void on the topic in the public education sector (Copland, 2003). Rosenholtz (1989) furthered these ideas by presenting research advocating for teachers

being placed into systems supporting their work as lifelong learners, thus allowing them to be more effective and committed to their practice.

*Table 2. Evolution of Collaborative Leadership in Education*

Researcher/Year	Sector	Brief Findings
Murphy (1988)	Education	Analyzed instructional leadership literature used to further define distributed leadership and its importance within education. Attempts to fill research gap in the area of collaborative leadership as it relates to education.
Rosenholtz (1989)	Education	Presented research findings detailing teachers being more committed to their practice when engaged in effective systems supporting professional learning.
Leithwood (1991)	Education	Applied ideas of transformational leadership presented by Burns and Bass to education.
Conley/Goldman (1994)	Education	Advanced the idea of facultative leadership where the collective ability to solve problems to improve performance is presented as a benefit to an organization.
McLaughlin/Talbert (1993)	Education	Advocated for shared decision making, collaboration, and time to plan in the educational workplace
Darling-Hammond (1996)	Education	Advocated for shared decision making, collaboration, and time to plan in the educational workplace
Elmore (2008)	Education	Identified five domains important to distributed leadership. They are policy, professional, systemic, school, and practice. How these domains apply to the multiple leaders within a distributed system is studied.

In the early 1990's Leithwood continued to build on these ideas in the public education sector, publishing research promoting the building of a collaborative culture to increasing the capacity and skills of those inside the educational organization applying the ideas presented by Burns and Bass to an educational setting (Copland, 2003). Conley and Goldman (1994) advanced ideas of collaborative leadership to the role of the principal, articulating how principals can lead without dominating. Concurrently, Senge's (1990) work in the *Fifth Discipline* began moving into education as a way to explain the power of the collective whole. The idea of knowledge brokering continued in the mid 1990's, as McLaughlin and Talbert (1993) along with Darling-Hammond (1996) began to advocate for the convergence of shared decision making, collaboration, and time to plan collaboratively in the educational workplace. By the late 1990's



and into the new century building leadership capacity through a distributive leadership model was widely accepted in promoting a *culture of inquiry* in the school organization. (Copland, 2003; Hallinger, 2003; Jackson, 2000; Leithwood, & Jantzi, 2000). In addition, distributive leadership became a central component of leading in a turnaround context after NCLB in the early 2000's (Duke, 2006; Leithwood & Strauss, 2008).

### **Clarifying the Central Motivating Mission: The *Why***

In 2009, Simon Sinek wrote the book, and delivered the corresponding TEDx Talk, *Start with Why*, presenting a framework motivating people to focus on what inspires them. As presented the *Why* is a theory that success comes from businesses, leaders, and individual people operating from a perspective in which what matters most, known as the *why*, becomes the central motivating mission to drive daily decision making. According to Sinek's theory, inspiration around this central motivating mission creates a following of supporters willing to do what they do not because they have to, but because they want to. Examples Sinek uses to support this theory include Apple's intense inspiration to making the most innovating and exciting products, Martin Luther King Jr. inspiring others around the Civil Rights movement, and the Wright brothers using inspiration rather than money as the drive to be the first to fly a plane.

Sinek (2009) clarifies his theory by stating few leaders separate inspiration and manipulation. For instance, Sinek uses the example of leaders within the Apple Company have stayed true to the inspiring vision of making unique products that make life easier for the buyer of the products. Their *why* is they believe in challenging the status quo in making beautifully designed, simple to use, small, user-friendly personal computers. As a side note they make quality products, but quality is not their central motivating mission. Starting from and sticking to this *why* over the course of time, without relying on gimmicks and/or manipulation, has allowed

them build a loyal customer base. According to Sinek people do not buy what you do, they buy *why* you do it. As a counterexample, Sinek describes Dell Computers as not being able to garner such a loyal following due to the narrow focus of making great computers rather than diversifying.

Sinek's work can be translated to education. Starting with the *why* requires long term thinking devoted to a process of continuous improvement, or systems thinking with the idea of getting better year by year, month by month, week by week, and day by day. Bolman and Deal (2008) indirectly define this type of systems thinking to entail clear but not excessive goals, well defined but not excessively defined job roles, evident control systems that are not obsessive, and employees behaving with focus but not callousness. Organizations that behave with such a systems perspective are often in direct contradiction to the quick fix approach that happens in business today, driven by short-term gains that result in destroying the long term health of an organization (Sinek 2009). In education this quick solution approach translates to reactionary decisions from high stakes accountability with the hope of creating a quick fix, albeit short term, in order to achieve a better accountability rating (Fullan, 2005; Scott, 2007).

Leaders in a turnaround context play a huge role in the process of inspiring as they are the primary communicators in an organization (Duke, 2004; Duke, 2006; Leithwood & Sun, 2012; Public Impact, 2008). Sinek reinforces this idea:

We are drawn to leaders and organizations that are good at communicating what they believe. Their ability to make us feel like we belong, to make us feel special, safe and not alone is part of what gives them the ability to inspire us. Those whom we consider great leaders all have an ability to draw us close and to command our loyalty. And we feel a strong bond with those

who are also drawn to the same leaders and organizations. Apple users feel a bond with each other. Harley riders are bonded to each other. Anyone who was drawn to hear Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. give his “I Have a Dream” speech, regardless of race, religion or sex, stood together in that crowd as brothers and sisters, bonded by their shared values and beliefs. They knew they belonged together because they could feel it in their gut (p. 55).

Building loyalty and trust with a group of people starts with leaders building relationships in the education sector (Cosner, 2009; Tschannen-Moran, 2004). As Sinek (2009) states: “hearts are won before minds.” Sinek’s ideas are echoed in the literature on leading in turnaround contexts, as building trusting relationships, motivation, and having a central mission are also central ideas of literature about leading in a turnaround context (Duke, 2004; Leithwood & Sun, 2012; Public Impact, 2008).

### **Potential Accelerators for Turnaround Work**

In addition to Sinek’s work, the conceptual framework used in the study includes six accelerators of school turnaround to be considered by turnaround leaders. Relevant literature related to these accelerators tied in the conceptual framework is broken down in the following sections for each of the six accelerators.

#### **Accelerator 1: Distributive and Collaborative Leadership in Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)**

According to Copland (2003) the research base on distributive leadership can be summed up by three premises. First, a culture in a school must emerge where it is accepted that the collective energies from a group outweigh the sum of individual energies. Dynamic interactions between actors in the organization and their expertise can further enhance these collective energies, thus allowing for goals to be met much faster than an organization could by its

members failing to interact. Second, task completion among these different roles, or who leads and who follows, is defined by who is best skilled to complete a task rather than a hierarchical approach. Who completes a task will thus span between different roles or actors within a system. Third and last, distributed leadership rests within experts in a system rather than a hierarchy, thus numerous function-based leaders cohabit within a system. A leader then must be a skilled manager of these functional leaders to employ them to solve school problems.

Acceptance of distributive leadership in schools has laid the foundation for the increased use of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) as an effective tool at advancing school improvement. The acceptance of these changes over time resulted in an increased literature base on what constitutes an effective PLC. This literature base on effective PLCs can be categorized into the following five relevant assumptions:

- (1) PLCs require the support of leadership within a school that promotes collaboration and knowledge sharing through relationship building.
- (2) PLCs require a school culture that promotes accountability through a shared mission and values in the organization.
- (3) PLCs require a culture of instructional based professional development to be established within the school.
- (4) PLCs require a data-informed and data-driven school.
- (5) PLCs require the nurturing of the PLC processes as it relates to implementation and ongoing support.

Each of these characteristics is broken down in the following subsections.

**Leadership support.** Of in-school factors, the level of impact of leadership is second only to teaching in a school in affecting student achievement in turnaround context (Leithwood

et al., 2004). The impact leaders have in a school is magnified, since principals directly affect the work of teachers by serving to guide teachers' growth and development inside and outside of PLCs. Principal leadership in an organization also serves as a catalyst for unleashing what an organization is capable of (Leithwood et al., 2008). Furthermore, in studying 38 urban school principals, Spillane (2010) found that these principals spent 78% of their time in co-work with other educators, suggesting that principals are not solo practitioners. Understanding the role of leadership support in PLCs is important in a turnaround context.

One way leaders can effectively unleash this capacity is by promoting the collaborative knowledge sharing that PLCs can provide across an organization. Hord (2004) describes supportive and shared leadership as an essential piece of putting together a successful puzzle of implementing PLCs. She provides evidence that knowledge sharing creates situations in which the responsibility of learning is shared throughout each stakeholder of the organization's hierarchy. Spreading out this learning promotes collaboration across each position in the organization, leading everyone to be responsible for contributing and further increasing knowledge sharing. A benefit of this approach is that teachers who share in principal-supported collaborative decision making are less likely to burn out, which can be a positive outcome of the PLC process (Dworkin, Saha, & Hill, 2003). Such an approach also requires those in the organization to trust each other. When this trust is managed appropriately, through leaders building relationships, this collective trust can build positive morale within the organization (Adams, 2013; Checrkowski, 2012). These relationships and accompanying principal support are two of three factors that help existing PLCs in schools to be successful (Teague, 2012).

**Shared mission and values.** Promotion of the PLC process by leadership must go beyond the level of supporting knowledge sharing to include the intertwining of the other four

requirements of PLCs. A second vital requirement of the PLC process is a culture that drives accountability through a shared mission and value set (Hord, 2004). Hord notes school leaders must paint a forceful image of what the future holds and how the vision will be obtained with genuine commitment throughout the organization. DuFour and Eaker (1998) describe the mission as essential in establishing the organization's purpose, but advocate that the vision is equally as important as it guides the direction of the organization. They go on to describe environments conducive for PLCs to include a shared sense of direction for what occurs within the learning community in order to achieve success. Senge (1990) solidifies this point by stating community learning cannot occur without a shared vision permeating the organization. Hord and Tobia (2002) further develop this idea by supporting the need for the vision to be compelling, a state only reached by creating the vision collaboratively. Once this collaborative and captivating vision is attained, effective PLCs can become the tool that supports and enhances the vision of a school wide focus on learning (DeFour & Mattos, 2013).

**Embedded professional development.** PLCs, supported by a leader who encourages collaborative knowledge sharing as part of his/her compelling mission of the organization, can be even more effective when instructional based professional learning and development is prevalent throughout the school (Hord, 2004). PLCs can support this professional development focus by giving teachers the time to come together to collaborate on common professional development topics occurring at the school-wide level, allowing for connections to be made within the context of the smaller professional learning communities within the school (Lieberman & Miller, 2011). Admiraal, Akkerman, and de Graff (2012) describe the need for educators to build strong connections to professional development within the context of the school culture, rather than having the acquisition of knowledge from professional development occurring in isolation.

Furthermore, they use a strong research base on PLCs as evidence that teachers' development can be enhanced when membership in collaborative communities is maintained. Admiraal et al. (2012) also present findings that teacher development within PLCs is enhanced regardless of the teachers' stage of development.

PLCs guided by relevant professional development can also break down the walls of isolation in secondary schools allowing for teaching to be less of a trial-and-error process. Hord (2004) describes PLCs with embedded professional development as having the power to break through isolation by creating new ideas, structures, and techniques for students to be exposed to as a result of teacher collaborative inquiry. Dufour and Mattos (2013) reinforce the importance of collaborative inquiry for teachers by making the connection that teachers have the single greatest impact on student achievement, thus their development can influence student achievement in significant ways when they chose to work together. Vescio et al. (2008) provide the collective analysis of multiple studies stating that when ongoing professional development is used within the collaborative PLC process, positive impacts on teaching and learning become noticeable outcomes in many more than just a few classrooms in the school. It stands to reason professional development embedded within a PLC can have an increased positive impact with the support of the leadership on campus. Jones, Stall, & Yarborough (2014) provide evidence that this collaborative inquiry focused on professional development topics can only reach maximum effectiveness with the support of the principal building and a positive culture for learning within the school. This line of thinking further solidifies the idea that the five main themes of effective PLCs presented in this study are highly intertwined.

**Data supported collaborative inquiry.** While professional development is a key component of PLCs and the collaborative inquiry that takes place, reviewing data within these

PLCs is equally important in the collaborative inquiry process. Data use is defined as the practice of synthesizing information to foster common understandings for facilitating the high-yield practice of collaboration and resulting next steps (Wayman, Spring, Lemke, & Lehr 2012). Kennedy and Smith (2013) advise collaborative learning time must be supplemented by data analysis that informs decisions and next steps for student instruction while integrating the ongoing professional development on a campus. Blankstein (2010) furthers this claim by stating one of the six key principles of effective PLCs is using data to drive instruction and continuous improvement. Educators engaged in PLCs can redirect instruction based on data-defined needs to impact individual student performance, whole class performance, and school performance in order to improve student achievement (Jones et al., 2014). In doing so, instructors create a culture where they are not just data rich, but data informed. Wayman, Jimerson, and Cho (2012) advocate that data informed educators can collectively develop common understandings allowing stakeholders to build confidence, value the process of looking at data through active dialogue, create self-determination, and have a better likelihood of sustaining the work, adding clarity to the school's vision. These ideas further the connectivity of the requirements of effective PLCs in the literature.

**Ongoing and nurturing support.** A fifth requirement of effective PLCs in the literature is the necessity of ongoing nurturing support throughout the PLC implementation and sustainment process. Hord (2004) articulates the need for having supportive systemic conditions to define the when, where, and how the staff will come together as a group to make PLCs effective. Much of the research in this area focuses on how principals must be creative in finding the appropriate use of time needed for educators to meet in PLCs (Barton & Stepanek, 2012; Hord, 2004). In addition, Hord advocates the larger the school the greater the need for



many small PLCs as opposed to one large PLC. Nurturing support can also be provided by careful attention to the norms within the PLC process at the implementation stage, and by monitoring the execution of these norms throughout the sustainment of PLCs (Hord & Tobia, 2002; Teague 2012). In addition, supportive conditions require educational leaders to pay careful attention to developing relationships and trust within PLCs. Cohen and Brown (2013) articulate building relationships and encouraging adults to engage in their own goal-setting are critical factors principals must engage in by leading from within as a partner in the PLC process. Routman (2012) further supports the importance of relationships by stating that trusting relationships are vital in holding things together to improve practices.

### **Accelerator 2: Building Trusting Relationships through Personalization and Appreciation**

Relationships are not only essential in the PLCs on campus, but may also lead to accelerating the turnaround process when they are used by leaders. In fact, without positive nurturing relationships, trust breaks down, making advancements within an organization unlikely (Adams 2013; Daly, 2009; Hargreaves, 2001). Typically when educators think about resources in schools, money, supplies, human capital, and community partnerships rise to the top as most obvious examples. However, a resource such as trust is technically considered a support or an available means that can be used for enhancement. While more obvious budgetary resources are no doubt of great need to school leaders and the educators they are leading, there are resources that transcend the boundary of being funded by money, a resource which is not always available to build capacity within a school. Furthermore, school leaders can often work smarter rather than harder to leverage other high-yield resources pushing positive outcomes in the organizations they lead. Many of these high-yield resources are dependent on social capacity, or the ability for groups of people to work collectively to solve problems (Hargreaves, 2001).

Social Capacity carries importance as it requires high amounts of collective trust between educators transcending the boundaries of title and rank (Hargreaves, 2001). Subcultures exist in most organizations reflecting the functional units, rank, geographically isolated parts, and/or other groups that have a shared history (Schein, 2010). In addition, Schein argues that alignment of these subcultures is often a tall task, yet these subcultures must be in alignment in order for optimal organizational performance. Spanning boundaries within organizations' subcultures thus becomes an important skill for school leaders. School leaders often deal with resentment between subcultures of an organization with one sector failing to have a coherent understanding of the importance of other sectors of the organization. Heifetz and Linsky (2002) would call for the need of a balcony perspective, and use the analogy of being on a balcony seeing how those on the dance floor interact with each other. Thus, leaders are often challenged with the tall task of getting the subcultures on the dance floor to engage in dancing with each other in order to optimize performance. Bolman and Deal (2008) would refer to this concept of seeing the big picture as, "reframing." A difficult proposition to tackle for leaders is this very reframing work, as it relies on the ability of the leader to be trusted and in turn to get those within subcultures to trust each other.

Without positive nurturing relationships trust breaks down, making advancements within an organization less likely due to a reduction in capacity within the organization (Adams, 2013; Daly, 2009; Hargreaves, 2001). Furthermore, leveraging social capacity and trust in an educational organization trumps the programs being utilized in a school as a precondition for program success (Adams, 2013). For instance, the most well thought out literacy program at an elementary school is only as good as the people who implement it and their capacity to trust each other in the process of overcoming implementation issues. In other words, trust opens up

successful functionality in an organization, and the capacity of the organization to tackle problems of practice. In reviewing the work on trust in schools subthemes emerged including:

- (1) Common definitions of the word trust.
- (2) The process of building trust through purposeful alignment to organizational norms.
- (3) The leadership styles most conducive to building trust.
- (4) The overall role of trust in the organization.
- (5) The value of personalization of interactions through the use of appreciation in the workplace, encouraging collective activities, and utilizing emotional neutrality.

**What is trust?** I define trust as an accelerator in line with Daly's (2009) work. Daly defines trust as how one engages in a relationship and is willing to be vulnerable to another. Engagement and vulnerability is specifically focused on the interactions and confidence one party will possess on the other in regards to the values of benevolence, competence, integrity, openness, reliability, and respect as partially described by Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (1999). Goleman (2006) solidifies this idea of trust in a leadership context by describing leaders who are trusted as often understanding, in-tune with their organization, and thus well respected making those led inspired to do work. In an educational leadership context, leaders who are trusted are defined as garnering greater buy-in from teachers for the educational vision promoted by the leader (Miller et al., 2008). Furthermore Miller et al. (2008) define trusted education leaders as those who support two-way conversation with respect and an open mind.

**Process of building trust through alignment of organizational norms.** Building trust and thus relationships is not an event, but rather a process in an organization. Part of this process is ensuring alignment between resources and expectations. Adams (2013) and Louis (2007) indicate that part of the trust-building process in an organization requires actions matching

expectations as a method of building trustworthiness. It is noteworthy in this case that actions are considered a powerful behind-the-scenes resource in which trust can be increased in an organization by simply having those inside the organization behave in a way where what they do matches what they say. Donaldson (2006) supports this idea, stating the role of trust can only be utilized to improve student performance if leaders' actions match their words. In a similar tone, Bolman and Deal (2008) use the structural frame, one of four culture frames, to reinforce the action of placing people in the right roles and relationships to support the meeting of expectations. Elmore (2008) reinforces this idea of alignment between resources and expectations by using what he terms the theory of reciprocity. This theory entails for every expected increase in improvement; there should be an equal effort of leaders acting in a way that provides the supportive conditions to meet expectations thus improving outcomes. When leaders attempt to align leadership actions with their expectations, confidence and trust tend to increase.

Alignment between members of the organization and their buy-in to espoused values and mission of the organization is another common theme in the trust building process. Schein (2010) describes espoused values and beliefs as the ideals, goals, values, and aspirations that rise from group collaboration into action. In successful organizations these varying espoused values become what the organization places importance on and are thus often reflected in the organization's mission. Sinek (2009) and Bryant (2014) further this idea by describing the theory that successful organizations function by aligning everything they do to their collective *why* in an organization. The *why* is what drives members of the organization to do the "how" and the "what" in the organization, thus establishing a platform more conducive to collective buy-in and sustainment of organizational success. Senge (2006) reinforces this idea of collective buy in to the mission of the organization by describing how the organization functioning as a

collective whole is much stronger than the organizations individual parts. The literature thus supports the claim that cultures with high levels of buy-in on what they value are marked by high levels of agreement between members of the organization and more positive relationships.

Trust can also be built through collaboration and collaborative structures. Cosner (2009) chronicled 11 urban high schools, 10 of whose leaders placed great emphasis on setting, enforcing, and then reinforcing norms of interaction in order to build capacity with the trust environment of the staff in the school. In these schools time for educators to collaborate in committees, purposeful scheduling, and increased professional development time were utilized to provide opportunities to build trust. Hord (2004) describes supportive and shared leadership as an essential piece of putting together a successful puzzle of implementing professional learning communities (PLCs), which are highly structured units of teachers focusing on common problems of practice, supporting the idea of leaders reinforcing norms of interaction.

**Leadership styles most conducive to building trust.** Collaborative styles of leadership also tend to pay higher dividends in promoting trust within an organization. Daly (2009) found empowerment, participatory, and inclusive leadership practices allow for less threat rigidity and more openness in organization, making it more likely to move to the building of organizational capacity. Senge (2006) advocates leaders move an organization forward not because they have to, or are paid to, but because they are driven by adding value to the organization through collaboration. Trust is also established and promoted when teams work alongside the leader for a common goal, rather than groups working in a more top-down approach (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Furthermore, in a study of over 1600 Canadian teachers by Mascall et al. (2008) found high levels of academic optimism defined as trust, collective efficacy, and academic emphasis, were present when coordinated forms of shared leadership were the norm. While not all of these

examples show direct correlation to trust building, one could assume each example promotes the unification of practitioners and school leaders in an environment based on trust. Building this culture requires leaders who have a unique skill set marked by the ability to listen, internalize data, align the data with a vision for the organization, and thus make effective decisions.

**The role of trust in educational organizations.** The literature also points towards the important role trust plays in an educational organization to enhance communication, reduce conflict, and improve student outcomes especially in turnaround school situations. For instance, Gordon, Alston, & Snowden (2006) and Donaldson (2006) argue a leader's communication is more focused, and receptivity to communication by those being led is increased when high levels of trust are present. Gordon et al. also argue that communication and trust are intertwined in the actions of listening, setting the organizational agenda in teams, distributing leadership, and displaying emotional composure. Cosner (2009) reinforces this idea by providing examples of how trust improves communication, increasing the exchange of ideas on how to improve the instructional core in schools, mitigating the silos often existing in larger schools. Furthermore, the presence of collective trust in a school organization guides the communication behind critical conversations in the right direction as trust reduces conflict and increases open-mindedness. Tschannen-Moran (2004) adds value to this line of thinking by providing evidence that successful school leaders often mentor others in conflict resolution skills based on effective communication further increasing the capacity to reduce conflict. Bolman and Deal (2008) support the association between high levels of consideration for employees through effective communication being related to less conflict in an organization. Equally as important, when this trust is managed appropriately to reduce conflict through leaders building relationships, this

collective trust can build positive morale within the organization (Adams, 2013; Checrkowski, 2012; Heifetz & Linsky, 2002).

A high level of trust in an organization also plays the powerful role of enhancing school turnaround and improving student learning. Duke (2006) and Leithwood & Strauss (2008) support collaborative practices and distributive leadership as top practices in school turnaround, implying that building trust is a critical factor in reforming troubled schools. Byrd and Schneider (2003) determined student learning improved as a direct result of building trust in a recent longitudinal study in Chicago Public Schools. Furthermore, Mascal et al. (2008) studied 1,600 schools finding high levels of academic optimism and increased student performance were associated with school environments containing planned distributive leadership based on trust. In this study relevance was given to how leaders manage emotions, motivations, and feelings of those they led to build trust and indirectly improve student learning. Elmore (2008) further supports the idea of trust playing a role on student performance increases, focusing on how trust is more likely to be built within turnaround efforts on a scale no bigger than the school level. Elmore argues trust can only be built by taking on problems of practice at the site level, believing *internal accountability* to solve problems trumps external forces mandating school improvement. Clearly trust plays a powerful role in an organization working to improve student performance and to guide school reform.

**Personalization of interactions: Appreciation, collective acts, and emotional neutrality.** Personalization of interactions between leaders and those led can be increased when leaders value appreciation in the workplace and take a personal interest in building trust with those in the organization (Lencioni, 2007; Miller et al., 2008). School leaders often face established norms and subcultures rooted in negative perceptions toward leadership for reasons

such as practitioners feeling underappreciated in the organization. While this is the case, people need organizations as much as organizations need people, making alignment of needs between the two groups important (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Covey (2004) furthers this idea by stating: “Next to physical survival, the greatest need of a human being is psychological survival, to be understood, to be affirmed, to be validated, to be appreciated (p. 253)”. Under-appreciation can be combated by leaders making sure stakeholders are known, valued and inspired. In their popular literature book, *The Five Love Languages in the Workplace*, Chapman and White (2011) advocate that valuing stakeholders requires leaders to empower the organization by encouraging people through tapping into the most prevalent of their five “love” languages. They define these “love” languages as the specific ways employees want to receive appreciation, which often times differentiate from employee to employee. The five love languages include words of affirmation, tangible gifts, quality time, acts of service, and physical touch. Leaders using these love languages rooted in showing personalized and specific appreciation for the people in the organization, tend to build trust and collective buy in from those they lead.

Personalization can be further utilized by leaders to build trust in their organization by the promotion of collective activities in their schools. The formation of “us” rather than “me and you” along with the development of “we” rather than “I” are attitudes leaders should embrace to develop collectiveness in an organization (Donaldson, 2006). Galvanization of stakeholders also occurs around mission statements and visions building trust in an organization (Adams, 2013; Collins, 2001; Gordon et al., 2006; Leithwood & Strauss, 2008; Sinek, 2009). Schools are naturally set up to promote a vision, as most schools can be unified around a theme comprised of working in some way to morally and ethically advance outcomes for kids (Donaldson, 2006). Shared missions and trust have a reciprocal relationship as they require trust and also build trust



(Adams 2013). Working to build trust through supporting collective activities on a campus has the power to guide an organization to improvement.

An even more significant example of how personalization can build trust in schools entails the ability of a leader to manage emotions on a school campus. A leader being able to have an acute sense of emotional intelligence and management is vital in managing relationships, and encouraging rather than discouraging stakeholder voice in an organization (Goleman, 1995). An ability to listen first and act second is needed in most school organizations in order to understand the big picture of what is really going on in critical situations. Furthermore, ensuring the interaction is focused on authentic development and improvement in the “space between” leaders and those being led is essential in allowing the organization to progress forward (Sellon & Smith, 2004). Sellon and Smith (2004) state:

Leadership is not a matter of using certain skills and implementing particular practices, nor is it about being right. Our cultures misplaced focus on the skills and traits of the solitary leader who will somehow see what others are missing and point to destinations others can't find. We mistakenly assume leadership is based in the skills and activities of the individual person, so we try to build leaders rather than the right relationships through which leadership can be offered. Leadership resides not in the leader, but the “space between” the leader and the led. Leadership is relational. (p. viii)

For example, trust itself will build in an organization when conflict is not suppressed underground, but rather embraced in determining professional solutions thus avoid self-destructing relationships in an organization (Donaldson 2006). In addition to listening, leaders must be able to bridge the “space between” by effectively boundary-spanning the various parts of the organization carrying information to bring consensus guiding macro level change (Bolman &

Deal, 2008). Doing as such allows reflection on the reasonableness of actions by stakeholders within the organization building trust through transparency.

### **Accelerator 3: Culture of Inquiry**

High levels of trust are also needed in order for members of an educational organization to reflect on and question educational practices (Hord, 2004). Promotion of collaborative school wide reflection in an educational organization can leave members of the school vulnerable if there is an absence of a trust nurtured by school leaders (Teague, 2012). When trust and reflection become part of the school culture, a powerful *culture of inquiry* can be the result leading educators to new understandings on how to meet student needs (Elmore, 2008; Hord, 2004). Reflective inquiry is often an outcome of collaborative leadership and PLCs on a school campus, thus much of the literature on the subject is reviewed in the aforementioned portions of the literature review. However, the potential power inquiry may have as an accelerator of leading in a turnaround context, and its place on the conceptual framework of this study makes it deserving of a concise separate analysis.

To inquire in an educational setting is to question one's practice and subsequently gather or collect information to examine if the practice can be improved. It is the idea that members of the school organization are lifelong learners willing to examine their practice in an effort to look for more effective ways of conducting operations or delivering instruction to students (Bullough, 2007; Hord, 2004). In turn, school improvement can be accelerated by members of a school having an open-mindedness to improvement. These members can move reflective inquiry beyond educators who tend to be isolated by silos, and into the culture of the entire school through thoughtful leadership (Hoy, Gage, & Tartar, 2006). Hoy et al. (2006) indirectly describe inquiry as leadership mindfulness, or the idea that leaders encourage faculty to play with ideas,

experiment, and be resilient in delivering instruction. In addition, Robinson (2010) studied inquiry initiatives over a five-year period in urban New York City schools finding that reflective inquiry in schools was most successful when paired with leaders who supported the shared decision making process.

*A culture of inquiry* is not only linked to collaborative leadership styles and trust, but also to the accelerator of collaborative leadership in PLCs and professional development. PLCs bring educators together to analyze common problems of practice in schools (Dufour & Mattos, 2013; Hord, 2004; Hord & Tobia, 2002). In doing so educators often go through a “plan, do, study, and act” cycle highly based on reflective inquiry (Hord, 2004). In summary they plan a lesson, implement it, study the outcomes and necessary changes, and they act upon changes to implement lessons differently in the future. Data are often used in these PLCs to synthesize information to foster common understandings for facilitating the high yield practice of collaboration and next steps (Wayman, Spring, et al., 2012). According to Robinson (2010), teachers reported they were engaging in different conversations about their practices when utilizing collaborative inquiry, thus allowing them to tackle problems collectively rather than in isolation. In addition, inquiry leads to teachers gaining a better understanding their own needs for professional development (Hord, 2004).

One of the positive outcomes of a *culture of inquiry* on a school campus is the power it has to allow a group of educators to be adaptive to the ever-changing landscape of school accountability. When educators are willing to question and reflect on their practices at the school level, they are more likely to adapt to external pressures of accountability (Elmore, 2008). In addition, Robinson (2010) presented findings that teachers participating in collaborative reflective inquiry felt as if they were more likely to be able to adapt to the individual needs of

students. Robinson's work reinforces educational research done by Copland (2003) in which he reviews turnaround schools, specifically finding teachers involved in schools studied were able to come to a better consensus on areas needing changed to meet student's needs. This adaptability can be attributed to the increased exposure an educator receives to other ideas about their practice and leads to increased student performance outcomes.

#### **Accelerator 4: Core Values, Vision, and Central Mission**

The conceptual framework for this study starts with the *why*, as defined by Sinek, being central in driving the work of improvement in schools. This *why*, or a central motivating mission, is paramount in driving the work of school leaders and the schools they lead. When utilized correctly core values and central missions have to be much more than statements posted on walls, websites, and organizational documents. They must permeate throughout an organization and into the culture in a way that affects the day-to-day operations and actions of those within the school. They must be visited and revisited by articulate leaders who promote what the school stands for through a strong set of ideals and beliefs (Marzano et al., 2005). For this reason core values and mission statements are not only at the core of the theoretical foundation of this study, but are also used as one of six accelerators for leadership in a turnaround context.

An extensive amount of literature recognizes the value of mission statements and core values in guiding the work of an organization, and more particularly leading a turnaround school (Duke, 2004; Duke, 2006; Leithwood & Sun, 2012; Public Impact, 2008; Senge, 2006). As with other accelerators the literature base points at leadership being the key in utilization of the accelerator. Bolman and Deal (2008) assert that great leaders help articulate a vision, set standards for performance, and create the focused direction needed in an organization.

Galvanization of stakeholders around mission statements, vision, and values can also be used by leaders to build trust in an organization (Adams, 2013; Collins, 2001; Gordon et al., 2006; Leithwood & Strauss, 2008; Sinek, 2009). Senge (2006) argues that in doing so; leaders can foster genuine commitment to a cause rather than compliance. Furthermore, when the vision and mission of a school are shaped correctly by school leaders, they can be a powerful motivator for organizational learning in a school (Kurland, Peretz, & Herz-Lazarowit, 2010). Fullan (2008) describes this effect as connecting peers with a purpose, or investing in employees so that their commitment to the vision increases. The literature also points towards encouraging leaders to hire employees that fit the vision for the school. While he paints a broad picture of organizational theory, Sinek (2009) argues great companies hire motivated people and inspire them. He furthers this idea by stating average companies give their people something to work on, while great companies give their people something to work towards.

### **Accelerator 5: Systems Approach**

While core values, vision, and mission statements can be utilized to accelerate leading in a school turnaround context, so can building systems in an organization. For instance, Bolman and Deal (2008) assert that a vision without a strategy remains an illusion. Essentially systems must be in place in schools to ensure the parts of the school system function as seamlessly as possible with the whole (Senge, 1990). Schools with effective systems approaches can ensure the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Effective systems are more prevalent at a smaller scale. Elmore (2008) places great emphasis on scale, in particular presenting and supporting findings that large scale systems based school reform does not take into context what is happening at a smaller scale within schools. Successful systems in schools also take into consideration scale, or more specifically the unit of work and structures supporting the work

inside a portion of an organization. The operating systems inside each unit of work are important. If these systems are overlooked then misdirection of resources and energy occurs within the organization (Bolman & Deal, 2008).

While smaller scale leads to better chances for successful systems within schools, schools often function in districts made up of several schools. District-level systems, just as school-level systems, can provide guidance and direction to those doing the work inside the system especially in a turnaround context (Public Impact 2008; Robinson & Buntrock, 2011). The literature points toward district leaders needing to focus on district systems that support their schools with school level leaders that are connected to these systems (Fullan, 2005; Togneri and Anderson, 2003). At the same time consideration must be taken to allow loose enough couplings to these district level systems in order for the leaders to take into account the local context within the system they are working (Bolman & Deal, 2008; Elmore, 2008; Fullan, 2005). Turnaround leaders who are connected with those they serve often know what is best for their schools better than districts, and need the autonomy from district level school leaders to protect the school against outside influences that might break down existing effective systems within schools (Fullan, 2005; Public Impact, 2008; Robinson & Buntrock, 2011). Fullan (2005) articulates that all large scale reform efforts must have successful systems operating both within the district and within the school.

Learning organizations, such as schools, must have systems in place in order for educators in the system to know how to operate and be successful (Bolman & Deal, 2008). A lack of systems leads to chaos. Systems make full patterns clearer and help us see how the seemingly invisible fabrics inside an organization intertwine and relate within each other. Fullan (2008) and Schmoker (2007) argue implementation within a system is important in order to attain this clarity. For instance, Schmoker (2008) uses the example of potentially successful first

year teachers being placed in a bad system where feedback to the teacher is not occurring. The result is a teacher who fails to develop new professional competencies needed to keep up with the ever changing demands of teaching and learning. Similar to teachers being more successful with feedback, schools with effective systems are more likely to sustain success if a change in leadership occurs. This is due to the systems, and how those act within the systems, transcending beyond the change in leadership. Fullan (2005) describes the need for an abundance of “systems thinkers in action,” stating that learning organizations with successful systems are more likely to have a group of systems thinkers leading in a collaborative capacity throughout their school.

#### **Accelerator 6: Internal Accountability**

In the conceptual framework, the accelerators of school turnaround work in unison with each other rather than independently. This premise is important when considering a definition of what *internal accountability* looks like in a turnaround school context. *Internal accountability* is the strikingly obvious presence within a school of the integration of individual responsibility and collective expectations in order to achieve accountability to the instructional core of the school (Elmore 2008). Elmore (2008) defines this instructional core as the unit that all policy decisions, turnaround efforts, or systemic changes must be scaled to in schools. Elmore’s idea of the instructional core is a continuation of ideas presented by DuFour (2004) who states improvement efforts in schools must have the following three essential elements:

- (1) a setting in which clear evidence exists that children learning is the primary purpose,
- (2) a teaching staff collectively working to ensure all children learn, and
- (3) purposeful efforts and pin-point focus at supporting teachers in the endeavor of teaching and learning.

The term *internal accountability* and its intense focus on the instructional core was introduced by Richard Elmore in the late 1990's at about the same time as the advent of the high stakes accountability movement marked by intense external pressures upon schools. Elmore (2008) argues that internal coherence, or knowing what a good school should look like, is a precursor for any low-performing schools ability to respond to external pressures. Figure five articulates *internal accountability* in the form of a visual showing the convergence of individual responsibility, collective expectations and accountability at a local level.

Achieving *internal accountability* would appear to rely heavily on the other accelerators. For instance, *internal accountability* where collective expectations and individual responsibility meet requires distributive leadership conducive to collective knowledge sharing. A group of educators forming PLCs is one pathway for this internal alignment to take hold in an organization as teacher leaders can come together to discuss the heart of their business: the



**Figure 5: Internal Accountability [Adapted from Elmore (2008)]**

instructional core. Schools improve by acquiring new expertise relevant to their local context, rather than doing what external policymakers want regardless of context (Elmore, 2008;



Marzano et al., 2005). The presence of strong collective *internal accountability* thus drives the instructional agenda at the school, sorting through external changes imposed by forces outside the organization to determine which changes are most relevant.

The level of depth of the capacity for learning within the organization is also relevant for both turnaround and *internal accountability*. It is simply not enough to have only the principal of a turnaround school and the other instructional leaders such as assistant principals, teacher leaders, and informal leaders deepening their expertise. Rather, the level of depth of knowledge sharing should reach what Collins (2001) would articulate as a tipping point or a state where a flywheel is rapidly moving toward those in the school doing what they do because it is best for student learning, not because it is a job for which they get paid. In turnaround schools, the organizational capacity to address student learning needs is often the most obtainable capital resource to be tapped, as other forms of capital are not as readily available (Elmore, 2008). Organizational capacity is affected greatly by a teachers' intrinsic motivation to increase their own knowledge and thus the capital of the organization. Elmore says it best:

Ambitious and challenging practice in classrooms occurs roughly in proportion to the number of teachers who are intrinsically motivated to question their practice on a fundamental level and look to outside models to improve teaching and learning (p. 28).

This notion further reinforces the need for distributive collaborative leadership in a school, and the ideas produced by this leadership style in order to reach a level of inclusion of a vast majority of teachers within a school. Leadership of this nature promotes *internal accountability*, and thus has a positive effect on turnaround.

Accountability also becomes crystal-clear in organizations that function at an extraordinary level of depth with their moral and ethical core of their business. This moral or

ethical core is most effective when an intense focus on core values, mission, and/or what Sinek (2009) calls the organizational *why* are evident. Bolman and Deal (2008) describe this clarity in accountability as observable when members of high-functioning teams are enjoying work around a common purpose, thus being more likely to hold themselves collectively accountable for their work. In a similar fashion, Branch et al. (2013) found that teachers who depart from schools characterized by successful leadership and student achievement data are much more likely to have been among the less effective teachers in the school who are not able to contribute to high-functioning teams. Turnaround leaders thus have an opportunity to create a culture of *internal accountability* where those not willing to get on the bus with promoting high expectations for instructional improvement are isolated outliers within the school culture. Leithwood and Sun (2012) and Public Impact (2011) both present evidence that leading in a turnaround context requires a sense of *internal accountability* where change is required and accepted by all. In addition, Duke and Salmonowitz (2010) provide evidence that the lack of conformity must first be accompanied with turnaround leadership that inspires, boosts expectations, conveys caring, cheerleads, acts tough, and yet sympathizes with those entrusted with the academic endeavors of students thus requiring leaders to be in tune with the relationship side of leadership. Essentially a leader's primary responsibility is to maintain accountability to the collective result, making individual accountability a more manageable endeavor. This furthers the idea that *internal accountability* works in conjunction with other accelerators such as a strong central mission and the building of relationships built on trust.

Much discussion about *internal accountability* revolves around the notion of tight or loose couplings, meaning should external forces outside the organization have tight control over of the organization or looser control. Having *internal accountability* should not be confused

with complete free reign, autonomy, or extremely loose couplings. For instance, Elmore (2008) presents finding that accountability in successful public schools rests with teachers holding each other accountable to high standards more than the leader. While the couplings are loose in this example, teachers are still held to high standards. Research on the level of control in school based organizations leads to the findings that educational institutions should be managed by balancing between *internal accountability* and external structures (Elmore 2008; Heinz-Dieter 2002; & Schmoker 2007). Structures should be set up both externally and internally to protect the instructional core of what is done at the school level rather than abuse it. Schmoker (2007) argues this can be achieved by “shedding our addiction to broad external initiatives.” In doing so, essentially what is achieved is structured autonomy within individual schools and their respective systems focusing on the art of teaching and learning. Doing as such allows schools to focus on teaching and learning within the context of their individual realities, rather than the broad based stroke of the perceived realities of those imposing external pressure onto a cadre of schools that are highly differentiated. Creating atmospheres that protect against misguided external pressures becomes the challenge of turnaround school principals, who attempt to protect the internal structures within their schools in an epoch of external pressures brought on by large scale standardized accountability.

### **Summary**

In reviewing the work on leading and leadership in a turnaround context, it appears a unique set of skills, competencies, and actions exist. As the idea of turnaround evolved over the last 20-30 years, it became apparent that scholars in the field of turnaround believed that having a positive culture played a big role in overcoming obstacles and promoting facilitators of school improvement. The term “turnaround” gained further momentum with the introduction of SIG

grants in 2009, and the four corresponding turnaround models that could be used in the over 15,000 schools that qualified for the grants in 2011. A culture of collaboration in leading in turnaround contexts was increasingly promoted as a school improvement strategy by educational researchers. The six accelerators posited in the conceptual framework, could have the potential to speed up turnaround through leveraging this culture of collaboration. These accelerators include turnaround leaders using:

- (1) *Distributed and collaborative leadership in PLCs,*
- (2) *Building trusting relationships through personalization and appreciation,*
- (3) *A culture of inquiry* for continuous improvement,
- (4) *Core values, vision, and a central mission* to promote turnaround,
- (5) *A systems approach,* and
- (6) *Internal accountability* to maximize the potential of those involved in turnaround.

The following chapter three describes the methodology that will be used in this study to determine possible answers to conceptual framework question, setting up the exploration of these issues in three exemplars of “turnaround leadership” in two turnaround schools.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### **Rationale**

Large urban school districts across the nation continue to struggle to keep up with their non-urban counterparts in terms of achievement scores, especially for students of color and students in poverty (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Darling-Hammond, 2006; Graham & Teague, 2011). Unfortunately, these urban schools are at a disadvantage before the high-stakes game of school accountability even begins. Areas of disadvantage for urban students include low social economic status as defined by free or reduced lunch status, providing less exposure to enrichment opportunities outside their sphere of influence (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Jensen, 2009; Kozol, 1995; Tavernise, 2012). Additional disadvantages include lack of access to resources both inside and outside of school, and access to highly qualified teachers that can provide the relationships and content knowledge needed for urban students to be successful (Brearden, 2006). Poverty is the paramount link to this abbreviated list of obstacles struggling urban schools must work to overcome, yet overcoming these obstacles can and does happen, albeit not as often as urban school leaders and their communities would like. Effective leadership and support for teaching and learning seems to be a consistent theme at the center of these turnaround stories (e.g. Duke, 2004; Duke, 2008; Leithwood & Strauss, 2008; Public Impact, 2008), including how leaders construct meaningful understandings of the struggling urban school to guide turnaround. As urban school leaders continue to search for answers, stories of successful urban school turnarounds become better known and documented, allowing other leaders to make meanings of the stories.

## **Purpose of Study and Guiding Questions**

The purpose of this study is to identify two stories of leaders who have led urban schools through the turnaround process, to examine their respective journeys, and to analyze those stories through the lens of the conceptual framework of key cultural accelerators. In doing so I aim to determine the extent to which the stories reflect the use of the accelerators noted in the conceptual framework. Providing narrative case study descriptions will hopefully assist other school leaders as they embark on the turnaround process of molding and shaping the adult culture of their campus.

Accordingly, the study was guided by two broad questions:

- (1) To what extent do turnaround leaders improve school culture for adults purposefully and intentionally during the initial stages of the turnaround process?
- (2) How and to what degree do turnaround leaders use strategies reflective of the key accelerators posited in the conceptual framework to guide school turnaround?

## **Research Design**

### **Philosophical Stance**

The lens used in this research is supported by a philosophical stance that is interpretive in nature. The interpretive stance is one in which the research is meant to make meaning of experiences of others in order to provide guidance (Merriam, 2009). I firmly believe that one can gather much deeper meanings of situations they personally experience, as these experiences allow exposure to all the human interaction and emotions that are revealed in these varied experiences. In addition, I believe in the use of multiple pathways to meet a challenge, which in the case of this research is to guide leaders to nurture an adult culture on a turnaround campus. In using this philosophical stance, my hope is that leaders find greater empowerment to

understand that change can happen on a turnaround campus, if a purposeful and intentional effort at building the culture needed for change is the primary focus.

My experiences in the area of school reform have led to the use of this research lens; as I was placed in a situation of leading a low-performing school in my first assignment as principal. I quickly learned that I personally had a striking absence of leadership capacity needed to build a positive support system to the campus community engaged in turnaround. Filling this gap meant my faculty, starting with my leadership team, and I were always dissecting experiences within the organization to make sense or meaning of them as a collaborative leadership group. Since the school I was charged to lead was labeled a “low performing school,” there were many experiences for both teachers and students that were not leading to positive outcomes. After determining meaning from these experiences, we had to quickly focus on what we could improve in order to get a little bit better every day for our students at teaching and learning. This careful approach of looking at everything we did with a fine-toothed comb, and making sure we were developing young men and women, became the norm of how we did business. It is this same interpretive stance based on my experiences that guides me to do this basic qualitative research.

### **A Qualitative Case Study Approach**

The research study takes the form of a basic qualitative case study, and uses an interpretive approach. A qualitative case study is one in which there is an in-depth analysis and in-depth description of a bounded system (Merriam, 2009). For the purposes of this study, this bounded system includes the cases of three turnaround principals in two turnaround schools. The principals participated in the study primarily through interviews and observations. These interviews, in addition to observations of collaborative faculty-based meetings and analysis of key documents, were used to reconstruct their respective turnaround journeys, especially as it

relates to the cultural elements in the change process. The nature of these narratives constructed from stories, observations, and documents in two different schools make this work a multi-site study requiring data analysis across multiple venues.

In conducting the study, I worked to deeply understand the culture within which the turnaround leaders worked at two urban turnaround schools. These schools required me to deeply understand the complexities and interactions of the stakeholders within the school. Using qualitative methods allowed me to understand the data in the study since schools in general are highly humanistic and complex in nature. Hendricks (2013) describes qualitative research in having a purpose of being able to understand and interpret phenomena as they occur in their natural settings. My goal was to make meaning of all the variables within an urban turnaround school as it relates how a leader goes about culture building, while fully understanding that there is not a linear path to school turnaround work. As stated by Denzin and Lincoln (2011), qualitative research attempts to estimate reality rather than fully capture it, and thus is the best approach to capture the nonlinear stories of building and sustaining a positive adult culture in an urban turnaround school. According to Merriam (2009), qualitative research strives to understand how people make sense of their world and its experiences. This study attempts to understand how turnaround leaders make sense of their world, the turnaround schoolhouse, and how they work to build a positive adult culture.

The qualitative approach also allows me to determine to what extent the accelerators described in the conceptual framework are implemented in each of the two turnaround schools. While these accelerators originate from commonalities in the research base, trial and error still exist in how and when the turnaround leaders may implement the accelerators, if at all, making the turnaround work non-formulistic. Quantitative methods could not be used in this study as the



epistemology of such methods assumes that reality is fixed and able to be understood (Hendricks, 2013). Work in turnaround schools can be led by a set of guiding themes; however, the context of the situation differs greatly from school setting to school setting, making reality different in each setting. How the accelerators are applied in each setting depends greatly on how the leader of the school interprets its own context and culture.

Case studies of each of the schools identified are the end product for analysis. Yin (2008) describes a case study as working to investigate a phenomenon in real life, where the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context are blurred. In this dissertation study, the phenomenon of the building of an adult culture originating from an innovative motivating *why*, are different based on the setting of the two case studies. The case studies are also descriptive in their recreation with the intent to provide the reader with a rich, thick, and concise description of the phenomenon (Merriam, 2009). The descriptive approach allows the research community the opportunity to deeply understand how two particular urban leaders build their adult culture in going through the turnaround process, adding to the overall knowledge base on turnaround school leadership.

## **Participant Selection Procedures**

**Identification of study sites.** The study of three leaders serving in two turnaround contexts was analyzed for this dissertation. For the purposes of this study, I used non-probability or purposeful sampling (Merriam, 2009) to focus on schools with particular qualities. This type of sampling was used with the goal of determining what occurs in turnaround and the implications. The selection of this type of sampling provides the opportunity for gleaning the most possible knowledge (Merriam, 2009).

***Data sources to support selection.*** An iterative process of combining expert recommendations and data analysis was used to select turnaround leaders for the study. Selection of leaders was based on the following three qualifications in order to ensure objectivity was maintained:

- (1) A leader who was in, or is currently in, a school with low math and or literacy student achievement scores based on state standardized tests in alignment with the pre-defined bounded qualities of the research study.
- (2) A leader who was in, or is currently in, a school receiving School Improvement (SIG) funds
- (3) A leader that is recommended by a district level central office expert as having turnaround characteristics.

More specifically, turnaround leaders elected for this study operated in a school that was struggling with school achievement as indicated by standardized test data (i.e., lagging behind in literacy and mathematics as compared to schools in both their district and state). Each leader studied implemented strategies funded by School Improvement Grants (SIG), and their campuses fell within one of the three different need based tiers. These tiers range from Tier I, or most in need of assistance, to Tier 3 or least in need of assistance (Lazarin, 2012). Adequate Yearly Progress Data (AYP), and published Texas Education Agency lists were used to identify these schools and their turnaround leaders, as reporting improvement status is public domain and a requirement for each state based on No Child Left Behind (NCLB). Specifically, NCLB requires schools to maintain levels of academic achievement, and in many cases improvement in both mathematics and literacy. Turnaround leaders chosen for this study are within the state of Texas.

In addition to being in a SIG school with underachievement in math and reading, the turnaround leaders were also selected with the assistance of expert recommendation. A central office leader in the district where the two schools were located made initial recommendations. In order to ensure objectivity, the chosen leaders were either those who exhibited turnaround qualities and/or met the definition the district utilizes to guide selection of leaders in a turnaround context.

**Identification and selection of turnaround leaders.** Principals entering these turnaround schools, and the principal's successor in one of the two case studies, are the primary participants. They have experienced overcoming the obstacle of student achievement data lagging in the two aforementioned subject areas for two or more years before their arrival to the school. Due to the leadership of these principals in their urban schools, the turnaround process either has occurred or is in motion. Furthermore, each school showed evidence of the probability of academic improvement in both mathematics and literacy being sustained beyond the tenure of the principal leadership. Louis et al. (2010) articulate positive effects on a school's culture when leadership turnover is avoided; however, they also articulate that a principal lifespan is less than four years, on average. While finding turnaround leaders meeting these qualifiers was arduous, the use of these qualifiers ensures that schools studied did not have a one-year anomaly of poor data. The collection of data from these principals and the secondary participants listed below occurred over a one-year period when I had access to each school.

**Gaining access.** The identified principals were sent emails (see Appendix B), asking if they would allow me to analyze their turnaround leadership experiences in this endeavor. After gaining approval, meetings were set up with the principals and their leadership directors that supervised them. These meetings explained the study in depth, including the research questions

and conceptual framework diagram. In addition, an agreed upon schedule of visitations to the school was constructed and later shared electronically with both the principal and the direct report. The goal of the study, to articulate the successful turnaround story of both the leader and the school as it relates to building a positive adult culture, was explained.

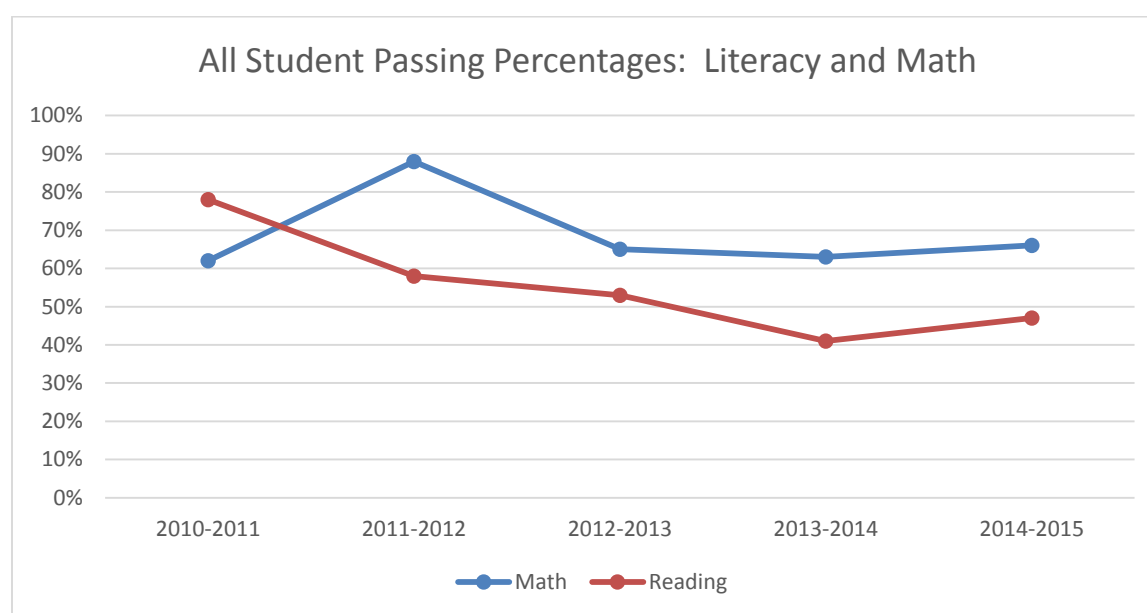
**Identification and selection of other leaders.** In each school, secondary participants in the form of formal and informal leaders were selected. These leaders were identified during the course of the research as a vital piece of being able to validate and enhance the articulation of the turnaround story of the school studied. Depending on the school studied, four to five of these secondary participants were identified in consultation with the principal that was interviewed. In addition, approximately 20 secondary participants were involved in each school as participants in observed meetings. Furthermore, cooperation from these secondary participants was garnered to obtain documents providing general information that enhanced the study.

#### **Context of the Study: Circle High School, Sunnyside Middle School**

**Circle High School.** Circle High School (CHS) is located in the center of a large urban school district in the state of Texas. The building that houses the school is an historical site, and one of the first high schools to be built in the city. There were nearly 1,200 students in the school in the 2014-2015 school year (TEA ASR Circle, 2015). The composition of the student body is diverse including 25% of students being of African American descent, 69% being of Hispanic descent, 4% being of Caucasian or Asian descent, and 2% being from other ethnicities. A total of 80% of the students are classified as economically disadvantaged, and 16% are considered English Language Learners (TEA SRC Circle, 2014). The mobility rate of students, or the number of students who did not complete the entire year at the same school, was over 26%

which was 9% over the state average (TEA ASR Circle, 2015). The turnaround principal at the school is Dr. Clear.

A review of the state achievement data in literacy and math at Circle High School is summarized below, with a more in depth analysis in the appendix section (see appendix G). The state achievement data for Circle High School and math is aligned with the bounded system of



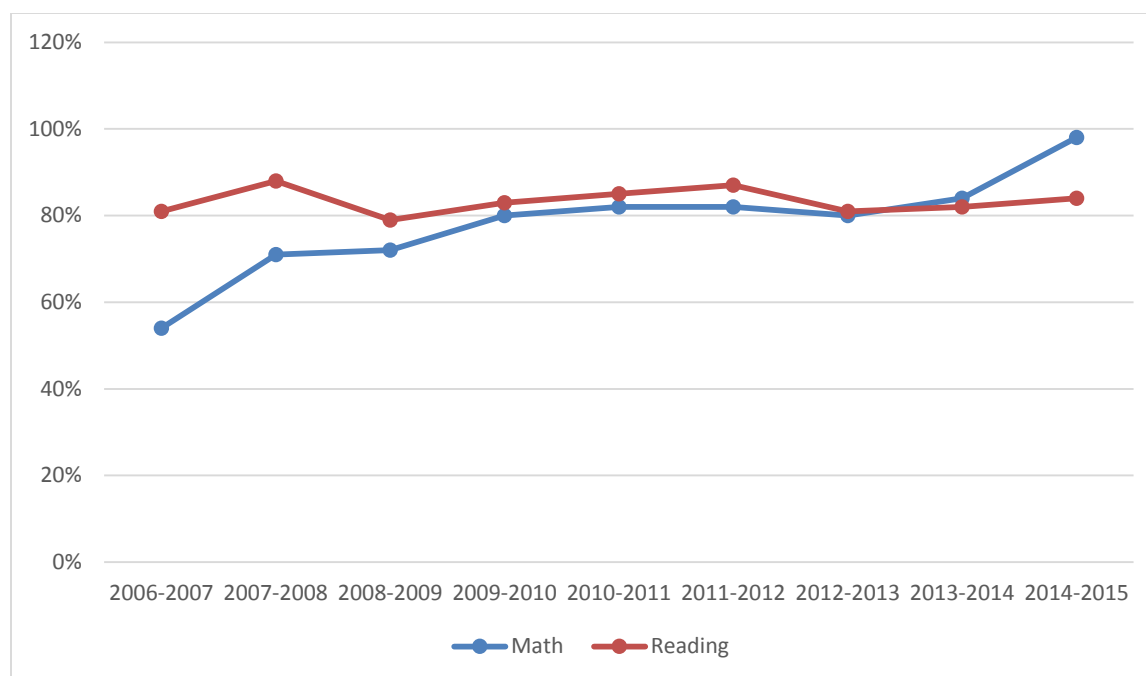
**Figure 6: Circle High School State Achievement Data 2010-2015 (TEA 2015 Historical Data)**

having at least two years of bleak data in literacy and math with an upturn in data in these same areas. The start of the uptick in both subject areas coincides with Principal Clear's first year of service as principal in the 2014-2015 school year. It should be noted that the school met standard in Principal Clear's first year, while the school did not meet standard in three of the four years before he became principal. In addition, the school had a 1 point increase in index one (student achievement), and an 11 point increase in index four (postsecondary readiness) during Principal Clear's first year (TEA ASR Circle, 2015).

**Sunnyside Middle School.** Sunnyside Middle School (SMS) is also located in the center of the same large urban school district in the state of Texas. Nearly 700 students were in the

school in the 2014-2015 school year (TEA ASR Sunnyside, 2015). The composition of the student body is diverse including 13% of students being of African American descent, 67% being of Hispanic descent, 16% being of Caucasian or Asian descent, and 4% being from other ethnicities. A total of 70% of the students are classified as economically disadvantaged, and 8% are considered English Language Learners (TEA SRC Sunnyside, 2014). The mobility rate of students, or the number of students who did not complete the entire year at the same school, was over 16% (TEA ASR Sunnyside, 2015). The demographics were slightly different during the 2009-2010 school year, which was the first year of turnaround at Circle Middle School after being labeled low performing by the state,. There were 200 fewer students enrolled, 7% more of whom were African American. (TEA AEIS Sunnyside, 2010). The turnaround principal is Dr. Fury.

A review of the state achievement data in literacy and math at Sunnyside Middle School is summarized below, with a more in depth analysis in the appendix section (see appendix H). The state achievement data for Sunnyside Middle School is aligned with the bounded system of having at least two years of bleak data in literacy and/or math with an upturn in data in these same areas. The start of the uptick in both subject areas coincides with Dr. Fury's second year of service as principal in the 2007-2008 school year. It should be noted that the school met standard in Dr. Fury's first and second years, while the school did not meet standard in her third year due to not meeting one of 25 benchmarks that the state required all schools to meet. This benchmark was African American Science student achievement. Just one year after not meeting standard, the school became recognized in the 2009-2010 school year (TEA AEIS Sunnyside, 2010). More recently, Mrs. Willie has continued the positive achievement trends as Dr. Fury's



**Figure 7: Sunnyside Middle School State Achievement Data 2010-2015 (TEA 2015 Historical Data)**

successor. She has led the school to across the board gains in each of the four state achievement indexes in the 2014-2015 school year. These increases included a three point increase in index one (student achievement), a point increase in index two (student progress), a four point increase in index three (Closing Performance Gaps), and a seven point increase in index four (postsecondary readiness) during Principal Willie's most recent year of leadership. (TEA ASR Sunnyside, 2015).

### **Data Collection Procedures**

Data collected at both schools was analyzed throughout the data collection timeline and included several sources (see Appendix D). All data collected were analyzed through the lens of the research questions, which are: (a) To what extent do turnaround leaders improve school culture for adults purposefully and intentionally during the initial stages of the turnaround process, and (b) how, and to what degree do turnaround leaders use strategies reflective of the key accelerators posited in the conceptual framework to guide school turnaround. Sources of

data gathered in this study included: (1) document analysis; (2) interviews; (3) school Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) achievement data; (4) observations; and (5) physical plant and classroom walks.

**Document analysis.** The collection and analysis of documents provided further clarity to the turnaround story of the school. Much information about the schools' culture was gleaned from the viewing of formal documents including campus improvement plans, state achievement data, and outside service provider consultant reports. Other documents such as meeting agendas and journal entries emerged as valuable in understanding the turnaround story. A total of 17 formal documents including the AYP data collection reports for both schools were analyzed. Nine of these documents were from Circle High School, and eight of these documents were from Sunnyside Middle school. Additional informal observations of school and classroom postings also assisted in making meaning of the phenomenon of turnaround occurring in both schools.

**Interviews of principals and key stakeholders.** Interviews were conducted of turnaround principals and the determined key stakeholders in order to provide data to articulate the turnaround story and corresponding case study. These interviews were conducted using the interview protocol (see Appendixes C and F), and were audio recorded. A total of 11 interviews were conducted in the study ranging from 25 to 45 minutes. Six of these interviews assisted in the articulation of the turnaround story at Sunnyside Middle School, and five interviews assisted in the process at Circle High School. Three of these interviews were of turnaround principals, with Sunnyside Middle School having the unique situation of being able to interview the turnaround principal and the successor. The other eight interviews were comprised of assistant principals (2), counselors (3), and teachers (3).



Interviews were transcribed, with transcriptions made available to interviewees upon request. A majority of the questions used in the interviews were open-ended, allowing the interviewee to express opinions, feelings, and emotions about the school turnaround process. Hendricks (2013) describes such inquiry based data as data that allows the researcher to add richness to the investigation. The interviews were semi-structured, allowing me to ask questions not included on the interview data collection tool. This allowed the interviewee to provide context adding to the vividness of the turnaround story as it involves the building of an adult culture in a turnaround school (Hendricks, 2013).

**School AYP achievement data.** Using the AYP data collection tool (see Appendix E), I disaggregated the literacy and mathematics state achievement data from the school to ensure the school was within the bounded system. In the case of Sunnyside Middle School this improvement was indeed sustained. No Child Left Behind (NCLB) required states to report AYP Data in reading and math, and is the data that were used for this portion of the study. Data were recorded into the AYP data collection tool (see Appendix E), thus substantiating improvement and turnaround. Sunnyside Middle School data is reflected in Appendix G, and Circle High School in Appendix H.

**Observations of leadership and/or professional learning community (PLC) meetings.** As with observations of the physical environment, observations of meetings provided valuable data as to how the adult culture operates within the turnaround school. Meetings observed include leadership team meetings, professional learning community meetings (PLC), an outside service provider meeting with the principal, continuous school improvement team (CSIT), pyramid meetings, formative assessment team meetings, and/or administrative leadership meetings. A total of 11 meetings were observed at the two schools. Meetings

observed at Sunnyside Middle School (four in total) included a PLC meeting in English Language Arts, a formative assessment team meeting, a pyramid meeting, and a leadership team meeting. Meetings observed at Circle High School (seven in total) included four PLC meetings, an outside service provider meeting with the principal, an administrative team meeting, and a CSIT meeting. I attempted to be a non-participant observer in each of these meetings, only participating if directly engaged by attendees. This allowed for more of a focus on the accurate collection of data while the meetings were in session.

**Physical plant hallway and classroom walks.** The building of a positive adult culture is not something that is just talked and/or written about, but is also something that can be seen. Walking into a school can paint a vivid picture about the culture as it relates to the working environment for the adults and how that translates to students. While conducting each of the three visits to the school, I walked the school hallways often visiting classrooms. Undertaking these site walks allowed me to observe relevant postings that continued to add richness to the school turnaround story and thus the case studies.

## **Data Analysis**

**Data management/organization.** Data were collected and analyzed by me as the researcher. Data collection tools and the actual data mentioned herein were kept both electronically and in hard copy format. Pseudonyms were used to mask data at all times, and electronic data were stored on a password protected computer. Hard copy data were kept in a locked cabinet at my home, and will be kept in a locked file cabinet at the principal investigator's office for at least three years. Excel spreadsheets were used to assist in coding the data from each of the five data sources which include documents, interviews, AYP student achievement data, observations, and physical plant and classroom walks.

**Analysis of documents, interviews, and observations.** In alignment with the process suggested by Merriam (2009), a two-step process was used to analyze documents, interviews, and observations after information was accurately recorded. This process included consolidating or reducing the data, and then interpreting the data. The first step of this process included reducing the data into meaningful units to analyze. The conceptual framework (see Appendix A) was used to assist in creating codes that fit the data; however, due to the nonlinear nature of qualitative research, I was observant of other codes relating to building a positive adult culture within a turnaround school. This process resulted in a total number of 43 different codes, all of which can be viewed in the coding schematic (see Appendix I). Over 440 pieces of data were attached to these 43 codes.

The second step used included reporting the data, or using tools that allowed me to begin classifying the data into relevant themes. In this step I made initial interpretations of the data through categorizing the units within three excel spreadsheets. These three spreadsheets included a spreadsheet for principal interviews, one for non-principal interviews, and one for observations and document analysis. The two strategies of categorical and holistic analysis, both supported by Rossman and Rallis (2012) in qualitative research, were used to understand the data in order to create the case studies. Common categories, including but not limited to the accelerators in the conceptual framework, were analyzed at each site. In addition, practices that were inclusive and connected holistically within a single site were also analyzed.

**Creation of case narratives (within case analysis and cross-case analysis).** Within each case I created vivid descriptions of the current context and setting of each school in which the turnaround leader operated in order to provide readers with the best possible understanding of the turnaround environment. This section titled “setting” kicks off each case study and includes

several pieces of data to assist in understanding the context of the school. In addition, I provided the context and background of the turnaround principal of each school. The case study then goes into the presentation of themes, using data from a case study database.

Following the within-case analyses, a cross-case analysis is offered. The goal of this cross-case analysis was to determine generalizations between the two schools as to how, and to what extent, the turnaround leaders in each school worked to impact the adult culture of the school to accelerate turnaround. I was mindful that each turnaround leader and case study varied, meaning that different codes, strategies, and outcomes were present.

### **Issues Related to the Research Design**

To be of value to the field, qualitative research must be persuasive, yet still trustworthy, in both the eyes of the researcher and the audience in order to maintain ethical standards (Mills, 2011). Guba (1981) established that qualitative researchers should attend to issues of credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability.

**Trustworthiness.** Trustworthiness is considered to be the ability to maintain and uphold credibility and objectivity (Merriam, 2009). I worked to maintain trustworthiness by being observant of codes relating to building a positive adult culture within the turnaround schools that were not only within, but also outside the conceptual framework. Patton (2002) describes this approach of looking beyond the surface for other explanations as a key practice in upholding the ethical standards of a study. The use of rich descriptions in the narrative also increased the trustworthiness of the research. Readers are provided a narrative with descriptive thickness in relation to what is being observed whether inside or outside the framework, which upholds what Maxwell (1992) would define as descriptive validity. Wolcott (1994) would describe this approach as assuring that the researcher is not obsessed with finding the ultimate answer. I

firmly believe that the framework presented in the research is just that, a framework, and as such there is not one ultimate answer to building an adult culture in a turnaround school.

**Dependability.** Dependability involves reliability, or the notion that a study would produce the same results if conducted twice. According to Merriam (2009), validity and reliability are achieved through the study conceptualization, or the way data are collected, analyzed, and interpreted. Adherence to process validity, or the idea the study has been conducted in a competent manner, can increase dependability (Mills, 2011). In this study dependability was upheld through a clear audit trail, member checking, peer editing, and triangulation. The clear audit trail used supported ethical standards both in regards to the literature review, and the work in the field. In addition, the work was peer edited by other researchers and practitioners in the field in order to provide assurances that the study was dependable. Dependability was also enhanced through the bounded system in which the research was conducted. This bounded system of looking primarily at how a turnaround leader conceptualizes the building of a positive adult culture within a school has a specificity that ensures a finite look at a problem. This narrow rather than broad approach increases the dependability of the research in terms of its accuracy (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002).

**Credibility of research.** Credibility involves the notion that the results are believable from the lens of the participants in the research (Merriam, 2009). One way the credibility of the research was addressed by the use of triangulation from various sources within each turnaround school. Dependability thus increased, not only due to specificity of the bounded system, but also by the very nature of collecting data within the bounded system by a variety of sources as supported by qualitative research practices (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). In addition, the aforementioned data collection tools were used to accurately track the data, and are available to

other investigators in order to ensure transparency and accuracy. Field notes, summary notes, and transcriptions of interviews were developed within 24-48 hours after the visit to the school upholding the accuracy of interpretations as supported by Merriam (2009). To further increase dependability, member checking was conducted, allowing the participant to check the accuracy of the interpretation of what is being observed. Furthermore, follow up interviews with the principal were conducted in order to ensure credibility of the comprehensive school site visits as supported by Maxwell (1992). Every effort was made to reach a level of saturation, described by Merriam (2009) as a state when the same themes begin to be repeated in the data collection process, prior to the final principal interview.

**Credibility of researcher/conformability.** The credibility of the researcher, to include the transparent sharing of the researcher's positionality, is critical in increasing the credibility of the study (Merriam, 2009). Doing as such allows the researcher to maintain evaluative validity, or the ability to uphold objectivity in order to report data in an unbiased way (Mills, 2011). I have been in the seat of a successful turnaround school principal. Being in that role could decrease the objectivity in the research. However, to increase credibility of the researcher and conformability, I stayed grounded by aligning the study to the research questions. Taking this approach allowed me to focus solely on what others leaders in turnaround were doing to building a positive adult culture as turnaround leaders. In addition, using the aforementioned best practices in establishing ethical standards enhanced my credibility as the researcher. Conformability was upheld by keeping detailed field notes, observations, and musings in a journal. Upholding a systemic nature of data collection, as described herein, allowed me to remain cognizant of how personal feelings and reflections have an outcome on the final product of the study.

**Transferability.** Transferability is the notion of how, and to what degree, the ideas presented in the study can be generalized to other settings (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). Purposeful sampling, or the idea of using a sample that allowed for the richest possible data, were used in this study to increase transferability. The use of two turnaround schools and their turnaround principals as the bounded system in which data were collected, allowed for direct transferability to other stakeholders in the school turnaround process. These stakeholders include central office leaders in charge of struggling schools, principals involved in turnaround leadership, researchers interested in turnaround school work, teachers, students, and/or parents in a turnaround school. Each of these stakeholders may be able to make meaning for the data and literature to improve outcomes for students in a turnaround setting. In addition, schools outside the bounded system may also be able to extrapolate information on culture building to assist them in non-turnaround schools. A comprehensive view in painting the context of each case study was my primary focus in order for the audience to gain an understanding of the study's transferability as supported by (Merriam, 2009).

### **Limitations**

**Generalizability.** While the study has significance to school leaders, it would be remiss to fail to acknowledge the limitations in the study. The first limitation is that the sample type of the study is not directly generalizable to the entire K-12 school community. However, ideas from the rich descriptive stories of school leaders who are faced with the toughest of tasks in turning around difficult schools could still provide valuable insight to assist schools outside the direct realm of schools studied. Furthermore, the study is directly applicable to the leaders facing the daunting task of school turnaround.

**Trustworthiness.** There is a real possibility that participants in the study over-exaggerated the turnaround story, making collection of data challenging. This chest-bumping syndrome could be a direct result of school leaders and those interviewed to over-emphasize their rich story. This could have occur due to participants having such an emotional investment in their work that the story itself could become caught up in exaggeration. Attempts to mitigate this limitation were addressed by carefully analyzing responses to the interview questions and documents to exempt items that seem to be outliers in the story itself.

**Assumptions and bias.** One should not assume that the work of turnaround is done alone. The purpose of this study is to isolate the turnaround school leader, and be able to understand the complex relationship between the leader and the building of a positive adult school culture that originates from an innovating and motivating *why*. The turnaround school leader is a central agent in this culture building work, which has a direct impact on educators, and thus an impact on students (Louis et al., 2010). While this is the case, a positive school culture is not built solely from the interaction of the turnaround leader and the educators he or she leads. Building a positive culture in a school involves other pieces of the puzzle such as involving parents, community partnerships, and student voice to name just of a few parts of the whole. As such this research looks at one small segment of the turnaround puzzle.

As a turnaround school principal, I was mindful of his bias and the potential bias of those involved in the study. To mitigate this bias I used a structured approach guided by my conceptual framework, while staying true to the reality that influences to building a positive adult culture in turnaround outside the framework existed. In addition, I reflected on field notes and used appropriate data management strategies to prevent bias. Furthermore, rigorous processes in carrying out the study such as conferring with my dissertation chair and others



connected to my research as supported by Merriam (2009). In addition, those connected to the research could be biased about the turnaround efforts of the school. While this bias might exist, careful observation, skilled questioning, and detailed data collection were used to mitigate this bias (Merriam, 2009).

Despite these collective limitations, the study still informs the knowledge base for educators on the topic of school turnaround and culture. This increased knowledge base attempts to provide clarity in how leaders go about building a positive adult culture in turnaround schools. The study does not attempt to add another prescribed plan to the endless abyss for educators to choose from on the topic of school reform. In turn, this increased clarity is valuable to the educational community regardless of its limitations.

### **Summary**

This chapter reviewed the methods I used in order to examine the research questions in the study, which involves the story of three turnaround leaders in two schools who have led urban schools through the turnaround process. The methods used ensured consideration was given not only to the research questions, but also to the conceptual framework in order to organize the work. Descriptive and narrative case studies are used as the end product to analyze these turnaround cases. Turnaround principals were selected based on their schools and their leadership fitting into a bounded system that included an iterative process of combining expert recommendations and data analysis. Thus the turnaround principal is the primary unit of analysis for the study. Data collection procedures included coding and breaking down information that originated from sources such as documents, meeting observations, classroom and hallway walks, state achievement data, and key stakeholder interviews. Data management procedures were thoroughly outlined, and explanations of how this data led to the creation of both within case and

cross-case analysis was given. In addition, issues related to the research design were discussed in detail. In the next chapter, a comprehensive summary of the findings for the study is presented in the form of two descriptive case studies. These case studies involve how three turnaround leaders, in two different turnaround schools, conceptualized building a positive adult culture in their turnaround settings.

## CHAPTER 4

### WITHIN CASE FINDINGS

This chapter presents the cases of three turnaround leaders who led in the context of two turnaround schools. These three leaders include both Dr. Fury and her successor Mrs. Willie at Sunnyside Middle School (SMS), and Dr. Clear the turnaround leader at Circle High School (CHS). I examined how these three turnaround leaders contextualized working on their adult culture in a turnaround context as it related to the following two research questions: (a) to what extent do turnaround leaders improve school culture for adults purposefully and intentionally during the initial stages of the turnaround process, and (b) how, and to what degree do turnaround leaders use strategies reflective of the key accelerators posited in the conceptual framework to guide school turnaround.

The findings are presented in two distinct sections in this chapter with each section dedicated solely to the story of the turnaround leaders within each case. Both of these sections begin with a description of the school site contexts prior to turnaround. They will each progress into in-depth findings, beginning with the extent turnaround leaders worked to improve their adult culture in a purposeful and intentional way in the initial stage of turnaround. In addition, a look at how leaders contextualized the usage of the *why* and the key accelerators posited in the conceptual framework are examined within each school. Sustainment of turnaround is analyzed in the unique case of Sunnyside Middle School, as they had sustained turnaround for eight years at the time of the study

#### **Case 1: Turnaround Leadership at Circle High School**

##### **Turnaround School Leader and School Context**

Circle High School (CHS) is led by Principal Clear who was in his second year as turnaround principal at the time of the study. His career in education was comprised of previous

turnaround experience all spent in the same district as CHS. He was a successful teacher in a turnaround middle school for three years before being assigned to assistant principal at a different school in the same district. This experience as an assistant principal was significant as it was spent working on successfully sustained turnaround for four years at a middle school with a diverse population. He was then promoted to principal at another middle school that was not in turnaround in the same district for three years before becoming a high school principal at CHS. This was his first experience of any kind at the high school level.

During the course of the study, Dr. Clear appeared deeply involved in his own personal growth and the growth of CHS; for example, he completed his PhD in educational administration with a focus on organizational behavior. I made multiple visits to collect data and conduct interviews at the school. During these visits he was rarely found in his office, choosing to put a premium on visibility within his school. When I could get his full attention away from the heart of the work during the school day, he would still politely excuse himself from our conversations during passing periods to be visible in the hallways. In watching his interactions with adults and kids during this time, and it was evident that he was well respected. For example, he was respectful yet direct when asking groups of students to stop loitering in the hallways and move on to class. Kids would respond to his requests with little or no questioning. He took nearly every opportunity that presented itself to purposefully interact in a genuine way with as many stakeholders as possible.

CHS is located in the center of a large urban school district in the state of Texas. The school had nearly 1,200 students in the 2014-2015 school year (TEA ASR Circle, 2015). The composition of the student body is diverse including 25% of students being of African American descent, 69% being of Hispanic descent, 4% being of Caucasian or Asian descent, and 2% being

from other ethnicities (see figure 8). A total of 80% of the students are classified as economically disadvantaged, and 16% are considered English Language Learners (TEA SRC Circle, 2014). The mobility rate of students, or the number of students who did not complete the entire year at the same school, was over 26%, which was 9% over the state average (TEA ASR Circle, 2015). The Texas Education Agency (TEA) lags behind one full school year in reporting school attendance; however, in the 2013-2014 school year, 91.9% of students attended school which was four percent below the state average. Educational staff at CHS is comprised of 104 adults, 87 of which are teachers (TEA TAPR Circle, 2015).

Observation data suggested at CHS suggested that turnaround was both needed and occurring. When approaching the three-story building, which was built in 1936 and is now classified as an historical site, it was not unusual to find students in small groups during non-class time lining the front of the stately school, which was marked by a lush green lawn. These students were often not engaged in the most appropriate activities during the times not dedicated for classes consisting primarily of times before school, after school, and during open lunch. It was the norm for me to see students riding skateboards, making fun of other students, and even using profanity. However, once approaching the school a student would often open the door, and adults were immediately visible to me either at the front door or in the main office. I was always greeted warmly, and would often ask students for directions to a certain room I needed to get to. These students were generally very helpful and very respectful.

There did seem to be an absence of relevant postings, and/or bulletin boards promoting accomplishments of teaching and learning. During passing periods the adult presence increased, with cadres of administrators, teachers, and other educators working harmoniously and tirelessly to ensure students safely moved from one class to the other on time. The phrase “young man” or

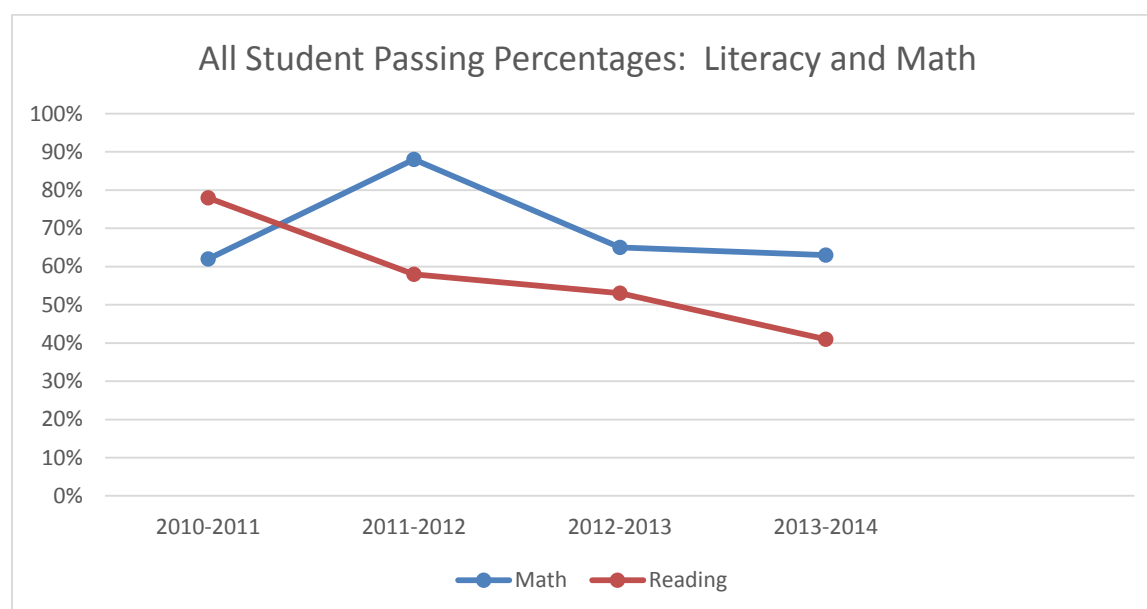
“please keep moving” were ones I heard educators use to help support the work of moving students from class to class. I was somewhat surprised at how responsive students were to these requests, considering the behavior I often saw during before and after school times. While it was apparent that there was much work to be done in terms of school climate, the phrase “Circle is the Place to be” marked the building and was talked about by stakeholders during the research study. Participants at CHS did speak genuinely about their work and being excited to be a part of it, in alignment with this slogan.

### **School Site Context Prior to Turnaround**

This was not the school’s first attempt in terms of working on turnaround. For instance, during the study interviewees often referenced the 2009-2010 school year as being a key year for the school. During that year, school stakeholders avoided school closure by successfully meeting state accountability measures (TEA AEIS Circle, 2010). The principal leading the school at this time continued for one more year after the avoidance of closure, and then a new less successful principal took over. This less successful principal was later replaced by an interim principal mid-year. As with most turnaround principals, Dr. Clear took over a school that had leadership turmoil before his arrival. Dr. Clear recounted several times that the school lacked basic systems prior to his arrival; these areas included having meeting agendas, clear expectations for procedures at lunch, and procedures involving accountability with attendance.

School achievement data at CHS shows that academic performance was declining after the avoidance of closure, and before Dr. Clear’s arrival (see figure 8). In the time period spanning the 2010-2011 school year to the 2013-2014 school year, all student performance on state standardized tests in Reading decreased by nearly 40% with decreases each year. During the time period spanning the 2011-2012 and the 2013-2014 school year, all student performance

on state standardized tests in Math decreased by nearly 30%. During the course of this time the school performance rating fell back to one of “not meeting standard”, according to the Texas Education Agency (TEA SRC Circle, 2014).



**Figure 8: Circle High School State Achievement Data before Turnaround (TEA 2014 Historical Data)**

Interviewees asked to describe the time prior to Dr. Clear’s tenure provided a vivid description of how these years between turnaround stories were viewed by key stakeholders at the school. An assistant principal who has served under both Dr. Clear and the previous two leaders (removed principal and the removed principal’s interim), stated that during the mid-year leadership transition, many of his days were spent having conversation to calm folks, trying to stabilize the situation. He described his time as being spent involved in damage control, parent conversations about change, and working on reassurances in order to try to move the school forward. In addition, one teacher described the time period as one during which performance suffered greatly. This teacher also described his experiences with punitive enforcement of undisclosed questionable policies, and consistent FERPA violations that had a negative effect on morale. Furthermore, the time period was described as one that was highly destructive with

some teachers walking out, quitting at mid-year, or quitting at the end of the year. The interim principal who took over was described in one interview as a great human being who was not in the position to move instruction and/or test scores forward in the way needed for school turnaround due to his limited time as interim. One assistant principal described what happened during the year before Dr. Clear's tenure as follows:

There was a smell of loving and respecting your school after averting school closure, and I caught the other end of that as things got wiped out very quickly with a complete turnover in administration.

It appears from these accounts that trust in administration was broken down prior to the school turnaround that Dr. Clear was about to embark on. It is also noteworthy that in all the time spent with Dr. Clear not once did he speak negatively about his predecessors, choosing instead to focus on a more forward thinking approach.

### **Initial Stages of Adult Culture Building**

**Purposeful and intentional?** One of the two research questions involves determining the extent that the turnaround leader was purposeful and intentional in the initial stages of turnaround. Findings suggest that Dr. Clear was very intentional at working to build a positive adult culture during the initial stage of turnaround which was a year marked by student achievement gains. For instance, he reported conducting a robust needs assessment before he started the job at CHS to determine how the organization was behaving from an external lens. To do this he reviewed school data and listened intently to key stakeholders in the organization, helping him gather formal and informal data to let him know where to begin turnaround. This data led to intentional actions that could be observed in both the school campus improvement plan and his initial vision for the school. However, interviewees reported that teachers were not



initially open to trying new things coming from this needs assessment, rather wanting to stick to what they had always done. One teacher reported that the first year was “kind of tough,” involving Dr. Clear working to find his place in working at the high school level in which he did not have experience. This teacher felt that decisions were being made with instruction in mind, but in a vacuum that did not consider campus voice. However, this teacher went on to report that Dr. Clear began improving in this area as the year went on, developing plans to include teacher voice after listening to teacher feedback. In addition, interviewees felt that there was a clear focus on weak areas needing to be improved during Dr. Clear’s first year. One of these most glaring weak areas was improving systems needed to provide consistency in the organization. Intentionality in building a positive adult culture was thus evidenced by Dr. Clear conducting a purposeful needs assessment leading to action, listening to leadership teams to gather teacher input, and having a clear focus at improving systems for consistency at CHS.

Dr. Clear himself reported being intentional about his practices. He referred to the importance of employee job satisfaction as being a very important first step of turnaround. He described himself as working consistently to have purposeful conversations to work to plant seeds to change people’s thinking. He linked these conversations, job satisfaction, and job performance succinctly in improving student outcomes, noting:

When you change one’s thinking you change behavior, and when you change one’s behavior you change performance.

In response to this statement I asked him if he felt he was intentional about improving the culture for adults. He stated he thought he was, but also said that sometimes working to assist adults on campus was a subconscious venture originating in his nature as a people person. He provided an example of often being proactive in seeking out employees who are having a bad day, rather than

being reactive and waiting for the bad day to fester into poor performance. During one observation he was clearly engaged in this process, checking in on a Science teacher in the classroom who was struggling with an issue outside of school that was impacting her job performance. In this example it appears that Dr. Clear was taking purposeful action that was indeed intentional; however, the innate skill of being a people person assisted him in the purposeful actions taken.

Of the key stakeholders interviewed at CHS, all four believed that Dr. Clear was very intentional at working to improve the adult culture. In fact all four answered the question of intentionality almost immediately. The lack of trust in previous administration was cited as perceived reason on why he was so intentional, and one interviewee clarified by linking teacher survey data that was shared with the administrative team as evidence. The administrators at the school reported that they took both tangible and non-tangible actions to purposefully impact teacher morale. Another administrator stated that Dr. Clear worked with the end in mind, knowing what outcome he was seeking while working to build a series of steps to get to that outcome. One example of this end in mind intentional approach was evident when one teacher stated:

Dr. Clear makes it a primary focus to work on the positive attitude of the teaching staff, and I know from him explicitly stating it repeatedly that he wants a staff of professional and capable growth oriented folks. He wants people who are capable of identifying the problems with solutions and feel comfortable in doing so. So I know he is making conscious efforts to improve the morale.

**Accelerators used to start turnaround during the initial stages?** A second research question in the study involved determining the degree in which turnaround leaders use strategies

reflective of the key accelerators posited in the conceptual framework. To understand the answer to this question in the initial stages, participants were asked which of the six key accelerators their school started on to begin turnaround. Responses suggested that Dr. Clear intentionally started working on turnaround of the adult culture in the areas of improving the systems approaches used at CHS, increasing distributive leadership through collaborative PLCs, and building more *trusting relationships through appreciation and personalization*. Three of the four interviewees reported that Dr. Clear began working most intently on the systems of the school and the relationships, while the other interviewee cited that systems and distributive leadership were areas of primary focus. When Dr. Clear was asked a similar version of this question, he seemed to believe that relationships were the most important starting point in turning around the adult culture. He followed by saying *core values, vision, and central mission* was the next most important accelerator, differing from other key stakeholders. Dr. Clear then cited using a *systems approach* as the next most important accelerator for turnaround. It is also of note that Dr. Clear was adamant that prioritizing the accelerators was a rather chaotic task due to the accelerators themselves being interconnected.

### **The *Why* and the Accelerators: Stabilizing Crisis and Improving Adult Culture**

The *why* and the accelerators were used to varying extents by Dr. Clear to work on the initial stages of school turnaround. In the conceptual framework, the *why* consists of the idea of the turnaround leader being motivational in describing the clear purpose as to *why* the organization exists. The six accelerators include:

Accelerator 1: *distributive and collaborative leadership in PLCs,*

Accelerator 2: *building trusting relationships through personalization and appreciation,*

Accelerator 3: *a culture of inquiry,*

Accelerator 4: *core values, vision, and central mission,*

Accelerator 5: *a systems approach,* and

Accelerator 6: *internal accountability.*

The following sections describe how Dr. Clear used the *why* and the six accelerators to stabilize the crisis at CHS, and to improve the adult culture for educators at the school.

**The *why*: Is the turnaround leader motivational?** The origins of the conceptual framework of the study begin with the *why* or the motivating clear purpose of why the organization exists. Theoretically this *why* drives decision making, allowing the organization to get to a tipping point and educators to work in unison on continuous improvement. At CHS, this *why* in the form of a mission statement was transparent on nearly every agenda analyzed in the document analysis portion of data collection for the study. The *why* consisted of the phrase: “Igniting in every student and staff member the mindset for continuous growth, self-improvement, and lifelong learning.” When asked during the interview process the importance of the formal *why* for the organization Dr. Clear responded:

You know it is human behavior even when we are little children to ask why. Why are we doing this, why are we doing that, and even as adults when you really get down to it people want to know the *why*. Understanding the *why* does not necessarily mean they are going to agree or disagree. But it is going to give them the empowerment of knowing *why* we are doing what we are doing, and so often, at least in my lens, that is overlooked.

But in my opinion the *why* is a very powerful key to performance and to turnaround.

The *why* at CHS appears to be firmly rooted in the beliefs of the turnaround leader, providing a potential roadmap for educators at the school to move the work of continuous improvement forward.

Stakeholders at the school seemed to be fairly tuned in to this *why*, especially as it relates to making decisions. All of the participants interviewed reported that Mr. Clear was indeed basing his decisions on a *why* for the organization; however, this *why* did have some variance dependent upon the interviewee. Classifications of the *why* from interviewees generally fell into two distinct categories of “being there for kids”, and to “improve test scores” for students. They referred to experiences in which he has used “being there for kids” in intense situations with parents, students, and faculty to turn these situations from negative to positive.

An example of Dr. Clear’s use of the *why* occurred during one observation of the CHS Continuous School Improvement Team (CSIT) which occurred right before Christmas break. Dr. Clear followed a very difficult conversation and presentation from an outside provider in which key members of the team seemed to exhibit some anxiety about the selection of the provider in a very unique way. He called in a surprise special group from outside the meeting area to join the group. This special group was CHS Choir students ready to sing holiday carols in the middle of the meeting. The participants’ body language could be seen moving from anxiety about their responsibilities of choosing a service provider, to tapping with their feet and singing along with the students. Following the performance, he reminded all staff that the job at hand was to add value and growth to all students as the purpose of the meeting. Furthermore, on the agenda for this same meeting was a list of both formal and informal data on the number of students needing intervention, further solidifying the purpose of choosing a service provider. In this case the service provider presenting was representing a mentorship program for the neediest of kids, a relevant topic for the nearly twenty educators at the meeting. This same student-centered purpose was evident in reviewing both campus improvement plans and campus needs

assessment. It was clear that decision making was being based on the *why* that the turnaround leader was promoting in the school.

Three of the four interviewees felt that Mr. Clear was motivational in expressing this *why*. The outlier participant stated:

I think he is trying to be motivational but I do not find his attempts to be motivational motivating. Things that others feel motivational seem insincere at times because the effect he is trying to produce is increasing moral or excitement about a cause.

Mr. Clear was aware of this blind spot. When asked if he believed educators at the school thought he was motivational in explaining the *why* for CHS he responded:

You know I think not to the level that I want yet for sure, but it may be more so this year (second year) because of the work that we did last year. I mean last year the work that had been done was getting everyone on the same page, and going into the year two I think we are going to have more people that connect with our why. As I have shared with them, if you do not know why we are doing what we are doing and you do not ask then I am going to wonder what is wrong.

In observing Mr. Clear during our visits, I did not see him being motivational in what some might believe is the traditional sense of the word. Mr. Clear's motivational style contrasted sharply from the traditional way an athletic coach might be considered motivational. He did not raise his voice, or give an epic speech to invigorate his staff. Instead he seemed to lean on emotional composure, visibility, a calm nature, and an intense focus to be motivational. His assistant principals described his motivational style as follows:

I think that Dr. Clear is interesting as a leader, because his personality is not loud. He is not extroverted. He is not like a coach type leader. However his style is very effective.

It is more like that of a quiet stealth leader, and he is someone who might be underestimated, but over time yields very strong results. The reason I say that is because I have had the opportunity to sit in on several different conferences with him. Some people come in and they are mad and yelling and ranting and raving, and I have never seen him do the same.

This description is very much aligned to observational data I witnessed in shadowing Dr. Clear. Due to his visibility within the school, I was able to observe him modeling these aforementioned skills for others. For instance, I noticed meaningful conversation happening with six different students or educators during a ten minute period that occurred before, during, and after passing period. These conversations went beyond surface level, digging deeper in asking specific questions to meet the needs of the customer he was serving. For instance, during one observation Dr. Clear discussed how a campus monitors job function could be improved in a new hallway sweep system they were implementing for students who were late to class. One assistant principal reported lessons she picked up from watching Dr. Clear take the time and patience to get to the root cause of a student's behavior in a way that allowed the student to "save face", thus building relationships in the process. It appears that having a clear purpose, or *why*, articulated by the turnaround leader has had a significant impact on stabilizing the crisis and accelerating turnaround at CHS.

**Accelerator 1: Distributive and collaborative leadership in PLCs.** According to the conceptual framework, distributive and collaborative leadership in professional learning communities (PLCs) is the idea of leveraging these learning communities along with a distributive leadership approach to assist in promoting the purpose of an organization. Doing so allows the organization to move forward in building a positive adult culture as an accelerator of

turnaround. At CHS only one person interviewed placed the greatest priority on the collaborative leadership in PLCs in relation to other accelerators. While Dr. Clear did not believe this was the most important accelerator in building an adult culture in the turnaround process, he still placed enough importance on it to have outside providers come to the school to coach his PLC teams during year two of his tenure. This reputable education think tank in the state of Texas was brought in to work in several schools in Dr. Clear's district, and he quickly plugged CHS into this intensive and systemic yearlong professional development opportunity. Interviewees articulated that systems were put in place to provide all teachers in a particular department with a common planning time. This work was done in preparation for the outside provider's yearlong work at CHS in the 2015-2016 school year, and in an effort to make sure teachers could increase collaboration. The assistant principal with supervisory duties over the science department described the supporting conditions for effective PLCs as a huge advantage:

One great thing we have here is that our science department is all off at the same time with the exception of our advanced placement teachers. So being able to meet with the science department every morning, knowing that is an easy thing to do because they are all going to be there is great. The department works very well together so you can find them in one room no matter what the content is. On Wednesday we have our Science department meetings, and our PLCs occur on Tuesdays with Biology. They occur on Thursdays with Chemistry and Physics. So we have those times to be able to collaborate and work.

This same assistant principal described that his teachers knew they were going to be held accountable, but that the PLC process also gave them a sense of relaxed freedom in the classroom to have the confidence to drive instruction.



In observing Mr. Clear during a half day visit with the outside providers, it was apparent that PLCs at CHS were progressing through the nascent stages of improving toward proficiency. For instance, early in the data collection process I observed four separate PLCs on campus during the same day that the outside service provider was conducting a technical service visit. Each of the four PLCs had the exact same framework on their agendas, and three out of four were looking at student work. The PLCs were teacher led, and most teacher leaders seemed uncomfortable in leading the PLCs. When asking the outside providers and Dr. Clear about what I observed they described action steps from the previous technical assistance visit, where a lack of agendas and the need to build leadership capacity by rotating leaders was determined as a next step in improvement. The purposeful next steps had a firm connection to this data from the last site visit. The actions of each PLC having a similar shell for the agenda was intended to provide focus for each PLC. Teachers within each PLC were rotating through leading the PLC in order to build leadership capacity. Dr. Clear noted:

They were really in the initial stages of the PLC process so my leaders needed structure before autonomy. They also were working to develop and improve in terms of using the standards and leading. They have come a long way but have a long way to go.

Observational data from this day of PLC visits was directly aligned to Dr. Clear's comments about where PLCs began, where they are now, and where they are likely going. It was also encouraging to see an estimated 90% of the time in PLCs being devoted to instructional items. In addition participants in each PLC meeting were being observed by over ten experienced educators. Despite this added pressure conversations were focused on students and participant did not seem to be overly nervous. At least one of the PLC's showed emerging levels of open,

honest, and transparent conversations, stopping just short of fully engaging in reflective discussion.

While the PLCs were in their early stages of developing, they also seem to be evolving. The assistant principal who supervised the English PLC commented that her PLC has evolved from being very administrator driven to being teacher led:

Lately our PLCs have been a little different because they are coming in with the questions, with the data, with the tools and so it has been interesting to say go plan, come to me when you need support. So it is watching them look at data by period, about how many kids got it this period, how many got it next period, and what are we going to do to reteach? They are doing that in a very organic way, and that is exciting to see.

Dr. Clear reinforced this theme of evolving, practically gushing with confidence about his United States History PLC when I checked back in with him toward the end of the data collection process at CHS. He stated:

When you visited our US History PLC the group was just talking without focus and not using data. So we took baby steps to increase focus and data use. They just had a great PLC last week and are now understanding the process to a greater extent. The December report (from the outside service provider) made specific mention of the progress they have made.

In reviewing reports from the outside providers at the end of the data collection process, this progress was documented as not being limited to the United States History PLC, but rather encompassing each PLC on the CHS Campus.

The distributive approach of leadership appears aligned with Dr. Clear's leadership style and expectations. Described by each interviewee, this style is one of collaboration coupled with

clear expectations that leaders on campus collaborate about problems of practice, while simultaneously aligning the vision of the school to these problems. Leaders have been given autonomy to lead, albeit at varying degrees over the course of Dr. Clear's tenure. Dr. Clear described the level of autonomy given to his leaders by stating:

Well from the get go there was a level of autonomy, but a level of autonomy that was guided, because the previous seven years of work that I have been doing led me to believe that leading does not always come naturally. So you have to help teach, train, and coach, so that others start realizing why we are doing what we are doing and how these things impact performance. So to some there was a level of autonomy and others would probably say that there was not much autonomy, but from a leadership capacity standpoint I felt that there was a pretty good sense of autonomy.

One assistant principal recalled a potentially pivotal moment at the beginning of the school year in which the Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) was at their first meeting of the year, in year two of Dr. Clear's tenure, and conversation started off right away, because now they had a free forum to suggest ideas. Another interviewee reported having expectations and allowing autonomy resulted in ideas coming to the forefront that may have otherwise been concealed.

One interviewee described feeling the autonomy to lead:

Dr. Clear has his own cohort that he does for people that are working to be an administrator, and he allows us to come in and help with administration duties. It is a great learning experience. He also expects our department heads to be in the classrooms to help their fellow teachers by providing support.

These data were reinforced in observations of the CHS administrative team. During each meeting participants, in this case assistant principals, took turns leading a leadership development portion of the meeting due to Dr. Clear structuring meetings in this way.

While most interviewees believed they had the autonomy to lead, one interviewee believed that there was still much work to do. This interviewee described a feeling of frustration during the first year of turnaround. He felt his team did not know soon enough that a district directive involving last minute preparations for state assessments could be avoided by turning in a plan for the entire department to move forward in a research based way. This person described this experience and the experience of gaining autonomy as follows:

So to a large degree there still seems to be a large communication channel that is disconnected. For instance, administrators come to observe but some feedback resides in checking a box, and there is no real dialogue. So things are detached, distant, and autonomy comes under threat because things are not genuine. That might be potentially unsettling for people who are scared of taking risks. So there has to be a way to combat that. So for those who are uncomfortable with confrontation or constructive feedback autonomy does not exist. If you are comfortable with that process then yes things are absolutely fine.

While there is much work to do in ensuring PLCs continue to evolve and leaders have autonomy to lead at CHS, findings show that leadership has indeed been distributed to a set of leaders linked to the overall purpose of the school. In addition, these findings clearly show a focus on distributive and collaborative leadership styles in PLCs to build a positive adult culture at CHS as an accelerator to school turnaround.

**Accelerator 2: Building trusting relationships through personalization and appreciation.** In the conceptual framework, providing meaningful feedback and affirmation allows an organization to build trust, increasing chances to achieve the purpose of the organization and build a positive adult culture to accelerate turnaround. Each person interviewed placed great emphasis on *building trusting relationships based on personalization and appreciation* as being important in building a positive adult culture, thus being a powerful accelerator to school turnaround. Two of four persons interviewed believed this accelerator was most important in building a positive adult culture, while the other two rated it the second and third most important accelerators. Vivid and detailed responses from those interviewed were evident in each interview in regards to this accelerator. For instance, one non-administrative interviewee described the importance of relationships by noting, “Building relationships is huge because if you do not have a staff that can work well together you are going to have a hard time in turning around a school.” Furthermore, one AP mentioned that the relationships built over a time period consisting of a little more than a year had stopped the decline in performance of adults and really put the school back on the right track.

Concurrently, Dr. Clear also valued building trusting relationships with his staff as a key accelerator, claiming that it was the most important accelerator in being a turnaround leader.

He stated:

First and foremost to move anything there has to be a connection. The truth is that you cannot move people unless they have some type of connection to the person who is the carrier of the message. So to me building relationships and appreciation is beyond important, and your vision will never take hold if you do not have it.

Dr. Clear went on to quantify the importance of being authentic with relationship building. He stated that many people work to build superficial relationships in the workplace, but those with a true gift work to build genuine relationships with those they serve. In watching Dr. Clear work with the kids and adults at his school, he seemed to have this gift as evidenced by the deep conversations he had with stakeholders. These conversations went well beyond surface level salutations and into conversations meant to check the pulse of, and respond by assisting, those with whom he was working. He also related building relationships with the words credibility and integrity stating:

Building relationships is more than just having experience and expertise, but rather the idea that leaders must be accepted as being honest by those they serve. Your level of integrity and trust as a leader is essential in building relationships and doing what you have to do.

Another interviewee reinforced these ideas involving credibility and relationships when she said:

His *why* is always, “If you know me, I am about integrity.” During tough conversations he often says, “If I am here and not talking with you about this then I would not have integrity.” He has this ability to kind of change a course of a conversation at a critical moment when someone says something intense, and he has way of turning things around causing the whole conversation to shift back to what really matters.

Multiple interviews reported that Dr. Clear shared these ideas about building relationships and trust with his staff in year one of turnaround. They believed he was very authentic and unique in sharing ideas in a way that set forth clear expectations for his staff.

Specific examples of building trusting relationships were common at CHS. One pathway used to build trusting relationships at involved using tangible items to show appreciation for

work being done in the school. For instance, one interviewee mentioned that breakfasts at the school were common as a way to get people to collaborate and talk. One AP linked building trusting relationships to professional development by noting, “We support the staff not just mentally, but also in ways that make sure the staff is able to get needed training.” An assistant principal, noted she would send thank you notes to teachers for making phone calls in order to take action to improve student attendance. However, she also questioned if this was the best approach. She went on to note:

So we were very intentional in doing things for teachers last year. In the beginning we attempted to do things that were very external. Like hot chocolate and coffee, and that was not an easy task to make coffee and hot chocolate for 150 people. We were getting up at four in the morning. And for Valentine’s Day we gave teachers some items. But my reflection on this was that teachers as whole did not see this as my administrator is doing this for me. It was almost like a one-time speech, it was extrinsic and not intrinsic.

It appears that the assistant principal was at least cognizant of other ways to show appreciation for educators to build trusting relationships.

A more obscure pathway used at Circle High to build trusting relationships was to be respectful of educator’s time. One teacher echoed the aforementioned thoughts of extrinsic motivations by stating:

I can say I have been to trainings to build morale and supposedly make us feel better. I am sitting there but I cannot find the time to do what is expected of me, yet I am mandated to do things to feel better which is simultaneously frustrating. In an ideal situation I would like to say from the administrators to the teachers everything should be centered on making teachers job easier. Streamline things. Directives and one-way

communication are often met with resistance by teachers, and I see that as often being that teachers do not want to work or as teachers being fussy. Sometimes teachers want to work and do the best but there is a limited amount of time and resources to align prioritization of tasks.

This teacher went on to state that Dr. Clear has done a wonderful job of realizing that there are ways to save time and ways to make things more efficient in disseminating information. He gave several examples of this when he stated:

We are now doing faculty e-meetings to get information out so that not everyone has to be in one room. Video information and things like that using technology. Dr. Clear also decided to do faculty meetings before and after school so that teachers could then choose what is best for them. With department chairs he gave us a two week deadline for lead teams and information needed from the departments, making it possible for me to carve out some time to get what is needed rather than a one day turnaround. Now we are proactive being ready for the next month rather than running around to get things done reactively in one day.

During one observation of the CSIT meeting, I was curious as to why only 20 members signed onto a sign in sheet for attendance at the meeting, leaving more than 10 members not in attendance. Toward the end of the data collection process, I asked Dr. Clear about this dynamic. He stated that he took the advice of his teachers who were telling him that they needed more time, and he felt that he needed to meet that request when possible. Consequently, he stated he is very purposeful in making the agenda, only requiring educators to come to the meeting if the information on the agenda is relevant to their specific function on campus.



Dr. Clear commonly asked educators about next steps in order to identify obstacles to overcome. In addition to time, items such as supplies, information about school happenings, feedback, or budget concerns were shared with him. This led Dr. Clear to take action to fill in these gaps which was surely appreciated by the requestor, and could potentially lead to building trusting relationships. For instance, members of the United States History PLC group mentioned they needed to have a video shot of an effective PLC to assist in their development and growth. During the observation of PLCs during one visit, I saw students involved in a media tech program shooting videos of an effective PLC that will likely be shared with the US History PLC team. At the end of this filmed PLC the team filmed gave each other a high five, feeling very excited that they completed a successful taped PLC.

Findings also led to other ways that relationships and trust were intrinsically built at CHS. For instance, interviewees reported that in the middle of Dr. Clear's first year as a turnaround principal the entire staff went to a ropes course to work on teambuilding during a professional development day. One assistant principal recalled an event that required everyone to work as a team to trust each other in order to pull off the event. She described this event as follows:

We had an event that required us all to work together, and it was a seemingly silly event. The Make a Wish Foundation granted a student wish and called us to help. We had community partners donate tee-shirts, we had students make a tunnel, and the news was here. We had a celebrity here, it was kind of a big deal. That event required us as a leadership team to work together, and cede some responsibility to teachers. We had to say just trust us, it will be great for the school, great for the kids, and you will love it. It

required us to be vulnerable, as we could not tell teachers why, but we needed their help.

And then to see it come to fruition and work it was special.

The assistant principal in this case felt that trust was being built due to the success of the event.

Another assistant principal reported similar findings that his PLC team was increasing their level of trust with each other and with administration. This perception of increased trust was attributed to his willingness and confidence to allow teachers to try different things, and experiment with how the curriculum could be adjusted to better drive instruction. They felt they had a leader that could guide them, and give them the freedom to get the student achievement moved forward.

Similar levels of trust seemed to develop early in the turnaround process in the administrative team. One assistant principal reported:

We meet as an admin team once a week, but we share the leadership role so we rotate on who creates the agenda, who leads the meeting. One thing that is interesting that helped build our trust and capacity as leaders is that each week we start with a PD for ten minutes. When Dr. Clear first came on board I will be honest I was like we have 10 minutes and there is so much that has to be done here, but I am a team player so I sucked it up and did it. But about a month into it I started enjoying it, and started enjoying hearing what my colleagues had to share. I think having everyone with a role has allowed everyone to have an equal voice, and has assisted us to grow as a group.

Administration leadership team meetings aligned to the information shared in interviews. The administration team meeting began with an activity in which one assistant principal shared words that most described her viewpoint of effective leadership, and a summary of the book titled *The Five Levels of Leadership*. During this meeting Dr. Clear was home with his children who were

sick, but was still able to join the entire meeting via conference call. The meeting ended with him thanking his administrative team for having a local restaurant deliver food to his house in an effort to give their principal a pick-up on a somewhat difficult day at home with sick kids.

Tangible or otherwise, it appears that Dr. Clear placed high levels of value in working to build *trusting relationships through appreciation and personalization* in order to build an adult culture to accelerate school turnaround.

**Accelerator 3: A culture of inquiry.** According to the conceptual framework, a *culture of inquiry* allows an organization to discuss how it might enact the “why” by openly dialoguing about current instructional practices and data within the organization to build a positive adult culture and accelerate turnaround. Three out of four interviewees, not including Dr. Clear, rated a *culture of inquiry* in the bottom tier of the accelerators that have an impact on school turnaround. This same cohort of interviewees also had very limited responses in regards to a *culture of inquiry*, responses that lacked richness. This could mean that the former vernacular of “*culture of inquiry*” had not been introduced teachers, and/or could be related to the newness of the PLC movement on the campus. This trend was limited to the *culture of inquiry*, and contradictory to every other accelerator at CHS. One interviewee tried to contextualize a *culture of inquiry* as follows:

There tends to be in some people the idea that if someone asks you a question then they are undermining your content knowledge and validity as a teacher. And figuring out some way to get people to understand that being questioned is not bad is the key.

Dr. Clear also placed the least value on the *culture of inquiry* as an accelerator for turnaround during his interview. In reflecting on a *culture of inquiry* he stated:

A *culture of inquiry* begins because you get all these other things (accelerators) into place and people start to inquire about why we are doing what we are doing, and they also start to look at ways to improve the core values and beliefs that were established in the organization.

It could be that a *culture of inquiry* will be more pervasive and accepted as the Professional Learning Community (PLC) model at CHS develops from the previously mentioned nascent stages of development. In the four PLC meetings, there was a lack of reflective questioning which was in line with the observational data, leading me to believe that the PLCs were somewhat robotic in nature.

Observational data did lead me to believe that a *culture of inquiry* was beginning to emerge at least with the administrative team and the continuous school improvement team (CSIT) meeting. During the administrative team meeting, the flow of information was very much a two way street where assistant principals were free to inquire and pose different ideas. This was also evident, albeit to a lesser degree, during the CSIT meeting. This leadership group was considering hiring an outside service provider that would provide a mentorship program to the most at risk kids on campus, adding to the other two mentorship programs that were already in use on campus. The leadership team had asked Dr. Clear for more interventions for their highest need kids as a result of a data defined need that they were observing and working to solve. Approximately seven different members out of the twenty on this team asked questions of the presenter showing evidence of a two-way information flow and inquiry. However, Dr. Clear did have to encourage the group to ask questions of the presenter once the presentation was over. It is of note that the other interviewees did articulate that they have frequently been involved in using data to lead discussion and work to determine root causes of issues on campus. While this

is the case, a culture of inquiry is at best emerging at CHS, and seems the accelerator that has been utilized the least.

**Accelerator 4: Core values, vision, and central mission.** In the conceptual framework the core values, vision, and a central mission are coupled with the *why* to guide the organization as an accelerator for building a positive adult culture and turnaround. At CHS the formal central mission is to ignite in every student and staff member the mindset for continuous growth, self-improvement, and lifelong learning. This mission statement is very transparent and visual as it was posted on each agenda of meetings I observed. Two out of the four key stakeholders, not including Dr. Clear, placed importance on *core values, vision, and central mission* rating it in their top three most important accelerators of adult culture in turnaround. The other two interviewees placed this accelerator as the fourth and sixth most important accelerator. Dr. Clear described his beliefs about *core values, vision, and central mission* as follows:

Often times those items (*core values, vision, and central mission*) can get pretty muddy in the work that we do, but turnaround leaders that survive are remembered for their turnaround leadership results. What these leaders actually stood for in these areas is the key. A turnaround leader to me is specifically a leader who is able to influence without ever waiving on their core values and beliefs of not only themselves but also the organization.

Dr. Clear also reported that *core values, vision, and central mission* was the second most important accelerator in the work of building an adult culture in a turnaround setting following building trusting relationships.

While Dr. Clear was firmly rooted in his own core values from the beginning of his turnaround tenure, it was evident that he did not come to the vision and central mission

immediately. Five out of five interviewees indirectly referred to a courting period occurring before developing the CHS vision and central mission; known as an MMVV, or their motto, mission, vision, and values. One assistant principal reported that they were confused about why Dr. Clear did not come in and create a mission statement as the first order of business, but in reflecting understood that there was “a method to Dr. Clear’s madness,” stating he was taking an environmental scan before working to collaboratively create an MMVV the right way. Another assistant principal noted this delay by stating that veteran teachers were perplexed as to why CHS did not have initially have an MMVV on a piece of paper. This assistant principal remembered responding to veteran teachers by saying, “We have to have things in order first before moving that work forward. We have to get people to believe what we are trying to do. It is more than just words on paper.” Another assistant principal recalled the uncertainty of not having an MMVV:

So when Dr. Clear got here we did not know what are mission, or our MMVV was. We did not know one another but we knew had to work together. So we had a system for our meetings, a system for working together in departments, and we would say what about doing this and then there would be a system. That is really how we made it through about the first half of the year last year was with systems. And then about February/March we really started talking about what we wanted CHS to look like and what we stood for. And our motto...*Circle is the Place to be* came out of our admin meetings. I was like we kept telling people *Circle is the Place to be* whether we were talking with kids or talking with the community. Then we had this MMVV committee that came together to shape this whole thing you see now.

Dr. Clear took a very careful, calculated, and systemic seven- to eight-month approach at building CHS *core values, vision, and central mission*.

To help reduce the uncertainty in the first semester of his tenure as turnaround leader, Dr. Clear did use several acronyms aligned to his own core values to work to guide work of turnaround. For instance, the acronym 3T, consisting of trust, transparency, and teamwork was used. Another acronym was coined the PEAR mentality, or the idea that educators should focus on performance, effort, accountability, and relationships. Interviewees could articulate these guiding principles and their importance. One interviewee indicated this by saying:

You know PEAR and 3T we implemented that at the beginning of last year. It was looked at as something like a mission and motto, but something you could do every day. You could have these qualities with your kids, in your classroom and implement them. We did not have a MMVV, but we did have something to let us know where we are going. We took those PEAR and 3T's after the fact and created a mission and motto from them, so they are important to what we do.

All interviewees reported that the 3T's and PEAR had trickled down to staff, all recognizing that it was important to Dr. Clear. In addition, they reported that Dr. Clear would follow up in quizzing his staff on these items at faculty meetings. One interviewee jokingly commented about these quizzes and stated:

And everyone was like oh yea the PEAR arrr, arrr, arrr, arrr (mockingly). So he had these little post cards made and he was like what are the three T's, just write them down. He started holding people accountable for this, and they were okay I need to know it. So this year when we talked about it with kids, we began to hold ourselves accountable because this is what we stood for. This year I have heard it used in classrooms with

kids. When we talk about it in meetings it becomes powerful. I have it up in my office from one of my little tests as well. Now I finally know it. I think it helps when we talk because it is not about one person, it is about an idea and how I can model it.

In addition, both assistant principals mentioned that the 3T and PEAR Mentality has given them something to focus difficult conversations on with teachers, parents, and/or students, as the core values are at the heart of what the school is about. In addition, at the end of the study Dr. Clear said he was very excited to see that people were understanding these mindsets, making the turnaround work a bit easier each day.

It is interesting to note that two other acronyms surfaced in the research. The administrative team used the acronym PARROT. The “P” in this acronym stood for four words which included promptness, patience, perseverance and professionalism. The “A” stood for aligned administration. The two “R’s” stood for relationships and respect, and the second “R” for response rate. The “O” stood for optimal optimism, and the “T” for trust and teamwork. These qualities were to ensure that the admin team knew what their focus was. Students also had an acronym used to provide a value system called PRIDE. It stood for perseverance, respect, integrity, development, and excellence.

Dr. Clear’s influence as a turnaround principal on the *core values, vision, and central mission* are evident. The ideas behind the CHS MMVV seem to be his ideas that he was worked to model, but are also ideas in which he has gained buy in at the school. He reinforced this, saying, “I really think there are different characteristics and attributes of a turnaround leader. What really separates leaders, or exceptional and extraordinary leaders, is their core values and beliefs to themselves.” One teacher noted it did at times seem the values were being forced on them, wishing that the collaborative group used to build the MMVV would have formed sooner.



The motto that has been developed, *Circle is the Place to be*, is aligned to Dr. Clear's vision for the school. The motto is also posted throughout the school and on nearly every agenda that was used during meetings I observed. The pervasive nature of this motto was described by one counselor as follows, "I think that the main thing that has stuck is that *Circle is the Place to be*. I mean truly everyone talks about it. We go to our feeder middle school and talk about how *Circle is the Place to be*". While the MMVV took some time to emerge, it does appear to be transcending traditional boundaries of a high school to be collectively accepted as a primary accelerator of a positive adult culture at CHS.

**Accelerator 5: A systems approach.** In the conceptual framework, a *systems approach* refers to the idea that time can be held sacred when everyone in the organization understands how the organization itself will behave, mitigating stress in decision making aligned with the *why*. Findings suggest that CHS began their turnaround journey heavily focusing on this accelerator of building a positive adult culture for turnaround. Each of the five interviewees, including Dr. Clear, rated this accelerator in the top three in terms of impacting the adult culture as an accelerator for turnaround at CHS. One interviewee thought this was the top accelerator, one thought it was number two, and three thought it was the third most important.

Dr. Clear was one of the three that rated a *systems approach* as the third most important accelerator to build a positive adult culture in school turnaround, ranking it behind building trusting relationships, and *core values, vision, and central mission*. He mentioned that systems allow an organization to know how internal processes work, thus understanding how the organization will behave. Furthermore, he mentioned that systems can be used to drive the core mission and central values of an organization and can strengthen relationships. In conducting a needs assessment of the school shortly after accepting the position, he came to the conclusion

that the school lacked basic systems, citing reviewing lesson plans, how rooms were assigned without a purpose, and procedures for posting information in school as examples. When asked why he put so much emphasis in this area he stated, “We started here both because of campus needs and because it is an individual strength of mine. But be mindful that effective systems free up time to focus on other things and changes the organization culture”. This perceived systems void at CHS prior to Dr. Clear’s arrival was reinforced by both assistant principals, one of whom reported:

Things were not about kids when I worked with other principals. I would ask what our system for attendance recovery is, and there was none. Counselors met and said [to students] “You need to go” [to credit recovery], sometimes kids went, sometimes they got packets turned in, and sometimes they did not. For me it was difficult because I am very instructionally focused. What is the best way to change the kid’s life? It is an education and if we are not preparing them you know we are not changing things for the better. So some of my instructional focus and systems were running into a brick wall. I knew coming in that I was not part of a team that had that vision.

Another assistant principal stated that she could tell that Dr. Clear was extremely systems focused from day one, as he wanted to focus on efficiency before effectiveness in moving the school forward. A teacher reiterated these comments by stating that Dr. Clear is very analytical, very specific, and focused on how structures exist and are in place to drive change.

It appears that using a *systems approach* gradually allowed the school to function more smoothly, leading to increased success in the second semester of the school year. In addition, stakeholders at the school reported that their work was easier due to an increased level of consistency at the school. A teacher reported, “From day one we kept adding new systems for

things that were not in place all the way through the end of the first semester of Dr. Clear's first year. It added consistency". Another assistant principal went on to indirectly describe consistency in a very specific way when he stated:

Yesterday was a great example of systems. Dr. Clear was at a principal meeting, one AP at another meeting, and another off campus with only two here. We had issues that were snuffed out ASAP, with a plan in place and we knew what to do. When the others rolled in, they just picked right up and moved the work forward. Teachers were on point with what we needed to do. We had a controlled release yesterday because of these issues, and everyone knew what to do. I got on the intercom and everything went smooth and the end of the day went fine. We are almost there if not already and are moving in the right direction in using systems. Teachers know what to expect.

Another teacher mentioned that the administrative support coupled with a *systems approach* made his work contrastingly easier than the previous turnaround school where he taught. He mentioned that the administrative team stays focused on working to do a few things well and perfecting them, which was a stark contrast to his previous assignment. He went on to state that his job was easier because standards were in place to work on the items that administrators wanted to improve. Observational findings reinforced this system approach. For instance, systems were in place for checking in visitors, and for having standard meeting agendas. Each agenda had a next steps section to close the agenda, evidence that they were systemically focusing on continuous improvement. In each classroom in the school a teacher's lesson cycle or BEEP (before, ending, engaging, and practice) was posted.

Another way CHS was using a *systems approach* was through the use of data to determine root causes to solve problems. Three out of five interviewees specially mentioned

getting to the root cause in looking at data. One teacher responded, “One way we have a *systems approach* is looking at the data, and looking at the root cause to determine why we are having a problem in an effort to determine how to fix it”. In addition in meetings, data were routinely used to work at determining the root cause of problems. For instance, the Continuous School Improvement Team (CSIT) was working to systemically determine how they would place students in available spots for mentor programs on campus and the expected outcomes. This work resulted in looking at the data of the most underperforming students and the root cause of their academic performance based on achievement, behavior, and attendance data. Dr. Clear commented on this, remarking:

Well the root cause analysis was that those kids are far below reading levels thus causing an inability to perform. We needed the data first before moving forward with the specific kids. Now we are working on cohorts together so that there is a more intense intervention focusing on wrap around support and improving their reading.

In another meeting, data from PLCs was shared with the conclusion being that the PLCs were not functioning properly. This conclusion was based primarily on educators not taking charge in the PLCs. As a result the decision was made to rotate leaders in each PLC so that leadership could be shared, and the outside service provider could provide feedback to these leaders. Data were also used to assist with the 9<sup>th</sup> grade cohort of students to make sure they are on track, and provide supportive interventions to those who were not.

Dr. Clear asserted that the systems being put into place were making a definite impact. He stated, “Well, I think from a school standpoint that discipline is dropping, confrontations between students and kids are less significant, and drops in the number of altercations happening in the building. We still had altercations but it was not to a level that it was last year”. Dr. Clear

went on to report that during his first year closing of school was successful, with many of his employees being surprised at the absence of major issues at the school. He attributed these gains partially to the systems put in place.

**Accelerator 6: Internal accountability.** In the conceptual framework, the idea of *internal accountability* entails each person in an organization being held accountable to the *why* through the expectation of personal mastery within the organization, accelerating the building of an adult culture in turnaround. Each interviewee left the accelerator *internal accountability* out of their top two most important accelerators in building a positive adult culture, with two of the five interviewees believing it was the least important accelerator. One teacher did place some importance on this accelerator, stating that he felt he trusted Dr. Clear because he built relationships and listened. Therefore he felt non-threatened when told he was not on the right track because the relationship was already there. Other examples of *internal accountability* also existed. One of these examples was a PLC video that was being filmed in order to allow others to view, and hold themselves accountable to, what a proficient PLC would look like.

Dr. Clear rated *internal accountability* as the fifth most important accelerator of building a positive adult culture in a turnaround setting. He reported having to establish the little things being done right, believing that neglecting the little things would lead to much bigger problems over time. Dr. Clear reported that CHS was not as far as they would have liked to be in promoting *internal accountability*, but that he was excited to begin to see more people taking ownership of being at their best for kids. He was eagerly awaiting to see more steady growth in terms of self-improvement in both the academic achievement of students and personal mastery or accountability with staff. Dr. Clear described accountability:

When I think of accountability, which I shared to the staff, I think of you as an individual being accountable when nobody is around. Not the traditional way everyone thinks about accountability. When you are really holding people to the fire [it matters] when they are doing things that they should not be doing. Maybe it is coming to work on time, maybe it is turning in lesson plans, or maybe it is having personal conflict on a weekly basis.

Dr. Clear also mentioned, while letting out a sigh followed by a chuckle, that the issue of not being accountable to expected outcomes manifested itself at a very high rate during his first year. He reported having more critical conversations about being accountable to outcomes at a higher rate than any other year he was principal.

Having critical conversations and taking action in documenting poor performance was one way that Dr. Clear has held folks accountable for not following policies and systems. This was also evident to interviewees. Three out five educators interviewed, including Dr. Clear, reported personal changes and improvements in working together being closely aligned with the accelerator of *internal accountability*. They alluded to collaboration from teacher to teacher increasing, relationships increasing, and their work becoming easier, due to an increase in expectations from their principal. One teacher said:

I think internal accountability is important but requires relationships. When you build that relationship then the accountability to each other is enhanced. If we do something differently we should be able to let each other know and hash out who is on the right track because of the relationship that is there.

One interviewee even mentioned that several teachers were “toxic” and needed to leave in order allow for everyone to be more accountable to each other. Dr. Clear stated:

There is a lot of people from non-renewals to hard conversations where I had to tell them that this is not the right place for them. It is difficult to shed light on, but it is something that you know has to be done if you are a part of turnaround. Unfortunately, it [removal of ineffective teachers] had to happen but it is amazing because you talk to veteran teachers about folks we could not wait to get out of here and they are thanking you for doing what is best for kids. In organizations when you are dealing with turnaround there is going to be a significant amount of change. Typically when change happens you have organizational structure changes, but the reality is it really comes down to the personnel changes to drive improvement.

His assistant principals reiterated the importance of having critical conversations, stating they were intentional about conversations with teachers, working to improve feedback to assist in their professional growth. It is interesting to note that Dr. Clear’s interview came at the beginning of the data collection cycle before official state achievement data were released to schools. At that time he was concerned that personal issues would impede student achievement gains as evidenced by the following:

You know what is tough is when you are dealing with so many personal issues which have such a close relationship with academic performance, and it is hard to get performance when people are not doing what they are supposed to do to begin with. So you know I think that year two we are going to see a good gain in the academic areas, because we are trying to change the climate into a PEAR mentality.

While Dr. Clear was indeed concerned with the personnel changes interfering with instruction, CHS had achievement gains in his first year as turnaround principal no longer being rated as *improvement required* by the state of Texas. *Internal accountability* likely had an impact on molding a positive adult culture as an accelerator for this turnaround.

## **Case 2: Turnaround Leadership at Sunnyside Middle School**

### **Turnaround School Leader and School Context**

Sunnyside Middle School is led by Principal Willie who was in her tenth year at SMS at the time of this study. She spent her first four years at the school under the leadership of Dr. Fury, a principal who led the school through turnaround for a four year period before being assigned to a high school principal in the same district as SMS. Dr. Fury received her Ed. D. while serving as a high school principal. Before being a turnaround principal, Principal Fury was AP for four years in two different middle schools in the same district. In addition, she was a teacher for eight years prior to going into administration. Principal Willie became the successor to Dr. Fury, beginning a six year process of sustained improvement from turnaround at SMS. Her only experiences in administration and at middle school occurred at Sunnyside, as she was a fourth and fifth grade elementary teacher in the same feeder pattern of schools for eight years prior to becoming an administrator. Both turnaround leaders are the focus of this case, although they led in very different contexts within the same school.

Mrs. Willie presents herself as a highly reflective principal. In addition, she was aware of the ongoing difficulty of trying to continue to grow and improve what has become a high performing school. Upon walking up to the school a visitor would see a large banner above the front doors that commemorates this high performance in the form of a national award won in the 2014-2015 school year for urban school excellence. The school won this award again in 2015-2016. In talking with Mrs. Willie during the course of the study, she would often reflect on how



to work toward continuous improvement for the students of SMS now that turnaround had been successful sustained. For instance, during one visit she was working to determine how she could prepare for an upcoming meeting she was hosting to focusing on vertical articulation of expository writing skills in her feeder school pyramid. She had gathered feedback from other feeder school principals that the previous feeder school principal meeting was not successful and she wanted to improve the outcome for the meeting she was hosting. Interviews with key stakeholders at the school often referred to this calculated, controlled, and highly systemic decision making process as being a part of her “DNA” as a leader.

In contrast, each of these same interviewees mentioned that her predecessor, Dr. Fury, was strikingly more intense and spontaneous than Mrs. Willie. Each interviewee either directly stated or alluded to the fact that both Dr. Fury and Mrs. Willie were extremely passionate, well respected, results driven, and effective leaders. However, these interviewees felt that Mrs. Willie was more likely to take her time in making calculated decisions. In interviewing Dr. Fury at her new school, her passion radiated throughout her conversations and voice tone as she talked about the experience of leading SMS through the declining performance and crisis stabilization stages of turnaround. This observation is aligned with interviewees describing Dr. Fury as having leadership qualities akin to those of a motivational athletic coach. While there does appear to be a difference between the leadership styles of the mentor vs. the mentee in this case, deeply caring leaders appear to have led SMS for nearly 10 years.

This caring results-driven approach has led to sustainment of improvement at SMS for the students it serves. The school is located in the center of a large urban school district in the state of Texas. The school had nearly 700 students in the 2014-2015 school year (TEA ASR Sunnyside, 2015). The composition of the student body is diverse including 13% of students

being of African American descent, 67% being of Hispanic descent, 16% being of Caucasian or Asian descent, and 4% being from other ethnicities. A total of 70% of the students are classified as economically disadvantaged, and 8% are considered English Language Learners (TEA SRC Sunnyside, 2014). The mobility rate of students, or the number of students who did not complete the entire year at the same school, was over 16% (TEA ASR Sunnyside, 2015). During the 2009-2010 school year, which was the first year of turnaround at SMS after being labeled low performing by the state, the demographics were slightly different. There were 200 less students enrolled, 7% more of which were African American. The economically disadvantaged percentage was 5% more, and the mobility rate was 9% more than it is currently. In addition, the attendance rate in the 2009-2010 school year was 94.7% (TEA AEIS Sunnyside, 2010). The Texas Education Agency lags one full school year in reporting school attendance; however, an aggregate of 96% of students attended school each day in the 2013-2014 school year above both the state and district average. Educational staff at SMS is comprised of 50 adults, 42 of which are teachers (TEA TAPR Sunnyside, 2015).

In my initial observations of the climate at SMS, it was evident that kids seemed to function responsibly without needing the support of adults. Very few kids could be found loitering when I entered the building for visits. The three story school built in 1927 is formed in the shape of a “U” with lush green grass surrounding the front of the school. Upon entering the school a visitor walks up a grand staircase, marked by motivational postings, bulletin boards, and information on each side of the staircase. At the top of the staircase is the office, marked by more print rich and colorful bulletin boards. Each trip I have made to the school has been marked by a quiet, businesslike, calm, and caring sense in the air. For instance, during passing periods teachers were visible in the hallways; however, I got the impression that little

encouragement was needed of students as they never congregated during passing period and got to class time. Each classroom has a three foot by five foot college banner hanging outside the door, representing the college or university from which the teacher graduated. These banners extend into the cafeteria to promote college and career readiness. In visiting with Mrs. Willie in the cafeteria on one visit, I observed a well-managed system of getting students lunches with students knowing expectations for being in the cafeteria. For instance, conversations could be carried on with Mrs. Willie without interruption or the need to talk over a high noise level. In addition, Mrs. Willie frequently asking questions of her teachers to check on how they were doing. She was very specific in talking with teachers in a way that could only be explained by her having deep relationships. I was greeted warmly each time I entered the front office area. I felt excited each time I entered the building as I knew that something special was going to be observed.

### **School Site Context Prior to Turnaround**

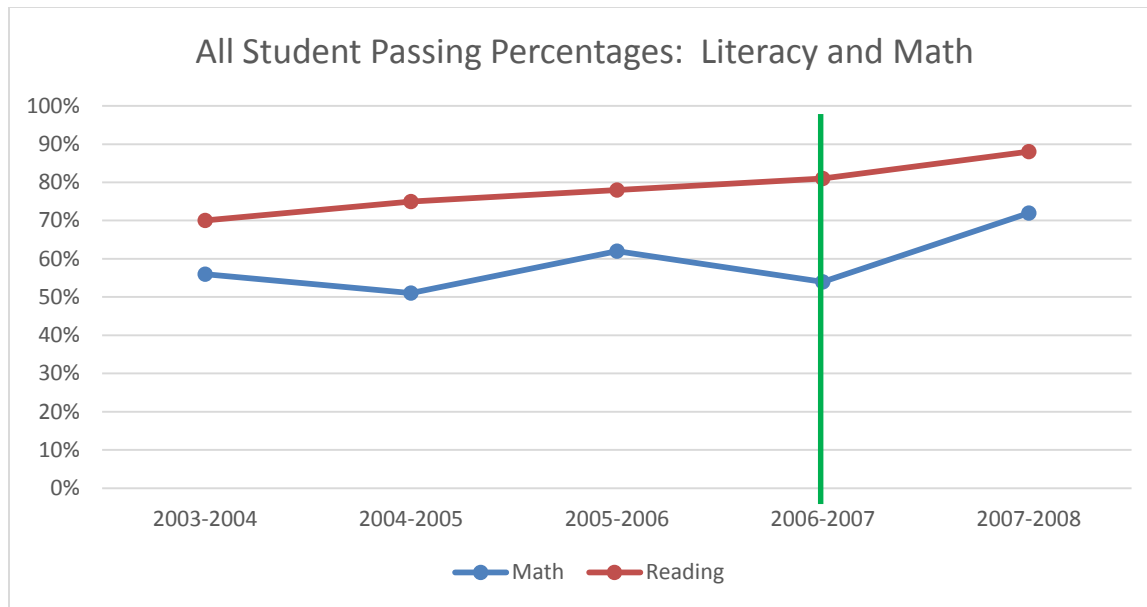
SMS was eight years removed from moving from low performing to recognized status at the time of the study, and had sustained improvement during this eight year period. While the school was a bit removed in terms of years from turnaround, interviewees could provide vivid recollections of the school site context prior to turnaround. To understand the role of leadership at Sunnyside, it is important to examine not only the role of the current principal, Mrs. Willie, but also the prior efforts of Dr. Fury, herself a catalyst in the turnaround and sustainability story. As with many turnaround principals, Dr. Fury took over a school in the 2006-2007 school year that had perceived leadership turmoil before her arrival. For instance, one counselor at SMS could distinctly remember people talking about problems which arose everywhere before Dr. Fury arrived, and remembers Dr. Fury “curing” these problems one by one. Teachers at SMS

reported many of the really good teachers left prior to Dr. Fury arriving, and noted that trusting relationships in administration had completely broken down. Interviewees reported remembering teachers teaching several course preparations, and one experienced teacher could distinctly recall having to reduce new teachers' anxiety levels each day due to the stressful situations they were teaching in. One counselor reported that the students lacked clear expectations causing an environment where "kids essentially ran the school." Mrs. Willie, herself an assistant principal at Sunnyside during Dr. Fury's tenure, described how students disrespected their teachers and teachers disrespected their students. Another counselor reported that the local teacher's organization was often at the school trying to mediate. Dr. Fury described the environment at the school prior to her tenure in the following way:

We walked into a staff that was extremely divided and did not like one another. There was a lot of animosity in place at SMS the last couple of years before I arrived. They had lost a lot of children, where a school which had an enrollment at about 800 had come down to less than 500.

Mrs. Willie also described the time period as one during which SMS had a poor reputation, leading to families taking their students to other schools. It appears that a supportive school environment was not evident prior to turnaround for the educators at the school.

The school achievement data in literacy and math at SMS did not paint as poor of picture as interviewee's responses in describing the school site context prior to turnaround. Data shows that academic performance results were at worse mixed in terms of improvement prior before Dr. Fury's arrival (see figure 9). Dr. Fury arrived during the 2006-2007 school year (see green line on figure 9). In between the 2003-2004 school year and the 2005-2006 school year, all student performance on state standardized tests in reading increased gradually by a total of 8%. These



**Figure 9: Sunnyside Middle School State Achievement Data before Turnaround (TEA 2008 Historical Data)**

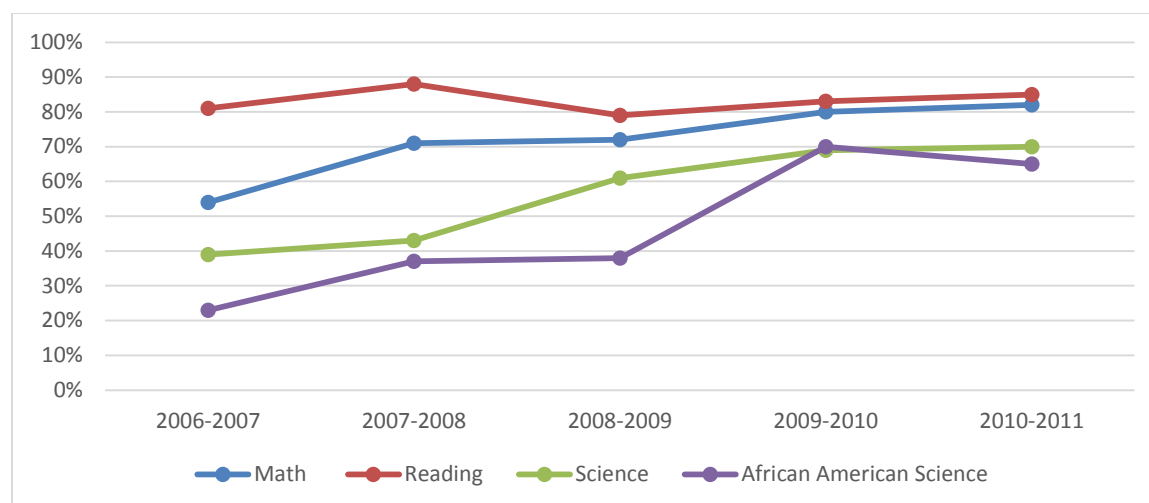
gains in reading continued at an even more rapid rate after Dr. Fury's arrival. In between the 2003-2004 school year and the 2005-2006 school year, all student performance on state standardized tests in math bounced up and down, but increased by a total 6%. After Dr. Fury's arrival math scores dipped, followed by a dramatic increase in her second year (TEA AEIS Sunnyside, 2008). In looking at the school achievement data and interview data it appears that trust might have well been breaking down prior to the of arrival Dr. Fury; however, student achievement was still gradually rising. It is also noteworthy that dramatic gains occurred in the second year of Dr. Fury's tenure, as evidenced by the data.

### **Dr. Fury in the Initial Stages of Adult Culture Building**

**Purposeful and intentional?** One of the two research questions involves determining the extent that the turnaround leader was purposeful and intentional in the initial stages of turnaround. Two questions presented themselves to me in working to answer this research question. First, just how purposeful or intentional was Dr. Fury in working to build her adult culture in order to continue to build upon the modest gains that were in place before her tenure?

Second, when exactly was the school officially in turnaround? At SMS the extent of purposefulness and intentionality differed, as Dr. Fury did not report that she was as intentional and/or purposeful as her teachers thought she was.

The first two years of Dr. Fury's tenure were marked by dramatic increases in literacy and math student achievement. In analysis of a document written by Dr. Fury shortly after turnaround and well before the beginning of this study, she succinctly described her initial impressions of SMS as follows, "In the past, SMS had success, and the surrounding community still had a distant memory of a school that "once was" and was looking for a new identity and the promise of tomorrow". The time that turnaround occurred at SMS is important to define. As previously stated, teachers perceived the climate as toxic before Dr. Fury arrived, and Dr. Fury felt that the school culture in her initial year as principal was less than ideal. However, student achievement data did not take a large dip until Dr. Fury's third year in her tenure, or the 2008-2009 school year (see figure 10). This dip occurred only in the subject area of reading where student achievement on state standardized tests decreased by nearly 10%, while math student achievement remained relatively stable (TEA AEIS Sunnyside, 2009). It was also during this school year that SMS was labeled by the state of Texas as a low performing school, primarily because of the school's failure in supporting science achievement among African American students. (See figure 10). Science scores in the "all students" category increased nearly 20% during this same period. After this third year the school was labeled low performing and began to receive SIG funds to assist in turnaround. While it might be hard to pinpoint exactly when SMS was "officially" in turnaround, the school was fully engaged in school improvement once receiving the "low performing" label from the state and the corresponding school improvement funds. They were also working to stabilize student performance at the school.



**Figure 10: Sunnyside Middle School State Achievement Data: Dr. Fury's First Three Years (TEA 2011 Historical Data)**

During the initial stages of school turnaround, or the first three years of Dr. Fury's tenure, it was evident that Dr. Fury was very intentional at working to build a positive adult culture. One teacher responded by stating that Dr. Fury was very intentional about listening. This teacher said that when Dr. Fury first took over the staff felt relieved, because the former principal was not as willing to hear what the staff had to say. Dr. Fury was reported to have implemented several ideas that teachers suggested for the benefit of children. These ideas included such things as Saturday attendance recovery, and after school grade recovery. Each interview participant supported what Dr. Fury reported, stating that suggestions by staff were often implemented as long as they met Dr. Fury's intense vision that there were no shortcuts in working to benefit kids. One teacher reported:

At the start of Dr. Fury's tenure everyone was cautious, from the year before when there was a lot of negativity that was still laboring. We did not know what we were going to get with our new leader, and she came in and stood on tables and told us her philosophy of where she came from. She told us everything we were going to do was

going to benefit the kids with so much passion, well let's just say you knew we were going to be okay.

A counselor reported that there were so many changes during that first year that she worked directly with the principal to try to keep up the trust up of anyone who was resistant to the changes. Several interviewees also articulated that they could recall intensive hiring processes, where Dr. Fury led interview committees with very specific questions that would assess if a potential teacher fit the student-centered culture that SMS was working to establish.

Intentionality in building a positive adult culture was thus evidenced by Dr. Fury purposefully listening to her faculty, taking suggestions for improvement from faculty and moving them forward, sticking to her personal vision of doing everything to benefit students, and having very deliberate hiring practices in order to shape a student-centered faculty. In addition, of the key stakeholders interviewed at SMS each felt strongly that both Dr. Fury and (later) Mrs. Willie were very intentional in working on building the adult culture.

This intentionality continued after the third year of Dr. Fury's tenure, when SMS embarked on school improvement with federal grant money. Coming off being labeled low performing, Dr. Fury led her staff in a Summer Planning Academy (SPA) retreat funded by grants given to schools with the intent to assist in school turnaround. During this retreat Dr. Fury spent time purposefully organizing for effort to make the most out of the professional development. Interviewees reported that this academy included any staff member that impacted kids, including office clerks and custodians, and that Dr. Fury wanted everyone there without excuses. Dr. Fury chartered school busses to get to a resort outside the boundaries of the school district, and at first the reaction of her staff was less than approving. However, that perception quickly changed. A counselor reported:



The SPA was held off campus at a place that allowed for a lot of time to be with each other. We spent more time looking at data, making plans, and doing teambuilding. I think everyone got to know everybody away from school. I saw that as fantastic.

Everyone got on the same page with the data, what we needed to do, and how to work.

We came back maybe once a month and would go over what we covered just to keep it fresh.

In reviewing planning documents for this SPA retreat and turnaround school grant, it was also very evident that Dr. Fury was very purposeful in working to build a collaborative culture through teambuilding and looking at data.

Perhaps ironically, Dr. Fury seemed to feel that she was somewhat less intentional than her staff reported her to be. She realized that she was indeed purposeful in setting up a collaborative hiring process and working on morale by providing tangible items and events for her educators. Intentionality in giving tangible items to teachers was sustained in Mrs. Willie's tenure as a turnaround leader. Interviewees reported that such events as cookouts, "reindeer games" (where each educator gets gifts such as duties being covered during the holidays), and refreshments being delivered during class time to the classroom began during turnaround under Dr. Fury and continued years later. However, Dr. Fury also indicated that she reacted subconsciously based on her vision and ideas that were presented by others. She alluded to the fact that her administration team provided the origins for many ideas—ideas she purposefully, yet naturally, worked to implement but did not take credit for. In giving credit to others she said:

Senge said, which relates to what I saw at SMS, that a group of people can come together with a common vision and accomplish what others think you could not. I think we showed what a learning system could do when a group of people worked together on a

common vision. If I did not have some way to have that people could come together to work on that, then it would have never happened. That was on my admin team. I think once you have that success and see it evident and watch where it came from and where it went you know that it is possible.

It appears that Dr. Fury did often take purposeful action which was indeed intentional; however, the skill of aligning decision making with her vision for the school assisted her in making quick decisions based on the feedback of others.

**Which accelerators did Dr. Fury utilize to start turnaround during the initial stages?** A second research question in the study involved determining the degree in which turnaround leaders use strategies reflective of the key accelerators posited in the conceptual framework. Stakeholders interviewed most often believed that Dr. Fury intentionally started working on turnaround of the adult culture in the accelerator of *core values, vision, and central mission* at SMS. They most often believed this accelerator was followed by the accelerators of distributive and collaborative leadership, *internal accountability*, and building *trusting relationships through appreciation and personalization*. Participants were asked which of the six key accelerators to school turnaround their school started on to begin turnaround, and the four aforementioned accelerators were most often mentioned in an equally distributed way. When Dr. Fury was asked a similar version of this question, she seemed to believe that *core values, vision, and central mission* were the most important starting point in turning around the adult culture. This response aligned with the responses of key stakeholders interviewed. She immediately followed by saying building relationships had to be coupled with *core values, vision, and central mission* if educators were going to collectively move work forward. It is also

of note that Dr. Fury was adamant that prioritizing the accelerators was a difficult task due to the accelerators being interconnected.

### **The *Why* and the Accelerators: Contextualization and Usage by the Turnaround Leader Leading to Sustained Turnaround**

The *why* and the accelerators were used to varying extents by Dr. Fury and Mrs. Willie to work to lead a sustained turnaround over an eight year period that was still going at the time of this study. The *why* consists of the idea of the turnaround leader being motivational in describing the clear purpose as to why the organization exists as stated in the conceptual framework. The six accelerators include:

Accelerator 1: *distributive and collaborative leadership in PLCs,*

Accelerator 2: *building trusting relationships through personalization and appreciation,*

Accelerator 3: *a culture of inquiry,*

Accelerator 4: *core values, vision, and central mission,*

Accelerator 5: *a systems approach, and*

Accelerator 6: *internal accountability.*

The following sections describe how Dr. Fury and Mrs. Willie used the *why* and the six accelerators to stabilize the crisis and lead a sustained turnaround at SMS, improving the adult culture for those at the school.

**The *why*: Is the turnaround leader motivational?** The origins of the conceptual framework of the study begin with the *why*, or the motivating clear purpose of why the organization exists. Theoretically this *why* drives decision making allowing the organization to get to a tipping point in terms of educators working in unison on continuous improvement. At SMS the clear purpose was very student-centric. Dr. Fury described this *why* as being “all kids

can learn and there are no shortcuts in getting there”. It is interesting to note that this clear purpose was mentioned by three of the other five stakeholders interviewed even though they were not directly asked. One stakeholder noted, “What I really admired is that she (Dr. Fury) was about the kids, and she loved those kids.” In addition, interviewees could recall this specific *why* during interviews occurring several years after turnaround. Dr. Fury and every other interviewee mentioned action steps at SMS that aligned to this clear purpose in the organization. These actions included academic pep rallies, having one-on-one conversations about teaching and learning, and SMS educators going into a public housing project to provide support to groups of students struggling with academics, behavior, and attendance. Dr. Fury described the clear purpose through the lens of academic pep rallies. According to her these pep rallies were used to acknowledge both high performing teachers and student learning so people knew what was most important, which was the work involved in ensuring kids were successful. In addition, this student-centric *why* was the driving force in documents analyzed, ranging from requests for grant funding to campus improvement plans. Dr. Fury described the clear purpose as being powerful in allowing her to bring together a staff of educators that originally did not have a unity of purpose, to a group that was united in achieving extraordinary results.

As Dr. Fury’s successor, Mrs. Willie seemed to build upon the clear purpose already established at SMS. As Dr. Fury’s mentee turned successor at the same school, she also reported that her purpose was to continue student-centric practices already established and improve them. Her *why* was directly related to Dr. Fury’s *why*, showing evidence of sustainment. She firmly believed that the *why* was important, and allowed her to explain the thought process behind what was being done at the school, so that educators could carry the charge of improvement forward. She stated:

Whether you are meeting with a student or you are meeting with a teacher everybody wants to know why you are asking me to do this. If I understand your perspective then I am more likely to do it, but if you just tell me this is how you're going to do it and then this is how and when you are going to do it then they will not buy in. People want to know the importance and relevance behind it.

Mrs. Willie further described the *why* as follows:

I think that I am able to get people to buy in to what is important for kids, I keep kids at the center, and I am able to express why I am doing this. I have a good heart. No one can ever say that I am mean or malicious. I think my teachers know I care about them, I care about our kids, and that is why they are more willing to do what I ask of them.

Mrs. Willie mentioned that she was working to train her current assistant principal to understand the concept of using the collective *why* of SMS as a way to ensure educators at the school know the importance of decisions. She also reported that working to continue to improve upon student-centric practices that were already solid, or her *why* for SMS, was a challenging task that she most often reflected upon.

Stakeholder interviews affirmed the turnaround leader's viewpoint of the *why* at SMS. Simply put, all five interviewees could articulate that the decisions were made through a student-centric lens based on the idea of continuous improvement for both turnaround leaders at SMS. When asked if Dr. Fury aligned her decisions to the clear purpose of the organization one counselor reported:

Always. It was never just do it because I said. It was do it because of the why we are doing it which was for kids. The thought process was ask about where we want to go for kids, here is what we are thinking about doing for kids, and do you guys have another

way to do it. It was not a do it because I said so, it was about how can we do better and how can we move forward?

Another counselor reported that Dr. Fury was very passionate in describing improving student learning, always following up with describing the rationale for those involved so they understood the clear purpose. For example, two teachers even reported that they had trepidation about carrying forward certain tasks, yet moved forward with them anyway due to being able to understand the *why*. One teacher reported the following as it related to teaching science, an area of academic need according to state achievement data, in her non-science classroom:

At first I was not sure, BUT I did it because I knew from the beginning that she [Dr. Fury] was doing it because she thought the kids would benefit, and that is how it was presented to me. I remember the way she presented it was that sometimes kids cannot get it from one teacher they need to hear it from several. I could completely understand that.

Findings show that this student-centric *why* not only stood the test of time at SMS, but also transcended beyond both turnaround leaders to those educators they served.

So to what degree did Dr. Fury use motivational tactics in promoting the *why* for SMS? All interviewees reported that Dr. Fury had exuberant passion in expressing the *why* and advocating for kids. One counselor described Dr. Fury as being very motivational at expecting and also demanding that educators be part of the change for students, stating that she was extremely passionate and motivational. This counselor described this phenomenon as follows:

She was just very passionate about the school and saw that it could change, believed that it could change, and made believers out of everyone else. And people did not engage just because she said you had to, they did it because they believed. They wanted on that boat with her, because she was gung ho and they wanted to be with her. She would get

too fired up sometimes, and she was good at it and the kids loved it. I would roll my eyes at times, but it would work.

Mrs. Willie, as an assistant principal during Dr. Fury's tenure, reiterated that Dr. Fury was motivational in expressing the *why* when she stated:

I would say that what I learned from Dr. Fury is passion, and how do you ignite a passion for learning. And I know it sounds really corny, but man she could get people fired up. She is an old coach. It is what I always tease her about, she is an old coach and she could coach everybody up.

It is interesting to note that Dr. Fury, during her interview several years after turnaround, still had undertones of an intense passion for the work that was done and the kids of SMS often still wearing on her sleeve the fire that key stakeholders described.

Findings led to Mrs. Willie using a more controlled motivational style in expressing her equally student-centric *why*. Interviewees described Mrs. Willie as continuing to promote a student-centric *why* based on continuous improvement, but they all believed that she was not as demanding as Dr. Fury. One counselor expressed the following in this regard:

Dr. Fury was really go get them, BAM, BAM, BAM. Mrs. Willie has that but not quite that strong coming on. She is gentler in the way that she deals with things. You know she is gentle, but firm. She does it a little bit more quietly. They are both very good leaders, but Dr. Fury is stronger as far as coming in like a bull in a china closet, while Mrs. Willie is a bit gentler but still kid focused.

It is interesting to note that Mrs. Willie described herself as being a calm and emotionally composed leader, who was very calculating in how she conducts business. She stated:

You know I am a very calm person and I do not get fired up quickly, I don't go yelling at people, I am just a pretty calm person. I can get people on my team with me very quickly, and I like to be very inclusive and collaborative. That is where we kind of shifted in a sense with our leadership team.

Mrs. Willie was calculated during three meetings, in which she would listen approximately 80% of each meeting. She kept her talk time primarily to asking questions that allowed her to assess if the clear purpose of SMS, meeting the needs of all students, was being met. It appears that having a clear purpose, or *why*, articulated by both turnaround leaders in contrasting ways has had a significant impact on sustaining turnaround at SMS.

**Accelerator 1: Distributive and collaborative leadership in PLCs.** All SMS interviewees but one placed great importance on the collaborative leadership in PLCs being and important accelerator for building a positive adult culture at SMS. Two interviewees described *distributive and collaborative leadership in PLCs* as the most important accelerator, two interviewees described it as the second most important accelerator, and the other interviewee placed it in the bottom three accelerators. The interviewee rating this accelerator first mentioned the following:

Definitely distributed leadership is most important. She (Dr. Fury) called me in the first year and she told me, "Allyson (pseudonym), you are a leader I need you to lead." And I said, "This is my first year here hold on!" But she was very good at recognizing who her leaders were, and she was all about pushing out her message that way.

In contrast to key stakeholder interviewees, Dr. Fury did not refer to distributive and collaborative leadership when asked to put the six accelerators in order, choosing instead to focus on three other accelerators in depth. These three accelerators she felt she relied on the



most were having a *systems approach, building trusting relationships through personalization and appreciation, and core values, vision, and central mission*. She reported that she either had greater strengths in these areas (*core values, vision, and central mission*), or that they were accelerators needed to restore trust in administration at the school.

In contrast Mrs. Willie put *core values, vision, and central mission* much further down in terms of importance. In sustaining turnaround as Dr. Fury's successor Mrs. Willie placed *distributive and collaborative leadership in PLC's* as the most important accelerator to sustain turnaround. The difference in responses by Mrs. Willie and Dr. Fury could be attributed to the differing stages of turnaround each leader experienced. Mrs. Willie reported relying on *distributive and collaborative leadership in PLC's* heavily:

I would say looking at those (accelerators) distributive leadership is most important. It goes back to ownership and teachers having a voice and being heard. Our teachers are an incredible resource. So I would say distributive leadership as long as you are able to get the right leaders. You have to have the right leaders.

She went to state that she believed it was her job to make sure teachers are happy in terms of having what they need to carry the work forward. The way she used the word "happy," was more in a sense that they had ownership of and input in decisions that directly impacted them. For instance, she mentioned how leadership was distributed to a team of teachers by allowing them to be part of the interview team for hiring. She also mentioned making decisions about scheduling, wanting her teacher leaders and teachers to have input in that process. Mrs. Willie was also very quick to give credit to leadership team for sustained success at SMS. She stated:

I think it is personality. I do not take a lot of kudos. I do not think it is me alone. In the bigger picture it is me and my leadership team. It cannot just be me I think it is the

people I have around me. It is funny when the new superintendent was here he was walking around and he said something about the school, and I said I do not take credit for it, and he pushed back a little bit saying you have hired all these teachers here. I said we have really good teachers and so okay I guess so, but I guess I just do not look at it like I am this big driver. I think it is more of a team effort.

Mrs. Willie always presented herself in a humble way during the course of the study, knowing the work of turnaround could not be done alone.

Dr. Fury could not be observed interacting within a collaborative leadership setting due to her being several years removed from being a turnaround leader at SMS during the time of the study. On the other hand, Mrs. Willie led three different collaborative meetings all of which aligned with her own self view of the importance of *distributive and collaborative leadership in PLCs* as an accelerator. One of these meetings was with her administrative team, one was as leader of a pyramid principal PLC, and the other was with a formative assessment PLC. During the pyramid principal PLC, a meeting of every principal in the feeder pattern of SMS, Mrs. Willie led a very rich conversation about writing in the feeder schools. This conversation was anchored in learning walks, or observations by all feeder-school principals, in writing classrooms on her campus. The outcome of this meeting was principals beginning the process of working to identify the characteristics of exemplary expository writing in their schools. Assistant principals were brought in to lead some of the learning walks, building their leadership capacity. In Mrs. Willie's administrative team meeting, she was as an active listener as each of her team members shared information about their assignments in the school. Each administrator or counselor in this meeting took ownership of their work. The use of a common agenda to drive the meeting that had a common structure as previous meetings, seemingly added to the fluidity. This identical

leadership style of being an active listener to collect information about the work being done was exhibited in the formative assessment PLC. Teachers in this meeting were charged to reenergize the schools effort to use formative assessments to check for understanding. While Mrs. Willie and Dr. Fury were both directly involved in PLC meetings, they were also described or witnessed as collaborative listeners as they led.

It was clear from the findings that SMS had a distributive leadership and collaborative leadership model during the tenure of both turnaround leaders; however, this leadership model evolved greatly through the turnaround process. Key elements such as looking at data, and having regularly scheduled instructional based PLCs were reported throughout the tenure of both Dr. Fury and Mrs. Willie. One counselor reported:

When Dr. Fury came in she set them (teachers) with the teams. I see that as excellent as those teachers meet as a team, every day, working together and each person on the administrative team had a day to go in with them. For instance, Tuesday is our day, counselors' day, to discuss student concerns with everyone around the same table. And then Mrs. Willie has her day to go in, Fridays, along with the assistant principals. So we keep up with them. The other part of that is beautiful is that parents can come in and see everyone at once. They love it, and we have the parent involvement coming in and the teachers can keep very close contact with the parents. My personal opinion is without that piece, you can do everything you want and it is not really going to work.

Furthermore, Mrs. Willie reported making a shift with the leadership team during her tenure, placing more of an emphasis on ownership and listening. One counselor affirmed this line of thinking when she stated:

Team leader meetings were sustained and important, but Mrs. Willie probably did this a little bit more. Mrs. Willie does not make the decision on her own, she will take things to the team leaders and they will decide what they think is best before a final decision is agreed upon. She has the team leaders take it back to their teams then we come back together to decide what is best for the students. So if you have the right people the decisions will be better.

In regard to the usage of collaborative and distributive leadership, it is important to note that Mrs. Willie relied on this accelerator more during the sustainment stage of turnaround, than did Dr. Fury during the initial stages of turnaround. The evolving nature of this accelerator throughout the tenure of both turnaround leaders, has led to the accelerator being used as a means of improving instructional practice for adults, leading to a positive adult culture being built over time at SMS.

**Accelerator 2: Building trusting relationships through personalization and appreciation.** Each person interviewed at SMS placed significant emphasis on this accelerator. The four non-turnaround principals interviewed rated this accelerator between second and fourth, with two interviewees believing it was the third most important accelerator at SMS. Both Dr. Fury and Mrs. Willie rated building trusting relationships as the second most important accelerator to build the positive adult culture at SMS during turnaround, although they both cited different accelerators as being the most important. Dr. Fury believed that building trusting relationships was runner up to *core values, vision, and central mission*. Mrs. Willie placed trusting relationships as runner up to *distributive and collaborative leadership in PLC's*. This could be due to each of them being turnaround leaders during different stages of turnaround. It is

also pertinent to note that both turnaround leaders struggled to put the accelerators in order due to believing the accelerators were too connected to place priority on one over the other.

While not a single participant ranked building trusting relationships through personalization and appreciation as the top accelerator, they could describe with vivid details how relationships were built by the turnaround leader in both tangible and non-tangible ways at SMS. Mrs. Willie described the transformation of building relationships at SMS during Dr. Fury's tenure very succinctly:

You know there was no warmth in the building. It felt cold and so I started asking teachers to post student work. How are you going to highlight kids and them being proud of what they do? So it was just that shift from feeling very sterile very cold and not welcoming. And we had to make it very warm.

Student work can still be seen posted at the time of the study at SMS. It seemed to be just one of several action steps that set expectations for adults allowing them to work together to construct a positive adult culture through building trusting relationships. For instance, teachers were recognized for their work through items that were given to them. In working to build a positive adult culture, teachers were awarded at the academic pep rallies by Dr. Fury right alongside kids through medals commemorating their accomplishments. These academic pep rallies seemed to have the effect of creating trusting relationships with the staff through acknowledging teachers meeting the high expectations for student learning. Dr. Fury described this as follows:

Teachers talked about students not caring. So I had to do a lot of listening and we created the academic pep rallies to honor student performance. We also acknowledged high performing teachers at that point to bring teachers and students together so people knew what I felt was most important.

The idea of giving teachers and students a tangible gift to show appreciation for their work, seemed to have a big impact. Currently half of the student population at SMS is in honors classes. One counselor stated that the students in advanced placement were not there to build our numbers, but rather because they are smart. She described that this could only be achieved by teachers and students coming together to work for a common cause.

Other tangible ways to show appreciation for teachers existed at SMS. Sustained events such as cookouts for the staff took place through school donations. Dr. Fury stated the following in a document written to summarize the turnaround experience:

To honor teachers and staff each six-to-nine week period, the school held a barbecue lunch for SMS teachers and staff. A local church provided the grill and picnic tables for our students and teachers. The barbecue provided structured time for faculty to come together in an informal setting to develop positive relationships.

In addition to these cookouts, two teachers reported receiving thank you notes placed on their desks to show appreciation for work completed at the school. Mrs. Willie described the importance of these of doing little things when she stated:

You have to have relationships with teachers and buy in to get them to work for you. So I try very hard to send out positive emails, go by and say hello, and we do teacher appreciations. Things to make them feel they are important and that I recognize them because I know they work hard.

Similarly, notes were often found at the bottom of the agendas to encourage staff. The following note was found on the agenda for one PLC meeting involving teachers working to increase the use of formative assessment, “thank you so much for your openness to attend these workshops and willingness to help with the PD with our teachers!! You are what makes this school great!!”.

I also observed teacher appreciations being planned during one of the administrative team meetings, as participants in this meeting were planning for Valentine's Day gifts for teachers. In addition, three interviewees described a specific teacher's appreciation activity, when they described receiving refreshments from administrators during a class. This way of showing appreciation was described as follows:

I would say Mrs. Willie started taking even more care of teachers. Dr. Fury cared, but Ms. Willie even more so and took it a step further. For instance she would go into the classroom with a wheelbarrow. And then we had full size candy bars and drinks, so we would go into class and interrupt their instruction and clap and cheer for your teacher because they were fabulous.

Another very unique way educators were appreciated in a tangible way included an event called run for the roses. It is best described by one counselor as follows:

One thing that Dr. Fury started that Mrs. Willie still does is run for the roses. I would think that it would get old, but it has not and happens at nearly every staff meeting. We get a dozen roses, and it starts out Mrs. Willie giving a rose to someone who has done something wonderful. And then the next person does the same thing. And it is a really small thing, just a rose, but being complimented in front of your peers is very good for them and their peers.

Dr. Fury described this event as a structured opportunity for colleagues to honor their peers and to heal some of the emotional wounds resulting from the past culture. Dr. Fury also alluded to the fact that tangible items honored teachers for their work, likely leading to the building of trusting relationships, opening doors for other accelerators to be effective.

Appreciation and personalization was also shown by the turnaround leaders in non-tangible ways. For instance, one teacher reported that the gift of time is always honored by having structured meetings with a focus. She reported, “Yeah, I would say time is held sacred. They (turnaround leaders) know we have been stretched thin. They will cancel a faculty meeting when they get this sense. And just being aware of that is the biggest appreciation piece”. Meetings at SMS were streamlined and organized to save time as evidenced by three collaborative meetings at SMS. Another non-tangible way of building relationships included the turnaround leader, in this case Dr. Fury, being able to motivate educators to the point of caring and trusting each other at seemingly grandiose levels. One teacher reported:

You know, I remember when Dr. Fury was here, I remember her calling us up to a faculty meeting. I knew there was a tipping point when people were getting emotional over scores keeping us from a good academic rating. They are only scores, but you could tell that they really cared. And cared as a community, as she called us up there to tell us how hard we worked and that the scores were not indicative of how hard we worked. And I could tell that there was a change, a change in caring in the community, where we knew that we were stronger as a whole.

This same meeting was described by Mrs. Willie in the following way:

We got our scores in and she called a faculty meeting at the end of the day. Anytime you have a faculty meeting at the end of the day it is not going to be good. It was the year we went academically unacceptable. And she kind of teared up a little bit, and everyone else kind of cried. Some of the teachers already knew this was coming through the counselors so they went and bought items that were significant that tied in to her themes. So they bought her a potato, and some oars which went with the white water rafting



theme that she did. Everyone was kind of in tears because we worked so hard, and we were built up as a team. We got our scores back and we were like, “This is not good, we are on the bad list.” Everyone was emotional about that, and it was nice to see some of those teachers cry, because you knew they got it.

It was also evident that Mrs. Willie was genuinely working to ensure teachers were happy through service leadership. This started with her predecessor working to honor and serve good teachers. Sustained work at including educators in the hiring process, listening, taking input, and seeking out educators in the hallway to have positive conversations were consistently talked about and observed as non-tangible ways trust was built. Mrs. Willie reported:

I try really hard in the morning, to go by classrooms before school starts to have a conversation with them. For instance, tomorrow is Tuesday and I am going to go by one teacher’s classroom while everyone is on duty to talk with him. So I try to make connections personally, you know positive relationships with people. I keep making those deposits, because there is going to become a time when I am going to ask you to do something.

One counselor also reported both turnaround leaders would focus on more than just serious work-related conversations to build trust, noting both leaders would balance fun teambuilding activities alongside the seriousness of the work.

Not only did the work at building *trusting relationships through appreciation and personalization* sustain the tenure of both turnaround leaders, but findings indicate building trusting relationships transcended the turnaround principal/educator relationship. An abundant amount of data suggested support teachers trusting each other in the turnaround work, with each of the six interviewees mentioning this as a point of pride. For instance, during one

administrative team meeting administrators and counselors opened by complimenting each other on unique talents the other leaders possessed. One participant in this meeting was an AP intern who was being mentored, who glowed when recognized by one of her more experienced peers. One counselor described the phenomenon of building trusting relationship which transcended the turnaround leader/educator level at SMS as follows:

We are like a family. There is a lot of morale building occurring for teachers when we see that they are not doing as well. I would say we have each other's back. The counselors do a good job of feeling teachers out especially when they are feeling overwhelmed, and going to Mrs. Willie but not breaking confidentiality. For example, we have a teacher on medical leave and another teacher has been teaching during her planning and lunch to make up for the other teacher being out. So Mrs. Willie is going to do something for her, because we know she is at her breaking point. That is the kind of things we do.

A counselor noted that every teacher had been recognized with a rose in the "run for the roses" activity that occurs during faculty meetings. Teacher to teacher trust and positive relationships were also specifically described by one teacher:

A trusting relationship allows us to get to all of our kids. Perhaps you are struggling with a kid and he is JUST not getting it, and I have a pre-AP class and you have regular kids. You are still going to send me that kid, and he will do the work in my room. Maybe he thinks you are evil and I am sweet, but all we care about is the kid doing the work. That is the kind of thing we do.

Another teacher reiterated this stance by saying that teachers often take each other's students during tutoring time when parent conferences or other unexpected events arise. She reported that this is almost automatic and done without the other person asking.

Having trusting relationships with the adults were perceived to have had other positive impacts on kids. One teacher reported that the conversations in the faculty lounge and lunch room of the school are not toxic as seen in some schools, stating:

If you come down to the lunch room teachers (sharing the same students) will be down there talking with each other about students that are off, and it is NOT bad but to get a consensus of other teachers. So all the teachers here they notice things, and when they notice things they follow through. They do not just let it go, for instance we have a really good communication with counselors and with administrators. We talk with each other and it is open. It is what we do.

Another counselor further stressed the importance of trusting relationships with adults and the impact it has on kids:

The relationships that the staff builds with the kids really helps a lot. It helps with discipline, and with academics. I cannot compare it with anything as I was only at one other middle school, but the staff here they work so hard with kids and as a counselor it makes me very happy because they care, they really care. I do not think we have one person on this staff that does not care. And usually there always is somebody, but I cannot think of one person.

It should be noted that just as Dr. Fury included educators at the awards assemblies, she also took every single employee on the payroll to the Summer Planning Academy (SPA) after the school was rated low performing. Decisions like this likely led to the expectation that trusting

relationships were to transcend the title one had as an employee at SMS, and thus became a key accelerator in building a positive adult culture for turnaround.

**Accelerator 3: A culture of inquiry.** At SMS Four out of four interviewees, not including the turnaround leaders, rated a *culture of inquiry* as either the least important or second least important accelerator at SMS. This same cohort of interviewees also had very limited responses in regards to a *culture of inquiry*, responses that lack richness with scarce details. This trend was limited to the *culture of inquiry*, and contradictory to the responses of every other accelerator. Mrs. Willie tried to contextualize a *culture of inquiry* as follows:

I kind of like the *culture of inquiry*. I have never thought of it that way or would word it like that, but you cannot be happy with the status quo. It was like last year we got our data and it was very similar to the year before so I felt that we were leveling out and just maintaining. So we really had to talk at the beginning of this year as to what was going to be our push so that we could go from good to great as to what we were going to do.

Mrs. Willie came to the conclusion during the interview that a *culture of inquiry* tied for third with three other accelerators, placing equal importance on each. Dr. Fury chose this accelerator as last, albeit indirectly, as she failed to mention it at all, choosing instead to spend time talking about other accelerators.

While all stakeholders placed a *culture of inquiry* quite low in rating the accelerators, observational data showed that some importance was placed on it by Mrs. Willie. Each of the three collaborative meetings showed evidence of a *culture of inquiry*. Mrs. Willie spent 80% of her time listening, often leading with professional questions. These questions were often followed by inquiry into a problem of practice at the school. For instance, during the formative assessment team meeting the question Mrs. Fury wanted to inquire about was how to increase

formative assessments on campus. She had just sent her team to two days of formative assessment training off campus. By the end of the meeting participants had an active discussion about modeling at faculty meetings, and doing refreshers in PLCs. During a feeder school principal meeting, Mrs. Fury spent time inquiring about expository writing with feeder school principals. She wanted to answer the question, “What is exemplary expository writing?” During this visit, principals inquired about what they saw in the classroom involving this problem of practice. She had a similar style in an administrative team meeting, in which she had a series of questions for her administrative team regarding next steps for cohorts of students. About 20% of the talking was done by Mrs. Willie, with the rest of the time spent listening to her team discuss next steps for students cohorts. While low importance was placed on a *culture of inquiry* by participants in the study, evidence did exist that it had some impact on practices involving building a positive adult culture in the sustained turnaround at SMS. In addition, it appears that Mrs. Willie was highly skilled in an accelerator in which she did not understand the formal vernacular of “*a culture of inquiry*”.

**Accelerator 4: Core values, vision, and central mission.** At SMS interviewees could not recall the specific formal language of the central mission. However, each interviewee could remember that they worked together to draft the central mission and that the mission was student-centric. In addition, each interviewee could articulate the Dr. Fury’s vision was to ensure that all students achieved with no excuses. She articulated this vision as well by stating, “I came in as a central values and core mission type person. You know it began with a vision that there were no shortcuts and that all kids could learn. But it was not going to happen in one school day. So we were there for all kids and all kids could learn”. Key stakeholders rated the accelerator as one of the most important in the building the adult culture for turnaround at SMS.

Four interviewees rated this accelerator as first, and two rated it fourth. Dr. Fury believed this accelerator was the most important, while Mrs. Willie rated it as being the fourth most important accelerator.

Dr. Fury was adamant that the other accelerators enhanced her vision and school mission. She believed trusting relationships and distributive leadership could easily enhance the vision she had and the corresponding mission of the school. She stated:

You have to be developing leaders, but you also have to have an understanding through a trust level. You get that through continued actions and working on the mission moving forward, and then developing the relationships to affirm that mission moving forward.

In addition, she also believed that this vision and mission had to be supported by having a passion about where the school was going to go; this passion was frequently mentioned by those interviewed as being a defining characteristic of Dr. Fury's leadership style. She coupled the need for passion with the need to have hiring practices that brought in high quality teachers who would easily buy into a student-centric vision. She used the following analogy to describe the effect of hiring high quality teachers, "It is kind of like weeds growing. If more grass grows the weeds begin to die out". Dr. Fury also believed that the vision was closely related to distributing work to other leaders on campus and getting them to buy in. She stated:

Turnaround leaders get people on board to buy into a vision to get work distributed and carry that load forward in a common way. It is not about a title and position, it is about influence and how do we get those on a campus to influence others to move in the right direction? It is not isolated to just an administration, it is across the board and only begins because we have the title.

Mrs. Willie also placed emphasis on the vision and mission being important, describing how it guides the school and helps keep work for students moving forward. Her end-in-mind vision was for folks to have great pride in SMS. She described this pride-centric vision/goal as follows:

As my first year as a principal we did our beginning of school year waiver day on culture. You know what a mission statement and a vision statement should look like. I went into each classrooms before the first day of school and I took pictures of their children, or went on Facebook and screen shot it. So I put these picture together in my PowerPoint, and asked them if they would put their own kid at this school. So I put a face to it. And would I be proud to put my kid here? And if not why? Like you know I have kids and would I have put my kids there then...no. And now I would 100%.

Mrs. Willie's statements are evidence that she was not content with SMS just meeting state accountability standards through the turnaround process. Instead she was focused on how to make a good school a great school while sustaining turnaround.

Key stakeholders supported Mrs. Willie's sentiments, and could vividly explain how the *core values, vision, and central mission* was directing the *why* at SMS under both turnaround leaders. One teacher stated, "So when Dr. Fury took over her vision was clear, and it was about the kids. She was very driven, forward, and passionate about this being for the kids. And that vision I like it because it was very clear on why she was doing what she was doing". Another teacher explained the vision and how it guided decisions at SMS when she explained:

Dr. Fury was always about what is best about kids. Let's say for instance this kid was not good with writing but was good at art to express himself. Then she would ask us why he cannot do a poster including all the details of an assignment. Let him do what he can do. Now she was not saying writing lacked importance, but in order for him to feel good

about what he was doing then let him do it in a way he feels good about to get him to the writing. It was always about how to push kids in the classroom and our relationships a little bit further.

One other piece that stuck with interviewees was, “there are no shortcuts”, or a commonly used phrase by Dr. Fury in explaining that there would be no excuses in turnaround. One teachers described this theory by saying:

We saw the commitment of admin which trickled down to teachers committing. The students saw the teachers’ hard work and the culture was one of success. A guarantee, and there was nothing else. Like “no short cuts,” that was our motto for a while, “no short cuts”; and we just did everything as a group that we could do to help our kids ensure success.

While the language of a formal central mission at SMS did not emerge as being remembered by stakeholders of SMS, it does appear that a sustained vision of being all about kids with no excuses was alive and well. In addition, this vision had great importance as a primary accelerator of a positive adult culture in the sustained turnaround of SMS.

**Accelerator 5: A systems approach.** Findings at SMS suggest that a *systems approach* was not emphasized as much as other accelerators. Each of the four non-turnaround principal interviewees, placed this accelerator in the bottom three in terms of impacting the adult culture as an accelerator for turnaround at SMS. Contrastingly, Dr. Fury rated this accelerator as the second most important. The contrast in responses from Dr. Fury and the other interviewees could be due to interviewees being many years removed from the initial turnaround. Dr. Fury noted, “I was very interested in strategy and planning with the end in mind, but also realizing that the work that we did could not be done within just the school house”. Mrs. Willie was more



aligned with non-turnaround principal interviewees, rating taking a *systems approach* as the least important accelerator in sustaining turnaround during her tenure. This could be due to systems already being in place, and supports the notion that other interviewees got so accustomed to a *systems approach* that they failed to remember how important it was many years removed from initial turnaround. Mrs. Willie noted, “Dr. Fury is very different. I think what has helped keep us moving forward, and no doubt she was that catalyst that driver who shook things up, was not having to change systems. And then I got to come in already knowing where we were”. In the statement Mrs. Willie is indirectly stating that systems were not as emphasized in the sustained improvement stage of turnaround, due to these systems being part of the culture at SMS.

Two out of six interviewees mentioned that these systems originated from Dr. Fury listening to others in order to create systems that were friendly to the end user. Dr. Fury reiterated this sentiment stating that systems were created based on talking to the teachers about what they felt were the biggest struggles. One teacher described systems being put in place based on feedback from educators. She mentioned that the process was often discussed with teachers in order to make sure things that were being done could be improved. It should be noted that key stakeholders did not often respond to questions about this accelerator with as much vividness as other accelerators, often choosing to discuss other accelerators instead.

At SMS, each of the three collaborative meetings showed Mrs. Willie listening and gathering ideas before making decisions. In her formative assessment team meeting the group discussed how they were going to increase the use of formative assessment on campus. Ideas such as modeling in faculty meetings, putting out a list of commonly used formative assessment tools acquired at a training attended by all members, looking at student work with formative assessments, and using the formative assessment team to encourage teachers to include a

formative assessment in PLC planning all rose to the forefront as systemic ways to incorporate formative assessment to fill a gap at SMS. In addition, the formative assessment team knew the guiding question a week prior to the meeting, allowing them to prepare. Mrs. Willie discussed how she would share expectations with team leaders and department chairs, working to systemically boundary span across the organization. During Mrs. Willie's administrative team meeting, she showed systemic leadership by using the same shell for the agenda as the previous meeting. In doing such her administrative team knew what to be prepared for, discussions on how kids and teachers were performing, enhancing the richness of conversations. New items on the agenda were also included in the meeting, such as preparing for state testing study camps three months ahead of time. Mrs. Willie was systemic in thinking about these camps, as her primary goal was to outline a three month calendar for her upcoming faculty meeting that listed all dates for in-school and out-of-school camps.

When participants talked about systems they not only talked about listening, but they also discussed having an end goal in mind. The word autonomy was also associated with systemically thinking with the end goal in mind for both turnaround principals. It appeared that educators had some autonomy to lead once systems were created at SMS. For instance, during turnaround the campus was going through an implementation of a new math curriculum used district wide. The campus determined that there was gaps in the curriculum. Dr. Fury reported:

Having a clear understanding of what the data showed, which were the holes, our next steps were giving teachers the autonomy to embed instruction into those holes to meet the needs of kids. That was a KEY piece in that, we could not just say we were going to teach this without having the end in mind.

One teacher interviewee reinforced what Dr. Fury said when she stated:

Out of the ten years I have been here, I have been the team lead for eight. I took a little break in the middle. So I definitely feel that under both Dr. Fury and Mrs. Willie that I was allowed to lead. For instance, they will let me know what needs to be done but they let me do it not micromanaging at all. They trusted that I would do it with my team, not telling me how I have to do it.

Dr. Fury also frequently mentioned that having structures in place as it related to having conversations about problems of practice, and within those conversations the allowing of teachers to have what she referred to as “a little bit of autonomy.” Mrs. Willie, reiterated this stance when describing how Lead Content Teachers (LCTs) over content areas were used. These lead content teachers were responsible for providing instructional leadership through coaching teachers in their department. She stated:

There was some restrictiveness with the Lead Content Teachers because they were new. So I do not know how comfortable teachers felt in taking that leadership role. But I think that we did a good job of using them as a leadership team and we would meet with them. That was our leadership team, the LCTs, Dr. Fury, and I. So I think they had more autonomy in that regard.

Mrs. Willie reinforced the amount of autonomy those on the leadership team had when describing her own role on this team as Dr. Fury’s assistant principal. She said:

I think Dr. Fury was a great to have as a mentor to me, a new AP who knew nothing about secondary school. I could come up with my own ideas. I was over the Science and ELA department, because I had the Science background so I felt like she gave me some free reign. And when we met she was like how is it going, do you have any questions do you need anything? And I was like here is what I am doing, but at the

same time she was holding my toes to the line. Like if my data did not come back well on a benchmark she would be, “what is going on... what are you doing”? So she kept pushing me to be accountable, and that helped my growth.

It appears that Dr. Fury had a system in place to hold those on her leadership team accountable to the student-centric vision at SMS. While key stakeholders did not place great importance on using a *systems approach* as an accelerator of a positive adult culture, systems were used by the turnaround leader to provide clear expectation and hold those in the organization accountable.

**Accelerator 6: Internal accountability.** Interviewees at SMS varied in their rating of where *internal accountability* ranked in terms of importance. Two non-turnaround principal interviewees rated the accelerator as second most important, and two others believed it was the third most important. Dr. Fury and Mrs. Willie rated this accelerator as 4<sup>th</sup> most important and sixth most important respectively.

While Dr. Fury did rate this accelerator lower than three others, there was evidence that she believed that *internal accountability* was important. More precisely, she believed in having clear expectations for her educators as a model of how she expected adults to work with each other. She spoke of providing feedback to teachers so that there was consistency in expectations of learning in the classrooms. She noted, “Number one we had to ensure that high quality instruction was going on in every classroom, and how data had to drive high quality instruction going forward”. Dr. Fury made the connection between instruction and student behavior in the classroom:

I think number one we had to look at making sure there was order, because without that you do not have anything. It is hard to teach with quality without it. But the activities students engaged in were important because what happens in the classroom impacts the

discipline. So I had to make it very clear at that point as to what behavior was expected of the kids. We had to work really hard on not having only worksheets and not just the sit and get type lessons. And what student engagement looked like conversations were held resulting in discussions about appropriate activities.

Dr. Fury described the process of getting buy-in to these clear expectations as a difficult venture during the initial stages of turnaround. However, she also described that she relied on her natural skills as a leader, leveraging them to successfully get the buy-in needed. She stated:

I think that I was genuine and I think that is important. I think they knew that I cared. Did they know that the first year? You know I think anytime you go into changing expectations you have a dissidence as to what is going to happen. So when I first came in I had to get the trust of my faculty, and get them to trust each other, and start getting them to act with accountability amongst everyone.

Collective accountability promoted internally was important to Dr. Fury especially in the initial stages of turnaround.

Other findings indicate that Mrs. Willie continued to place emphasis on *internal accountability*. As aforementioned, the formative assessment team at SMS showed evidence of this trend. It was evident that Mrs. Willie would boundary span by sharing the outcomes of the meeting to her team leaders and department chairs. These outcomes consisted of sharing formative assessment strategies in various ways in order to increase usage. In doing this Mrs. Willie was holding herself accountable, as well as those within the organization, to move outcomes forward. It is interesting to note that teachers in this formative assessment meeting were allowed to speak freely and even professionally challenge Mrs. Fury, furthering the collective accountability members of this team had with each other. In addition, participants of

all meetings were given guiding questions for each meeting so that they would be prepared and more accountable for having rich discussions. Mrs. Fury described *internal accountability* during her tenure:

So I think you have to have the vision going and know what it is going to take to get there. So having accountability, I can tie it back into my vision by saying if we truly want this school to flourish and continue to flourish, then this is why I am asking you to do this and we have to have accountability to that. It helps keeping us moving forward.

She went on to remark:

I think it starts obviously with me. With me modeling my expectations. I do not feel like I am above anybody. You want me to come in and teach and demonstrate let me do it.

You want me to mop up a spill, let me do it. If I cannot find my custodian, you know you will see me picking up trash in the cafeteria. I do not care.

*Internal accountability* was also seen in documents used at the school. Currently the data defined needs at the school include writing, writing across the curriculum training, and Science professional development, each of which have action steps that are included in the school's campus improvement plan.

Key stakeholders placed emphasis on *internal accountability* as well. One teacher described that teachers had a level of *internal accountability* with one another, to a level that they would check in on each other to hold each other accountable. An example provided was assisting each other with student tutoring when emergencies such as parent conferences came up. Another teacher referenced this by saying, "Accountability to the mission was important. We had to follow through because Dr. Fury was so passionate about our mission that if you did not get on board then it was pretty much you needed to go away or ask for a transfer". This stern

message seemed to be balanced with an intense sense of caring by Dr. Fury. Mrs. Willie stated remembering the following in regards to *internal accountability* and Dr. Fury's passion:

At a lot of our faculty meetings, and everyone still teases her because she stood up on the table—she would get into it. She would talk about teamwork, and all of us being on the same ship together. About a potato and white water rafting analogies with teamwork. She stood up on a table at a faculty meeting and was preaching about unity, and really built the sense that we have to work together. So it was those steps in the beginning of seeing who was in for the right reasons, who was sticking to things, and who was going to go.

Sunnyside's sustained achievement gains could at least partially be attributed to clear expectations, hiring practices, and the passion of the turnaround leaders. *Internal accountability* also likely had at least a moderate impact in molding a positive adult culture as an accelerator for turnaround.

### Summary

This chapter included an in-depth review of two cases studies involving building a positive adult culture in a turnaround setting. One of the featured schools of these case studies was Circle High School (CHS) led by Dr. Clear. Dr. Clear was very purposeful and intentional in the initial stages of turnaround. While he believed deeply in the *why* to guide the organization, his motivational style was calculated. In the initial stages of turnaround, findings suggest that Dr. Clear relied most on using a *systems approach* as an accelerator for building and adult culture. CHS also spent significant time on *distributive and collaborative leadership in PLCs*, particularly in year two of turnaround.

The second featured school profiled in a case study was Sunnyside Middle School (SMS) led initially by Dr. Fury, and then by her successor and former assistant principal Mrs. Willie. Dr. Fury was very purposeful and intentional in the initial stages of turnaround; however, she did not feel she was as purposeful as other participants. She was passionate and motivational as a turnaround leader, especially when she articulated the *why* to guide the organization. In the initial stages of turnaround, findings suggest that Dr. Fury most relied on *core values, vision, and central mission* as an accelerator for building and adult culture. Mrs. Willie was also purposeful and intentional as Dr. Fury's successor; however, she had a more calculated leadership approach. Her motivational style was one of controlled composure. The usage of accelerators by the turnaround leaders differentiated based on the stage of turnaround, and the leadership style of the turnaround leader at SMS. In the next chapter a cross-case analysis of the findings will build upon the established within case studies for turnaround leadership at both schools.



## CHAPTER 5

### CROSS-CASE FINDINGS

While in the previous chapter I examined the purposefulness and intentionality of the turnaround leaders and their use of the accelerators within each case, in this chapter, I draw comparisons between the turnaround case studies, and, more importantly the turnaround leaders. Pushing beyond the individual cases to a cross-case analysis has value in terms of understanding how turnaround leaders contextualized their experience. In addition, according to Merriam (2009), cross-case analysis enhances the external validity and generalizability of the findings, allowing for the building of abstractions as they relate to the research questions. These research questions involve the turnaround leader's intentionality in building a positive adult culture, and the extent in which the six accelerators posited in the conceptual framework were used.

This chapter will focus primarily on these two particular foci grounded in the research questions in a cross case format; however, comparisons will also be made in regards to the context of the turnaround schools in which the turnaround leaders did their work. The chapter will begin by looking at comparisons with this turnaround context, progress to comparing the makeup of the turnaround leaders, before advancing into comparisons of how intentional the turnaround leaders were in building a positive adult culture in the initial stages of turnaround. The cross-case analysis will then move into looking at the similarities and differences in how the turnaround leaders used the *why* and the six accelerators, posited in the Conceptual framework, to advance the positive adult culture in the turnaround setting. The chapter will close with a detailed look at how the turnaround leaders "accelerated the accelerators", and the themes of building an adult culture in turnaround uncovered in the study.

## Turnaround School Context

The context of the two cases and turnaround leaders studied were intentionally selected to be moderately different in nature. Both schools were urban secondary schools, had been in engaged school turnaround, and had received school improvement funds; however, the direct similarities stopped there. Sunnyside Middle School (SMS) was a sixth grade to eighth grade middle school, while Circle High School (CHS) was a traditional grade nine to twelve high school. Each school was in a different stage of turnaround at the time of the study. CHS was at the tail end of the declining performance stage of turnaround, and was in the nascent stages of crisis stabilization as evidenced by moving from “Not Meeting Standard” in the Texas Accountability System to “Met Standard”. SMS had pushed well past both of the stages CHS was in, residing in the sustaining improvement stage years after the initial turnaround.

The composition of the students of the schools studied was somewhat similar at the time of the study (see table 3). While CHS had nearly 500 more students than SMS, the

*Table 3. Demographic Comparisons between Study Sites 2014-2015 (TEA 2015 SRC)*

	Circle High School	Sunnyside Middle School
Student Enrollment	1188	690
African American Percentage	25.1%	12.9%
Caucasian Percentage	2.8%	17.4%
Hispanic Percentage	69.8%	65.2%
Economically Disadvantaged Percentage	79.3%	68.4%
Mobility Rate	22.4%	11.1%
ELL Percentage	16.4%	7.2%
Student/Teacher Ratio	13-1	16-1

demographics of each school consisted of a somewhat similar make-up. Similarities in demographics included both student bodies being primarily Hispanic with significant ELL populations. The schools were moderately different in terms of economically disadvantaged and mobility rates (TEA ASR Circle, 2015; TEA ASR Sunnyside, 2015).

### **School Site Context Prior to Turnaround**

In the case of both CHS and SMS findings suggest the existence of leadership turmoil, a lack of trust in administration, and chaos prior to the arrival of the turnaround leaders. At CHS the principal was removed mid-year the year prior to the arrival of the Dr. Clear, and several principals had short stays prior to the arrival of the Dr. Fury at SMS. Dr. Fury described the relationship between teachers and administration at the time of her arrival as follows, “I asked them what they saw happening in the school and what we needed to do moving forward.

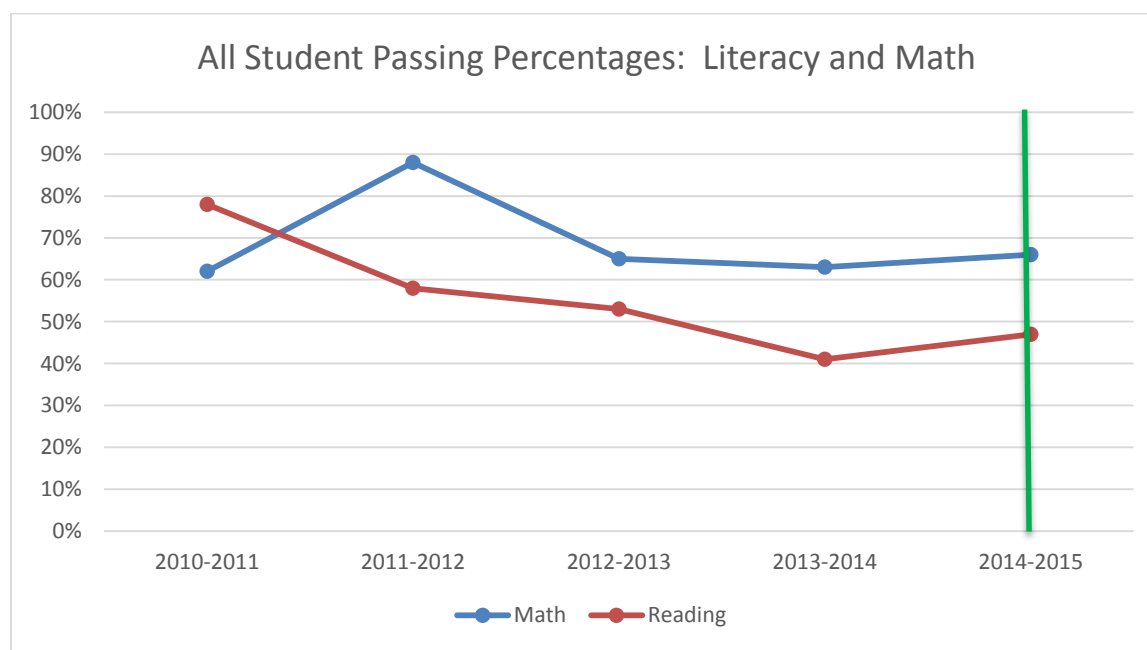
Number one I learned there was a division between the principal and faculty, one being against the other, so I knew unification of the faculty was important”. In both cases, participants in the study described the schools as fighting a poor reputation to the extent of losing students to other schools. While SMS enrollment had been gradually improving at the time of the study, their enrollment was approximately 200 students less during the first year of Dr. Fury’s tenure. This pattern of declining enrollment mirrors those at CHS, where a high mobility rate was evident during the first year of Dr. Clear’s tenure. In both cases participants reported teachers leaving the school prior to the arrival of the turnaround leader. Furthermore, participants described a lack of systems, or even chaos, in both cases prior to turnaround.

### **Turnaround School Data Trends in the Initial Stages of Turnaround**

Data trends at CHS and SMS showed evidence of declining student academic performance; however, the rate and severity of the decline was much more profound in the initial

stages of turnaround at CHS. During the three years prior to the arrival of Dr. Clear, student achievement in literacy declined 40%, while student achievement in math declined 30% (TEA SRC Circle, 2014). Data did not paint the same bleak picture at SMS prior the arrival of Dr. Fury. In the three years prior to Dr. Fury’s arrival performance of the “all students” group on state standardized tests in Reading increased gradually by a total of 8%. During this same time period, all student performance on state standardized tests in math bounced up and down, but increased by a total 6% (TEA AEIS Sunnyside, 2008).

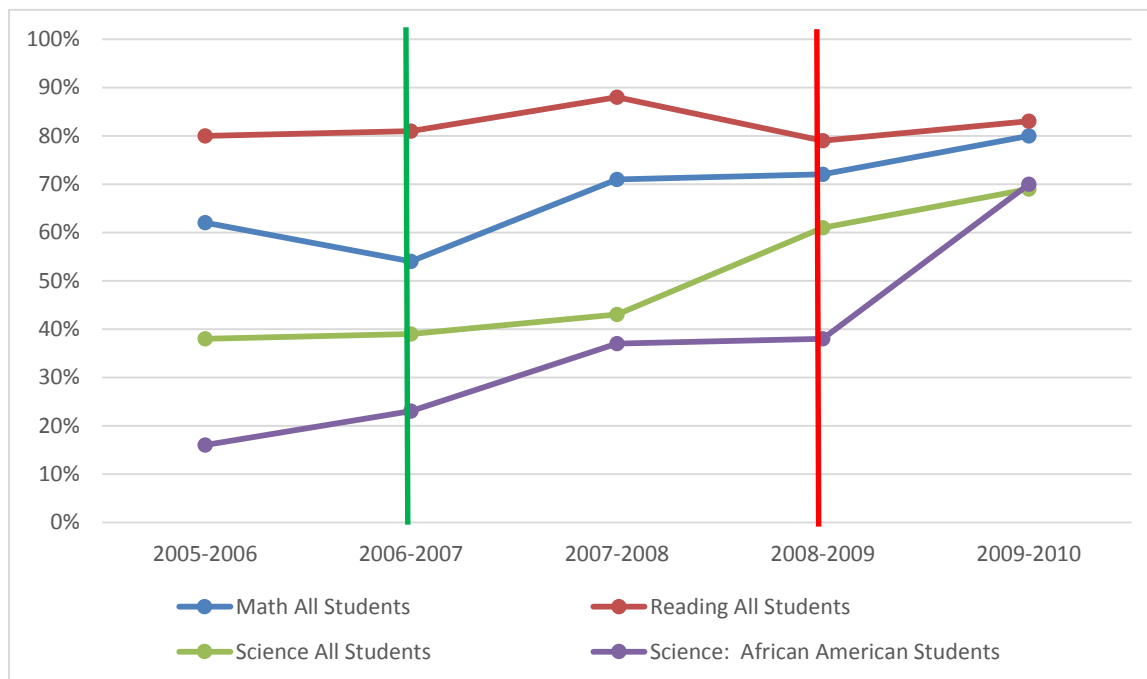
Once both schools were rated low performing, turnaround leaders were able to remove the negative label within one year. Dr. Clear came into a school that was rated *low performing* and moved the school to a *met standard* rating, while the school did not meet standard in three of the four years before he became principal. His arrival year of 2014-2015 is indicated by a green line in figure 11, and corresponds to data he would be responsible for influencing in his first year. Gains occurred in two of the four focus areas of the Texas Accountability System, including a 1 point increase in student achievement and an 11 point increase postsecondary



**Figure 11: First Year Turnaround Data (Circle High School)**

readiness during Dr. Clear's first year (TEA ASR Circle, 2015). Figure 11 also indicates that during this same time period, math student achievement increased 3% to 66% of students meeting standard, and Reading student achievement increasing 6% to 47% of students meeting standard (TEA TAPR Circle, 2015).

Contrastingly, Dr. Fury came into a school that was rated *academically acceptable*. Her arrival year of 2006-2007 is indicated in figure 12 by a green line, and corresponds to data she would be responsible for influencing in her first year. Gains in reading student achievement that had already been established three years prior to her arrival, continued at an even more rapid rate in Dr. Fury's first two years. Fluctuating scores in math student achievement prior to Dr. Fury's arrival, dipped in her first year followed by a dramatic increase in her second year. It was during her third year, indicated by a red line in figure 12, that achievement scores in Science with



**Figure 12: First Year Turnaround Data (Sunnyside Middle School)**

African American students did not increase fast enough to keep pace with rising standards set by the state of Texas, resulting in the rating of *academically unacceptable*. Just as at CHS under the leadership of Dr. Clear, achievement scores rose dramatically at SMS in the next year after the negative rating (see figure 12). The “all student” group reading achievement scores increased 3%, “all student” group math 8%, “all student” group science 8%, and Science African American group an exceptional 31% in the year following the *Academically Unacceptable* rating (TEA AEIS Sunnyside, 2010). These gains were enough to move the school from *Academically Unacceptable* to *Recognized* in just a year.

### **The DNA of the Turnaround Leaders and an Ideal School Culture**

There is a moderate level of similarity in the experiences of the turnaround leaders prior to their turnaround leadership experience at SMS and CHS. Both Dr. Fury and Dr. Clear worked in the same urban school district in which their turnaround school was located prior to their turnaround principal experience. Their total years of experience before becoming a turnaround principal ranged from 10 to 12 years. Similarly, both turnaround principals had worked in diverse schools, preparing them for the turnaround principal settings. While Dr. Fury was a first time principal in her new turnaround setting, Dr. Clear had been a principal already at the middle school level. Dr. Fury had experience at the middle school level where she was guiding turnaround, but Dr. Clear did not have experience in any form at the high school level where he was leading turnaround. Dr. Clear had four years as an assistant principal and three years as a teacher in a turnaround setting, while Dr. Fury had no experience in a formal turnaround school.

### **Qualities of the Turnaround Leaders**

In reaching beyond their prior expertise and into the qualities that made up the DNA of each turnaround leader, it was evident they both had attributes that met the context of their new

role as a turnaround school leader. Findings suggest that both schools were relatively chaotic with a need for an increased focus on student academic achievement prior to the arrival of the turnaround leaders. An argument could be made that SMS was more stable than CHS at the time of arrival of the turnaround leader, if looking solely at student achievement data. Dr. Clear used an emotionally controlled leadership style to build relationships with his staff. He coupled this style by taking a *systems approach* to clearly define how the school would behave and operate. His DNA as a leader seemed to be more than sufficient to calm the waters at CHS and move student achievement forward. Dr. Fury seemed to be the more visibly motivational of the two turnaround leaders, choosing to start with the vision that all students could achieve and there would be “no shortcuts” in getting results. Like Dr. Clear, she coupled her leadership style with a focus on building trusting relationships. Her DNA as a leader was certainly aligned to being able to repair relationships between teachers and administrators at SMS paving the way for sustained turnaround. It is important to note that both leaders were reported to be great listeners of those they led.

### **Key Stakeholder Definitions of an Ideal School Leader**

Key stakeholders interviewed were asked what made up an ideal turnaround leader with their responses furthering the idea of the turnaround leaders’ skill set being aligned to the context of the school. At CHS interviewees described an ideal turnaround leader as one who changes the culture to one of respect, and someone who is dedicated to work well past end of school day to create this change. Dr. Clear believed that a turnaround leader was one who is able to influence without ever waiving on core values and beliefs not only to themselves, but also to the organization. One teacher at CHS described a turnaround leader as follows:

Someone who is willing to approach things in a new way. To abandon systems that do not work. Someone willing to implement new systems. But if we look at turnaround as working on something that does not work, as something that is failing and on a downward track headed in the wrong direction, then it would have to be someone who will stop whatever is going on. That means challenging the current bureaucratic structures that are in place, and having a willingness to abandon whatever is causing that course or direction.

Similar responses involving the ideal turnaround leader surfaced at SMS. An ideal turnaround leader at SMS was described as someone who could build a collaborative leadership team, and someone who had the patience to hear before being heard. In addition, a turnaround leader was described as someone who is visible in order to get a good feel for the environment of the school. One teacher at SMS described an ideal turnaround leader as follows, “They have to have ambition, know where they are going, have people in the right places, and respect for themselves and those they lead. They have to be just open and willing”. It seems that the skills exhibited by both Dr. Fury and Dr. Clear are aligned to the responses of interviewees in regards to the DNA of an ideal turnaround leader. In addition, Mrs. Willie also seems to exhibit skills aligned to interviewee responses.

### **Descriptive Terms Used to Describe the Turnaround Leaders**

There is direct alignment between the qualities interviewees described as making up an ideal turnaround leader and the descriptive terms they used to describe turnaround principals at SMS and CHS. Key stakeholders most often listed the descriptive term of “listener” to describe their turnaround leader (see Table 4). In addition to the term “listener”, several other words were used by key stakeholders to describe *each* of the three turnaround leaders in the study.



These terms include caring, clear, collaborative, instructionally focused, intentional, mentor, relationship builder, supportive, systemic, trusting, visible, and visionary. Each of these words are italicized in table four. It is important to note that items in this table are either direct, or close

*Table 4. Descriptive Terms used to Describe Turnaround Principals*

Dr. Clear (CHS)	Dr. Fury (SMS)	Mrs. Willie (SMS)
Analytical	<i>Caring</i>	Businesslike
Authentic	<i>Clear</i>	Calculated
Calm	Change Agent	Care Provider
Calculated	Coach	<i>Caring</i>
<i>Caring</i>	<i>Collaborative</i>	<i>Clear</i>
<i>Clear</i>	Committed	<i>Collaborative</i>
<i>Collaborative</i>	Convincing	Controlled
Conscious	Cognizant	Gentle
Consistent	Curer	Giver
Controlled	Demanding	Inclusive
Efficient	Driven	<i>Instructionally Focused</i>
Emotionally Composed	Fiery	<i>Intentional</i>
Forward Thinking	Forward Thinking	<i>Listener</i>
Genuine	<i>Instructionally Focused</i>	<i>Mentor</i>
Inclusive	<i>Intentional</i>	Outgoing
<i>Instructionally Focused</i>	Student-Centric	Passionate
<i>Intentional</i>	<i>Listener</i>	Questioner
Inquisitive	<i>Mentor</i>	Recognizer of Talent
Kid-Friendly	Motivator	<i>Relationship Builder</i>
<i>Listener</i>	Motivational	<i>Supportive</i>
Man of Integrity	Outgoing	Sustainer
<i>Mentor</i>	Outside the Box	<i>Systemic</i>
Open	Passionate	Thoughtful
Quiet	Preacher	<i>Trusting</i>
<i>Relationship Builder</i>	<i>Relationship Builder</i>	<i>Visible</i>
Specific	<i>Supportive</i>	<i>Visionary</i>
<i>Supportive</i>	Spontaneous	
<i>Systemic</i>	<i>Systemic</i>	
Time Saver	<i>Trusting</i>	
<i>Trusting</i>	<i>Visible</i>	
<i>Visible</i>	<i>Visionary</i>	
<i>Visionary</i>		

to direct responses, of key stakeholders during interviews. The descriptive terms further clarify the qualities comprising the DNA of the turnaround leader as being equally as important as, and maybe even more important than, the prior experience they bring to the table in order to meet the context of the turnaround school.

### **Key Stakeholder Beliefs about an Ideal School Culture**

Findings also suggest that key stakeholders' beliefs about an ideal school culture are aligned to the direction in which the turnaround leaders are guiding their schools. Interviewees at both schools were asked what qualities make up an ideal school culture for turnaround. At CHS responses included stakeholders being willing to try new things, positivity, administrative support, celebration of student successes, personal development, and kindness. One teacher at CHS described the ideal school culture as follows, "So I would like to say that a warm, respectful, sheltering type of environment of support is hugely beneficial. One that is immune to the daily hardships we face". In addition, one assistant principal believed that an ideal culture for turnaround included educators "respecting where they work." He noted:

Respect where you work. Respect it because you need to come on time and not want to leave early. To come early and to stay in late, to spend extra time to go to kids sporting events, competitions, to have that buy in. We have an MMVV, but respect the place you work. It goes a long way when teachers are in the halls, going to events, having conversations in the halls. Kids feed off that and they are willing to do things like follow the dress code. As for as school culture and climate with adults, respect it. You applied here, wanted to be here, and we hired you. You know troubles and trials exist, so be willing to work through those.

Responses to the question fitting the context of the school were also postulated at SMS. These responses were somewhat different due to SMS being in the sustained stage of turnaround.

Interviewees described an ideal school culture as one in which all educators are heard and have a voice. Other qualities of an ideal school culture included responses such as warmth, high expectations, celebrations of academics, and family-like. Mrs. Willie described an ideal school culture at SMS by remarking:

A culture of pride in the school. You always have to talk about how you love your school, and the pride you show is infectious. Your teachers feel it. I tell them all the time at every assembly we do, every grade level team meetings we have, how proud I am of this school and how much I love them. I tell everybody, I have the best school, the best kids, and the best teachers.

Both document analysis and observations also support the findings of turnaround leaders guiding their schools in a way that was aligned to the perceptions an ideal school culture for adults in their turnaround context.

### **Intentionality in Building a Positive Adult Culture in the Initial Stages of Turnaround**

One of the two research questions for the study involves the extent to which urban school leaders improve school culture for adults in a purposeful and intentional way during the initial stages of the turnaround process. Both leaders were very intentional in working to improve the adult culture by fixing problems and building relationships to regain trust in the administration that had been broken. However, Dr. Fury and Dr. Clear differed in terms of which accelerators they chose as an initial starting point for rebuilding this adult culture. Findings suggest that both turnaround leaders used the accelerator of building trusting relationships to help push their work; however, this accelerator was secondary to other accelerators. For instance, Dr. Clear began this

process of improving the adult culture by primarily using a *systems approach*, and Dr. Fury primarily began by using a central mission, vision, and core values. In addition, while both leaders were very intentional in working in the aforementioned accelerators, they also used the innate skills or leadership qualities displayed in Table four to guide their work.

The two leaders did differ in the length of time they had spent perfecting work in the primary accelerator used. Dr. Clear, by default of only being on the job for a little more than a year, spent most of his first year refining systems. Observations present evidence of his shifting into working primarily in the realm of the accelerator of *distributive and collaborative leadership* in the second year of his tenure. On the other hand, Dr. Fury had been working on the accelerator of building *core values, vision, and central mission* throughout the first two years of her tenure. She continued to work primarily on this accelerator during the time the school was rated *academically unacceptable*, and continued to focus on building relationships to instill the vision with stakeholders. Both leaders saw not only gains in student achievement during the first year of their tenure, but also in the case of Dr. Fury extraordinary gains the year after being rated *academically unacceptable*. Findings suggest the turnaround leaders used the primary accelerators to restore trust and bring enthusiasm to invigorate the cyclical energy in their schools, regardless of the path taken to get these results.

### **Common Themes of Turnaround: The *Why* and Accelerator Usage**

The second of the two research questions involved answering how, and to what degree do turnaround leaders use strategies reflective of the key accelerators posited in the conceptual framework to guide school turnaround. Findings suggest that all three turnaround leaders placed great emphasis on the key accelerators. Each turnaround leader used these accelerators to a different extent, blazing their own trails to improve the adult culture in their turnaround settings.

### **The *Why*: Greater Importance during Initial Stages?**

It appears that both turnaround schools utilized the *why* to a great extent during the initial stages of turnaround. At CHS the *why* was described through the following formalized statement: “Igniting in every student and staff member the mindset for continuous growth, self-improvement, and lifelong learning”. It is interesting to note this *why* included BOTH students and staff members at CHS. The *why* took a while to develop as Dr. Clear surveyed the environment in the first year of turnaround before embarking on a formal process to develop the *why*, which was essentially the vision for the organization. At SMS the development of the *why* was a less formalized process, consisting of a phrase used from the beginning of Dr. Fury’s tenure. This phrase was: “all kids can learn and there are no shortcuts in getting there.” Regardless of the pathway used to develop the *why* both leaders rationalized actions, next steps, and changes with the use of the *why*.

Connectivity between the schools’ *why* and the turnaround leader was also evident. Origins of the *why* at SMS were directly linked with Dr. Fury, and her vision for how the school would move forward. It is reasonable to suggest that this *why* for SMS would not have been present under another turnaround leader, as it was deeply rooted in the belief system and core values of Dr. Fury. While Dr. Clear did not immediately lead with the *why*, as it took time to develop, he also seemed to ground the *why* in his core values and belief system. His ideas of the 3T’s consisting of trust, transparency, and teamwork were the basis for the *why*. The basis for the *why* also included another acronym coined the PEAR mentality, or the idea that educators should focus on performance, effort, accountability, and relationships. As with Dr. Fury, these ideas were shared with turnaround educators at their schools in the nascent stages of the turnaround process at a level of saturation in which interviewees could at least partially recall the

specific language tied to the *why*. Another similarity of both leaders was that they allowed for educators and leaders at the school to have relative autonomy within the *why*, using the *why* as a guide for those in the organization.

So is the *why* more important in the initial stages of turnaround? It seems reasonable to suggest this is the case. Findings show that both Dr. Fury and Dr. Clear utilized the *why* to a great extent. They both referred to it being natural for people, in this case educators they were leading, to want justification on why decisions were made in in the organization. While not involved as a turnaround principal in the initial stages, Mrs. Willie built upon the established student-centric *why* but seemed to rely on it less since she took the reins of a school on the move. Her focus was less on the *why* and more on how to distribute leadership around the *why*. She supported this when she stated that distributive and collaborative leadership was the most important accelerator in terms of sustaining school turnaround. In addition, data points towards a more stable staff in the sustained stages of turnaround, who already firmly know the *why*, compared to a staff that was initially marked by new teachers who needed more justification during the initial stages of Dr. Fury's tenure.

### **Two Distinctive Ways Turnaround Leaders Motivated with the *Why***

Findings clearly show that Dr. Clear and Dr. Fury had completely different styles in motivating educators with the *why*. While not as drastic of a difference, Mrs. Willie's style in motivating educators was also very different than Dr. Fury. Dr. Clear was reported to have a controlled, composed, and calculated demeanor in working to motivate educators in the turnaround process. Ms. Willie was reported to have a businesslike, gentle, and thoughtful style to motivate educators in sustaining turnaround. Conversely, Dr. Fury was reported to be fiery, outgoing and visibly passionate in her motivational style. As a reminder Dr. Clear did have three

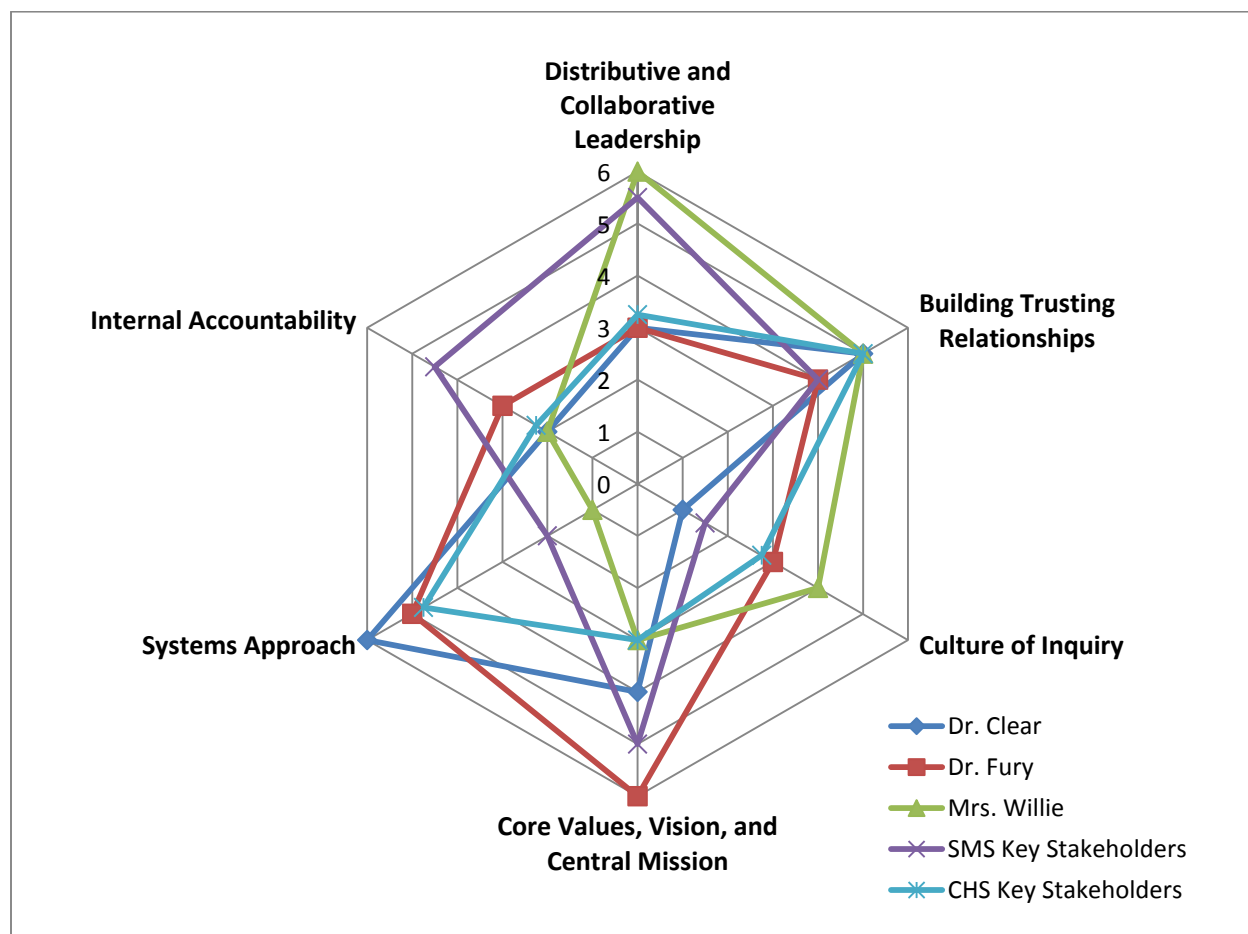
years of principal experience prior to being a turnaround principal, compared to no experience for Dr. Fury and Mrs. Willie. While the experience gap before becoming a turnaround principal did exist, Dr. Fury seemed to be more of a motivational coach type leader, unlike her more counterparts whose motivational style was more emotionally controlled. A look at the differences in descriptive terms key stakeholders interviewed used to describe the turnaround leaders in the study further solidifies these findings (Table 5). In this table words to describe Dr. Clear or Mrs. Willie (in blue) are listed that differentiate from those words used to describe Dr. Fury (in white). Words such as calm, controlled, emotionally composed, and quiet were used to describe Dr. Clear. Polar opposite words such as demanding, driven, fiery, outgoing, and spontaneous were used to describe Dr. Fury. Dr. Fury's successor Mrs. Willie seemed to align more to the motivational style of Dr. Clear than she did of her predecessor in working to sustain turnaround.

*Table 5. Differences in Descriptive Terms used to Describe Dr. Clear, Dr. Fury, and Mrs. Willie*

Dr. Clear	Dr. Fury	Mrs. Willie
Analytical	Change Agent	Businesslike
Authentic	Coach	Calculated
Calculated	Committed	Care Provider
Calm	Convincing	Controlled
Conscious	Cognizant	Gentle
Consistent	Curer	Giver
Controlled	Demanding	Inclusive
Efficient	Driven	Questioner
Emotionally Composed	Fiery	Recognizer of Talent
Forward Thinking	Forward Thinking	Sustainer
Genuine	Motivator	Thoughtful
Inclusive	Motivational	
Inquisitive	Outgoing	
Man of Integrity	Outside the Box	
Open	Passionate	
Quiet	Preacher	
Specific	Spontaneous	
Time Saver		

### Extent of and Reliance on the Accelerators by Turnaround Leaders

Reliance on the accelerators can be arrived at by combining the perceptions of turnaround principals, the perceptions of key stakeholders interviewed, and observations at the turnaround schools (see figure 13). Findings show that the turnaround leaders placed greater importance on some accelerators than others, and that importance differentiated depending on the turnaround leader. It should be noted that Dr. Clear placed the accelerator of *systems approach* as the third



**Figure 13. Utilization of the Accelerators**

most important accelerator; however, evidence originating from other interviews and observations provided ample evidence to suggest that he utilized this accelerator more than others. In the case of Dr. Fury and Mrs. Willie evidence from interviews and observations was directly aligned to their own self view regarding reliance on the accelerators. Table six



articulates the top three accelerators turnaround leaders relied on to drive those they led toward turnaround, or in the case of Mrs. Willie to sustain turnaround.

*Table 6. Top Three Accelerators Utilized by Turnaround Leaders*

Dr. Clear	Dr. Fury	Mrs. Willie
Systems Approach	Core Values, Vision, and Central Mission	Distributed Leadership
Building Relationships	Systems Approach	Building Relationships
Core Values, Vision, and Central Mission	Building Relationships	Culture of Inquiry

In addition to these findings, it seems that the turnaround situation and/or turnaround leader's characteristics guided the utilization and reliance of the accelerators. For instance, CHS was lacking basic systems needed to allow those within the system to function efficiently. They were paired up with a leader who was described as calculated, controlled, efficient, and systemic. At SMS, student achievement gains were occurring prior to the arrival of Dr. Fury; however, they seemed to need a committed, driven, demanding, and motivating leader to continue the gains and become an exemplary school and to rebuild trust in administration. Moving to the stage of sustainment at SMS also quite possibly changed the needed reliance on the accelerators. Mrs. Willie relied most on a distributive approach to sustain the work, a quality that can be paired with her being the most often described as a listener of the three leaders. It is also interesting to note that the accelerator seemingly used the least throughout the study, a *culture of inquiry*, was suggested by Mrs. Willie as being one of the top three accelerators she used.

**Accelerator 1: Distributive and collaborative leadership in PLCs.** Two of the three turnaround leaders utilized this accelerator to a great extent in order to build a positive adult culture in the turnaround process, even though it was only in the top three accelerators based on reliance for Mrs. Willie who was sustaining turnaround. CHS began intensive work on this

accelerator in year two of Dr. Clear's tenure, using year one to infuse systems in order to settle down the organization. This intensive work began by bringing in an outside service provider to assist in forming core content area PLCs that were very much aligned to the research-based idea of PLCs. United in these PLCs were teachers who taught the same content, but most often did not share the same students. SMS leaders contextualized distributive and collaborative leadership a bit differently in forming academic teams where groups of students were shared by the same teacher. These teachers met to support students more efficiently. In addition, SMS had PLC's in the truest of forms with their formative assessment teams, originating from Mrs. Willie, which focused solely on improving instructional practices. SMS PLCs were marked by turnaround leaders being more directly involved in guiding the work, while CHS turnaround leaders chose to take a more back seat approach in hopes of building leadership capacity. Very limited data was uncovered to support Dr. Fury utilizing PLCs in the truest of forms; however, academic teaming was utilized to support turnaround.

All three turnaround leaders utilized a leadership and administrative team to work to collaborate and distribute leadership; however, findings suggest that this accelerator was less prevalent at the early stages of turnaround and more prevalent during the sustainment stage. Observational data at both schools aligned with this finding. The formative assessment and administrative team meetings at SMS had very rich and fluid conversations taking place, while the PLCs at CHS were more robotic and unnatural.

**Accelerator 2: Building trusting relationships through personalization and appreciation.** All three turnaround leaders placed heavy reliance on this accelerator in order to build a positive adult culture in the turnaround process, and it was in the top three accelerators relied on for turnaround for each leader. Both Dr. Clear and Dr. Fury reported this accelerator

was needed in order to make their respective primary accelerators go, essentially leading to a finding that none of the accelerators could operate without trusting relationships. Dr. Clear best summarized the importance of trusting relationships as it relates to turnaround leaders when he stated:

First and foremost to move anything there has to be a connection. The truth is that you cannot move people unless they have some type of connection to the person who is the carrier of the message. So to me that is where building relationships and appreciation is important.

In addition, building trusting relationships transcended the turnaround principal/educator relationship at SMS where turnaround had been sustained. At SMS educators reported high levels of trusting relationships from teacher to teacher, and from teacher to student. CHS did not yet have similar findings in regards to trusting relationships transcending the boundary of the turnaround principal/educators relationship. This limitation at CHS was likely due to the limited length of time between initial turnaround and the conclusion of the study. Furthermore, the culture at CHS was primed for this phenomenon to take place.

**Accelerator 3: Culture of inquiry.** Only Mrs. Willie rated *culture of inquiry* in the top three accelerators, with the other two turnaround leaders placing much less importance on this accelerator. This accelerator had the least detailed and vivid responses by interviewees of any of the accelerators. This could be because the term “*culture of inquiry*” is not necessarily common language in the education world in comparison to the other accelerators. A culture of inquiry, or openly dialoguing about current instructional practices and data within the organization, was also viewed by me as being utilized less than any other accelerator. While this is the case, the accelerator did still have some impact at both turnaround schools. Open dialogue

was in its nascent stages in the PLCs and Continuous School Improvement Team (CSIT) meeting at CHS. It was proficiently developing in the administrative team meeting in which Dr. Clear was brought in to conduct via phone conference. A *culture of inquiry* seemed strengthened beyond proficiency during the sustained improvement stage of turnaround at SMS. During the SMS formative assessment team meeting, teachers and Mrs. Willie had a very open, fluid, and rich dialogue about next steps to move formative assessments forward using data to support next steps. Findings suggest that having deep dialogues signifying a *culture of inquiry* could be a gap to exploit for Dr. Clear and Dr. Fury in the initial stages of turnaround, and that getting to a proficient level in the accelerator takes time to develop.

**Accelerator 4: Core values, vision, and central mission.** Two of the three leaders utilized this accelerator heavily in order to build a positive adult culture in the turnaround process, with Dr. Clear and Dr. Fury rating it in the top two accelerators of building an adult culture to sustain turnaround. At CHS the motto, mission, mantra, vision and values (MMMVV) was created in a collaborative way during the second semester of the first year of turnaround. The MMMVV is posted on their website, with other pieces, such as the mantra, visible throughout the school. In contrast Dr. Fury seemed to lead with a less formalized and/or visible MMMVV. Nonetheless, her student-centric vision, involving taking no shortcuts in assisting kids, permeated throughout the school as her number one rated accelerator of building an adult culture in a turnaround setting. Her vision, just like Dr. Clear's MMMVV, was very much grounded in her beliefs as a turnaround leader. Findings lead to Mrs. Willie relying on this accelerator much less, likely due to the vision of SMS being set by Dr. Fury and sustained with the streamlined succession plan.

**Accelerator 5: Systems approach.** Dr. Clear relied on this accelerator more than Dr. Fury, and significantly more than Mrs. Willie, in order to build a positive adult culture in the turnaround process. While Dr. Clear personally believed this accelerator was the third most important, evidence shows that the accelerator was relied on more than any other accelerator to build a positive adult culture at CHS. It appears that CHS used systems much more due to the situation Dr. Clear walked into being more dismal than the one that Dr. Fury found as turnaround leader. Dr. Clear reported that systems for basic functions like attendance taking, monitoring of students during non-class time, and cafeteria procedures, among others, were not firmly established at the beginning of his tenure. Dr. Fury also placed high importance on using a *systems approach* at SMS, rating it in the top two accelerators of building an adult culture to sustain turnaround. Like Mr. Clear, she also reported the need for systems:

We had to have systems you know, but I created the systems based on talking to the teachers about what they felt were the biggest struggles. The other piece we had to structurally change from a *systems approach* included systems for the after school program, the academic pep rallies to combat apathy, the homeroom period, and we had the elective periods streamlined so that our teams' content areas could meet during the school day.

Much like the accelerator of *core values, vision, and central mission*, this accelerator seemed to be needed less at the sustained stage of turnaround. Mrs. Willie reported that the Dr. Fury did such a great job of putting systems into place that very few systems needed to be changed at the beginning of her tenure.

**Accelerator 6: Internal accountability.** Each leader relied on this accelerator at moderate levels to build a positive adult culture in the turnaround process; however, none of the

turnaround leaders felt it was most utilized in turnaround. During the interviews of turnaround principals, both Dr. Clear and Dr. Fury chose to spend more time discussing the top their top three accelerators (see table 6). Dr. Clear rated this accelerator the fifth most important, and Dr. Fury rated the accelerator as fourth most important. In addition, key stakeholder interviewee responses from both schools lacked richness in details, with only a *culture of inquiry* having fewer rich replies. Each turnaround leaders were reported to hold folks accountable for end outcomes, and at each school participants reported that they were accountable to each other. Dr. Fury was reported as not shying away from critical conversations with educators who were not meeting end outcomes. This seems to have led to educators holding each other accountable over time. Current observation data points to *internal accountability* being alive and well at SMS under the leadership of Mrs. Willie. Teachers sharing the responsibility of tutoring, meeting participants being highly prepared, and teachers being willing to take kids that were having problems in other classrooms all served as evidence to support this conclusion. CHS had not reached this level under Dr. Clear, but improvements in the PLC process that could lead to increased *internal accountability* were evident. Teachers in these PLCs were reported to be holding each other accountable for end outcomes at higher levels, making the accelerator of *internal accountability* an emerging accelerator at CHS.

### **Interconnectivity between Accelerators**

Turnaround leaders were very specific in reporting that the accelerators were highly interconnected. Furthermore, they struggled to prioritize the accelerators due to how much they felt the accelerators correlated to one another. Dr. Clear linked four accelerators with one another, in prioritizing the accelerators from most to least important. Dr. Fury was adamant about this interconnectivity when she stated:

I do not think you can prioritize this accordingly, I think it all happens at the same time. So what is important is having a vision of what we value and then building the relationships and listening to make that happen. It (use of accelerators) is extremely interconnected. It began with a mission that there was no shortcuts and everything we do, we do to get kids where they OWNED it.

Both the aforementioned turnaround leaders felt that the accelerator *building trusting relationships through personalization and appreciation* was a precursor to every other accelerator in the conceptual framework, while Ms. Willie did not mention this interconnectivity. This conclusion was apart from the finding of trusting relationships not being rated as the primary accelerator relied on by turnaround leaders. In other words, findings suggest that trusting relationships at CHS enhanced the work inside the primary accelerator of building of a *systems approach*, and trusting relationships at SMS boosted the work inside the primary accelerator of *core values, vision, and central mission* in the initial stages of turnaround. Building positive relationships also transcended the stage of turnaround to enhance the use of each of the other accelerators, showing evidence that the accelerator was important regardless of the how far the school had progressed in the turnaround process. For instance, trusting relationships was directly interconnected at CHS in year two of turnaround at assisting with their targeted focus of enhancing the accelerator of *collaborative and distributive leadership in PLCs*.

Accelerators not involving *building trusting relationships through personalization and appreciation* were also perceived as interconnected. For instance, the PLC work at CHS was guided by the idea of continuous improvement and development for adults, an idea that originated from the work in the accelerator of *core values, vision, and central mission* at CHS. Furthermore at SMS, the accelerators *culture of inquiry* and *internal accountability* were linked

in their formative assessment team, allowing for very fluid conversations. Another example of the accelerators being interconnected included the common theme of time being looked at as an important piece of showing appreciation at both schools. Interviewees reported that leaders respecting their time could indeed be more important than other tangible gifts that are often given to teachers. Observations indicated that saving time in meetings could be accomplished by the turnaround leader by having routine structures, only having the audience at meetings that is needed, and/or having a focus question sent to participants prior to the meeting in order to allow participants to prepare. This gift of time, reportedly opened up the door for teachers to have more fluid conversations and increased inquiry and accountability to the student-centric vision at the schools, thus linking three accelerators. More importantly, these qualities were developed or developing during the meetings at both schools, an important finding since practices at the school were being impacted by the interconnectivity of the accelerators.

### **Accelerating the Accelerators**

During the course of the study several themes presented themselves that seemed to accelerate the six accelerators in the conceptual framework. These push in type supports sped up not only the building of a positive adult culture by turnaround leaders, but also turnaround. Findings suggest that these push in supports were common to turnaround leaders at both schools, and could be considered as additions to the conceptual framework. For the purpose of this dissertation the push in supports will be formally called *accelerators of the accelerators*. They include: (1) community and family support; (2) purposeful hiring practices; (3) and outside support from educational entities.



## Community and Family Support

Community and family support played a vital role for turnaround leaders at both schools as an *accelerator of the accelerators* not only in terms of speeding up turnaround, but also by improving the adult culture through making the work inside the accelerators more attainable. This role in *accelerating the accelerators* was well developed at SMS, and was in the initial stages of development at CHS. Dr. Fury described SMS as a community school environment, which was supported by documents showing that at least seven significant community partners were continuing to assist the school through turnaround. Dr. Fury described the importance of community and family support in a summary she wrote shortly after turnaround as follows:

I contend that the identified community partnerships and the actions they supported provided SMS staff and students with the ability to achieve recognized status by the Texas Education Agency in 2010. These partnerships were integral to the ability to change and diminish student and teacher apathy, improve student performance, generate a positive school climate, and increase parental involvement.

She went on to state, “As I look back on that experience I think about how everything was connected, the teachers were connected, the curriculum was connected, the student support was valid, and the community engagement we had outside was extremely important”. After succeeding Dr. Fury, Mrs. Willie also believed that the community and family support was important in sustaining turnaround. She mentioned that she realized, and continues to realize that the work at SMS could not be done within just the school house. She reported that keeping the community engaged was her most difficult challenge in continuing to improve student outcomes at SMS.

**Hope Housing Developments (SMS).** Several examples of community and family support rose to the forefront during the study involving the SMS turnaround, but one was mentioned by every interviewee during the study. This example entailed support the school and teachers provided to students that came from the Hope Housing Developments, a pseudonym for a housing project in the attendance zone of SMS. Dr. Fury organized for effort to take support to these students in need, reportedly surprising parents with droves of supportive visits from teachers. One counselor described this action step as follows:

When Dr. Fury was here we had Hope Housing. And those kids were in dire circumstances. Their behavior was not good, and we could not get their parents here because they could not get to the school due to where it was located. So we took that work to them. We got together with Hope Housing to do a meeting and took them pizza. All the teachers went, so the parents got to meet the teachers and they did not have to worry about transportation to SMS.

Dr. Fury described the reasoning for this active step in an interview as follows:

The second year of my tenure we found that one student group, our students who traditionally were in the Hope Housing Developments, were struggling. What we saw is that students who were transitioning from that area to SMS had lower grades, more attendance issues, and higher discipline. So I had to walk into the Housing Authority to get some help. Fights were breaking out and things like that. So what broke out was a partnership together to engage the parent base or someone who could act as such at the Housing Authority. So the kids transitioning had better behavior, had better attendance, and had better grades. So bringing in outside support was key to that turnaround as well.

The relationship between the school and Hope Housing continued well beyond this initial action step. The manager of the Hope Housing Project worked to have a two-way partnership, often driving parents to parent conferences and opening up the community center at the housing project after hours for students to complete work such as history fair projects. Another employee at the housing project was later hired as a teacher at SMS. Furthermore, community service hours were a requirement of those living in the Hope Housing Developments. Dr. Fury and the manager of Hope Housing agreed to allow the hours where parents were engaged with the school to count toward the community service hour requirement.

Working with Hope Housing in such an intentional way showed that Dr. Fury saw kids as an investment, but it was also an investment in the work of *accelerating the accelerators* to build a positive culture for adults. Interviewees reported that working with Hope Housing was directly aligned to the vision of the school. Furthermore, it likely increased the *internal accountability* amongst adults to the student-centric mission creating a stronger bond amongst educators at the school. This bond also likely enhanced trusting relationships, as interviewees reported spending time together at the Hope Housing Developments to collectively support students. Using a *systems approach* of purposefully working with Hope Housing also assisted in improving outcomes for a group of students with whom teachers were struggling, thus providing targeted assistance to teachers to make their work easier.

**Getting parents involved (SMS).** The Hope Housing Project example is just one of many examples where community and family support enhanced the work being done within and across the six accelerators. For instance, several events were held to get parents comfortable in visiting SMS. One teacher described these collective efforts as follows:

Bringing in the pep assembly and everything we have been doing for our kids brought in our neighbors and the stakeholders, so they were all becoming involved. We just opened our school to our partners and our parents. It was like hello, here we are, come and see us.

One event where parents could come to see the school entailed using the systemically developed grade level teams. These teams provided parents the opportunity to be able have very close contact with teachers during the school day at times in which each of the students' core content teachers were available to meet with parents. Interviewees reported that this idea improved the collaborative work within professional learning teams, and assisted the adults in supporting each other to meet student needs. An additional event involved what Dr. Fury described as a pivotal moment, where she worked with parents who wanted to transfer. She described this pivotal moment as follows:

A moment that stands out is when most of the kids in the SMS area wanted to head over to another high performing school, and I met with every parent (who wanted a transfer). I had a poster that showed the results that we were getting and the gains we were having in every area. The message was success breeds success.

Actions such as these likely built trust even further with teachers and made their work easier thus *accelerating the accelerators*.

Seeking out parent involvement to accelerate the accelerators was not always as easy as getting parents to come during the school day at SMS. Interviewees reported passing out coffee on the curb, and hosting dinners on the lawn where parents, grandparents, aunts, and uncles were all invited to build relationships in order to get family members to come to the school.

Furthermore, during an observation at the end of the study, Mrs. Willie was going the extra mile

by organizing for effort to have a student-led parent conference day. This day entailed students leading a conference that was facilitated by the team of teachers who educated the student. To meet the needs of parents, teachers at SMS agreed to collectively change their workday to 1pm to 9pm in order to hold these conferences and increase parent involvement.

**Community partners (SMS).** The support of community partners at SMS should not be undervalued in *accelerating the accelerators*. Local banks assisted in providing money for several events such as the awards assemblies. Dr. Fury described this support as follows:

The bank supported the students by developing and providing special medals—which identified the SMS mascot to honor student performance. In addition, the medals described the SMS motto: “There Are No Shortcuts.” Furthermore, at the end of the academic year, they took a group of students to lunch at a local country club, which for all of the students was their first excursion to an establishment of that type.

Teachers at the school frequently reported that it was cool for students to be smart. This made their work as teachers more simplified, and presumably made their work within each of the accelerators easier to perfect. In addition to the awards assemblies, cookouts on the lawn were supported by local restaurants where families were invited to spend time with SMS staff. A local church reportedly donated back packs, supplies for the teachers, and remodeled the teachers’ lounge. One document written by Dr. Fury described the remodeling of the teachers’ lounge as follows:

The work and donations of members of the Church of Christ (pseudonym for a local church) resulted in an amazing transformation. New paint, new lighting, desks, pictures, and a brand new sofa and chairs renovated a once dark, grungy teachers’ room. Parent meetings took place in this altered space.

Community support such as this assisted teachers to take pride in their work, accelerating the six accelerators.

**Challenges of sustaining community and family support (SMS).** As turnaround progressed, SMS leaders seemed to utilize community and family support more and more; however, Mrs. Willie did say that continuing high levels of support in the stage of sustained turnaround was one of her greatest challenges. Mrs. Willie supported this finding when she was asked to identify what might be absent for the accelerators in the conceptual framework. She stated:

I do not know if it is left off of the conceptual framework, but what I am lacking here and I am curious to how it would add value would be the community and parent buy-in and support. I went last year to the Texas Middle School Conference in February and there was this great presentation about a principal and all these great things she does to get parents involved. I think that is a key component of a good school that you have to have a good parent and community buy-in and partnerships.

The aforementioned student-led parent conferences are one of several data points that could be used as evidence that community and parent involvement are not lacking at the same level described by Mrs. Willie. These comments from Mrs. Willie are likely more indicative of evidence of her searching for ways to continue to improve. However, her frustrations at not being able to further advance parent involvement are evident. She stated the following:

I was just actually reading through an email about how do I get my parents involved again? You know I think the community is proud of us. My community partners they came to the banner presentation but it's kind of like a ghost town as your parents disappear after the beginning of the year. I would say that would help in a culture, and I

would like for us to get to it. I do not know if it is just a middle school thing or not, but this is a great school. My teachers work their butts off and we won that great award, but it is still so hard to get parents involved.

Conversely, during one observation several parents coming to the school to be interviewed by a panel that was collecting data to determine if SMS would receive a second national award for school excellence. The fact that there were few problems in getting parents to participate is a further example of how parents are indeed involved at SMS. This involvement is likely hard to sustain, but also likely continues to *accelerate the accelerators* during the sustained improvement stage of turnaround.

**Community and family support (CHS).** At the time of the study CHS was in the more nascent stages of the work of bringing in community and family support to *accelerate the accelerators* of building a positive adult culture; however, development in this areas was still evident. Furthermore, Dr. Clear seemed to realize he was lacking in this area during his first year at CHS, as he reported working more intently at building community and family support in year two of his tenure. Observation data did point to the foundations of this work beginning at CHS. For instance, several community partnerships were recognized at the Continuous School Improvement Team (CSIT) meeting. Each of these partnerships involved assisting student's social-emotional health. For instance, a church was working to adopt four families for the holidays, and another church decided to give out 20 turkeys with a full meal to families in need. A dinner theater fundraiser was in the works to support teachers at the school, and a partnership with a local bank was in the works. In addition to CHS being in the nascent stages in this area, it should also be noted that this *accelerator of the accelerators* was a possible gap in the conceptual framework. As such, purposeful questioning did not occur with those interviewed at

CHS in regards to community and family support as an accelerator for adult turnaround. It will be interesting to see if these partnerships can be leveraged at CHS at the same level as SMS to help *accelerate the accelerators*, and promote positive student outcomes by building a more positive adult culture at CHS.

In a follow up phone interview with Dr. Clear occurring during the end of the study, he did think that community and family support *accelerating the accelerators* at CHS was a valid conclusion in regards to the turnaround work. He presented other sources of outside family and community support that were in addition to the aforementioned sources of outside community and family support uncovered in the study. These sources included partnerships with the schools' active alumni association, the support of a local university that was in the same neighborhood as the school, and two-way partnerships with businesses in the immediate vicinity of the school. Dr. Clear stated that the contributions of these partnerships were assisting in filling in the social-emotional gaps of students at his school. In addition to the partnerships, he surprisingly reported that he was in the early stages of working with the Hope Housing Developments as a next step to increase the increasing number of parents that were becoming involved at the school. This is the same Hope Housing developments that were zoned into the SMS feeder pattern in 2007, and in which Dr. Fury worked with intently to support students and families.

### **Purposeful Hiring and Staffing Practices**

Key stakeholders from both schools could recall all three turnaround leaders using purposeful hiring practices that assisted in *accelerating the accelerators*. Findings in this realm centered on educators being the right fit, with turnaround leaders taking every opportunity to ensure the people in the system were tightly aligned to the *core values, vision, and central*



*mission* of the school. Purposeful practices by turnaround leaders at both schools included having critical conversations, requests for teachers to transfer, and the use of interview teams to align potential candidates to the right fit for the school. Due to these specific practices, turnaround leaders were able to find people that could work within the accelerators, advancing them and the positive adult culture.

**Hiring and staffing (CHS).** Findings at CHS were evidence of this dynamic in the first year of Dr. Clear's tenure. Two out of five interviewees reported shifts in teacher positions and/or teachers quitting due to lack of fit during the first semester of Dr. Clear's tenure. Dr. Clear explained:

Not that you like to see anyone go, but there were a lot of people from non-renewals to hard conversations where you tell them this is not the place and lets find somewhere else. So you know that aspect is something that you never to like to shed light on, but it is something that nobody will understand if they are not a part of it.

Dr. Clear justified asking teachers to move on by stating they could not keep up with the significant amount of change occurring in the organization, and he needed the right personnel in the right positions to turnaround the school. He went on to note, "You know trying to get the right people to buy into the right things, and also having the very crucial conversations about a person not having goodness of fit is important. Sometimes you had to really hold those conversations". Another interviewee reported that that the impact of the staffing changes could be seen at the end of the second semester as teachers began to seem more committed to the school, each other, and the kids.

**Hiring and staffing (SMS).** Findings similar to those at CHS, that have had a much longer timespan to develop, were evident at SMS. Educators that did not fit the vision at SMS

were asked to transfer in the initial stages of turnaround, a stark contrast from the current environment where teachers are leaving only for promotions. One teacher, who started the same year as Dr. Fury, reported that many teachers left the year of Dr. Fury's arrival due to not being able to keep up with the changing expectations, especially in regard to what good instruction should look like. Dr. Fury described staffing practices as follows, including her justification for asking teachers to transfer:

I walked into a staff that was extremely divided and did not like one another. There was a lot of animosity in place there the last couple of years at that point. They had lost a lot of children and a school that had an enrollment at about 800 had come down to 500.

So that work began in that year of trying to bring people together and number one trying to determine who needed to be on the bus. We identified those who needed to be off the bus, and those that needed to be on different seats on those bus. That work was key work that had to be done quickly to move the school forward.

Mrs. Willie also recalled staffing practices in a similar way through the lens of an assistant principal. She continued to justify the idea of asking teachers to leave as follows:

I think first of all there had to be an identification of who the bad seeds were. Who are the toxic seeds of negativity? You either work with them or win them over. You move them or you drive them out. And I will tell you that she (Dr. Fury) did a great job of really weeding out those who were not in it for kids.

Other interviewees alluded to Dr. Fury often reminding folks that she expected them to be part of the change that was going to happen at SMS, a statement that showed her confidence and commitment to turning around the school. In a document summarizing turnaround at SMS, Dr.

Fury cited Senge's work in the book *The 5<sup>th</sup> Discipline* to describe the team she was a part of at SMS:

Most of us at one time have been part of a great team, a group of people who functioned together in an extraordinary way—who trusted one another, who complemented one another's strengths and compensated for one another's limitations, who had common goals that were larger than individual goals, and who produced extraordinary results

[From Senge, 2006, p 4]

Having a team of educators willing to be part of the change put the right people in place to *accelerate the accelerators* for a positive adult culture at SMS.

Another valuable hiring practice that put the right people at SMS was the use of hiring teams to select educators for positions. Generally speaking these teams consisted of Dr. Fury, Mrs. Willie, and teachers who would work closely with the person interviewing for the open position. One teacher described both being hired and being on the hiring team as follows:

When Dr. Fury and Mrs. Willie hire people they make it very clear that it is not do your "eight and hit the gate". You might be here early for tutoring you might be here late, you might in some cases come in on Saturday with the kids without pay, just for their kids.

It is interesting to note that phrase "eight and hit the gate" as something not to do at SMS was referenced by four out of six interviewees. Dr. Fury summed things up concisely when she stated:

If I am honest I would say the hiring practices played in. What I learned as an assistant principal that I brought to SMS was that we hired in committee. Everyone was responsible for the hire on the committee and everyone bought in. So when we hired in committee we were very specific as what we were looking for. We were not going to

hire someone who was going to “do their eight and hit the gate”. We wanted someone who bought into “all kids can learn”.

In addition, an effect of the hiring teams was explained by one interviewee as follows, “If it is just the administration in an interview then there is no buy in, but if teachers are in the interview too then they are going to take care of that person a lot better”.

While I did not turn up any observational or document analysis data regarding hiring practices in the research, data involving interviews from interviewees regarding hiring practices did reach a saturation level. In addition, staffing and hiring practices at both school drove the work of school turnaround, putting the right people into the right seats to *accelerate the accelerators* of building a positive adult culture.

### **Outside Support from Educational Entities**

Turnaround leaders at both CHS and SMS received support from outside educational entities. Collectively grouped, these entities consisted of groups who had some level of expertise in education and were located outside the immediate scope of the school. In both turnaround cases the support from these outside entities could be considered as beneficial in *accelerating the accelerators*, advancing the positive adult culture for turnaround.

**Outside support (CHS).** Dr. Clear relied on support from outside educational entities at CHS, ramping up this support in year two of turnaround. He had sent his team and teachers to professional conferences at the state level, and had worked to contract out support services for mentorships for some of his most needy students. In addition, he contracted out the work at developing PLCs with an educational think tank in the state of Texas. Dr. Clear was initially enthusiastic about the level of support he was receiving from his district, which coupled with the outside educational think tanks level of support during the first technical service visit, when

seven members from the two groups were providing extra assistance during this initial visit. These members included two school district directors, a consultant from the think tank, two district instructional specialists, a district level assistant superintendent, and a professional service provider charged to assist with turnaround. However, sustained support to Dr. Clear—especially from his school district—began to wane during follow up technical service visits. He stated, “We went from having nine people at the first meeting (he included himself and an assistant principal) to only my think-tank consultant at the last visit. You know how I feel about that in terms of wanting to get better”. The level of support did taper off in assisting with the yearlong contracted service work involving PLC development, but the work was reportedly greatly assisting collaborative leadership in PLCs by the end of the study. In addition, other forms of outside support, such as the mentorship consultant, was enhancing the dialogue and inquiry about how to assist students needing the most help as CHS. Both examples support outside educational entities *accelerating the accelerators* for a positive adult culture at CHS.

**Outside support (SMS).** Very similar findings were evident at SMS, as turnaround was supported by work done in the school from various outside educational entities. Just as CHS, educators at SMS were sent to conferences, such as the Texas Middle School Conference, in order to advance educational practices. SMS had also progressed much further in this area than CHS, a finding that is in direct alignment with other *accelerators of the accelerators*. SMS had engaged with several outside entities to provide professional development support, as evidenced by document analysis. These included, but were not limited to, Covey training, Kilgo training (data breakdown strategies), collaborative group work training through a satellite campus of the University of Texas, learning walks training, and differentiated instruction training. In addition, Dr. Fury stated that they visited other schools in the state of Texas that had similar demographics

but better student achievement. Dr. Fury also worked with the local college to assist teachers to meet students' needs. In one document analyzed, she wrote:

KSU (pseudonym for a local Texas University) began collaborating with the SMS AVID class by mentoring students each week. The school identified a group of students and paired them with a mentor, a KSU student in an Adolescent Development class. KSU students spent time with the SMS students for a 30-minute period every Tuesday, and on Thursdays, the KSU students would meet with their professor at the campus to discuss the mentoring relationship and the development of the adolescent student. These mentoring relationships provided a positive role model in the younger students' lives, and the mentoring provided an applied learning opportunity for the KSU students studying adolescent development.

It is safe to assume that each of these professional development or support ventures provided by outside educational entities, added value to the organization, advancing turnaround. In addition, interviewees referred to many of these opportunities in interviews, indirectly connecting them to *accelerating the accelerators* of a positive adult culture in turnaround.

### **Common Attributes of Turnaround Leaders Uncovered**

Several common key attributes of turnaround leaders were uncovered during the course of the study. Just as the *accelerators of the accelerators*, these attributes were not given direct attention in the conceptual framework. Furthermore, each of these common attributes of turnaround leaders had a positive impact at advancing the work occurring inside the accelerators at a quicker pace. It is likely that the accelerators would not have had as profound of impact on turnaround without these turnaround leader attributes percolating to the forefront of the research. These common attributes included:

- (1) turnaround leaders limited avoidance of issues through critical conversations rooted in clear expectations,
- (2) turnaround leaders genuinely listening, and
- (3) turnaround leaders mentoring and modeling.

Each of these three themes were commonly mentioned as key attributes of all three turnaround leaders involved in the study.

### **Turnaround Leaders Limited Avoidance of Issues through Critical Conversations Rooted in Clear Expectations**

All three turnaround leaders dearly cherished the opportunity to engage in critical conversations with other educators who were not following clear expectations outlined in the organization. In doing so they rarely avoided the issue or problem that existed, engaging the educator about the issue for the betterment of the vision of the school in turnaround. The phenomenon was heavily utilized by turnaround leaders regardless of the stage of turnaround the school was in for the study.

At CHS clear expectations and critical conversations converged through the reliance on a *systems approach* to mitigate issues before they arose. For instance, one assistant principal at the school was extremely proud of the fact that only two out of five administrators were on campus the day before an interview and a serious safety incident was handled with a perfectly executed controlled dismissal. He attributed this success to the successful systems that were in place and practiced by educators. Similar calls to action to mitigate adult issues were also seen with Dr. Clear working on the next steps from PLC technical service visits, and in working to secure three different groups to assist in mentoring students at the school. Putting these systems in place set the tone, providing clear expectations and preventing many issues from arising.

When adult issues involving not following expectations occurred at CHS, Dr. Clear was clearly willing to address the issue through critical conversations. One interviewee paired Dr. Clear modeling integrity with crucial conversations when she stated:

His *why* is always, “If you know me, I am about integrity.” During tough conversations he often says, “If I am here and not talking with you about this then I would not have integrity.” He has this ability to kind of change a course of a conversation at a critical moment when someone says something intense, and he has way of turning things around causing the whole conversation to shift back to what really matters.

Three out of four other interviewees mentioned the importance of having a critical conversations in the turnaround process. Each noted that assistant principals were working to follow Dr. Clear’s lead in this area, working to have intentional conversations with teachers. Concurrent findings provided evidence that assistant principals were working to improve feedback to teachers. One assistant principal said, “That work, while it was kind of scattershot, showed that we really cared about people especially in that face to face and eyeball to eyeball time of really working with teachers even when the conversations were difficult”. In shadowing Dr. Clear I could clearly observe him tackling, and not avoiding, issues he noticed. For instance, during passing period he was consistently and constantly using the time to coach adults and kids on various issues.

Comparable findings were evident at SMS in regard to systems being used to mitigate issues. The phrase clear expectations was used by each interviewee to describe Dr. Fury and how she conducted business. Dr. Fury best described the use of systems and clear expectations to mitigate issues when she stated:



I think number one we had to look at making sure there is order, because without that you do not have anything. Classroom management it is hard to teach, and quality suffers without it. But the activities involving student engagement were important as well because what happens in the classroom impacts the discipline. So I had to have very clear expectations at that point as to behavior that is to be expected from kids. We had conversations to work really hard on not having only worksheets and not just the sit and get type lessons. We had conversations about what student engagement should look like.

Another SMS teacher referred to being influenced by Dr. Fury's clear expectations by stating:

You know Dr. Fury told us to expect nothing of a child was to insult them. So we had to have expectations. We had an idea of what kids can do and not all of them are going to do it at the same level. So to think that a child can't learn is ridiculous as they can learn but sometimes they just need expectations.

One counselor reiterated these sentiments stating that Dr. Fury demanded that the place "calm down" as it related to both students and kids.

As at CHS, critical conversations were not shied away from at SMS. Dr. Fury reported having these conversations when she responded:

We were brave enough to have conversations with teachers that were underperforming, and that showed by the turnover that we had at the end of the first year. People began to understand this is what was expected, this is what our performance was now, and how are you going to be part of it.

According to each interviewee, Mrs. Willie was also viewed as being willing to have crucial conversations. Mrs. Willie described these conversations as ranging from casual conversations to what she termed "hard-core brass-knuckle" conversations. This attribute of having critical

conversations ensured that accountability was upheld, having a positive impact on the adult culture for turnaround.

### **Turnaround Leaders Genuinely Listened**

Nearly every interviewee at each school reported that the three turnaround leaders genuinely listened to them, allowing them to have a voice on their turnaround campus. In addition, both Dr. Clear and Mrs. Willie were active listeners both in meetings and in day-to-day interactions with those they served. Coupling genuine caring with the attribute of listening only enhanced the leader's effectiveness. Dr. Fury described the most important attributes of a turnaround leader as follows:

You have to have competency and you have to be genuine. You cannot have a turnaround leader without a true north value system, a caring about success, and ability to see the end. I can see the end in everything we do. It is for students. I think that number one you have to be student-centered to be a turnaround leader, because it is all about the kids.

Dr. Clear also showed a level of genuineness in several of his responses to interview questions. One comment that clearly articulates this was his response to a question asking what leadership experience from his turnaround background had been most rewarding. His response was:

A leadership experience that I have not had yet. The fact is that every experience I have had I have absolutely enjoyed, and I think that what keeps me motivated is that there is also going to be something ahead in this profession and in any turnaround. With change you are always going to have that next exciting adventure.

Mrs. Willie also was genuine, perhaps being the best listener of all three turnaround principals. She had developed the attribute of listening at an exemplary level. In opening up her

administrative team meeting, she quickly described the purpose of the meeting which was to gain feedback from everyone on her administrative team in regard to their responsibilities. Within one minute of the meeting beginning, she went from talking to being an active listener.

Key stakeholders interviewed could provide several vivid details to describe their turnaround leaders being active listeners. At both schools interviewees described major decisions being made not because the leader said so, but rather due to engagement in a collaborative thought process. Examples of this collaborative thought process included decisions for such matters as a Summer Planning Academy, mentorship programs, PLC next steps, ideas presented by teachers about leveraging Saturdays to assist in instruction of students, and how to improve student writing. One counselor at SMS described this attribute as follows:

Mrs. Willie does not make the decision on her own, she will take things to the team leaders and they will decide. Before they decide she has the team leaders take it back to their teams, and then we come back together again to decide what is best for the students. So if you have the right people the decisions will be better.

Another teacher furthered this description of Mrs. Willie when she stated:

I think Mrs. Willie has just kept on with what Dr. Fury started. She opens things up and is willing to listen just like Dr. Fury did. And her leadership team has a voice, and all teachers have a voice. It has just been real positive, it is hard to imagine working at another school that does not have this type of culture.

A former teacher turned counselor at CHS reiterated the theme of listening for Dr. Clear stating he was a very collaborative leader. He noted:

It took him a while to create a mission statement because he wanted to talk with the community, parents, students, and teachers who have been here. And then he talked with

staff that have been here for twenty years, asking “why are you still here and why is PHS truly the place to be?”. So I mean he is not one of those ones who comes in and says here is what you are going to do, and here is how you are going to do it, he was more collaborative and he still is.

This counselor went on to report that Dr. Clear involves others in several different meetings campus wide to involve others in determining what next steps need to be taken. Just as with Mrs. Willie at SMS, Dr. Clear was an active listener to gain information about the turnaround at his school in meetings. It is abundantly clear that a key attribute of all three turnaround leaders included a genuine ability to listen.

### **Turnaround Leaders Mentored and Modeled**

All three turnaround leaders studied mentored others and modeled best practices in the turnaround process. At CHS, Dr. Clear led a group of aspiring administrators to engage in internship work, a noble task in the initial stages of turnaround when time is scarce. Mrs. Willie was working intently with an aspiring assistant principal who was placed at her school from a local university primarily due to her being an exceptional principal. Mrs. Willie described this mentorship as a way of paying it forward as she herself had a powerful mentor in Dr. Fury. She described Dr. Fury mentoring her as follows:

In the declining part of turnaround I was a new assistant principal, and everything was new to me. We had a principal that was (pause) amazing. She was a firecracker—you talk about a catalyst for change? She was intense, and for me as a new assistant principal just an incredible person to work under. I see her very much as a mentor. As a leader it was a good growing experience for me.

In addition, Mrs. Willie had each of her assistant principals lead learning walks with principals from SMS feeder schools in an effort to build leadership capacity for those she mentored.

Each turnaround leader also modeled what they expected not only for adults, but also for the students in the schools that they led. I could never catch them off guard during observations, as they always acted with the upmost integrity and professionalism. Evidence of this modeling behavior impacting other adults and also kids was well captured by a counselor at SMS who noted, “Well when I came into SMS, Dr. Fury was here and it already had started turning around. But what I saw was the staff, caring for each other. The kids picked up on that and they became the same way. Everyone tended to work together doing their part”. SMS was described by another counselor as being a family where the staff was happy, because they were treated with respect by the leader. She went on to mention this behavior as rubbing off on kids. Mrs. Willie described this culture of modeling as follows:

So I feel we have really changed the culture of this school with the kids and with parents working hard. We celebrate academics where it is cool to be the smart kids. It used to not be that way, and now we do pep rallies for academics. I do think the culture it comes from me. From modeling my expectations, modeling my relationships with teachers.

CHS seemed to be on the verge of creating this same culture of modeling. While Dr. Clear was always using the attribute of a good role model, other evidence of modeling was beginning to emerge. PLC videos were modeling best practices of PLCs, showing evidence of teacher-to-teacher modeling. In addition, the staff had been working over the course of the last year and a half to model literacy. One interviewee stated:

In terms of their reading levels they are coming to us low, so we are pushing that reading is something to enjoy. So we have a reading and relationships period that happens every Wednesday, and I am a part of it. I leave my office for 30 minutes each Wednesday and the students read for 15 minutes. I also build relationships in talking about their grades, what they need to get to the A/B honor roll, and if they do not make those grades what we need to do. We also set up tutorials, so it is really just building up that relationship.

Mentoring and modeling seemingly transcended the turnaround leader to educator relationship at both schools, becoming key in promoting a positive adult culture for turnaround.

### **What does the Future Hold for the Turnaround Schools?**

At the conclusion of the research both schools were trending upward in terms of their positive adult culture and student achievement. At the end of the study SMS was awarded a national award for urban school excellence for the second year in a row, yet Mrs. Willie was not satisfied. When asked what her greatest challenge moving forward was she responded, “How do you keep improving? And that is what I think is the challenge, which I have a great support system for. So I feel that we really grew from when we were at our lowest point, and then now this is where my challenge is to keep moving us forward”. The calm and warm culture of the school, where interviewees bragged about kids “feeling cool to be smart”, seems primed for continued sustainment of turnaround on their venture to continue to be recognized as an exemplary school. Continued consistency in leadership, where there is a “goodness of fit” for the leader in a former turnaround setting, will likely be paramount in maintaining the turnaround. Even more importantly, this “goodness of fit” in a leader has definite implications in maintaining a positive adult culture for educators at SMS.

At the time of the conclusion of the research, CHS was in a much earlier stage of turnaround. Change had begun in year one of Dr. Clear's tenure, and seemingly continued throughout the research study. After year one of turnaround, CHS had attained three academic distinctions out of an available seven. The school had a three percent increase in Math student achievement, and a six percent increase in Reading student achievement on state achievement tests compared to the previous year. Each of the four areas the state of Texas monitors for accountability showed gains. Couple this with a calmer environment and one could conjecture that the school was primed and ready to begin the stage of sustained improvement, advancing in the turnaround process. More work on the accelerators could continue to build momentum and the positive adult culture for educators. In moving forward it will be interesting to see if CHS can follow the same trajectory as SMS, including raising their own banner for urban school excellence.

### **Summary**

This chapter included a cross-case analysis of the two cases and the three turnaround leaders in the study, specifically regarding how the three leaders built a positive adult culture in their turnaround setting. The two turnaround schools, Circle High School (CHS) and Sunnyside Middle School (SMS), had a moderately different context at the time of the study due to being in different stages of turnaround. The student composition of both schools was diverse. Declines in enrollment were reversing at CHS as they were working to rebuild the confidence of the community, while SMS had completely restored confidence and increased enrollment. Data trends at each school were indicative of schools with low academic performance; however, the CHS decline in performance before turnaround was more glaring. Both schools showed improvement in data the first year after the arrival of the turnaround leader.

A comparison of the turnaround leaders showed evidence of some similarities in their DNA. Key stakeholders interviewed described each turnaround leader as being caring, clear, collaborative, instructionally focused, intentional, a listener, a mentor, a relationship builder, supportive, systemic, trusting, visible, and a visionary regardless of the school site. While the turnaround leaders of these schools shared similarities in terms of their makeup, there were also differences. Dr. Clear seemed to rely most on emotional composure, while Dr. Fury was more visibly passionate and motivational. Mrs. Willie was most often described or observed as collaborative when comparing the three turnaround leaders. Both Dr. Clear and Dr. Fury were described as being very intentional in the early stages of turnaround; however, the accelerators they relied on the most differed. While each leader relied heavily on the *why* in the initial stages of turnaround, this *why* took much longer to develop at CHS. How the *why* was contextualized and used in each school was highly dependent on the leadership DNA of each leader and how it coupled with the *why*. Each of the three turnaround leaders placed building relationships in the top three accelerators; however, this was the only accelerator that each turnaround leader shared a heavy reliance on. Each turnaround leaders believed the accelerators were firmly connected.

Findings laying outside the conceptual framework also existed. Three of these finding were classified as “*accelerators of the accelerators*” and included: community and family support, purposeful hiring and staffing practices, and outside support from educational entities. Common attributes of turnaround leaders were also presented and included: turnaround leaders limiting avoidance of issues through critical conversations rooted in clear expectations, genuinely listening, and mentoring and modeling. The chapter concluded with a look into the future for each school. SMS was working to continue sustained turnaround and national



recognition, while CHS was working to continually improve to sustain turnaround. The next and final chapter will focus on conclusions, considerations, and recommendations for future research.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSIONS, CONSIDERATIONS, AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

School turnaround is difficult to attain, but much needed due to the alarming numbers of schools in the category of required school improvement, especially at the urban school level. During the time of the research study, the bottom 5% of schools were still considered by the federal government to be in school improvement and thus eligible for SIG funds (Redding, Dunn, & McCauley, 2015). Many more schools nationwide, while not defined to be in school improvement, are in need of turnaround to meet students' needs. Building a positive adult culture in a turnaround school is one of several important pieces of the turnaround puzzle facing turnaround leaders (Copeland & Neeley, 2012; Duke, 2004; Duke, 2006; Leithwood & Sun, 2012; Leithwood & Strauss, 2008); yet building this culture is not well contextualized in turnaround policies involving school improvement. The purpose of this study was to examine turnaround leadership through a people-first culture-based lens, providing turnaround leaders a potential road map to follow in their journey of building a positive adult culture in their turnaround setting. The study focused primarily on how leaders galvanized the educators they led to build this culture in turnaround schools. The conceptual framework, including the *why* and six accelerators, was studied to determine if the framework was valid in contextualizing this smaller segment of the turnaround puzzle. The turnaround journey of three leaders in two turnaround schools was used as the lens in the research to determine the extent urban school leaders improve school culture in a purposeful and intentional way, and how these leaders use the accelerators posited in conceptual framework to guide school turnaround.

This final chapter is dedicated to discussing overarching issues that arose from this study, highlighting considerations for the development or growth of turnaround leaders. In addition

considerations are suggested for the district level leaders on how to provide support for turnaround leaders and their respective school communities. Furthermore, suggestions for future research are proffered to conclude the research study.

### **Overarching Issues**

Several overarching issues were apparent in the research study and were classified into two subsections. The first subsection encompass five lessons learned from the research. The second subsection describes cross-cutting themes that bridged both case studies.

### **Lessons Learned**

**Turnaround leaders used the accelerators as interdependent components.** High amounts of interconnectivity between the accelerators of turnaround were apparent in the study. The six accelerators posited in the conceptual framework do not stand alone, and turnaround leaders should consider the interplay that occurs between accelerators to support turnaround efforts. Dr. Clear and Dr. Fury mentioned the complexity of putting the accelerators in order, citing their interconnectivity as a primary reason. They asserted that the accelerators could not function in silos, or by themselves, knowing that they must avoid the isolationism that tends to be a byproduct of traditional secondary schools (e.g., Kassissieh & Barton, 2009).

Building trusting relationships could be the most interconnected of the six accelerators as turnaround principals reported how vital it was in order to advance other accelerators especially in the early stages of turnaround. This interconnectivity was evidenced by PLC videos being shared at CHS in which educators were supported with examples of increased *collaboration and distributed leadership in PLCs*, but also built *trusting relationships through personalization and appreciation* by the turnaround leader modeling to educators the appropriate supporting of these very PLCs. At SMS the Summer Planning Academy as a response to being rated “low

performing” was an ideal environment for the accelerators to interconnect. Every staff member, regardless of title was invited to attend, most did, and trusting relationships were built along with *internal accountability* to a central motivating mission. Trusting relationships binds together improvement efforts in schools (Routman, 2012), and in this case serves as a lesson learned in how the accelerators are interconnected.

**Turnaround leaders varied in their leadership types.** In both schools, the turnaround leaders showed evidence of some similarities in how they led with all three having a collaborative leadership style. However, their leadership type, or common qualities, varied. Dr. Clear seemed to be the type of leader who was emotionally composed, Dr. Fury the type who was more visibly passionate and motivational, and Mrs. Willie the type who was a collaborative listener. While each leader had different types of leadership, Mrs. Willie and Dr. Clear were most closely related. Their leadership types also differed drastically with Dr. Fury, with Dr. Clear differing the most.

While each leader genuinely cared, placing teaching and learning as priority one in their schools, it appears that multiple leadership types in a turnaround context can lead to success. Leading in a turnaround context is not necessarily about how you express yourself, as long as you are professional. For instance Dr. Fury was unorthodox, but effective and appropriate, in expressing messages from on top of tables in order to fire up her staff. In contrast, Mrs. Willie seemed more attuned to leading by listening to educators during meetings. These examples present different types of leadership in turnaround; however, each of the turnaround leaders exhibited success up to the point of the conclusion of the study. Murphy (2008) reinforces the importance of type of leadership in turnaround, expressing that different types of leadership are needed in different stages of turnaround. Dr. Fury and Mrs. Willie were certainly at different

stages at SMS. In studying effectiveness of leaders by their leadership type, Urick and Bowers (2014) provided comprehensive evidence that more complex models were needed. The lesson learned could very well be that turnaround leaders should be themselves, as long as they stay true to ethical, moral, and professional standards.

**Turnaround leaders prioritized the accelerators based on school context and their distinctive leadership qualities.** While a lesson learned involved the interconnectivity of the accelerators, turnaround leaders did have to prioritize which accelerators were best for their specific turnaround context. It was a necessity for Dr. Clear and Dr. Fury to unite staffs that had lost trust in previous administrations, not having the luxury Mrs. Willie had of being a successor to a successful principal. Dr. Clear chose to use a *systems approach* to begin to unite his staff due to a lack of clear systems interacting with each other to support teaching and learning, while Dr. Fury used *core values, vision, and central mission* to guide her work in uniting staff to be student-centric. Both leaders led within their specific context to overcome challenges in improving their organization which is supported by research (Duke, 2004 & 2008; Leithwood & Strauss, 2008).

While context mattered, so did the perceived strengths each leader felt they had in regards to their leadership qualities. Each leader had some innate abilities that rose to the forefront that were natural to them as leaders, requiring little intentionality to enact. For instance, as a former athletic coach, Dr. Fury used visioning and mission statements to guide her organization. She even mentioned that she was a “core mission girl”, stating that she felt comfortable in leading others to an end outcome based on a set of principles. Dr. Clear specialized in organizational behavior in his doctoral program, and accordingly chose a *systems approach* to guide CHS. Mrs. Willie had the strength of being a fantastic listener, using this

quality to guide SMS in sustained turnaround. The lesson learned is that leaders lead by practices that are in accordance with their own strengths and school contexts (Murphy, 2008; Urick & Bowers, 2014).

**A culture of inquiry as a lagging accelerator.** A culture of inquiry was reported to be used utilized less than most, if not all, of the other accelerators. These findings suggest that having deep dialogues signifying a *culture of inquiry* could be a gap to exploit for turnaround leaders at both schools in the initial stages of turnaround, and that getting to a proficient level in the accelerator takes time to develop. At CHS use of this accelerator was nearly absent in year one of turnaround, and was in its very nascent stages, yet developing in PLCs, at the conclusion of the second year. At SMS a culture of inquiry was alive and well in each meeting I attended. Mrs. Willie seemed to be highly skilled in promoting this accelerator during these meetings; however, she might have not even known that she was naturally promoting inquiry. When asked about a *culture of inquiry*, she asked me for a definition. When told that a *culture of inquiry* was openly dialoguing about current instructional practices and data within the organization, she responded by saying, “I never thought of it (culture of inquiry) that way.” This accelerator could naturally need to lag due to other accelerators being precursors, and/or it could be that the vernacular did not register with participants. Regardless, the lesson to be learned for turnaround leaders is that this accelerator can be used to improve student achievement by leading educators to new understandings (e.g., Elmore, 2008; Hord, 2004), and turnaround leaders should consider where it should take precedence in turnaround.

**Turnaround leaders face somewhat predictable challenges.** There is not a concrete road map to school turnaround; however, turnaround leaders do face somewhat predictable challenges. This is due in part due to turnaround schools being often marked by poor student

achievement, apathy, prior leadership chaos, staffing issues, and minimal parent and community engagement (Breaden, 2008; Duke 2004 & 2008; Hoff, 2007). Predictable challenges provide the opportunities to be proactive in determining solutions (Leithwood & Strauss, 2008). For instance, Dr. Fury and Mrs. Willie were very proactive in setting up hiring teams to ensure hired staff were the right fit for the school. They also were forward thinking in working to make connections with parents in the Hope Housing Developments to address lagging student performance. In addition, Dr. Clear knew student achievement as a whole needed to continuously improve, and worked toward the solution of having a PLC technical assistance provider support collaborative work among educators at the school. Proactivity in finding solutions to predictable challenges is a lesson to be learned from these examples.

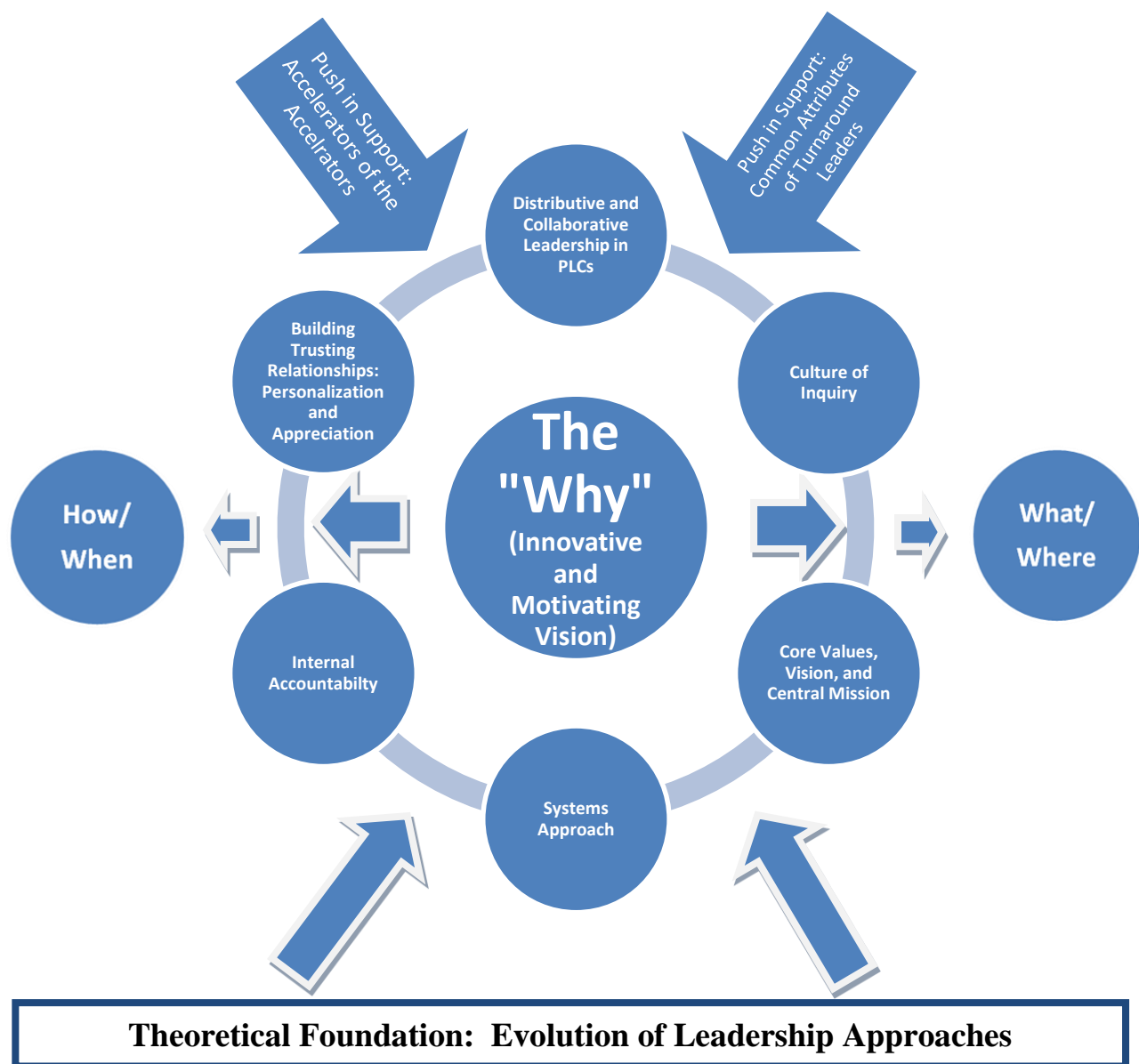
### **Cross-Cutting Themes**

Attention was given to making comparisons between the turnaround case studies, and more importantly the turnaround leaders, in order to increase understanding and comparative analysis of how turnaround leaders contextualized their experiences in relation to the research questions. This resulted several themes that cross-cut both case studies.

**Context of turnaround.** The three turnaround leaders in the two turnaround schools were in different stages of turnaround during the course of the study, as SMS had progressed through the entire turnaround process. There was relative similarity in the composition of the student body of each school with each school being diverse; however, CHS was in a much more chaotic state during the first year of the turnaround leader's tenure. Both schools showed improvement in student achievement data during the first year of the turnaround leader.

**Accelerators of the accelerators, and common turnaround leader attributes.** Two findings involving each turnaround leader building a positive adult culture in ways residing

outside the conceptual framework existed. The findings included the “*accelerators of the accelerators*”, and common attributes of each turnaround leaders, which are presented in the revised conceptual framework (see figure 14). The *accelerators of the accelerators* included: community and family support, purposeful hiring and staffing practices, and outside support from educational entities. A focus on these areas by each turnaround leader at both turnaround



**Figure 14. Revised Conceptual Framework (Building a Positive School Culture)**



schools seemed to *accelerate the accelerators* posited in the conceptual framework at an even quicker pace. Common attributes of each turnaround leader included: turnaround leaders limiting avoidance of issues through critical conversations rooted in clear expectations, genuinely listening, and mentoring and modeling. At the close of the study, SMS was working to continue sustained turnaround and national recognition, while CHS was working to continually improve with the hope of reaching sustained turnaround. It will be interesting to see if continued success will result for both schools in the immediate future, and if this success will be enhanced by continued focus on the accelerators, the accelerators of the accelerators, and common attributes of turnaround leaders.

**The why and the accelerators.** Both leaders relied heavily on the why in the initial stages of turnaround, but the why took much longer to develop at CHS. How the why was contextualized and used in each school was highly dependent on the leadership DNA of each leader and how it coupled with the why. Each of the three turnaround leaders placed building relationships in the top three accelerators; however, the rest of the accelerators were used to a varying extent based on the context of the school and the turnaround leader's attributes.

### **Considerations for Turnaround Leaders about Turnaround Leadership**

The findings of this study give rise to several considerations for leaders involved in school turnaround. These considerations get to the heart of the purpose of the research, which is to assist other turnaround leaders to make meaning of their own situations in order to be successful. Our educational system is marked by far too many schools being in turnaround, and successful turnaround is more elusive than it is certain (Fullan, 2010). According to Kowal and Ableidinger (2011) only an estimated 30% of school turnarounds succeed. Gaining an understanding of the framework for building a positive adult culture presented in this study, and

pairing that understanding supported by the research with the following considerations provides hope in increasing the dismal number of successful turnarounds.

### **Consideration 1: Context Matters**

The purpose of the study was to lay out a potential road map for turnaround leaders to follow in building a positive adult culture; however the word “potential” is a key. Context shifts and as it does strategies in turnaround differ. Since the context of each turnaround school is different, turnaround leaders should consider the conceptual framework, the *accelerators of the accelerators*, and the common attributes of turnaround leaders as a guide in blazing new trails to lead their adults to working together on the problems they face. Simply put there is no concrete road map to turnaround (e.g., Stringfield, Reynolds, & Schaller, 2008), and accordingly there is no perfect road map to interacting with adults and galvanizing an educator culture primed for turnaround. Guidance is however needed, especially for future turnaround principals who have in most cases not led as a principal in a turnaround context. These leaders should consider understanding other turnaround leadership stories, such as those presented in this study, to determine how to lead in the turnaround context in which they reside.

By nature turnaround requires change, and that gives each turnaround leader greater license to do things differently. Understanding the context of the turnaround allows change to be pinpointed on areas that can be impacted most. Furthermore, tremendous challenges in turning around schools can be overcome by taking actions specific to the contexts of the schools (Duke, 2004; Duke, 2008; Leithwood & Strauss, 2008; Public Impact, 2008). In regards to utilizing the framework of this study, understanding the context of the school allows a turnaround leader to pair the accelerators that could potentially have the most value with what is needed to move the adult culture forward. For instance, Dr. Clear chose to primarily spend his time rectifying adult

chaos by an intensive focus on adding systems to the organization. Dr. Fury chose to repair the relationship teachers had with administrators by passionately expressing a student-centric vision to have a collective impact on trust at the school. Each example shows how the leaders used the accelerators to impact the overall culture and their adult culture based on the context in which they were leading. In the case of SMS, the study was able to capture the story of a sustained turnaround. Over time SMS reality and context changed from declining performance, to stabilizing a crisis, and then to sustained improvement. How the two SMS turnaround leaders led in regards to the accelerators in a turnaround setting changed during the course of the eight years to meet the situation of the school. Similarly, once Dr. Clear felt that systems were in place to help create a better culture for educators, he shifted to focusing more primarily on the accelerator *collaborative and distributive leadership capacity in PLC's* in order to meet the context of the situation in which he was leading. These considerations align with Duke (2006), in which a study of 15 successful elementary turnaround schools revealed findings of varying leadership practices based on the length of time the school was engaged in the turnaround process.

While the broad idea of improving student achievement is common to each turnaround, the root cause of poor student achievement needing to be addressed was different in the two schools. Both schools required turnaround leaders to think about their current reality in the form of conducting an environmental scan in order to determine the root cause of the problem before beginning to influence the adult culture in a positive way at their schools. For instance, CHS was most marked by chaos and a lack of clear expectations as to how the organization was going to operate in the initial stages of turnaround, while SMS was relatively more stable in this area. However, SMS had an extreme level of distrust in administration that was reported at a higher

level than at CHS. The varying extent to which these phenomenon were occurring impacted the way the turnaround leader led in their current context (e.g. Duke, 2006), and how they used accelerators mentioned in the framework for each situation. Turnaround leaders should consider situational leadership as it relates to the context in which they are leading to build a positive adult culture that is primed to enact the turnaround.

### **Consideration 2: Pair Intentionality with Leadership Style and Attributes**

Turnaround leaders should consider being intentional and purposeful in the initial stages of turnaround in taking actions aligned to making improvements in the workplace environment for educators. Leaders in the study followed this consideration, while not leaving their leadership style in the dust at the expense of intentionality. In short they stayed true to themselves, never working to be something they were not. Dr. Clear and Dr. Fury were at almost opposite ends of the spectrum in terms of their personalities at school. In fact their pseudonyms represent their leadership styles. Dr. Clear was very calm, emotionally composed, CLEAR, and calculated on how he engaged adults to turn around a toxic environment. Dr. Fury was more fiery, outwardly motivating, and wore her passion on her sleeve to turnaround the educator vs. administration distrust. This CONTROLLED FURY she had for those who did not do right by kids unified her staff to rebuild what has become a flagship school in her district. For both leaders their style was not an act, but rather who they were coupled with a burning focus in having no excuses in working to better the situation for their kids.

Common attributes turnaround leaders used for turnaround, were aligned with recommendations of attributes needed and presented by researchers in the field. Each of the three turnaround leaders in the study were very well organized, they collaborated, listened, and had a sense of direction for the organization. Dr. Clear, Dr. Fury, and Mrs. Willie did not have

previous turnaround experience as principals; however, they had these common attributes needed to lead in turnaround. They were organized listeners, who developed people while repurposing the organization. They also had the confidence to lead and stay the course that was set in terms of direction for the school. These attributes are aligned with research presented by Leithwood and Strauss (2008), in which four essential competencies are presented that leaders must have in a turnaround setting; (1) direction setting; (2) developing people; (3) redesigning the organization; and (4) managing instruction. Public Impact (2008) reinforces these competencies, asserting that turnaround leaders should focus on results to keep up a push for meeting a long term vision, influence for results to motivate those they lead, problem solving to keep the organization moving toward goals, and show confidence in order to stay the course in face of adversity. Each turnaround leader in the study had these necessary common attributes, and coupled the attributes with being reflective leaders. This put them in a position to be able to fill in any gaps for leading in a turnaround context.

It would be interesting to know if the two leaders could have used these common attributes, stayed so true to themselves, and been successful, if they flip-flopped their leadership positions within the two schools in the study. While we will obviously never know, it may well be that their intentionality for kids, skill sets and attributes, and burning desire to fix struggling schools would indeed lead them to a positive outcome regardless of their differing styles. Dr. Clear and Dr. Fury could have likely been successful in other turnaround school contexts. Due to the complex nature of studying this phenomenon, research based literature in this area is somewhat limited. However, Candelarie (2009) did find the attribute of moral leadership was an *essential* attribute in a turnaround principal's behavior and a successful turnaround, discovering that turnaround principals are moral leaders who infuse moral leadership in their thinking,

decisions, and actions. In this study each turnaround principal was aligned with Candelarie's findings, increasing the likelihood they had the required attributes, style, and intentionality to lead in any turnaround context. The apparent consideration for turnaround leaders is "be intentional," but stay true to your natural skill sets and attributes.

### **Consideration 3: The Accelerators of the Accelerators Enhance the Speed of Turnaround**

Turnaround leaders should consider using the *accelerators of the accelerators* in the study, which include community and family support, purposeful hiring practices, and outside support from educational entities. Turnaround leaders should consider using these accelerators not only to enhance the validity of the framework, but also to enhance the building of the adult culture. The *accelerators of the accelerators* were infused into each turnaround school to help level the playing field for educators AND students. When student issues were addressed and supported professionally, then the work of educators to support these student issues seemed to be simplified by using the *accelerators of the accelerators at the study sites*.

**Community and family support.** Two great examples of utilizing the *accelerators of the accelerators* in regards to community and family support stood out in this study for future turnaround leaders to consider. At SMS, Dr. Fury, and then Mrs. Willie, built a culture in a turnaround setting where it was "cool" to be smart, using the academic award assemblies as a platform for this work. This work was not only amazing in terms of its impact and sustainability, but also occurred during the course of a complex turnaround. Students were leading their own parent conferences, with teachers facilitating during hours that were outside the normal educator workday. This type of culture would not have happened without the support of outside community partnerships and unique ways to engage parents. Similarly at CHS, the support of an outside educational entity in the form of an organization charged to build effective PLC's within

the school was responsible for making work within a positive adult culture at the school more simplistic. These practices were aligned with Calkins, et al., (2007), in which recommendations for effective turnaround included working together with outside partners.

**Purposeful hiring practices.** Staffing practices cannot be ignored and should be considered by turnaround leaders within a turnaround setting as an *accelerator of the accelerators*. All three turnaround leaders worked to first support the teachers on their current staff who did not fit the vision and direction of the school; however, they did not hesitate to take the actions needed to remove an educator not aligned to this vision. Hassel and Hassel (2009) encourage leaders to follow this pattern to get the “right staff and the right remainder,” advocating that change must be mandatory rather than optional for those who choose to stay when a new turnaround leader takes over. In replacing staff members, all three turnaround leaders chose to be purposeful in asking questions, and used interview teams to find educators who were the right fit for the vision. The work of the turnaround leaders is supported by aforementioned research showing that turnaround principals have to focus on direction setting as a key leadership attribute (Leithwood & Strauss, 2008; Public Impact, 2008). In addition strategic staffing practices can increase the likelihood of a student-centric vision being enacted in lower performing schools (Clark, 2012; Kowal, Hassel, & Hassel, 2009).

**Outside support from educational entities.** Using outside support as an *accelerator of the accelerators* appears to increase the collective impact those responsible for students at the school can have on students, and should be considered by turnaround leaders. The idea of collective impact involves numerous organizations playing a role in a coordinated fashion to meet the societal needs, including those of today’s youth (Forum for Youth, 2014; Flood, et al., 2015). Students in the state of Texas spend an average of 7 hours a day in school for 180 days

(Kolbe, et al., 2012). This accounts for an average of 14% of students' lives each year being spent within a school, leaving 86% of their time annually in non-school endeavors. By utilizing the accelerators of the accelerators, increases in school-related ventures can be attained in the 86% of the time students spend outside of school. Table seven articulates several examples of how collective impact at each school increased the outside the school day support for students. In some cases purposeful work during the school day also increased the amount of time spent outside the school day for students to focus on educational endeavors. While this table does not capture all the examples, it provides firm evidence of the importance of turnaround leaders considering the use outside support in order to increase positive outcomes for students. In addition, it simplifies the work of building an adult culture in turnaround.

*Table 7: Examples of Collective Impact to Meet Students outside the School Day Needs*

Circle High School	Sunnyside Middle School
<b>PLCs:</b> Increased teacher collaboration during the school day augmented student support outside of school	<b>Hope Housing Project:</b> Taking the work to the community center increased student instructional time the school day. It also brought more parents to the school to assist in supporting students.
<b>Outside School Academic Interventions:</b> At both schools teachers increased supports in ways such as tutoring for students outside the school day. These supports were aided by community partners and outside entity supports.	<b>Outside School Academic Interventions:</b> At both schools teachers increased supports in ways such as tutoring for students outside the school day. These supports were aided by community partners and outside entity supports.
<b>Outside Mentorships of Students:</b> Increased time spent outside of school in providing guidance to at-risk youth	<b>Student Led Conferences:</b> Increased student ownership and parent involvement outside the school day
<b>Frequent Parent Opportunities:</b> Activities such as home visit increased parent involvement	<b>Frequent Parent Opportunities:</b> Activities such as Lunch on the Lawn, increased parent involvement at the school
	<b>Awards Assemblies:</b> Increases in number of students awarded to a large majority of the school likely increased the amount of time on task with studies outside of school



**Consideration 4: Be Aware of Accelerators and Attributes that are Blind Spots**

Turnaround leaders should consider asking themselves which accelerators might be blind spots, or areas they are not utilizing to their full potential. For instance, the accelerators of internal accountability and a culture of inquiry were least often used by turnaround principals. These could be considered blind spots that the turnaround leaders did not think about; however, in the initial stages of turnaround both leaders seemed to focus on developing other accelerators first in order to open the door to higher levels of internal accountability and inquiry. In other words, these were not necessarily blind spots, but instead accelerators that at least in the two case studies needed to come at more advanced stages of turnaround. While this is the case, evidence suggests that the development of PLCs were not something that Dr. Clear latched onto until year two of turnaround. Similar findings existed with PLC's at SMS, as Dr. Fury did not start her work of turnaround in this area, yet eventually she built very strong PLC's. Therefore, turnaround leaders should consider which accelerators they are not primarily using, and plan with a forward-thinking approach on how they might use them in the future.

In addition to the accelerators, turnaround leaders should work to develop leadership attributes they are weakest in, as these could be blind spots needing to be grown. Each of the leaders was highly skilled, which was not surprising due the very fact that they were leading successful turnarounds. However, each of the leaders were also very reflective, having teams around them that helped assist with their blind spots. For example, Mrs. Willie and a very supportive leadership team balanced Dr. Fury's high expectations approach. These secondary leaders at SMS were given the autonomy to carry on the message of their principal using their own unique leadership style. Furthermore, each turnaround leader had a leadership team that they listened to and cultivated, allowing them to further support any blind spots. There is a

limited amount of research in general that focuses on turnaround leadership as it relates to such blind spots, but much research advocates building a culture where leadership capacity is cultivated in turnaround. Murphy and Myers (2009) advocate for empowering people, building teams, and developing people in order to create a productive culture. Turnaround leaders should consider the fact that they cannot do the turnaround work alone and must rely on the work of others (Public Impact, 2008). They should consider opting for using productive teams around them to assist with potential blind spots specifically as they relates to the accelerators and attributes needed for building a positive adult culture in school turnaround.

### **Consideration 5: Humanize Turnaround by Listening and Leading with the Heart**

By the very nature of the work, turnaround leaders are going to have trials and tribulations. They work in schools that have what could be considered bleak situations. They often face challenges such as students coming to school with social-emotional and academic gaps, dismal student academic achievement, lack of educator capacity to meet student needs, and a culture of low expectations (Breaden, 2008; Cucchiara, Rooney, & Robertson-Kraft, 2015; Duke 2004 & 2008; Hoff, 2007). Demands for improvement are high, and the expectations that face an education staff in turnaround are even higher. Change can leads to resistance for turnaround leaders, requiring them to stay visibly focused, committed, and self-assured amidst being personally and professionally attacked (Public Impact, 2008). This environment can challenge even the most highly skilled of educators and/or turnaround leaders. However, a turnaround leader has to be a beacon of hope amongst the chaos of turnaround. As with each of the turnaround leaders in the study, they have to consider ways to balance the harsh realities of turnaround by finding a way to humanize the turnaround process.

Leaders in this study appeared to be leading by staying true to their collective moral and ethical north. Each turnaround leader stayed true to who he or she was, from the fiery passion of Dr. Fury, to the persistent and calculated Dr. Clear, to the superb listener that is Mrs. Willie. They led with their hearts, and their hearts were genuinely all about kids. Each leader had the ability to handle the emotional roller coaster of turnaround, showing ability to handle the large amounts of baggage that turnaround brings. For instance, all three turnaround leaders were reported to be able to have critical but needed conversations about kids with one person, and then quickly be able to start anew to work on the next situation that presented itself. Their endurance to model professionalism by humanizing each situation they were involved in was simply extraordinary.

The juxtaposition between the unwelcoming situation in which each turnaround leader initially led, and the humanizing way the leaders in this study handled their turnaround situations serves as an example to other turnaround leaders to consider leading and listening with their hearts in turnaround. This aligns with research suggesting this consideration is essential in successful turnarounds. Johnson (2007) reported that interviewed principals currently working in high-needs schools, as well as education leaders with experience working with effective principals, believe that consensus building trumps shake-up as a long range strategy in schools. Most of the participants Johnson's study believed winning over the staff and working with them to carry out a plan for change is the way to genuinely transform a school. Ulrich and Woodson (2011) suggest that transformational leaders become meaning makers when they couple their required leadership duties with passion and emotion, thus creating work settings that are more productive with more committed stakeholders. Cai (2011) furthers the notion of emotional intelligence being linked to variables relevant to successful school turnarounds in studying

effective leadership behaviors of turnaround leaders. Leading and listening with the heart to help humanize turnaround should be considered by turnaround leaders as an appropriate action even amidst the chaotic situations that often mark turnaround efforts.

### **Recommendations for Districts in Selecting and Supporting Turnaround Leaders**

There are several recommendations drawn from the study for school districts in working to support and select turnaround leaders. Attending to certain factors in selection and support process may well be a piece of a larger puzzle, and certainly an important piece, in improving the rather dismal 30% success rate of turnaround schools (Kowal & Ableidinger, 2011). In light of the harsh realities facing turnaround schools, districts could ensure turnaround leaders are the right match for the situation, have appropriate support for leaders in turnaround, and be purposeful in succession planning. Each of these recommendations have the opportunity to help improve the chances for turnaround, an outcome that is best for the children and communities attached to each school.

#### **Recommendation 1: Matching the Turnaround Leader to the Situation**

In college, football teams work to recruit athletes with the highest amount of stars. A five star player, for instance, is considered to have attributes of a top notch prospect, assuredly bumping up the team's recruiting rankings. The findings of this study suggest that districts turn stars into hearts, working to select "five heart leaders" to lead in turnaround contexts. Each of the leaders in the study were able to humanize the harsh realities of turnaround by balancing the high expectations for kids with being genuine, authentic, and trustworthy. In addition, terms such as caring, clear, collaborative, instructionally focused, intentional, listener, mentor, relationship builder, supportive, systemic, trusting, visible, and visionary were used to describe

each turnaround leader in the study. I would recommend districts remember these terms in selecting leaders as it is the quality and character of the leader that will define the outcomes.

In understanding the composition of a turnaround leader as it relates to the correct fit, districts could at being purposeful as far as matching their own turnaround schools' contexts and their pool of turnaround leaders' DNA. Doing as such assumes that the district is being purposeful in building up their pool of leaders capable of leading in turnaround. As aforementioned, Dr. Clear and Dr. Fury likely could have flipped roles in the two turnaround cases and still had success due to them both having a set of core attributes needed for turnaround. However, their skill sets in the turnaround schools in which they were placed were even more directly aligned to what the school needed, serving as an advantage to each school. In the case of CHS, the lack of systems caused chaos requiring a leader who could quickly input systems for how aspects of the organization were going to operate; Dr. Clear completed his PhD in educational administration with a focus on organizational behavior, in direct alignment to the needs of the school. On the other hand, Dr. Fury faced distrust between administration and teachers in her turnaround context. An outgoing and passionate leader was the right recipe in order to unite the staff under a core mission about what is right by children. Her motivational style was in direct alignment to the needs of the school.

Perhaps districts should start the selection process by first coming to agreement on a formal definition of what comprises a turnaround leader. Steiner and Hassel (2011), state that typical school district practices are not designed to recruit and select talent for challenging schools, including the bold leaders needed for turnaround schools. Districts should think through creating a formal definition of what a turnaround leader looks like, pair this definition with a specific summary of the context of the unique needs specific to the turnaround school, and then

be purposeful in selecting turnaround leaders. To select turnaround leaders, districts could utilize purposeful interview practices using reliable tools designed to understand potential leaders attributes to determine if the attributes are a fit for the context. Public Impact (2008) does have a selection toolkit for turnaround school leaders, which they claim to be important when using competencies for selection to ensure that you are assessing a person's competence in the context of their efforts to be successful in work.

### **Recommendation 2: What External Support is Needed?**

Even the most skilled of turnaround leaders cannot do the work alone, and thus I would recommend districts utilize external sources in order to optimize performance (Herman, 2012; Public Impact, 2008; Rivero, 2009). Districts can provide this support in two broad forms. One form would be internal district support, and the other form external district support. For example, external district supports could guide and provide sustainment of resources directly to turnaround schools. These supports might include contracted services provided through local, state, or national grant funds for schools in turnaround. Turnaround leaders in the study used external support to assist in turnaround. Finding the appropriate balance between what supports can be given by external sources, and allowing the turnaround principal to have the autonomy is using these supports is critical to guide turnaround (Kowal et al., 2009)

**Monetary grant funds.** External support in the form of monetary grant funds was awarded to both turnaround schools in the study. They used some of this funding at CHS to pay for the PLC improvement initiative, and to access mentorship programs for their most at-risk students. At SMS funds were used to pay for Summer Planning Academies that were utilized to unify the staff around key actions for turnaround. In addition, these funds were used to pay for outside service tutors to assist students. SMS also went beyond grant funding to receive large

scale donations to drive incentive programs for their students. Calkins et al. (2007) would suggest that expenditures of these funds were warranted at SMS, as they state that effective turnaround at scale calls for bold, comprehensive action from the state, working together with districts and outside partners.

**Exercising caution in the speed of turnaround.** Contrary to much of the research in the field, which delves into studying rapid turnaround (see Hassel & Hassel, 2009; Kowal et al., 2009), the challenges described by the principals in this study suggest that districts could exercise caution in expecting swift change as an internal support to turnaround schools. Kowal et al., (2009) advocate turnaround efforts to be fast, with focused changes occurring in the first few months, and substantial improvements occurring within the first year. If districts want to temporarily avert negative labels they might be able to do that in the short term; however, if they want the kind of turnaround that results in award winning schools in the long term then they might choose a more cautionary path. For instance, SMS made gains in Dr. Fury's first year; however, their achievement data in reading did decline in year three, the same year they did not meet the state standard for an acceptable school. Had Dr. Fury been removed from her position, the chances of the school going on a sustained turnaround could have been greatly diminished. CHS had moderately significant gains in their first year of turnaround as well. While this is the case state expectations for student achievement on standardized tests, were set to increase at levels that were equivalent with gains that CHS made in year one of turnaround. It is somewhat likely that CHS could indeed improve in year two of turnaround, yet be rated "not meeting standard" by the state of Texas. Since leadership turnover could be a decelerator of school turnaround (see Mascall & Leithwood, 2010; Strickland-Cohen, McIntosh, & Horner, 2014) districts should look beyond fast turnaround, peeling back the layers to get a clear picture that

transcends school labels generated from state accountability ratings. School turnaround can happen quickly, but sustainment of turnaround takes time.

**Targeted resources.** Districts that subscribe to this deeper approach to school turnaround often dedicate specific and targeted resources to school turnaround leaders. Player, Hambrick, and Robinson (2014) suggest it is crucial that districts help struggling schools carefully diagnose the root cause of their failures and then make plans to address those issues. In addition, Kowal et al. (2009) describe how districts should establish structures within the district office to accommodate the deviations from school district policy that turnaround schools will require. Robinson and Buntrock (2011) suggest that district offices should have “stewards” built into their organizational structure at central office, similar to the district shepherds of turnaround used in Cincinnati Public Schools, to support turnaround efforts. Targeted resources are likely available, and turnaround schools need them.

### **Recommendation 3: Succession Planning to Sustain Turnaround**

With so few turnarounds actually ending in success, districts may want to consider succession planning as a way to address sustainment. Results of a study conducted by Hochbein (2012) indicated that three years after a school experiences turnaround, on average, academic performance declines from peak performance. In addition, large urban districts are often juggling the consistent pressures of reducing the number of schools carrying “low-performing” (or similar) labels. Having succession plans for successful turnaround leaders can help reduce the number of schools not meeting standards by preventing relapses into low performance. While performance in this study did not revert back to the lowest of levels, succession planning could mitigate potential declines. Furthermore, research indicates that the life span of a turnaround principal is often short, making succession plans even more important (Hull, 2012).



The case of SMS in this study was ideal. Dr. Fury left her successful turnaround school to take on the new challenge of high school principal. The assistant principal during the initial turnaround, Mrs. Willie, supported Dr. Fury and then became principal sustaining turnaround years after it occurred. She had much different skill set than her predecessor, which according to literature in the field was needed as leaders need different skill sets for different stages of turnaround (Leithwood & Strauss, 2008). Contrastingly, Dr. Clear came into turnaround a school that had just been engaged in successful turnaround a few years prior. In this case of CHS, turnaround had not been sustained so it had to begin anew. Districts could be proactive in predicting what impact will be felt at the turnaround school when leader is gone, and then work diligently to ensure a suitable replacement to sustain turnaround is chosen. Research suggests that districts can work to solve succession problems in successful turnaround school contexts. Kowal et al. (2009) advocates that districts develop turnaround leader pipelines by directing resources to the development of leaders who have turnaround leader attributes. In addition, Dolan and Donnell-Kay (2014) suggest that districts should work on growing and hiring leaders who have turnaround competencies and skills, rather than just degrees and experience. Districts should follow these recommendations to sustained turnaround.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

The building of a positive adult culture in school turnaround is not directly studied in most turnaround literature. The conceptual framework looks at the extent in which accelerators of this adult culture exist, and the intentionality of the leaders in working within these accelerators. During the course of the intensive study into the two schools, CHS and SMS, several questions arose as to areas to be suggested for future research that could assist practitioners in the field in being more successful in the turnaround process.

### **Decelerators of the Accelerators**

The study focuses on six specific accelerators for building a positive adult culture, and three more accelerators were uncovered. These three additional relevant accelerators were coined *accelerators of the accelerators*. While each of these areas did impact the building an adult culture in turnaround to varying extents, it would be equally as interesting to know what leadership actions constitute decelerators of building a positive adult culture. For instance, would there be an opposite impact if the turnaround leaders neglected the six accelerators? Would turnaround schools that have autocratic and non-collaborative turnaround leaders decelerate the building of a positive adult culture in a turnaround context? Could a school be successfully turned around with decelerators present? These questions could all be answered with future research on decelerators of school turnaround.

### **Districts Working Intentionally**

It would be equally as interesting to know if school districts that engage in working intentionally have increased success in turnaround schools. For instance, how is turnaround success impacted if a district is purposeful in selecting turnaround leaders based on aligning the context of the turnaround school to the needed attributes of a turnaround leader? Much research exists about what attributes or competencies a school district should look for in a turnaround school (Public Impact 2008). However, how many districts actually follow these best practices? Tools were presented in the study helps districts in selecting turnaround leaders by determining what competencies candidates possessed. If the goal is a perfect match more tools, and guidance in this area could help districts in selecting turnaround leaders.

### **Leadership Selection after Successful Turnaround**

Similarly, studies that focus on leadership selection after successful turnaround would potentially be beneficial for school districts and their central office leadership. One of the schools in the study had successfully experienced a turnaround only to find themselves right back in turnaround a few years later after their turnaround leader left the school. Furthermore, findings from this study articulate that different types of leadership are needed in different stages of turnaround (Duke, 2006; Leithwood & Strauss 2008). Studies that focus on sustainment of a positive adult culture through appropriate selection of turnaround successors could be of benefit in the field.

### **PBIS and RTI**

One interesting development that was uncovered during the study was the moderate connection between positive adult culture and the impact on Positive Behavior Intervention Supports (PBIS) (see Anderson-Ketchmark, & Alvarez 2010); and Response to Intervention (RTI) (see Feuerborn, Sarin, & Tyre 2011). While neither of these initiatives was directly studied in this research, it appears turnaround leaders in the study were more equipped to provided intervention and support to students due to their building of a positive adult culture grounded in the accelerators. Principals utilizing the framework could unintentionally assist in improving PBIS and RTI as increases in teachers working in concert together seem to increase the supports provided to students (e.g., Hord, 2004). Furthermore, turnaround leaders in the study modeled expectations of behavior in the adult to adult world, and at SMS this modeling seemed to have an impact on adult to student relationships. Studies that focus on positive adult cultures in turnaround, and their impact on building successful PBIS and RTI programs could be of assistance to those engaged in turnaround.

### **Dependency on SIG Funding for Success**

One other beneficial piece of future research could compare the rate of successful turnaround with, and without, the assistance of SIG funding and the mandates that are attached. For instance, it would be interesting to know how many turnarounds are successful which do not reconstitute and hire new teachers compared to those who have this autonomy. Some research exists about the impact of reconstitution and/or restructuring on adult culture (see Cianca & Lampe 2010; Galletta & Ayala, 2008); however, more research in this area could assist in determining if districts should replace the leader or reconstitute. More research would also answer the question: Can trust be built quicker by a turnaround leader who engages in working with the staff they have? In this study turnaround leaders worked with the staff they had, but a significant part of the work in building a positive adult culture was taking a look at who needed to be removed. The districts were not able and/or did not choose to reconstitute their staffs as defined by the federal turnaround model, but they certainly did engage in making sure educators that were not the right fit no longer worked with kids at their turnaround schools. Further studies in this area could guide school district leaders in how to proceed in the initial stages of turnaround.

### **Conclusion**

In this study, two examples of turnaround schools are chronicled. These schools were led by three highly skilled leaders, albeit leaders who possessed very different skill sets utilized in differentiated turnaround contexts. They focused on building a positive adult culture in an effort to improve outcomes for the number one customer, the kids of their schools. There is much wealth, in the form of turnaround knowledge, to be gained by the stories of these three leaders. The knowledge is needed due to seventy percent of turnaround efforts failing nationwide. This is

an absolute alarming rate for too many children who find themselves in turnaround schools. For many of these students there is often no choice but to rely on their neighborhood schools to provide them what they need. For these students not only is the American dream often prohibitive, but also the end goal of college and career readiness is impeded. This study, and others like it, provide hope where there is despair to educators who are engaged in public school turnaround. Purposeful efforts, by those in the field of education, at understanding these stories can assist in helping to “turn around” the turnaround problem faced in the most difficult of American public schools.

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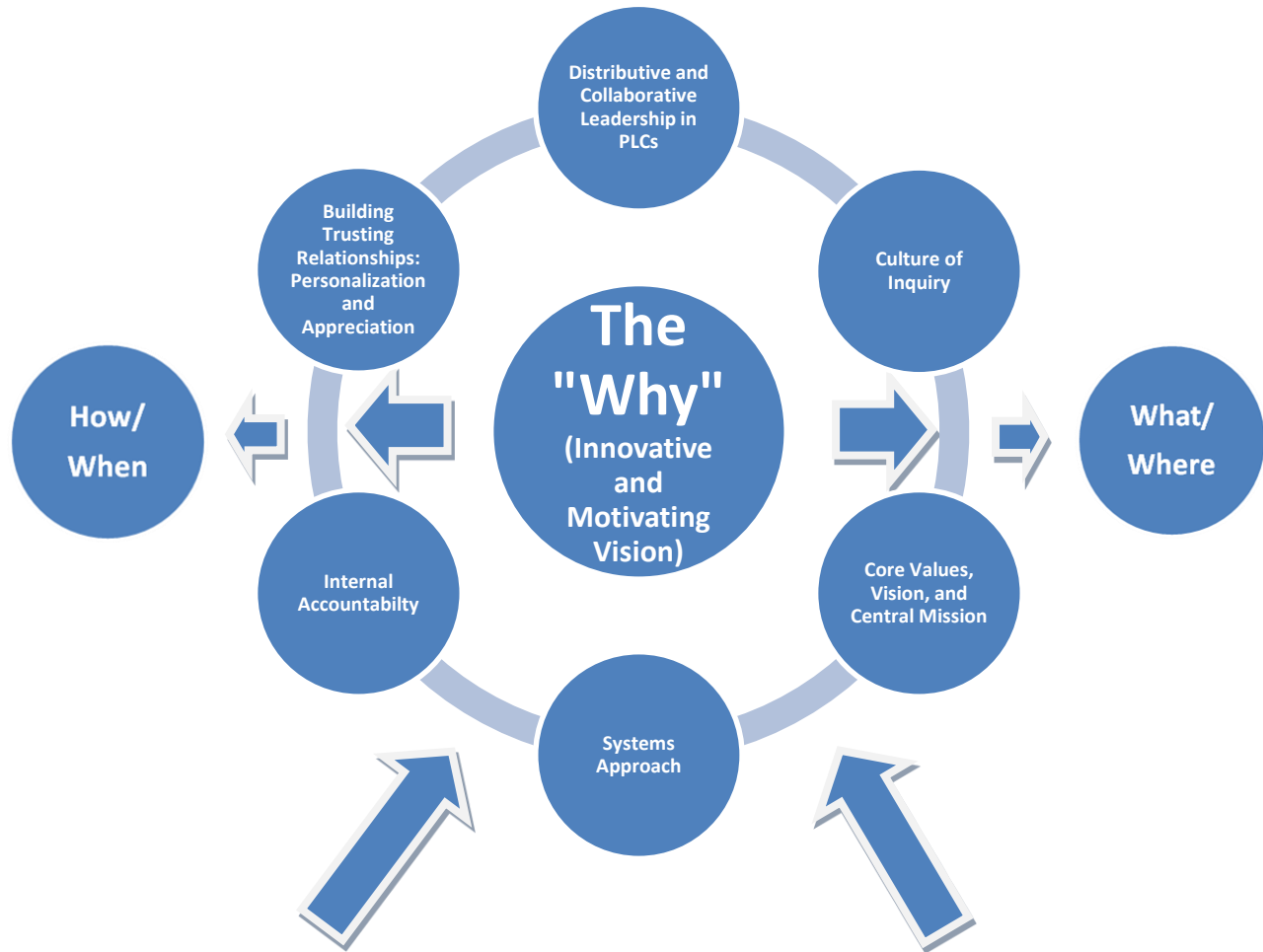
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**Appendix A**  
**Conceptual Framework (Building a Positive School Culture)**



**Theoretical Foundation: Evolution of Leadership Approaches**

## APPENDIX B

### Turnaround School/Principal Recruitment Letter

Date: (insert)

Dear Turnaround School Principal,

I am contacting you today to gauge your interest in allowing me to study your school and its recent turnaround successes. As a sitting urban school principal and Texas Christian University doctorate candidate, I am highly interested in being able to articulate your turnaround leadership story in order to empower other turnaround leaders in urban public schools.

If you wish to join, I will keep the time commitment to a minimum. Essentially I will ask that I be able to interview you to articulate your turnaround story as it relates to how you developed the adult culture needed to sustain turnaround in your organization. To further support this story I would ask that I be able to observe meetings with groups of educators, walk the physical plant, and interview other key players you identify as essential in telling the story of turnaround at your school. This story will also be supplemented by analyzing archived documents such as campus improvement plans, the school website, and/or other documents you deem useful. No students will be interviewed in the study. The total time commitment for interviews will not exceed 1 hour without your consent.

I sincerely hope that you will consider becoming a part of this research study. It will assist other leaders in understanding one turnaround journey. If you choose to participate, please let me know by responding to this letter via email. Should you agree, I would like to schedule time to speak with you and your direct supervisor to gain consent to do this research. If you do not wish to participate, no further action is required.

Knowledge sharing from one educator to another can lead to a butterfly effect of assisting other children in their academic success. Your school has done great things for kids in the form of turnaround that can directly assist the research community and other schools. Hopefully, it can also inform the development of future turnaround principals. Should you have any questions, or need any additional information, please email me at [t.j.jarchow@tcu.edu](mailto:t.j.jarchow@tcu.edu) or call my cell at 817-597-0113.

Thank you for your time and consideration in participating in this study. I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,  
T. J. Jarchow  
Ed. D. Candidate, Texas Christian University

*Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. The choice to participate is at your sole discretion and not required by your school or school district. You may withdraw from participation in the study at any time by informing the primary or student researcher. No students will be interviewed in this research, and no incentives will be offered for your involvement. Your responses will be completely confidential. Confidentiality will be upheld by using pseudonyms to mask the name of the school and yourself as a participant. Neither your name nor the name of your school will be disclosed by the student researcher in the final case study report, unless your school district provide express written consent to do otherwise that is agreed upon by every participant. In addition absolute compliance with all district regulations and policies of involving research in the school will be upheld.*

## APPENDIX C

### Semi-Structured Interview Question Bank (Principal Questions)

#### Background Questions

1. Briefly describe your past leadership experiences in education to include your current role and number of years in the role

How long have you been in your current role at (insert school)?

How many years have you been in education?

Which leadership experiences have been most rewarding? Why?

What do you feel is your greatest strength that you add to the organization and its mission?

2. What do you believe to be the ideal school culture?

#### Turnaround Leadership Questions

1. Have you ever been a leader in what would be considered a turnaround school as defined by being in a type of formal program improvement?

A. What was the name of that school?

B. If so describe the state of the school when you arrived

C. Suppose I shadowed you for a full day during the first six weeks of the first year....what might I see as your shadow?

D. What type of culture did the school have in your estimation?

2. Reflecting on this experience, what were your first key steps in working on turnaround at (insert school)?

How did these key steps assist your team in the turnaround process?

- 2A. (for those not on the front end of the process): From the viewpoint of someone who entered the turnaround process midstream, what implemented changes have been sustained? In your estimation, why have these changes been sustained?

3. What pivotal moments do you recall as tipping point moments, or moments that you/your team knew you were working on something special?

Possible Follow-up: Type of leadership did you exhibit in these moments

Where there moments when seemingly overwhelming obstacles presented themselves?

Describe, how did you overcome these moments

4. Do you believe that the school improved rapidly, improved gradually, flat lined, or regressed in your first year? Describe your reasoning for your response.

Would you say this first year was different than what you expected?

By Year Three?

By Year Five? (If applicable)

What is your opinion on the amount of time it took to reach improvement?

5. My goal is to be able to articulate the turnaround story in your school. With that being said, who are the other key players on the leadership side of the organization that would be of worth interviewing in articulating the turnaround story of your school?

What role did each of these key players hold in the turnaround process?

How much autonomy was given to them?

Did you have any key groups or communities that you relied on to do the work of turnaround?

Which Ones?

6. I am going to show you a list of six areas all related to school culture that are often times referred to in some capacity in the research base of turnaround leadership. If you had to put them in order of priority from most important in your turnaround process to least what order would you put them in?

Central Values and Core Mission

Having a Systems Approach

Building Relationships, Personalization, and Appreciation with Staff

Internal Accountability to the Mission

Culture of Inquiry

Distributive Leadership

To what extent did you rely on your #1 on the list to assist in school turnaround?

Some people would say that #6 is the most important, why do you think you focused on #6 the least?

What might not be included on the list?

Which of these key areas were frontloaded into the turnaround work you led your team on?

7. In your estimation, is the work at building a positive adult culture something that you intentionally or subconsciously focused on in the turnaround process?

8. In the initial stages of school turnaround, is the “why” things are done, how they are done, when they are done, where are they done, or what is done most important in school turnaround? Explain. (Note: student researcher will likely have to briefly explain Sinek’s work prior to asking this question)

9. Would your teaching staff consider you as motivational in expressing the “why” or the vision of the organization?

How do you know?

How do you feel that relates to your schools turnaround story?

10. What was the outcome of the turnaround story?

Describe the evolution of the state of the school from your inception as leader to when you left.

Was the improvement sustained? Why or Why not?

## **APPENDIX D: (Key Stakeholder Interview Questions)**

### Background Questions

1. Briefly describe your past teaching experiences in education to include your current role and number of years in the role

How long have you been in your current role at (insert school)?

How many years have you been in education?

Which leadership experiences have been most rewarding? Why?

What do you feel is your greatest strength that you add to the organization and its mission?

2. What do you believe to be the ideal school culture?

### Turnaround Leadership Questions

1. Have you ever been an educator in what would be considered a turnaround school as defined by being in a type of formal program improvement?

A. What was the name of that school?

B. If so describe the state of the school when you arrived

C. Suppose I shadowed you for a full day during the first six weeks of the first year....what might I see as your shadow?

D. What type of culture did the school have in your estimation when you first arrived?

2. Reflecting on this experience, what were your first key steps your school embarked on in working on turnaround at (insert school)?

How did these key steps assist your team in the turnaround process?

- 2A. (for those not on the front end of the process): From the viewpoint of someone who entered the turnaround process midstream, what implemented changes have been sustained? In your estimation, why have these changes been sustained?



3. What pivotal moments do you recall as tipping point moments, or moments that you/your team knew you were working on something special?

Possible Follow-up: Type of leadership did your principal exhibit in these moments

Where there moments when seemingly overwhelming obstacles presented themselves?

Describe, how your team overcame these moments

4. Do you believe that the school improved rapidly, improved gradually, flat lined, or regressed in your first year as an educator? Describe your reasoning for your response.

Would you say this first year was different than what you expected?

By Year Three?

By Year Five? (If applicable)

What is your opinion on the amount of time it took to reach improvement?

5. I am going to show you a list of six areas all related to school culture that are often times referred to in some capacity in the research base of turnaround leadership. If you had to put them in order of priority in the initial stages of your schools turnaround, how would you do it?

Central Values and Core Mission

Having a Systems Approach

Building Relationships, Personalization, and Appreciation with Staff

Internal Accountability to the Mission

Culture of Inquiry

Distributive Leadership

To what extent did your school rely on your #1 on the list to assist in school turnaround?

Some people would say that #6 is the most important, why do you think your team focused on #6 the least?

What might not be included on the list?

Which of these key areas were frontloaded into the turnaround work you led your team on?

6. In your estimation, is the work at building a positive adult culture something that your school intentionally or subconsciously works to develop?

7. Do you consider your principal as being motivational in expressing the “why” or the vision of the organization?

How do you know?

How do you feel that relates to your schools turnaround story?

8. What was the outcome of the turnaround story?

Describe the evolution of the state of the school from the beginning of the turnaround story to now.

Do you believe the improvements will continue to be sustained? Why or why not?

**APPENDIX E (Schedule for Data Collection)**

<b>Collection Schedule School 1</b>	<b>Collection Schedule School 2</b>	<b>Proposed Data Collection</b>
Pre Visit Recruitment (Summer 2015)	Pre Visit Recruitment (Summer 2015)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Secure schools willing to allow research to be conducted</li> <li>Complete AYP data analysis tool to ensure school is within bounded system</li> <li>Secure consent of school principal and district approval</li> <li>Start archived document analysis process to include researching the district's policy on research within schools</li> <li>Meet with school principal and direct report to establish school visitation schedule and explain vision</li> </ul>
Semester 1 August 2015 Visit 1 (Initial Visit)	Semester 1 August 2015 Visit 1 (Initial Visit)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Secure signatures on needed consent form from principal</li> <li>Interview Principal</li> <li>E-mail proposed school visitation schedule to principal and principal direct report.</li> <li>Identify 3-5 other faculty members to interview</li> <li>Identify meetings that could be observed to get a feel for the culture on campus.</li> </ul>
Work Interval 1 September 2015	Work Interval 1 September 2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Transcribe principal interview and code data</li> <li>Make transcription available to principal</li> <li>Continue archived document collection and analysis</li> <li>Consent forms will be sent to those identified to be interviewed or observed.</li> </ul>
Semester 1 October 2015 Visit 2 (Second Visit)	Semester 1 October 2015 Visit 2 (Second Visit)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consent process will be reviewed and completed with those identified to be interviewed or observed</li> <li>Interview 3-5 other key stakeholders identified by school principal</li> <li>Observe key leadership and professional learning community meetings with 10-20 participants</li> <li>Do school hallway physical plant walk</li> <li>Continue archived document collection and analysis</li> </ul>
Work Interval 2 November 2015	Work Interval 2 November 2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Transcribe key stakeholder interviews and code data</li> <li>Make transcriptions available to key stakeholders</li> <li>Finalize field notes of observations of meetings</li> <li>Finalize field notes of school hallway physical plant walk</li> <li>Finalize archived documents summary notes</li> </ul>
Semester 1 December 2015 Visit 3 (Final Visit)	Semester 1 December 2015 Visit 3 (Final Visit)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Observe key leadership and professional learning community meetings</li> <li>Do school classroom physical plant walk</li> <li>Follow up meeting with principal and key stakeholders to member check and update on progress (10 minutes per meeting)</li> </ul>
Semester 2 2016 Follow Up	Semester 2 2016 Follow Up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Finalize field notes of observations of meetings</li> <li>Finalize field notes of physical plant classroom walks</li> <li>Provide school leader with finalized draft of case study for their school.</li> </ul>

**APPENDIX F**  
**AYP Achievement Data Collection Tool**

	Mathematics Percentage Passing	Reading Percentage Passing
Struggling Year 1		
Struggling Year 2		
Struggling Year 3		
Turnaround Year 1		
Turnaround Year 2		
Turnaround Year 3		
Percentage Improvement		

**APPENDIX G**  
**AYP Achievement Data Collection Tool (Circle High School)**

	Mathematics Percentage Passing	Reading Percentage Passing	Met State Standard	Notes
Struggling Year 1 (2010-2011)	AS: 62%	AS: 78%	No	4% behind district in Reading 13% behind district in Math
Struggling Year 2 (2011-2012)	AS: 88%	AS: 58%	No Ratings	New Test-No ratings  11% behind district in Reading 20% above district in Math
Struggling Year 3 (2012-13)	AS: 65%	AS: 53%	Yes	5% behind district in Math 17% behind district in Reading
Struggling Year 4 (2013-2014)	AS: 63%	AS: 41%	No (IR)	4% behind district in Math 25% behind district in Reading
Turnaround Year 1 (2014-2015)	AS: 66%	AS: 47%	YES	<b>Turnaround Principal 1<sup>st</sup> Year</b> <b>3% Gain in Math</b> <b>6% gain in Reading</b> <b>3 Distinctions Earned</b>
Turnaround Year 2				

AS: All students

African American Student Passing Rates:	10-11	Reading (49%)	Math (78%)
	11-12	Reading (63%)	Math (87%)
	12-13	Reading (47%)	Math (59%)
	13-14	Reading (41%)	Math (51%)
	14-15	Reading (43%)	Math (54%)

**State Accountability Index Data: Circle High School**

School Year	Index 1 Student Achievement	Index 2 Student Progress	Index 3 Closing Gaps	Index 4 Postsecondary Readiness
12-13	55	*	*	*
13-14	59	NA	35	55
14-15	60	16	33	66

\* Due to changes in the accountability system, these areas are not comparable to the most recent years accountability

Source: TEA AEIS Reports (2010-2015) and School Report Cards (2012-2015)

**APPENDIX H**  
**AYP Achievement Data Collection Tool (Sunnyside Middle School)**

	Mathematics Percentage Passing	Reading Percentage Passing	Met State Standard	Notes
Year (2006-2007)	AS: 51	AS: 85	Yes	
Year (2007-2008)	AS: 72	AS: 88	Yes	
Struggling Year 1 (2008-2009)	AS: 71	AS: 78	No	African American Science was considered below standard
Turnaround Year 1 (2009-2010)	AS: 80	AS: 83	Yes	School was recognized
Turnaround Year 2 (2010-2011)	AS: 82	AS: 85	Yes	
Sustaining Year 1 (2011-2012)	AS: 82	AS: 87	NA	NO Accountability Ratings Change in assessment systems
Sustaining Year 2 (2012-13)	AS: 80	AS: 81	Yes	No Distinctions
Sustaining Year 3 (2013-2014)	AS: 84	AS: 82	Yes	4 out of 7 Distinctions Earned
Sustaining Year 4 (2014-2015)	AS: 98	AS: 86	Yes	5 out of 7 Distinctions Earned

AS: All students

African American Student Passing Rate:	07-08	Reading (84%)	Math (62%)
	08-09	Reading (71%)	Math (58%)
	09-10	Reading (88%)	Math (81%)
	10-11	Reading (86%)	Math (83%)
	11-12	Reading (63%)	Math (90%)
	12-13	Reading (82%)	Math (73%)
	13-14	Reading (82%)	Math (80%)
	14-15	Reading (79%)	Math (92%)

**State Accountability Index Data: Sunnyside Middle School**

School Year	Index 1 Student Achievement	Index 2 Student Progress	Index 3 Closing Gaps	Index 4 Postsecondary Readiness
12-13	78	33	*	*
13-14	80	36	43	38
14-15	83	41	47	45

\* Due to changes in the accountability system, these areas are not comparable to the most recent years accountability

Source: TEA AEIS Reports (2007-2015) and School Report Cards (2012-2015)

## APPENDIX I

### Coding Schematic

key term	working definition
accelerators	big picture ideas that speed up turnaround
authenticity	original and real (example: relationships look different from leader to leader due to how authentic they are)
autonomy	allowing others to make decisions within the context of "the why"
boundary spanning	ideas taken from one group to another by a key player associated with both groups
change (personal)	idea that the way the organization operates begins to dramatically shift
Clear Expectations	open honest conversations about where the organization is headed and how it plans on getting there allowing for those inside the organization to know how to move forward accordingly
community push in	outside support that accelerates the accelerators
connection	strong links between accelerators (example-building relationships and vision)
continuous improvement	the idea of getting better year by year, month by month, week by week, and day by day
core values, vision, central mission	When coupled with the "why" these elements provide guidance to those in the organization
credibility	more than just experience and expertise, but rather the idea that leaders must be accepted as being honest
crucial conversations	conversations that uphold internal accountability to the why within the organization
Culture of Inquiry	Allows an organization to discuss how it might enact the "why" by openly dialoguing about current instructional practices and data within the organization
declining performance	stage (see research) where the school achievement data goes down rapidly
distributive leadership (Collaborative leadership)	Idea of utilizing PLCs coupled with a distributive leadership approach to assist in promoting the "why" of an organization thus moving the organization forward
forward thinking	idea that what has happened in the past is less important than the experiences of the future

Hiring practices	items done with intentionality to select teachers aligned with "the why"
ideal school culture	one that focus on growth
initial stage of turnaround	time prior to stabilization occurring
integrity	being honest or fair
intentional	Purposefulness in moving the work of turnaround forward in an organization.
internal accountability	Ideas that each person in an organization is held accountable to the "why" through the expectation of personal mastery within the organization
initial stages of turnaround	time prior to stabilization occurring
leadership capacity	growing leadership throughout the organization to a larger set of leaders encompassing those beyond the principal
literacy strategies	working on reading as part of turnaround
mentor	someone who guides and teachers another to extend their leadership abilities
motivational	inspirational to a point of gaining buy in
needs assessment	determining weak areas in order to know where to start with turnaround
organizational behavior	when you change ones thinking you change behavior, and when you change behavior you change performance
leadership	
outside support	assistance offered by those not originally directly connected to the school on a daily basis
Pear Mentality	performance, effort, accountability, and relationships
pride	being infectious in talking about the positive direction of the school
SPA	summer planning academy funded by SIG dollars
sustainability	improvement actions that stood or have the potential to stand the test of turnaround
systems approach	The idea that time within an organization can be held sacred when everyone in the organization understands how the organization itself will behave mitigating stress in decision making aligned with the "why"
takeaways	items from PD that get back to classroom to improve instruction
teamwork	everyone on same page and working together
the <i>why</i>	The motivating clear vision openly expressed by the turnaround leader that can exist in an organization to drive all decisions, assisting to get to a tipping point of those in the organization moving in a common direction leading to continuous improvement
trusting relationships (personalization and appreciation)	By providing meaningful feedback and affirmation an organization builds trust increasing chances to achieve the "why"



TTT	trust, transparency, and teamwork
Turnaround	Turnaround is a dramatic change as documented by student achievement gains led by the changes in an organization that assist in achieving these gains. Often times this dramatic improvement begins or starts in the area of literacy, as literacy improvements can guide work in other content areas (Duke, 2006).
turnaround leader	a leader that leads a school toward improvement at a somewhat substantial rate. (Note: stark contrast to federal government definition connected to turnaround schools and their funding)
Warmth	a good feeling when you are in a building about how kids are cared for by adults