A TURNAROUND NETWORK

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Marie Morse

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Dr. Chris Unger
Advisor

College of Professional Studies
Northeastern University
Boston, Massachusetts

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative, case study was to examine and better understand the impact a multischool turnaround network had on school turnaround and improvement efforts in a large, urban, school district. This study specifically focused on the roles of both principals and central office administrators, the impact of adopted practices and the experience of members of the turnaround network. The study investigated both, what factors, structures, strategies and practices were perceived to have positively influenced the network and additionally what challenges and disadvantages existed within the network.

The Burke-Litwin performance and change model (Burke & Litwin, 1992) served as the theoretical framework and guided the design and analysis of this study. A literature review that included the historical impact, successful strategies, essential elements and the use of networks in school turnaround efforts informed this study. The central questions of the study include:

1. How did the network support central office leaders and principals in their turnaround work?
2. What were the various conditions, practices, and factors that contributed to the success of the network?
3. What were the perceptions of both principal and central office members about the advantages, disadvantages or challenges of network membership and participation?

A case study approach was used to explore and describe the perceptions of experiences of principals and administrators. It was evident the move to a networked learning model provided the leadership, direction, and guidance that assisted multiple schools navigate the chaotic landscape of school turnaround.

Keywords: school turnaround, networks, leadership
DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the wonderful staff, students, and families of Union Hill School.
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It with sincere appreciation I thank several people for their support and guidance through this doctoral journey. During the past several years, I have been through both the highs and lows of life. During this time, I have had the pleasure of seeing three of my children graduate from college (one more to go) and enjoyed many amazing family vacations at the Outerbanks NC and Falmouth MA, taken on a new job, am currently planning my daughter’s wedding, faced a life-threatening disease, and gained a real clear perspective about what matters in life. As much as I hate cancer, I do have to thank it for that.

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Chapter I: Introduction to the Study

The purpose of this qualitative, case study was to examine and better understand the impact a multischool turnaround network had on school turnaround and improvement efforts in a large, urban, school district. This study specifically focused on the roles of both principals and central office administrators, the impact of adopted practices, and the experience of members of a turnaround network. The study investigated both, what factors, structures, strategies and practices were perceived to have positively influenced the network and additionally what challenges and disadvantages existed within the network.

Turning around our nation’s schools is of critical importance and to date researchers and practitioners have yet to find the best way to ensure our lowest achieving schools have the resources, research, and skills to ensure a high-quality education for all students. Most recently, school improvement networks have gained popularity and have been identified as a possible way to achieve school turnaround success (Bryk, Gomez, Grunow, & LeMathieu, 2015). School improvement or turnaround networks may be described as an intentional form of collaboration among school leaders, administrators, and stakeholders, who regularly engage in and participate in problem solving, through the mutual exchange of knowledge and information. According to Sliwka (2003), this type of collaboration is desirable, as the sharing of personal experiences and reflections are “the ingredients of deep productive networking instead of loose forms of exchange” (p. 12). Understanding how a turnaround network impacted a district’s turnaround efforts in an urban school district may provide valuable insight into the most urgent issue of improving our nation’s most underperforming schools.
Statement of the Problem

The U.S. government, policymakers, and educators have been committed to improving underperforming schools for decades. The reform efforts of past and present consistently focused on finding ways to turn around underperforming schools. This complex work began in 1983 with the publishing of *A Nation at Risk* (U.S. Department of Education, 1983). This report created a sense of urgency in a time of inequity (National Commission of Excellence in Education [NCEE], 1983). Improving schools became an urgent priority of the federal government. In the following decades since *A Nation at Risk* was first published there have been several more federal attempts at reform which include; the 1994 Improving America’s Schools Act., 1994 No Child left Behind Act, 2002 Race to The Top, 2009, which was responsible for the tripling number of schools falling into underperforming categories the School Improvement Grants (SIG) of 2012, and finally, the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015. Unfortunately, each well-intentioned reform fell short of the intended goals and the promises made on behalf of students. Overall, the results were discouraging as minimal improvements were realized in the many schools that participated in these multi-billion-dollar initiatives.

The persistent problem of improving America’s low-performing schools is far reaching and pervasive as these schools often serve our nation’s most vulnerable populations. Turnaround schools typically enroll high-need, at-risk, minority students, with large percentages of these students living in poverty (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). The many chronically low-performing schools in the United States are located in urban settings, disproportionately and specifically serve Black, Latino, English language learners, and low-income students. Improving schools and providing access to high-quality education in the United States’ lowest achieving schools may be the most urgent and critical issue of our time. As Dragoset et al. (2017) addressed,
turning around these schools has proven to be a formidable task as many of underperforming schools remain persistently poor performing despite many attempts at improvement throughout the years.

Despite decades of efforts to improve low-performing schools, the impact of initiatives has been minimal as often, the changes undertaken are insufficient and have not met the magnitude of challenges that face chronically underperforming schools. As Calkins, Guenther, Belfiore, and Lash (2007) wrote:

Despite steadily increasing urgency about the nation’s lowest performing schools—those in the bottom five percent—efforts to turn these schools around have largely failed. Marginal change has led to marginal (or no) improvement. These schools, the systems supporting them, and our management of the change process require fundamental rethinking, not more tinkering. We will not make the difference we need to make if we continue with current strategies. That much is clear. (p. 4)

Significance of the Research

Most recently, research and policy have focused on the topic school turnaround. These efforts aim to fundamentally change the trajectory of low-performing schools to dramatically improve achievement in a relatively short period of time. This concept is somewhat new to education, and borrows from experience in the business sector. Research and experience indicate there is no single method or solution when it comes to turning around chronically underperforming schools. However, research, case studies, and experience have begun to shed light on some of the successful, effective practices and strategies that maximize the chances of turnaround success. As Mass Insight (2007) reports, turnaround schools often require a different approach for the school to realize dramatic student achievement gains.
A growing number of schools are beginning to experience success in turning around low-performing schools and understanding how this was accomplished is more important than ever. Answers to school turnaround may be found in the high leverage, promising, evidenced-based practices and initiatives described in the Massachusetts Turnaround Practices, or through case studies of successful schools (Lane, Unger, & Souvanna, 2014). Understanding what works in school turnaround has never been more important and may be best understood from the multiple perspectives of successful schools, practitioners and researchers’ experiences, insights and recommendations. Lane, Unger, and Stein (2016) depicted this perspective and have described turnaround in action, this research provides an “in practice perspective,” and presents a “finely grained and integrated look at key practices and actions taken by Level 4 and Level 3 schools that have made significant improvement in increasing student achievement” (p. 4).

Smarick (2010) and other critics call turnaround efforts a failure but proponents believe the effort highlighted innovative ideas and practices that may be the answer to the long plaguing question: “What to do about America’s failing schools?” Furthermore, Lane et al. (2014) suggested, when schools focus on specific leadership and instructional elements, they have better outcomes and increase their chance of success. As challenging and difficult turning around underperforming schools may be, we also know struggling schools can be turned around, as there are several cases of outlier schools (those that performed higher than comparison schools) and the key question is why? Lane et al. (2016) posited specific actions of leaders nested with the implementation of specific turnaround practices can influence high yield gains and position schools for improvement.

Literature on school turnaround has increased since 2009, but there is a need for additional research to better understand the successful factors and strategies employed in successful school turnaround efforts, to inform and assist other schools facing similar challenges. Possibly the best
way to define success and understand ways to improve our schools may reside in the stories of schools that defy the odds and perform at high levels. Our nation’s economic competitiveness depends upon the success of our schools but most importantly securing a prosperous future of choice, equity and opportunity must be the goal and aim for all.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative, case study was to examine and better understand the impact a multischool turnaround network had on school turnaround and improvement efforts in a large, urban, school district. This study specifically focused on the roles of both principals and central office administrators, the impact of adopted practices and the experience of members of the turnaround network. The study investigated both, what factors, structures, strategies and practices were perceived to have positively influenced the network and additionally what challenges and disadvantages existed within the network. A better understanding is needed of how the participation in a multischool turnaround network led to new knowledge to recommend specific strategies to inform, support and strengthen schools’ responses to the unique turnaround challenges that exist in schools across the network.

Recently researchers and school leaders have moved closer to understanding this phenomenon of school turnaround success by learning from successful school turnaround stories across our nation (de la Torre et al., 2013; Lane et al., 2014; Vince & Dunn, 2015). In many urban school districts, there are numerous schools that simultaneously require intervention and support all at once. Often there are not enough resources to meet the varied and intensive needs of these schools. As a result, school leaders have looked for new means to improve schools and have adopted the notion of networked learning as a way to innovate, adapt and share promising best practices. Wohlstetter, Malloy, Chau, and Polhemus (2003) promoted the idea of networks and
explained, “The concept of networks suggests that schools that work together in collaborative efforts may become more effective at improving organizational capacity and increasing student learning than individual schools working in isolation (p. 401). Additionally, Daly and Finnigan (2011) argued networks also provide an opportunity to shift and move from the singular focus of one school toward engaging the entire system toward an “inclusive, distributed network of connections” (p. 114).

According to Vander Ark and Dobyns (2018), “Networks offer the best path forward to proven solutions, so that every school does not have to reinvent the wheel” (p. xviii). Additionally, school networks may be the most important innovation in modern U.S. education as they offer unique opportunities for participants to “give and get” expertise as well as share in vibrant communities of adult learners. The power and potential of networks in schools may prove to be a promising innovation that meets the needs of our modern, contemporary schools as they evolve and adjust to increasing demands for improvements. Furthermore, Kim and Gonzales-Black (2018) said it is time to shift, as today’s model of school management and leadership still follow early 20th century principles and they were defined for a narrower and much less diverse group of students.

While scholars agree there is no one best way to ensure school turnaround success, researchers agree there are practices and efforts that have proven more successful than others. Kim and Gonzales-Black (2018) espoused benefits do exist when schools work collaboratively together in networks, but also warns networks have not been adequately studied and are not well understood in educational settings focused on school turnaround and improvement. Understanding the unique ways networks promote collaboration, knowledge creation, and sharing may provide insight into a new direction and approach to school turnaround. Learning how networks advance the knowledge
and practice of turnaround schools will serve numerous and varied schools and districts across our nation grappling with the challenge of multischool turnaround initiatives.

Additionally, understanding what works in schools and districts engaged in turnaround networks is an important and critical perspective. The lived experiences and perspective of principals and central office staff working on turnaround through networked learning provides insight and offers an opportunity to better understand how we can improve our nation’s most needy and challenged schools.

**Audience for the Research**

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine and better understand the impact a multischool turnaround network had on school turnaround and improvement efforts in a large, urban school district. This study specifically focused on the roles of both principals and central office administrators, the impact of adopted practices, and the experience of members of a turnaround network. The study investigated both what factors, structures, strategies, and practices were perceived to have positively influenced the network and additionally what challenges and disadvantages existed within the network.

Obtaining the valuable perspectives, insights and contexts of network participants was necessary and provided a critical lens that provided suggestions and ideas of how a school district used a turnaround network to engage in a large-scale school turnaround initiative. This case study research will assist the network members understand how their work strengthened, practice improved and identified ways the network activities assisted with turnaround efforts in their respective schools. In addition, a clearer understanding of how central office administrators working closely with intermediaries [INSTLL] impacted multischool turnaround efforts, will contribute to the body of knowledge on what works in school turnaround.
Furthermore, this work may be beneficial to the other schools and districts facing similar, complex circumstances and multiple schools needing intervention and support simultaneously. While we know what works in one context may or may not work in another, investigating what we know may produce new knowledge and add further insight for educators, school leaders and district administrators who are working to improve our nations’ most underperforming schools.

Research Questions

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine and better understand the impact a multischool turnaround network had on school turnaround and improvement efforts in a large, urban, school district. This study specifically focused on the roles of both principals and central office administrators, the impact of adopted practices and the experience of members of a turnaround network. The study investigated both what factors, structures, strategies, and practices were perceived to have positively influenced the network and additionally what challenges and disadvantages existed within the network. As our nation’s underperforming schools continue to struggle to find ways to improve, it is imperative policymakers and educators better understand factors that influence success in school turnaround.

The central questions of the study include:

1. How did the network support central office leaders and principals in their turnaround work?
2. What were the various conditions, practices, and factors that contributed to the success of the network?
3. What were the perceptions of both principal and central office members about the advantages, disadvantages, or challenges of network membership and participation?
**Key Terminology**

*No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) is legislation enacted as a part of the 2002 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. The goal of NCLB was to close significant achievement gaps across different student subgroups by 2014. Progress in these areas was monitored through high-stakes state assessments that measured progress toward meeting these goals in a measurement known as “adequate yearly progress.”

*Race to the Top Fund* (RTTT) refers to $4.35 billion in competitive grants rewarded to states, with turnaround being one of the key focus areas. Guidelines for the turnaround section of NCLB state local education agencies (LEAs) must implement at least one of four turnaround models. LEAs with nine or more turnaround schools must employ multiple models.

*School Improvement Grants* (SIGs), first authorized in 2001, are federal funds allocated to states by Title I formula. The funds are subsequently distributed competitively to school districts to improve low-performing schools. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (2009) significantly increased the amount of money available to schools and districts. These guidelines align with the guidelines of RTTT.

In 2015, the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA) replaced No Child Left Behind (NCLB) as the main law for K-12 public education in the United States. The main purpose of ESSA is to make sure public schools provide a quality education for all students. ESSA provides individuals states with more authority in how schools account for student achievement. This includes the achievement of disadvantaged students. These students fall into four key groups: students in poverty, minorities, special education students, and those with limited English language skills.

*Turnaround* is a term used to define a documented, quick, dramatic, and sustained change in the performance of an organization in 1 to 3 years.
Turnaround school is the term used to describe a school that is identified for improvement and must provide intensive intervention and support to dramatically increase student achievement.

Turnaround network refers to networks or networked schools are a group of turnaround schools connected by common challenges that seek knowledge together as a collective school improvement effort.

Theoretical Framework

In an effort to understand the influence and impact of a school turnaround network in a large urban school district change, this study will employ organizational change theory, specifically the Burke-Litwin performance and change model (Burke & Litwin, 1992), to examine and better understand the influence, process and phenomena of networks in a multischool turnaround effort in a Massachusetts, urban school district. The Burke-Litwin causal model of performance and change will be used to analyze the relationships between the 12 dimensions of transformational and transactional factors to better understand how to shift from a low achieving to a high achieving organization (Burke, 2002, 2008, 2014).

The Burke-Litwin model suggests organizational performance is affected by internal and external factors (Burke & Litwin, 1992). Burke and Litwin (1992) offered, “The number of variables changing at the same time, the magnitude of environmental change, and the frequent resistance of human systems create a whole confluence of processes that are extremely difficult to predict and almost impossible to control” (p. 523). Despite these challenges with competing and dynamically impacting factors and variables, consistent patterns of organizational change exist and can be seen in actual organizations (Burke & Litwin, 1992).

The model provides a framework to identify organizational and environmental elements that are critical to successful change efforts. The Burke-Litwin model represents the external
environment as the input, and the individual and organizational performance represents the output (Burke & Litwin, 1992). The feedback loop flows in both directions. According to Burke and Litwin (1992), environmental factors are the single, most important catalyst for change. The Burke-Litwin model is comprised of 12 components, elements, or dimensions, each has an important role within the framework of an organization.

In addition, this model demonstrates how these dimensions are causally linked and directly influence performance. The model not only discusses how dimensions are interconnected and interdependent but also demonstrates how the external environment affects the different layers within an organization. The model provides a systematic manner to diagnosis the needs and strengths of an organization and provides insight into ways the organization can change. Additionally, the model helps to explain the difference between transformational and transactional leadership and identifies culture as critical to the organization as members attribute meanings and values to a variety of external and internal situational contexts through the interrelated inputs experienced by the organization. The Burke-Litwin performance and change model defines culture as “the relatively enduring set of values and norms that underlie a social system” (Burke & Litwin, 1992, p. 526).

The Burke-Litwin causal model of organization performance and change considers environmental factors to be the most important catalyst and driver of change (Burke & Litwin, 1992). The theory is grounded in the belief important elements of organizational success and improvement, such as mission, strategy, leadership, and organizational culture, are impacted by influences outside and inside the organization. The Burke-Litwin performance and change model is an open systems model that analyzes an organization’s performance within the 12 elements of the model. Burke and Litwin developed the Burke-Litwin causal model of organization performance
and change while collaborating on organizational change projects for Citibank and British Airways in the late 1970s and 1980s (Burke, 2002, 2008, 2014).

The Burke-Litwin model has the most important factors featured at the top (Burke & Litwin, 1992). The lower layers become gradually less important, yet fundamental to the change process. The model is designed so all the factors are integrated and relationships exist between these elements. Therefore, a change in one will eventually affect other factors. Figure 1 identifies the primary variables, the interactions between these variables and how they affect change.

![Figure 1. Burke-Litwin model of organizational performance and change (Burke, 2014).](image)

These 12 drivers of change are:

1. External Environment – Direct impact of forces or variables outside the organization that influence organizational performance.
2. Mission and Strategy – Mission is the organization’s purpose and strategy is how the mission will be accomplished.

3. Leadership – Considers attitudes and behaviors of senior colleagues and how these behaviors are perceived by the organization as a group. “Persuasion, influence, serving followers, and acting as a role model, and we do not mean command and control, domination, and serving edicts instead of followers” (Burke, 2002, p. 231).

4. Culture – The norms that an organization, beliefs, values, behaviors that direct ways people behave and what is valued as important.

5. Structure – refers to the arrangement of organizational functions (e.g., accounting, manufacturing, human resource management) and operational units (e.g., the western region, customer service for product x, Goddard Space Flight Center within NASA) that signify levels of responsibility, decision making authority, and lines of communication and relationships that lead to the implementation of the organization’s mission, goals, and strategy” (Burke, 2002, p. 232).


7. Systems – “policies and procedures that are designed to help and support organizational members with their jobs and role responsibilities” (Burke, 2002, p. 233).

8. Climate – The perceptions of a group in a work unit, the view that shapes the organization as a whole.

9. Task Requirements and Individual Skills and Abilities – “the degree to which there is congruence between the requirements of one’s job, role, and responsibilities and the knowledge, skills, and abilities (competence or talent) of the individual holding the job”
10. Individual Needs and Values – “the extent to which one’s needs are met on the job” (Burke, 2002, p. 234).

11. Employee Motivation – Considers the significance of individual and organizational goals, motivation is key to effective change. Aroused feelings such as achievement, affiliation, and power that are directed toward goals.

12. Individual and Organizational Performance – The individual, group, or organizational outcomes and results of the throughput dimensions in response to the external environment (Burke, 2014).

Burke and Litwin (1992) offered transformational changes are directly impacted by environment factors of the model. Figure 2 presents the transformational variables, in the upper half of the model. Burke and Litwin (1992) defined transformation as the “areas in which alteration is likely caused by interaction with environmental forces (both within and without) and will require entirely new behavior sets from organizational members” (p. 529). The Burke-Litwin model proposes the arrows in the transformational section (see Figure 2) have greater influence on the change process (Burke & Litwin, 1992). According to Burke and Litwin (1992), “Moreover, in large scale or total organizational change, mission, strategy, leadership, and culture have more ‘weight’ than structure, management practices, and systems: that is, having “organizational leaders communicate the new strategy is not sufficient for effective change” (p. 529).
Figure 2 contains the transactional variables in the lower half of the model. Transactional is defined as “the primary way of alteration is via relatively short-term reciprocity among people and groups” (Burke & Litwin, 1992, p. 530). The important difference between transformational and transactional change within the model is transformational changes impact organizational culture, and transactional change impacts the organizational climate. In Figure 3, the weight of the variables in the transactional model have less influence on creating whole organizational change that can occur within a system. Changes associated with the lower arrows “may or may not affect the entire system” (Burke & Litwin, 1992, p. 529). The Burke-Litwin performance and change model identify three different levels within the organization; individual, group and system. Individual levels include motivation, individual needs, and job-match person. Group needs include climate systems, management practices, and structure components. System-level variables include the external environment, mission, strategy, leadership, and organizational culture.
Burke (2002, 2014) explained mission and strategy, leadership, and culture respond directly and most immediately to the dynamics of the external environment. Burke (2002) shared leadership serves as the main intermediary between the vision and strategy of the organization, and the culture represents and reflects the organization’s beliefs, identity, and ultimately its actions. Using an organizational change model specifically, the Burke-Litwin performance and change model assists in developing a deep understanding of the complexity of the change process in an organization (Burke & Litwin, 1992). The Burke-Litwin model provides the foundational underpinning of the research by providing a structure for the analysis of a turnaround network and the turnaround effort in a large, urban Massachusetts school district.

This research will describe how improvement networks impacted school turnaround efforts and share participants perspectives and stories by searching for broad and deep meaning about each organizational component and the interconnections of the transformational and transactional factors within the system. In addition, the model guides the understanding of organizational change as a
A complex system of interdependencies that must be understood and monitored to implement and sustain successful change initiatives. Organizational development theories and models can be helpful in diagnosing the needs of an organization and can help leaders develop the understanding of what systemic actions must be taken (Burke, 1994, 2002; Oterkiil & Ertesvåg, 2014).

**Competing Theories of the Burke-Litwin Model**

The Burke-Litwin model of organizational change is heavily influenced by both organizational change theory and systems theory (Burke & Litwin, 1992). There are a variety of definitions for organizational change, Burke (1996) shared organizational change refers to adaptations and modifications made within an organization that include changes among individuals and also across the entire organization. Senge (1990) shared, “Organizations learn only through individuals who learn. Individual learning does not guarantee organizational learning. But without it no organizational learning occurs” (p. 139). Finally, Van de Ven and Poole (1995) offered change is the observable difference over time in one or more parts or elements of an organization.

Lewin (1947), a seminal author of organizational change theories, provides a foundation for the understanding of how organizations change and evolve. Lewin espoused, for the change process to be successful, a 3-step procedure must be followed: unfreezing, moving, and refreezing. Lewin suggested, in the first step, the current level of behavior must be unfrozen to move toward the second step, which is the desired new level of behavior. The third step, refreezing, creates ways to make the new level of behavior “relatively secure against change” (Lewin, 1947, p. 344).

Schein (1985) continued Lewin’s (1947) work and suggested the change process is more intricate and complicated than three simple steps. Schein referred to the steps as “stages” that overlap. Schein developed seven key stages and identified there are three ways to unfreeze an organization: Stage 1, motivation, is to change by the induction of guilt or anxiety and creation of
psychological safety. Stage 2, changing, involves identifying a new model or leader and search the environment for new information relevant to the change. These two processes are necessary in order for individual organizational members to see change and associate this with improvement. In the last stage, Stage 3, refreezing, is the integration of the change for organizational members. Schein posited this two-step process links the new behavior with the member’s self-concept and ensures the new change fits well with others in the organization (Schein, 1985).

Systems theory was originally proposed by the Hungarian biologist Ludwig von Bertalanffy in 1928, but had not been used in organizational change theory until recently (Kast & Rosenzweig, 1972; Scott, 1981). The basis of systems theory is all the components of an organization are interrelated or interconnected, and changing one variable will impact many others, as organizations are viewed as open systems, those that continually interact with their environment.

A central theme of systems theory is nonlinear relationships exist among and between variables. Small changes in one variable can create dynamic changes in another, and large changes in a variable might have minimal impact on another. The concept of nonlinearity adds complexity and sometimes unpredictability to our understanding of organizations. This model is constructed and built upon D. Katz and Kahn’s (1978) open system framework, which proposes input-throughput-output with a feedback loop. The systems theory supposes and recognizes everything is connected to everything else. Senge (1990) posited the complex, integrated, social systems of an organization are effected by the variable and casual loop relationships, and adaptation depends upon the self-correcting ability of the feedback process. More importantly, this perspective suggests all members share responsibility for improvement within an organizational system (Senge, 1990).

The changing modern work place must adapt to changes in technology, data, relationships, and changing social systems that requires organizational change models to adapt from traditional
views and perspectives to current modern needs. These fast-evolving shifts have focused organizational change beyond the traditional skill sets toward complex and comprehensive models. Understanding and accelerating change in these highly complex environments requires organizations adapt and continuously learn. The environments continue to press upon organizations and multifaceted, simultaneous responses are required to ensure organizational success. The Burke-Litwin performance and change model consistently focuses upon the influence of the environment in a fast-paced change environment and understanding these factors are essential to organizational success. Moreover, Deal and Levinson (2016), Ferdman (1999), Meister and Willyerd (2010), Twenge (2010), and Zemke, Raines, and Filipczak (2013) reported modern-day workforce shifts, new external pressure, rapid and immediate access to information, and changes necessary in the new era of technology enhanced schools and work places require organizational systems to adjust and adapt practices to meet and possibly restructure whole organizational cultures and systems.

Rationale of Theoretical Framework

Building successful turnaround strategies at scale has been a difficult and elusive goal. School turnaround has become a recent phenomenon and understanding the complexity of this process is essential and critical as the United States works to improve underperforming schools. According to Le Floch et al. (2014), most failing schools are in urban settings and include large numbers of students of color and poverty. Additionally, Dragoset et al. (2017) espoused it is urgent schools find ways to improve, as most students who attend chronically underperforming schools remain behind, and thus the achievement gap is never closed. The Burke-Litwin performance and change model will frame this study designed to identify and understand the key drivers of change of a turnaround network in an urban school district in Massachusetts.
The Burke-Litwin performance and change model proposes revolutionary or transformational change can positively impact organizational success and change efforts. Organizational change is often unpredictable as change typically occurs in jumps and spurts as opposed to in an incremental, linear manner. Weick and Quinn (1999) described organizational change as either “episodic, discontinuous, and intermittent” or “continuous, evolving, and incremental” (p. 362). According to Burke (2008), it is very difficult to change organizational culture in a way that promotes deep, lasting change, as it involves many changing variables and confronting multiple unknown conditions.

This study will address and investigate potential ways to improve our nation’s lowest performing schools through analyzing the turnaround effort of a turnaround network. The Burke-Litwin model will support and structure the process of understanding of organizational change (Burke & Litwin, 2012). The Burke-Litwin model describes organizations as a complex system of interdependencies that must be understood and monitored to implement and sustain successful change initiatives. Organizational development theories and models can be helpful in helping to diagnose the needs of an organization and can help leaders develop the understanding of what systemic actions must be taken (Burke, 1994, 2002; Oterkiil & Ertesvåg, 2014). In this case study, the Burke-Litwin model will be used to best understand the use of networks and the perceived levers that influenced improvements in one Massachusetts urban school district’s multischool turnaround effort.

Conclusion

In this introductory chapter, the purpose of this qualitative case study research was discussed and identified. According to Yin (2014), a case study investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context especially when the boundaries between the
phenomenon and context are not clearly evident. This case will explore a contemporary issue in real-life context as research has yet to fully discover what works in schools undertaking transformation and turnaround.

Learning from the lived experiences, the stories, and perceptions of participants and the elements believed to be beneficial to school turnaround from the Turnaround Network will provide thick descriptions “through meanings and understandings developed socially and experientially” (Harrison, Birks, Franklin, & Mills 2017, p. 6). In addition, to research questions, the Burke-Litwin performance and change model (Burke & Litwin, 2012) will be used as a means to examine the influence of networks and the impacting factors of complex change.

In the next chapter, the literature surrounding the historical perspective of school turnaround, the successful strategies and practices associated with successful school turnaround, and school turnaround networks will be examined and discussed.
Chapter II: Literature Review

The Turnaround Challenge

Despite great efforts, billions of dollars spent, and a plethora of initiatives stopped and started, many of our nation’s high needs, high poverty public schools have been unable to overcome and eliminate the myriad of challenges facing schools working to turnaround, much to the dismay of the many who have been working at school reform for decades (Calkins et al., 2007; DiPaola, Tschannen-Moran, & Walther-Thomas, 2004; Dragoset et al., 2017; Duke, 2012; Herman et al., 2008). This elusive goal of improving our most needy schools continues to be of grave concern, an urgent, persisting, challenge and an equity issue in the United States, as students who attend high performing schools inherit access to a better quality of life than those who do not (DeArmond, Denice, Gross, Hernandez, & Jochim, 2015; Gergen, 2007).

Affording access to a quality education and effective schools should be an opportunity for all, but that is not the case. According to Harris (2010), many underperforming schools are located in urban, high needs communities and students living in these stressed environments are more likely to have experienced trauma, live in poverty and many attend underperforming schools. Furthermore, Le Floch et al. (2014) stated most failing schools are located in urban settings and include large numbers of students of color and poverty. As stated in Duncan (2010), approximately 22% of school-age children live in poverty (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019), and 5% or 5,000 of the nation’s schools are chronically underperforming and in urgent need of reform and change.

Numerous societal factors impact student achievement in schools; however, poverty ranks as one of the most adverse influences on school performance. A report by Mass Insight (2007) examined the negative impact of poverty on school performance and stressed most underperforming
schools were also high-need, high-poverty schools. To address these inequities of low-performing schools with wide achievement gaps, over consecutive years, schools were identified for improvement, restructuring, and transformation through numerous federal turnaround initiatives as early as 2009 through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. The early and numerous attempts at turning around our nation’s most challenging schools proved to be unsuccessful, as federal models were not able to meet identified improvement goals. What was learned was the complexity of school turnaround was substantial and success became the exception, most underperforming schools remained unchanged. The challenges in turnaround schools are compelling but turnaround is possible even in our nation’s most difficult schools. Cantor, Smolover, and Stamler (2010) acknowledged the negative effects of poverty but caution about setting low expectations based on disadvantaged students’ circumstances and shared “zip codes do not determine student destiny” (p. 1). Additionally, Duke (2015) offered hope and encouragement and asserts if even one school can turnaround, others can as well.

Conditions in our low-performing schools are complex as often schools must transform and face numerous, overwhelming obstacles concurrently. Bryk et al. (2015) purported our nation’s disadvantaged schools are “doubly challenged . . . confronting vast human needs, manage a huge array of programs . . . are chronically stressed environments” (p. 63). There is no silver bullet and the problems underperforming schools face will not be solved from a one-size-fits-all prescriptive approach. According to Peck and Reitzug (2013), our nation’s turnaround schools, are demanding, multifaceted and challenges vary from school to school. Furthermore, Bryk et al. (2015) warned we must find innovative ways to improve and shares “success will elude educational leaders and each new cadre of educational reformers unless they and their institutions are equipped with better ways of understanding the practical problems . . . of school improvement” (p. 19).
Turnaround is about change but the logical and practical application of change. Duke (2015) contended schools must take the guesswork out of school turnaround planning as lives lie in the balance and schools cannot afford the costly mistakes that come from poor strategy. Some critical keys insights to understanding the process of change in turnaround schools are listed here:

- Change is a process, not an event.
- Change is a problem of the smallest unit.
- Change invariable involves loss.
- Before new ways are learned, unlearning old ways is necessary.
- Groups can be a powerful means for achieving individual change.
- Structural change can lead to changes in individual behavior.
- Change often requires a degree of organizational stability (p. 15).

The Debate About School Turnaround

The pursuit of improving America’s schools continues despite setbacks and lackluster results. School turnaround remains as a popular approach many states, districts and schools take when tackling school improvement. This model serves as a popular design for school improvement and change despite significant criticism. Herman et al. (2008) asserted research is sparse and differences in the opinion of definition and meaning cause confusion. Moreover, the effectiveness of the turnaround model has been vigorously debated and has many critics but proponents espouse turnaround success stories pose the possible solutions needed to improve our nation’s most needy and underperforming schools.

Skeptics warn the many limitations of school turnaround create a compelling argument for why school turnaround may be just a trend and schools must not blindly engage in efforts that do not work (Murphy & Bleiberg, 2018; Peck & Reitzug, 2013; Peurach & Neumerski, 2015; Smarick,
Furthermore, Stuit (2010) suggested this approach is flawed and these schools should be shut down instead of turned around as research does not support that these interventions work. Additionally, Heissel and Ladd (2016) asserted turnaround has not been a successful model. The researchers conducted an analysis of 89 elementary and middle schools over 4 years in turnaround schools in North Carolina and found “little success” at these low-performing schools after turnaround efforts were enacted. Possibly, Peurach and Neumerski (2015) best summarized the many turnaround scholars with negative opinions of school turnaround and stated, “Successful turnarounds remain the exception rather than the rule” (p. 382).

Yet, momentous stories of turnaround success fuel the debate about school turnaround. Such as the remarkable case study done in the Canadian Province of Ontario. Beginning in 2004, 800 schools were identified as underperforming and began specific turnaround efforts focused on building capacity of teacher teams, principals and district leaders to create conditions for improvement at scale across the province. Currently, only 69 of those original 800 are still considered underperforming (Glaze, Mattingley, & Andrews, 2013). Similar remarkable outcomes invigorate the discussion of the merit of school turnaround. According to many scholars (Herman et al., 2008; Peck & Reitzug, 2013; Stuit, 2010), a better understanding of school turnaround is needed as there are limited empirical studies and literature on the topic and the scope of research is narrow and still does not provide enough evidence-based analysis of what works in turnaround work. Despite the criticism this novel idea still stands as a top choice of schools when confronting a need for radical and rapid change and improvement.

**The Concept of School Turnaround**

The term *school turnaround* is not entirely new to education and the earliest mention of the concept in educational contexts can be found as early as the 1990s (Duke, 2012). According to
Peurach and Neumerski (2015), turnaround’s origin and beginning was earlier and began in New York during the mid-1980s. However, by 2005, the school turnaround concept emerged as a formidable solution for states, districts and schools to use when looking for ways to dramatically improve. In 2005, Bill and Melinda Gates awarded Mass Insight Educational and Research Institute a grant to develop a framework for states to apply when confronting the need for dramatic improvement in schools. Calkins et al. (2007) authored the seminal report, The Turnaround Challenge, which served as the beginning of an era of a national emphasis and focus on improving our nation’s lowest achieving schools and began the much debated “turnaround” controversy.

The term turnaround is often interchangeable and can mean different things in definition, context and methodology. School turnaround has several interpretations and differs from school improvement in specific ways. School improvement infers slow incremental improvement over time while turnaround is a rapid and quick process. Mass Insight (2007) defined turnaround as “a dramatic, multi-dimensional change process at a chronically underperforming school” (p. 71). Corcoran, Peck, and Reitzug (2014) described turnaround as a rapid, measurable improvement in student achievement at persistently low-achieving schools. Consistently, Calkins et al. (2007) described turnaround as a documented, rapid, significant, and sustainable improvement. Other definitions refer to school turnaround as an improvement model of the federal government where removal of the principal, staffing autonomies, and other changes are imposed, and the other is a process for establishing quick and rapid improvement in schools (Corcoran et al., 2013; E. A. Hassel, Hassel, Arkin, Kowal, & Steiner, 2010; B. C. Hassel, Hassel, & Rhim, 2007; Herman et al., 2008; Smarick, 2010).

While school turnaround is dramatically different than school improvement; some claim there is little difference and school turnaround is a passing fad. However, Rhim and Redding (2014)
emphasized school turnaround differs substantially from school improvement as turnaround calls for change that is “urgent and disruptive that is in contrast to the incremental continuous improvement that has been characteristic of change for the past 20 years . . . it is not more school improvement or school improvement plus” (p. 14). Additionally, Calkins et al. (2007) distinguished turnaround from school improvement by explaining a school turnaround initiative “focuses on the most consistently underperforming schools and involves dramatic, transformative change” (p. 10). Critics and skeptics claim school turnaround is not sustainable and is essentially a quick fix, as the aim is to dramatically increase student achievement in no more than three years. Smarick (2010) warned, “The history of urban education tells us emphatically that turnarounds are not a reliable strategy for improving our very worst schools” (p. 11).

Furthermore, Herman et al. (2008) and Smarick (2010) critiqued the entire turnaround effort a failure as schools are identified as “turned around’ after marginal and minimal improvements have been made. Conversely, Hansen (2012) posited steady growth after a period of time is enough to declare a school is turned around and claimed a turnaround school is one that has consistently shown steady and improved growth of approximately 5 to 10 percentile points over 3 years and then sustains this growth for at least 2 years.

**Turnaround as a Model for Change**

Despite the disappointing and mixed results, school turnaround has become one of the hottest topics in education (Bottoms & Fry, 2009; Darling-Hammond, 2010). Some say turnaround success may be a case of “confirmation bias” or the tendency to “look for, find and favor information that matches we believe or wish to happen” (Bryk et al., 2015, p. 178). Yet, it appears turnaround is here to stay; turnaround has deep roots and successful case studies exist in business and schools alike (Pearce & Robbins, 1993; Peck & Reitzug, 2013). Perhaps the best-known
The challenge of fixing low-performing or failing schools has proven to be a very complex and perplexing problem. It has become clear there are many factors that influence success or failure, and reform will not be realized by a one-size-fits-all approach. David (2010) warned turnaround is “tricky business,” and there is no one single strategy that will work well in all schools. The grave issue of guaranteeing equity and access to high-quality schools for all students continues to challenge policymakers and educators alike but emerging practices identified from case studies provide promise, despite the turnaround criticism. Today turnaround stands as a hopeful and possible answer to educational equity issues in our schools.

A Need for Research

Research on school improvement and reform is plentiful. However, according to (Meyers, Lindsay, Condon, & Wan, 2012; O’Brien & Dervarics, 2013), research on school turnaround is limited and sparse as this term remains vague, subjective, and mainly informed by case studies. Bryk et al. (2015) espoused, “Unfortunately, the research and development infrastructure for school improvement is weak and fragmented” (p. x). Other limitations to this specific topic of turnaround are that the majority of the research and knowledge available revolves around case studies focused on the specific four turnaround models described in the Race to the Top (RTT) and the School Improvement Grant (SIG) literature, an outdated reference. Research that provides evidence of what works for a sustainable turnaround is needed to better understand and provide a consistent definition of turnaround and inform the practices to build these to scale.
Robinson and Buntrock (2010) shared turning around a school is onerous work, but leaders should view turnaround work as a “positive opportunity to transform a school rather than a public rebuke for poor performance . . . schools must be desirable places to work” (p. 26). Additionally, Fullan and Quinn (2016) shared turnaround success requires much more than structures, programs, and plans; the most critical facet is the “people” collectively and individually who share responsibility and are bound together by a shared purpose. Many scholars have written about the “despite the odds” schools, the challenges faced in turnaround schools across our country, and the specific practices employed that have successfully contributed to meeting the challenging goals and advancing school improvement at turnaround schools. These stories of success provide enthusiasm and interest in turnaround as a model for school change (Argote, 2014; Lane et al., 2016; Senge, 1990; Senge, McCabe, Lucas, Smith, & Dutton, 2012). Hence, school turnaround remains as a powerful lever for dramatic change despite the fact it is a complex phenomenon and research has yet to identify the best models and methods to foster change and improvement.

According to Bryk et al. (2015), conditions in turnaround schools are exceptionally complex and schools hard at work at improving, may become overwhelmed and eventually immune to improvement or become initiative worn; as numerous efforts are employed and tried and ultimately abandoned year after year. This propensity schools have to jump from initiative to initiative quickly before fully understanding the context of the problem and situation or “solutionitis” results in an incomplete analysis of problems and seeing complex matters through a narrow lens often lures schools into unproductive strategies (p. 24).

Mass Insight (2007) shared, “Low-expectation culture, reform fatigued faculty, high-percentage staff turnover, inadequate leadership, and insufficient authority for fundamental change all contribute to a general lack of success, nationally, in turning failing schools around” (p. 4). As
Estrada, Hammer, and Murray (2014) wrote, the stakes of continued failure are high, as many of the United States’ poorest children do not have access to good schools that provide an opportunity for a profitable future. Furthermore, the authors contend, if we cannot “find a better way to educate our neediest students, they will not have access to college and skilled jobs that can earn them a livable wage” (Estrada et al., 2014, p. 8). Concerns about the poor results in high-poverty, high-need schools remain high. While turnaround schools made some progress, it is far from what would constitute the school turnaround initiative a success. Resolving this issue is imperative as low-quality schools expose vulnerable students to suffer long lasting consequences. We currently do not have an answer to this plaguing question of “What to do about America’s underperforming schools?” Yet, stories of turnaround success offer direction, guidance and new ideas that offer a promising solution to this decades old issue (Dragoset et al., 2017; Smarick, 2010).

This literature review is organized into two parts, the first part will investigate successful turnaround factors and strategies and the second part addresses networks and the ways they impact school improvement work. Relevant literature surrounding school reform and school turnaround, past and present reform efforts, and common elements of successful turnaround elements and practices are discussed and chronicled. Finding ways to leverage promising reform practices and assist with the monumental effort required to improving the United States’ lowest performing schools may lie in the lessons learned from successful turnaround stories and the potential use of improvement networks that emphasize cross-school collaboration, innovation, and rethinking how schools learn, adapt, and change.
Background/Historical Perspective

*A Nation at Risk*

The U.S. government has long been focused on improving our nation’s public schools. Over the past 4 decades, policy and school improvement efforts have been continually shifted to meet the changing environmental factors that impact our schools. The role of the federal government “has evolved over nearly five decades, emphasizing education reform priorities that mirror the changing national education policy conversation” (American Institutes of Research [AIR], 2010, p. 1). While each reform promised change and improvement, none have accomplished our goal of overhauling our nation’s underperforming schools.

In 1983, the NCEE published *A Nation at Risk*. The report addressed the mediocre state of America’s educational system: “Our society and its educational institutions seem to have lost sight of the basic purposes of schooling, and of high expectations and the disciplined effort needed to attain them” (Discussion section, para. 3). *A Nation at Risk* created a sense of urgency and provided guidance regarding what American schools must focus on to improve. Extended learning time, improved teacher quality, improved curriculum and assessments for students were recommended to accelerate schools (NCEE, 1983). *A Nation at Risk* began the discussion and the heavy influence the federal government would play in school improvement, policy, funding, and strategy for the years ahead.

*No Child Left Behind*

In 1994, Improving America’s Schools Act was introduced. The focus of the act was to establish accountability standards for schools and hold schools responsible for results. Funding was provided to help disadvantaged children meet high standards through a varied and multipronged approach: prevention and intervention supports, professional development for teachers, technology
for education of all students, safe and drug free schools, promoting equity, addressing school
dropout, bilingual education, gifted and talented education, arts in education, and charter schools
(“Improving America’s School’s Act of 1994,” SEC. 2). These early attempts at school
improvement efforts while well-intentioned did not result in the improvements needed (Stedman,
1994).

Almost two decades following the Nation at Risk report, President George W. Bush
introduced “the cornerstone of his administration,” the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), which
was signed into law in January 2002 (U.S. Department of Education, 2003, p. 1). It was not until
2002, and the passing of the NCLB that resolute attempts at addressing inequalities in education
through mandating state assessments occurred. President Bush stated, “Too many of our neediest
While discussed and considered in previous reform attempts the NCLB law focused on outcomes
and held schools to yearly improvement and achievement goals (Dee, 2012; Dee & Jacob, 2011;
Vinovskis, 2009).

The law required yearly testing of students in Grades 3 through 8. Schools were required to
make adequate yearly progress (AYP) or face sanctions (Herman et al., 2008). The NCLB was a
success in many aspects, measurable gains were noted for all students but especially for those
needing the most (Dee & Jacob, 2011). The NCLB, at the time, was described as “the greatest
achievement” of the U.S. Department of Education and marked a significant change in the role the
department played in reform initiatives and leadership (Owens & Valesky, 2007, p. 24).

However, the NCLB did not result in success and fell short of meeting the robust, yet
elusive goal of ensuring all students in America’s schools were proficient by 2014. The NCLB
accountability system, AYP, established targets that required 100% proficiency in literacy and
mathematics by 2014. Schools adopted improvement efforts and focused on gap halving strategies concentrated on reducing the achievement gap. Hickey (2011) shared the AYP measurement became the most problematic part of NCLB formula, as success was unobtainable. Ultimately, states were allowed to apply for waivers to opt out of the requirements of NCLB such as the 100% AYP goal (McEachin & Polikoff, 2012; Weiss & May, 2012).

The U.S. Department of Education allowed states to create their own accountability systems. However, increasing numbers of schools fell into needing improvement categories and studies of the impact of state-designed accountability systems showed little evidence of academic improvement (AIR, 2010; Le Floch et al., 2014).

**Race to the Top**

Despite significant effort and the enactment of NCLB, the number of schools in need of reform had tripled due to the shifting and increasing accountability improvement targets era (Hamilton, Heilig, & Pazey, 2014). In an attempt to resolve this increasing number of schools the federal government established the Race to the Top Initiative. President Obama signed into law the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 to stimulate the economy and invest in education. ARRA emphasized several areas for improvement: high-quality teaching and learning, empowering families and educators, rigorous curriculum and assessment standards-college and career ready and effective and specialized interventions to improve conditions and achievement in the lowest performing schools in the United States (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). All 50 States, the District of Columbia, and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico were eligible to apply for competitive grants focused on innovative reform efforts (U.S. Department of Education, 2010).

States with previous success implementing improvement strategies received credit in the weighted scoring for a share of the $4.35 billion competitive grant. Race to the Top focused on
increasing student achievement, decreasing achievement gaps, increasing graduation rates, and examples of reform and innovation (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). Race to the Top grants were awarded to states to support improvements in their lowest achieving schools. The results once again were disappointing; however, new innovative practices were discovered through successful turnaround efforts in some schools across the country (Lane, Unger, & Rhim, 2013).

**School Improvement Grants**

The School Improvement Grants (SIG) program provided a new blueprint for a reenergized federal role in the Elementary and the Secondary Act (ESEA; Duncan, 2010). The SIG funding increased from $500 million to $3 billion to support schools which qualified for Title I funds, where at least 40% of the student body was identified low income (Trujillo & Renee, 2012). Schools that received SIG funds were among the persistently lowest performing schools in their state and are eligible to receive Title 1 monies.

The SIG program launched with the goal of substantially increasing the achievement of students in the nation’s lowest performing schools. School Improvement Grants were authorized through Title I, section 1003(g) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965. The ARRA of 2009 injected $3 billion into the federal SIG program. States that agreed to implement one of the four intervention models were eligible for funding. The U.S. Department of Education specified four turnaround models for those qualifying for Race to the Top and SIG funding. Local education agencies could choose from one of the four prescribed turnaround models as defined by the U.S. Department of Education (2010).

These models, structures, and policies provided guidance to the school turnaround effort. B. C. Hassel (2014) shared policy to offer a structure to enact for change: “Policy is what gives states
the leverage to change what happens in districts and schools so that the millions of students in low-achieving schools can have a better future” (p. 6).

**The Four Turnaround Models**

As school districts across the nation continued to struggle to meet the increasing targets from the No Child Left Behind era, the U.S. Department of Education shifted its emphasis to turning around the nation's lowest performing schools. In 2009, the federal government overhauled the Title I SIG program, increased its value to $3.5 billion, and identified four turnaround options from which chronically failing schools would have to choose from to get a share of the funding. Prior to this, school improvement grant money from the federal government had come with little to no direction as to how the monies should be used or how turnaround could be accomplished. The following models were proposed and all states, districts, and schools receiving federal monies were obligated to adopt one of these turnaround models as a part of their comprehensive turnaround plan.

**School Closure.** The school is closed and the students are transferred to other higher performing schools in the district. This model was designed for schools considered beyond repair and was the most dramatic option.

**Restart.** The school is closed and reopened under the direction of a charter management organization or an education management organization. Restart assumes private operators would provide a greater opportunity for improvement than the local public school or district.

**Turnaround.** The principal and at least half of the staff are replaced. In this model, schools must adopt a new governance structure, provide professional development, implement a research-based, aligned instructional program, extend learning and teacher planning time, improve community engagement, and provide operatingautonomies. Turnaround created new conditions for school success; leadership, instructional staff, programs, and training.
**Transformation.** The transformation model is one in which the district replaces the principal but is not required to replace the staff. Student growth may be included in teacher evaluations, and financial incentives may be given to high performing staff. Transformation provided new leadership to lead changes without removing the core instructional team at the school.

According to Hurlburt, Therriault, and Le Floch (2012), despite a strong commitment and robust effort, the SIG program was unable to impact the dramatic improvements the program intended. A recent report for the U.S. Department of Education indicated the SIG program had no impact on student achievement and the aggressive investment in the improvement of the schools in the bottom 5% of the nation failed to meet their ambitious goals (Dragoset et al., 2017). Questions remain about the effectiveness of the four turnaround models, however, a call for a better understanding of the conditions needed for school turnaround success and research that considers a new lens was sounded.

**Every Student Succeeds Act**

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was reauthorized and signed into law on December 10, 2015. ESSA reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and replaced NCLB. ESSA reduces the influence and authority of the federal government and provides states with more flexibility. ESSA presents several changes from NCLB: eliminates AYP and Highly Qualified Teacher (HQT), eliminates the requirement for teacher/principal evaluation systems and/or linking results to student test scores, eliminates prescribed interventions in identified schools, and eliminates SIG funds and requirements.

In addition, ESSA reduces the authority of the U.S. Secretary of Education and puts states and school districts in control through new flexibilities and opportunities. ESSA allows state leaders the authority to design their own school ratings and decide how to determine the lowest performing
5% of Title I schools; innovate with assessment options, such as using computer-adaptive assessments, choose the ACT or SAT instead of a separate state high school assessment and decide how to evaluate teachers. Furthermore, Saultz, Fusarelli, and McEachin (2017) contended this major shift, less federal influence and more state control in educational policy, may be in play over the next decade or possibly longer. Additionally, Van Roekel (2013) emphatically declared it was time for the United States to get school improvement right as many schools continue to fail and are overburdened by bureaucratic, political processes.

**School Turnaround Overview**

There are numerous definitions and conceptual understandings of what constitutes school turnaround. The limited yet growing body of research has provided insight into what works best in turnaround schools but has been unable to pinpoint the one best way to reform and turnaround underperforming schools. According to Balgobin and Pandit (2001), very little is known about how to actually turn around a school. Yet, many scholars have written extensively about turnaround, and Kutash, Gorin, Nico, Rahmatullah, and Tallant (2010) described the differences in the literature in the definitions of turnaround and explained the term refers to two specific improvement initiatives. The multiple understandings of turnaround have caused confusion and uncertainty among scholars and educators alike.

Turnaround may mean the U.S. Department of Education’s model for intervention or the second, more common definition, a rapid and quick improvement effort at a low-performing school. The school turnaround model as described in NCLB requires the replacement of the school principal and 50% of the school staff (Kowal & Hassel, 2005). On the other hand, Calkins et al. (2007) described turnaround as “dramatic and comprehensive intervention in a low performing
school that a) produces significant gains in achievement within two years; and b) readies the school for the long process of transformation into a high-performance organization” (p. 6).

The challenges in high-need turnaround schools remain exhaustive as the majority of schools that received SIG funding were both high poverty and high minority (AIR, 2010). Additionally, 53% of SIG schools were located in urban settings whereas only 26% of the nation’s schools are located in urban settings. Additionally, Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Leppesca, and Easton (2010) emphasized turnaround is most difficult to accomplish in neglected and stressed communities. Finally, Birman, Aladjem, and Orland (2010) reported 262 of 1,098 schools significantly increased academic achievement in 1 year, but only 12 of 262 schools sustained that improvement over time.

School turnaround has become a highly emphasized model of improvement in federal education policy, yet not all research indicates this has been a successful initiative. Steiner and Barrett (2012) indicated only 30% of turnarounds in education succeed and Peck and Reitzug (2013) found little correlation between school turnaround and sustainable success. Additionally, a recent report by Dragoset et al. (2017) for the U.S. Department of Education found the most recent SIG initiative did not positively impact student achievement. Yet, others share stories of success as reported by (de la Torre et al., 2013; Lane et al., 2014; Lane et al., 2016; Vince & Dunn, 2015). It is clear we must understand why some schools improve and others do not to address the greatest enduring injustice of our time.

Massachusetts’ Success Story

Massachusetts has been considered a leader in educational reform in the United States since 1993 and has also had exceptional turnaround success. According to Lombardo (2015), 80% of the United States made turnaround a priority and 50% of those states found actually turning around
schools to be a most difficult enterprise. However, Massachusetts stands as a model for turnaround excellence. Stein, Therriaut, Kistner, Auchsetter, and Melchoir (2016), in a report prepared for AIR, chronicled and described the success Massachusetts had in turning around its most chronically underperforming schools. Of the 40 schools identified by the state’s accountability system as Level 4 in 2010 and 2011 (among the lowest performing, least improving schools desperately in need of turnaround), 22 had exited turnaround status by the fall of 2015; a stark difference in outcomes as compared to national results (Massachusetts Department of Education, 2016). Lane et al. (2014) studied the conditions in Level 4 schools and conducted a 3-year analysis of common practices and conditions in those “achievement gain” schools, and compared them with schools that remained in turnaround and failed to exit Level 4 status to better understand the effective practices found in the achievement gain schools. As a result, Lane et al. (2014) found the achievement gain schools were characterized by four key turnaround practices.

These key practices ultimately became what Massachusetts refers to as their state-driven foundational, anchor structures for turnaround and school improvement. The four turnaround practices are leadership and professional collaboration; employment of intentional practices to improve instruction; tailored supports for all students; and a commitment to maintaining a safe and supportive atmosphere for all students and a collegial environment for educators (see Figure 4).

![Turnaround Practices Diagram](Figure 4. Massachusetts turnaround practices (Lane et al., 2014).)
The turnaround practices serve as a basis for and are considered critical, foundational conditions essential to the school turnaround success in Massachusetts. These structures, practices, and processes were universally observed in successful turnaround schools, and provide guidance but are not intended to provide a prescriptive approach to improving underperforming schools (Lane et al., 2013; Lane et al., 2014; Lane et al., 2016). Each school and district have unique and individual demands and trials however, these practices provide guidance, structures, methods, and ideas for leadership, professional development, teamwork, culture building, and customized solutions and intervention strategies that have been successfully applied with favorable outcomes in achievement gain turnaround schools in Massachusetts.

**Elements of Successful School Turnarounds**

Using the Massachusetts Turnaround Practices as an iterative guidepost for what works in school turnaround; numerous bodies of research were analyzed and revealed several common themes, elements, and factors that influence successful school turnaround. Reyes and Garcia (2014) reported, while empirical literature on what works well in school turnaround is scarce, there are common themes or indicators that may lead to success in school turnaround. As such, a comprehensive analysis and synthesis of multiple research studies on school turnaround as a model or a theory for dramatic improvement in schools was conducted to identify essential elements of turnaround. As reported by Aladjm et al. (2010); Brinson, Kowal, and Hassal (2008); Calkins et al. (2007); Fullan (2006); Herman et al. (2008); Kowal and Abdleidinger (2011); Lane et al. (2014, 2016); Leithwood et al. (2007); Peck and Reitzug (2013); Ratner and Neill (2010); Reyes and Garcia (2014); Rhim (2012); Roy and Kochan (2012), Trujillo and Renee (2012), Villavicencio and Grayman (2012), the following are considered essential to school turnaround success: (a) strong leadership that can orchestrate and drive change; (b) instructional focus areas as a top priority; (c)
highly effective teachers who possess skills and abilities that impact achievement; (d) a strong
culture focused on teamwork, learning, and adaptation; (e) assessment and accountability
structures; (f) ongoing professional learning that builds and develops staff skills; and (g) quality,
trusting relationships among staff, parents, and community members.

These elements are frequently embedded in school turnaround literature and an example of
these elements can be found in Massachusetts’ early turnaround foundational documents. In 2010,
Massachusetts published the state’s earliest strategy and approach to turnaround and established the
Essential Conditions for School Effectiveness (Massachusetts Department of Education, 2012). A
study in 2010 by the Regional Education Laboratory-Northeast and the Islands (2010) validated the
positive influence these factors had on school success. These essential conditions for school
effectiveness confirmed the need for comprehensive and systematic improvement and became the
blueprint for nationwide school turnaround efforts. Today Massachusetts’ approach has evolved and
currently identifies the Massachusetts Turnaround Practices as the framework for school turnaround
and improvement (Lane et al., 2014).

**The Influence of Leadership in Turnaround**

The impact of effective leadership and the principal’s actions, aptitudes, competencies, and
skills are widely discussed in turnaround literature. Leadership is complex and has been studied by
many. Burns (1978) stated, “Leadership is one of the most observed, yet least understood,
phenomena on earth” (p. 3). Furthermore, Hargreaves, Boyle, and Harris (2014) purported effective
organizations are led by leaders who inspire, encourage, and motivate; thus, the success of
turnaround schools depends on a strong, effective, committed and disciplined leader. The Wallace
Foundation (2013) highlighted the specific and critical impact principals have on every facet of
turnaround work and infer leadership may not only be about competencies and skills but rather mindsets and beliefs.

According to Duke (2015), turnaround principals are unique and must possess “special talents” and possess “never give up” attitudes and desire to make a difference (p. 4). Additionally, Duke (2015) contended turnaround cannot exist outside of the principal as “in no case was the principal an ineffectual bystander” (p. 3). Furthermore, Bryk et al. (2010) supported this concept, suggested leadership is a critical and essential lever for school improvement, and referred to the principal as a critical aspect to the success of a school. In fact, the role of the turnaround principal is so important it is suggested school turnaround cannot happen without an effective principal. Most importantly, the influence of the principal is profound and is strongest in schools that need the most or have the greatest challenges and “great schools do not exist apart from great leaders” (NAASP & NAESP, 2013, p. 1).

Reitzug and Hewitt (2017) shared being a principal of a turnaround school is different than being a principal of a non-turnaround school, as the turnaround principal must overcome stasis in which the school has been in for multiple years (p. 493). Additionally, Copeland and Neeley (2013) and Dodman (2014) claimed the turnaround principal is a complex role in which specific competencies are essential for success. Johnson (2007) identified two types of turnaround principals; those who are “transformers” with a positive, can-do attitude and conversely the unsuccessful ones who were identified as “copers” who were overwhelmed and unable to make instruction a priority. Clearly, the very important role of the principal in the turnaround literature is well documented and significantly important to the turnaround process (B. C. Hassel et al., 2007; Kotter, 1996; Lane et al., 2014; Lane et al., 2016; Miller, Brown, & Hopson, 2011; Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003).
Many researchers have tried to capture the essential conditions that must exist to ensure turnaround success. Dodman (2014) described the actions and priorities of successful turnaround principals and stated turnaround principals must “establish a sense of urgency” (p. 58) and have unique abilities to develop staff’s capacity to use data, collaborate, improve practice, establish trust, and build community.

Moreover, Lane et al. (2016) emphasized turnaround principals must adopt specific strategies that promote and advance the development of these practices in their schools. However, the key role of the principal in all school decision making is critically important. According to Fullan (2019), there is a need for nuanced leaders during a change initiative. Nuanced leaders are those who see the big picture and have an “instinct for orchestration” are humble, problem solvers focused on group success, and “courageous and committed for the betterment of humanity” (p. 12).

May and Sanders (2013) provided a deep explanation of the contextual conditions created by effective leaders and identified specific indicators to predict which turnaround schools would be more successful. Ultimately, while many facets of school turnaround are important, it was established schools that emphasize and promote a positive, collaborative climate, culture, and open leadership style were more likely to experience turnaround success. These factors highlight leadership as a significant and possibly nonnegotiable, critical component to the success of the organization. Moreover, defining the role of principal as the primary broker for collaboration, community building and outreach were found across multiple sources as effective common competencies of successful turnaround leaders (Aladjm et al., 2010; Calkins et al., 2007; Duke, 2015; Fullan, 2006; Herman et al., 2008; Kowal & Abdleidinger, 2011; Lane et al., 2014, 2016; Leithwood et al., 2007; Marzano, Walters, & McNulty, 2005; Miller et al., 2011; Owens & Valesky, 2007).
Influential Leadership

Duke (2015) identified influential leadership as the most important role of the school turnaround principal. The influence of the principal is significant and all schoolwide efforts must be directed toward developing several key areas: create a sense of urgency, develop an environment of trust and order, increase teacher capacity, skills, pedagogy, and focus upon data and lowest achieving students. The complex role of the turnaround principal requires these leaders to have exceptional and unique abilities to foster and promote organizational learning.

According to Northouse (2018), leadership is a transactional event that occurs between the leaders and followers. Turnaround principals are seen as key influencers and team builders. Duke (2015) asserted the “power of groups” are critical aspects of turnaround as “when group members share the perception change is needed then the chances for change is “greatly increased” (p. 17). According to Steiner, Hassel, and Hassel (2008), teams are critical to turnaround work, as problems cannot be solved by the principal alone. Furthermore, Vroom and Jago (2007) contended all leaders must have followers, and staff must commit to a vision of improvement and growth. Turnaround success depends on more than the leader; effective turnaround principals are those able to establish buy-in among staff.

Distributed leadership and empowering others is an important concept of turnaround school leadership. According to Leithwood et al. (2007), successful turnaround efforts depend on the efforts of all, each member plays an important role. Duke (2015) posited turnaround work cannot be done by a “heroic principal” alone and teams are powerful levers for change. Furthermore, Lambert (2003) explained leading is the responsibility of all, and a commitment to the goals of the organization is essential to the continued growth of the school. Additionally, Duffy and Chance
(2007) espoused the most successful turnaround principals are those who can bring about comprehensive change by empowering other staff to take on leadership roles.

According to Leithwood and Riehl (2003), providing guidance, direction, and exercising influence are the core responsibilities of the turnaround leader. Most importantly, Spillane, Halverson, and Diamond (2001) reported the turnaround leader must sell a vision and build an expectation of collaboration among staff to become involved in contributing to the process of turnaround. Thus, it is clear turnaround leadership is a multifaceted phenomenon and leaders must possess varied and specialized skills to effectively lead a school turnaround effort.

The principal is a key influencer and critical part of the school turnaround process and having just the right balance is what Fullan (2019) referred to in his book *Nuance*. Fullan purported turnaround principals today will need to reject quick fixes and temporary and or superficial change and take on complexity with clarity and depth. A competent leader is critical to turnaround success, but McNeal and Oxholom (2009) espoused a high-quality leader is not enough; turnaround without high-quality instructional staff will not be realized.

**Effective Instruction**

The characteristics of effective instruction are well developed and have been extensively researched. In fact, excellent instruction may be the single most important element of school turnaround success. As important as leadership is to turnaround, the impact of a great teacher may be even more important. Papa and English (2011) reported, “The key to turning around a low-performing school is to focus on instruction” (p. 13). A breadth of literature is available on the topic of instruction and many identify clarity, high expectations, and rigor combined with a positive learning environment, nurtured by trust, fairness, as essential facets of good instruction (Adams & Singh, 1998; Hattie & Timperley, 2007; McBer, 2000; Palardy & Rumberger, 2008; Sternberg,
Effective instruction is arguably one of the most important elements of school turnaround efforts.

The influence of a high-quality teacher is profound and heavily influences student achievement and school improvement efforts. Palardy and Rumenberger (2008) reported, “A string of highly effective or ineffective teachers will have an enormous impact on a child’s learning trajectory during the course of Grades K-12” (p. 127). According to Grant, Stronge, and Ward, (2011), effective teaching has been researched for decades and access to high-quality teaching correlates to higher achievement and conversely poor instruction yields low achievement. Furthermore, Stronge (2007) explained granting students opportunities to consistent high-quality instruction and effective teachers is the single most important factor of student success.

Hanushek and Rivken (2004) asserted if an at-risk student had a proficient teacher for 5 consecutive years, it would be enough to overcome the achievement gap and performance would be equal to that of a more advantaged peer. Additionally, Maxfield and Flumerfelt (2009) contended school improvement ultimately lies with the teacher, despite the attention given to the leader. Additionally, Fullan and Quinn (2016) and Kowal, Hassel, and Hassel (2009) explained schools must focus on instruction as a priority and teachers must develop specialized instructional moves and skills to build instructional capacity in an effort to help students progress and ultimately eliminate the achievement gap.

Finding and hiring qualified teachers poses a challenge for turnaround principals as competencies and necessary expertise are hard to identify and explain, thus choosing staff is difficult as teaching is a most complex act. Bryk et al. (2015) referenced Malcolm Gladwell’s article in *The New Yorker*, where it was shared it is nearly impossible to identify the best teaching candidates, and “choosing teachers was akin to selecting the next great NFL quarterback” (p. 88)
often an uncertain process. What constitutes effective instruction is difficult to describe and many scholars have provided some explanation but the question remains, is effective instruction a thing or is it what a person knows and does?

Understanding what constitutes quality is critically important for leaders of turnaround schools to understand. As reported by Sanders and River (1996), there is no other investment in school improvement as powerful as providing exemplary, high-quality instruction. The discussion regarding the impact of quality teaching is not new, yet it remains a most critical issue in contemporary education. Many have tried to capture the essence of what constitutes excellent instruction. Two large meta-analyses (Hattie, 2009; Marzano, 2003) were conducted on identifying high leverage instructional practices. Marzano (2003) shared nine instructional strategies most likely to improve student achievement across all content areas and across all grade levels. These strategies are: (a) identifying similarities and differences; (b) summarizing and notetaking; (c) reinforcing effort and providing recognition; (d) homework and practice; (e) nonlinguistic representations; (f) cooperative learning; (g) setting objectives and providing feedback; (h) generating and testing hypothesis; and (i) questions, cues, and organizers.

Furthermore, Hattie (2009) studied over 800 meta-analyses and attributed those with an effect size of 0.4 as strong influencers of growth. The following are some notable top-ranked practices: (a) cognitive task analysis = .87, (b) giving feedback = .75, (c) teacher-student relationship = .72, and (d) student expectations = 1.44. Additionally, Rosenshine (2012) reviewed and synthesized findings from three different research projects and identified the following 10 high leverage keys to good instruction: (a) review material, (b) present learning in steps with practice, (c) question throughout the lesson, (d) modeling, (e) guided practice, (f) check for understanding, (g) teach for mastery, (h) scaffold information, (i) independent practice, and (j) recursive reviews.
With little overlap between the many studies, it is difficult to determine what must occur in high performing classrooms. Understanding effective teaching practices, those who would promote deeper student understanding and learning is an essential factor to school turnaround work. However, identifying which methods would be best does not always translate into success or high-quality instruction. Hannan, Russell, Takahashi, and Park (2015) described it is not enough for schools to identify excellent practices—schools should employ implementation science procedures as they employ new practices to establish the high-quality pedagogy and measure for impact. Many initiatives fail, not because the initiatives are faulty but because schools often do not ensure correct implementation practices and processes to ensure success. Schools often become initiative fatigued due to the many starts, stops, and changes. Yatsko, Lake, Bowen, and Cooley-Nelson (2015) discussed and identified three common ways schools respond school turnaround needs: (a) kitchen sink – or the piling on of unconnected initiatives; (b) scattershot – random interventions that are not connected to specific school needs; and (c) laser focus – strategic interventions tied to data and specific school-related problems and issues (p. 39). Bryk et al. (2015) described these well-intentioned efforts often result in overwhelmed schools, lacking focus as “every few years a new set of reforms is acted on top of previous changes and those on top of more distal changes” (p. 63).

Moreover, Danielson (1996) may provide a more suitable and appropriate manner at which to identify teacher competencies. This approach deviates from lists of effective practices and instead proposes a continuum of teaching competencies to help describe elements of effective instruction. Danielson developed a framework for teaching that identifies and is organized around specific aspects of a teacher’s responsibilities empirical studies have validated as those that promote student learning. Danielson shared teaching is an extremely complex activity, and this framework illustrates the various areas of competence in which teachers must develop expertise and skill.
Danielson divided the complex activity of teaching into 22 components clustered into four domains of teaching responsibility: (a) planning and preparation, (b) the classroom environment, (c) instruction, and (d) professional responsibilities.

These multiple teaching practices and moves, while helpful do not describe the instructional focus necessary to develop the tacit knowledge of high-quality instruction. Bryk et al. (2015) described this perplexity and claimed the recent “knowledge explosion” in education has created an endless and growing number of lists and ideas of strategies and practices schools face when deciding how to address specific problems. Knowledge continues to grow at a rapid pace, ripe with reform ideas that present challenges for educators as knowing what works best is hard to identify (p. 63).

Research has provided guidance and has offered a breadth of ideas and practices that help to define effective instruction, but that elusive concept has remained speculative and unclear. The multiple studies share comprehensive lists and ideas, with little overlap and schools looking to change often overwhelm teachers with multiple initiatives. The crux of the issue does not lie with the research but specifically with what school do with this information. Bryk et al. (2015) posited:

Each new hot new idea seemed well intentioned but often impervious to evidence. The culminating effect of various reforms, layered one on top of the other, was often less than helpful. It seemed clear that if educational reformers continued to do what they had always done, education would continue get more of the same great variability in outcomes that often further disadvantages the most disadvantaged in our society. (Preface)

However, Lane et al. (2016) identified this difficult to describe phenomena of exemplary practice. The Massachusetts Department of Education’s framework for turnaround practices was provided to inform leaders and teachers in schools about what high-quality practices in schools
should be. Their breakthrough field guide provided “educators with examples of school-specific practices, in authentic school contexts, which have contributed to turnaround success, so that those engaged in turnaround can apply these practices in their own schools and accelerate turnaround efforts” (Lane et al., 2016, p. 1).

Lane et al. (2013), Lane et al. (2014), and Lane et al. (2016) spent years studying the Massachusetts’ schools involved in turnaround. Their pivotal work has allowed practitioners to gain insight into what worked, best practices, and perceptions and perspectives of both principals and staff involved in the turnaround work. These bodies of research chronicled and analyzed one of the nation’s most successful turnaround effort to share expertise and hopefully build to scale the success Massachusetts has had. The three publications: Emerging and Sustaining Practices for School Turnaround; Turnaround Practices in Action: A Three Year Analysis of Schools and District Practices, Systems and Use of Resources Contributing to the Successful Turnaround Efforts in Massachusetts Level 4 Schools; 2016 Massachusetts Turnaround Practices Field Guide (Lane et al., 2013; Lane et al., 2014; Lane et al., 2016) investigated the turnaround practices as a framework for improvement, identified what works in turnaround, and ultimately shared what schools look like when they are implementing well.

**Schools Must Embrace Data to Improve**

Many scholars, including Fullan (2007), Lane et al. (2013), and Ratner and Neill (2010), contended, to have success, it is critical all instructional decisions are strategic and related to the analysis of student data. According to Bryk et al. (2015), focusing on a small number of “impactful concepts” used “reliably to guide action” are imperative to school improvement and reform. Additionally, Corcoran et al. (2014) reported accountability measures must occur for quality
instruction to prevail. Bambrick-Santoyo (2012) contended data-driven emphasis is a “super lever” for struggling schools.

High-quality teaching tasks, practices, and strategies must be partnered with a belief system that emphasizes a growth mindset and a position all students are capable of learning. Furthermore, The Center for School Turnaround (2018), posited successful turnarounds place an emphasis on goal setting and review of data. Successful turnaround schools “develop goals informed by assessments of recent performance trends, and identify practices aimed at realizing a clearly articulated turnaround vision of significantly improved student learning” (Center for School Turnaround, 2018, p. 8). However, Duke (2015) warned looking at data is not enough as educators are constantly gathering data and making inferences that may be prone to misinterpretation. Turnaround schools must draw on multiple sources of data before drawing conclusions about student achievement to eliminate the guesswork and focus on what matters.

Knowing data is not enough. Turnaround schools that use data to adjust and “customize” interventions and tailor teaching to student-specific need to perform better than those that do not (Lane et al., 2013; Lane et al., 2014; Lane et al., 2016). Furthermore, Duke (2015) espoused turnaround schools must involve students in instruction that moves beyond “fluency and procedural knowledge” (p. 93) so students acquire the necessary skills to succeed in the long term. Benchmark data set with high expectations help schools understand the need, create conditions for improvement, and measure progress along the way.

**Need for a Quality Curriculum**

Coburn, Hill, and Spillane (2016) asserted, as important as teacher practice is to school improvement, a high-quality, rigorous, and challenging curriculum serves an equal and urgent role in school improvement. A new driver of this rigorous effort, the Common Core State Standards
(CCSS) and College and Career Standards have presented schools with robust and rigorous learning standards that promise to develop and promote higher order thinking skills and scholarship. Bryk et al. (2015) shared the new “Common Core State Standards substantially raise the bar as to what learning entails” (p. 18). These ambitious learning standards present challenging and complex curriculum shifts and increased performance expectations for all students. An aligned and rigorous curriculum combined with effective instruction are essential elements in school reform. Moreover, Darling-Hammond and Friedlaender (2008) wrote schools that involve students in “intellectual, stimulating and personalized education” (p.15). increase student performance and achievement. Schools with effective teachers that incorporate an aligned, rigorous curriculum create ideal conditions for improvement and success. Duke (2015) asserted, “Sustained progress depends on moving beyond reading and mathematics to engage students in problem-solving and other forms of applied learning” (p. 181). Additionally, the author warns, in the early days of turnaround, schools often focus on reading and mathematics and this will “launch the turnaround process . . . but not keep it afloat” (Duke, 2015, p. 180).

A Culture of High Expectations for All

It is critical that turnaround leaders develop and nurture the right conditions for success. Bryk et al. (2015) posited an improvement culture “puts learning to improve at its center and challenges everyone” (p. 179). Additionally, a culture of high expectations that promote positive beliefs and values about student abilities are certain and definitive, nonnegotiable conditions for schools focused on improvement. As such, Duke (2015) discussed the concept of “reculturing” which is an important first step of the turnaround process. Replacing a toxic work environment takes time but focusing mission, commitment, continuous improvement, collective accountability, collaboration, coherence, and caring are more likely to support gains in student achievement and
create positive work conditions. Furthermore, May and Sanders (2013) posited fostering a productive and positive climate is the most influential condition of transformative turnaround success.

Marzano (2007) and van den Bergh, Denessen, Hornstra, Voeten, and Holland (2010) noted when high expectations do not exist for all students, school performance declines. Learning experiences in high-poverty, low-performing schools are impacted by teacher beliefs about students’ abilities and these dispositions influence overall teaching efficacy. Van den Bergh et al. (2010) warned “ethnic minority students are at risk for school failure and show a heightened susceptibility to negative teacher expectancy effects” (p. 497). Negative perspectives held by teachers have dire consequences. Donohoo (2017) described this negative impact as the “Golem Effect” and explained this is directly related to the self-efficacy of teachers, lower self-efficacy has dire outcomes for students; as the lower the self-efficacy, they lower the achievement (p. 20). These urgent challenges and factors must be addressed in all turnaround schools so to provide equity, excellence, and access for all.

Agunloye (2011) asserted teacher beliefs, knowledge, and skill can lead to low performance. The following factors negatively impact overall school performance: (a) low expectations for self and students, (b) lack of motivation, (c) limited knowledge of effective teaching and learning practices, (d) low morale and frustration, (e) lack of interest in professional growth, (f) fatigue and rapid burnout, (g) poor relationship with students, (h) poor classroom management, and (i) teacher retention problems (Agunloye, 2011, p. 78).

The belief systems that staff possess may positively or negatively influence student achievement. These issues must be identified, remedied and addressed to build and maintain a high
achieving school culture. Several researchers have explored ways that schools can shift and change educator mindsets to influence change and ensure success for all learners.

Dweck (2006) shared the concept of mindset and the belief that basic abilities can be developed through engagement, dedication and hard work. There are two types of mindsets: a fixed mindset is the belief that intelligence is inherited, innate and there is nothing that can be done to change it and a growth mindset is the position that intelligence, skills and aptitude can be built over time. “It is not always the people who start out the smartest who end the smartest” (Dweck, 2006, p. 5). Positive belief systems have successfully contributed to high improving turnaround schools. Turnaround school must have a clear sense of urgency and a belief that all students are capable and it is the responsibility of the school to work collaboratively to ensure the success of all. Lane et al. (2016) expressed how a sense of urgency is needed to initiate change:

A strong sense of urgency to change the lives of students in the school and are willing to “do whatever it takes” to improve. The principal has a mantra of high expectations and no excuses and communicates this clearly and consistently to staff, ensuring that all teachers believe that they can directly impact their students’ achievement regardless of the students’ circumstances. (p. 3)

The belief intentional practices, attitudes, and perceptions about students’ abilities can bring forward change to students’ abilities and intelligence and their capacity for learning cannot be overstated or more important. Furthermore, Hess (2009) contended contemporary leaders face obstacles when attempting to confront negative biases and positions about student abilities; “breakthrough leadership is possible in schools if reform-minded educators boldly step out of defeating mindsets into the turbulence of change” (p. 29). Fostering a culture of high expectations is an essential element of turnaround success. Lane et al. (2016) expressed turnaround schools must
adopt “improvement mindsets” (p. 22) to effectively and boldly elevate achievement in turnaround schools.

**Professional Learning**

The work environment has an impact upon the success or failure of the turnaround effort. Those schools in which teamwork and collaboration were emphasized demonstrated more success. Lane et al. (2016) suggested leaders must “establish teacher agency, ownership, and urgency: Start building the community immediately” (p. 11). According to Spillane et al. (2001), a positive culture of collaboration, empowerment, trust, and respect assists in the development of a strong professional culture.

Additionally, Cucchiara, Rooney, and Robertson-Kraft (2015) studied 13 turnaround schools, while all report intense, challenging, and difficult work, the schools that shared a common vision, were aligned in purposeful, intentional plans and credible leadership fared better and reported more satisfying working conditions. Brambrick-Santoyo (2012) shared there are five essential steps to take in the development of culture and climate in a turnaround school: (a) set the vision; (b) hire the best (right) people; (c) interact intentionally about culture building; (d) monitor frequently for any negativity; and (e) build, maintain, and communicate.

Providing the framework and structure for collaboration and working in teams has proven to be a strong lever for success in turnaround schools. Goddard and Goddard (2001) identified teacher collective efficacy as an outcome of professional learning structures that are designed to promote opportunities for engagement and ultimately influence intrinsic motivation. Professional learning structures can lead to cultural shifts through the adoption of specific practices. As stated in Senge et al. (2012), team learning positively supports innovation and change as schools’ grapple with the complexity of school-wide challenges and issues. However, as Hargreaves and Dawe (1990) and
Datnow (2011) reported, authentic interactions among team members lead to continued and enduring efficacy. It is essential schools embrace authentic and organic structures for collaboration as contrived settings focused upon compliance and fidelity tend rarely lead to change. Moreover, Lane et al. (2016) asserted:

It is also important that school leaders develop multiple teaming structures—a matrix of grade-level teams, vertical teams, and student support teams—and support teachers using these structures effectively. Developing a system of high-functioning teaming structures and communication channels often accelerates problem diagnosis; the development, implementation, and testing of new practices; and the sharing and spread of practices that work. (p. 6)

Collegiality and dedication among staff help to maintain an intellectual emphasis and focus on the common goals of the school (Collins, 2001; Noddings, 2014). In fact, a positive, collegial school culture is so important Maxwell, Huggins, and Schewrich (2010) asserted reform is not possible without it. Relationships marked by mutual respect between leaders and staff help to build trusting and productive work conditions, even in the most challenging of schools. The value of emphasizing social capital among school work groups improves and supports the adaptive nature of school turnaround work by effecting and promoting team bonding, building affective attitudes and ultimately permitting the hard work of reform to take place (Fullan & Quinn, 2016; Maxwell et al., 2010). However, these learning systems and structures must be well developed, monitored and structured. Fullan and Quinn (2016) warned, “Groups are powerful . . . but can be powerfully wrong” (p. 13). It is essential that professional learning communities are focused, monitored, disciplined, specific, operate using norms and tackle a deep learning objective.
**Parent and Community Involvement**

Multiple studies and research support and chronicle the positive impact of parent, family, and community engagement on student achievement (Duke, 2015; Henderson, 2010; Mapp, 2003, 2012; McAlister, Mintrop, Chong, & Renée, 2012; Olivos, 2012). According to Fishel and Ramirez (2005), parent involvement is the participation of caregivers which may include parents, grandparents, stepparents, foster parents etc. that promote and advocate for their child’s academic and overall wellbeing. Scholars agree, family and community engagement positively impact student school performance and learning outcomes. A longitudinal study of Chicago Public Schools identified parent-teacher relationships as one of the five “essential supports” common to schools that showed improvement in student performance and achievement (Sebring, Allensworth, Bryk, Easton, & Luppescu, 2006). According to Duke (2015), “parents play critical and vital roles . . . and that parent and community involvement is a key to sustained school success but schools often pay great interest at the beginning of the turnaround process and over time involvement may wane” (p. 182).

Additionally, Payne and Kaba (2001) asserted there is a clear connection between establishing trust and school performance, relational trust between teachers, students and parents is critical to student success, performance, and overall achievement. Additionally, family engagement can support school improvement when parents engage in decision making through frequent interaction and participation with school staff. Donohoo (2017) argued these interactions are best when teacher-parent relationships are efficacious and positive. According to Hattie (2009), parent engagement with an effect size of 4.9 is a strong lever for school improvement and that parent and community involvement is an integral component of school success. Clearly research points to a direct correlation between engagement and achievement.
Parent engagement in high-need schools in low-income neighborhoods is often more difficult to accomplish in low-performing schools. Turnaround schools typically adopt specific and intentional plans to increase parent and family engagement (Lane et al., 2016). Frequent and deliberate attempts to include parents and community members has been a successful strategy used in successful turnaround schools. Effective engagement must be emphasized and an awareness that success depends upon the establishment of relational trust between families and school staff must exist in school reform efforts (Payne & Kaba, 2001).

There are many obstacles that turnaround schools face as they work to expand parent-school relations. In some cases, teachers’ beliefs and practices about home-school relationships in low-income communities may interfere with the successful accomplishment of school engagement initiatives (Payne & Kaba, 2001). According to Olivos (2012), teachers in high-need schools may have deficit beliefs or assumptions regarding the value the parent places on education. This negative attitude and disposition may negatively interfere with the development of much needed relationships between schools and families.

Schools must work collaboratively with community partners and families as this partnership is an essential component of school reform. McNeal and Oxholm (2009) posited once the community is included and becomes aware of the school’s issues and problems; positive change begins to take shape as the community begins to tackle challenges and mutually work with the school to address problems. School turnaround efforts must focus as much on family and community engagement as it does upon other academic and instructional initiatives. Continuing to seek ways to engage with families and community members must be a critical component of any and all turnaround efforts.
School Turnaround Success Summary

There is simply no one best way to improve an underperforming school. There is no series or sequence of events, magical or immediate steps to take or a formulaic, linear model to follow to ensure turnaround success. The process of school turnaround involves a variety of strategies, has many forms, and the interplay among the unique and different contexts of each school plays a significant role in the ultimate success of the turnaround effort. However, transforming a low-performing school into one of high student achievement can be accomplished through a committed, dedicated effort, focused on student achievement that involves using a variety of strategies and initiatives. Moreover, there are no good schools without great principals and low-performing schools in crisis cannot build systems, improve conditions and develop capacity alone; they need the help of others, staff, and the district leadership. District leadership can be a valuable asset when they focus their attention on establishing high performing teams and networks (Barbour et al., 2010). In all, groups and teams working together increase the chance for turnaround success. As such, networks of educators working together to solve our nation’s most urgent issue may offer a new lens, perspective and a potential solution to the long plaguing issue of turning around our nation’s most needy schools.

Networks in School Turnaround

Turning around a single school requires tremendous effort, resources, and strategy however many large urban school districts, cities and states face the need to improve many schools all at once and all at the same time. Many of these schools face similar, complex challenges and usually work separately despite the universal similarities. The elusive goal of turning around our nation’s underperforming schools has frustrated schools, districts, policymakers, and researchers for decades and we have yet to find the best ways to innovate, create and plan for success. Much has been
written about this most urgent issue and the overall results of recent turnaround efforts can be best described as disappointing as national policies and school-based initiatives have not been enough to close the achievement gap between high and low socioeconomic status (SES) schools (Ainscow, Muijs, & West, 2006).

While there is no question that many have been hard at work creating change, it is quite clear that despite great effort, we have not come very far. Hargreaves (2003) posited, decades of numerous improvement efforts have accomplished perfunctory changes that have not realized improvement or increases in student performance and achievement. Furthermore, Bryk et al. (2015) espoused change often does not lead to improvement in our nation’s public schools. Invariably, outcomes fall far short of expectations, enthusiasm wanes, and the field moves onto the next idea without ever really understanding why the last one failed. Such is the pattern of change in public education: implement fast, learn slow, and burn good will as you go. Additionally, Fullan and Quinn (2016) shared today’s educators are overwhelmed, tired, and overloaded. However, all is not lost as the initiative has created new ideas, knowledge and a better understanding of how schools improve. The good news is much has been learned about what works in school turnaround and professional collaboration and teamwork rank high as influential structures and practices that are reflective of successful turnaround success (Lane et al., 2014; Lane et al., 2016).

According to Albert, Church, Nemati, White, and Prashant (2002), networks are defined as groups of individuals or organizations that share and create information about common problems through exchanges that are “voluntarily entered into” (p. 12). Networks promise to leverage school turnaround efforts across groups and may serve as a compelling design for the future of school turnaround success. Leskiw-Janvary, Oakes, and Waler (2013) recently published a report with key
features and practices of strong learning networks. The report identified the following six key factors of effective learning networks:

- Collaborative inquiry – collective learning
- Leadership – all members share roles and responsibilities around leadership
- Relationships – trusting dynamics
- Instructional focus – creating a process of change with a focus on new thinking and ideas
- Reflection – is a focused effort intentionally embedded to better integrate and understand
- Accountability – learning from the network creates changes and improvements.

Daly and Finnegan (2011) wrote this shift in thinking and design for school turnaround through the use of networks, focuses more on advancing connections among network members and engaging the entire school, system and network in the process of problem-solving instead of focusing on the “singular approaches of the past.” Furthermore, many scholars have written about networks and espouse networks may serve key roles in school turnaround efforts as they work to solve complex problems schools face and have been unable to solve on their own without the support of broader resources and participants (Bryk et al., 2015; Kim & Gonzales-Black, 2018; Peurach, 2016; Smith & Wohlstetter, 2001; Vander Ark & Dobyns, 2018).

Networks may also promote innovation as information exchanges across the network allows for an influx of ideas to permeate across schools and give individual sites working in isolation the access to ideas and knowledge that they otherwise would not have access to (Bryk et al., 2015; Kerr, Aiston, White, Holland, & Grayson, 2003; Peurach, 2016; Vander Ark & Dobyns, 2018). Additionally, J. Chapman and Aspin (2003) offered networks can provide an opportunity for shared
and dispersed leadership and responsibility, this can be capacity building-produce new knowledge, mutual learnings and move attention away from the microscopic preoccupation with micro-level change at individual schools and spread innovation across all levels. As school, districts and states work to improve outcomes in our nation’s schools, networks have emerged as a way to support collaboration, innovation and as a means to build improvements to scale due to their ability to deliver supports more effectively than traditional central office models have been able to (Kelleher, 2014).

However, empirical research on the impact of educational networks is scant and limited. Black (2008) shared the research on networks is inconclusive however the impression is that there are “potential benefits that networks can provide” (p. 99). Muijs, West, and Ainscow (2010) also purported little correlation has been found between school turnaround improvement and the use of networks as a driver for change. However, as researchers are just beginning to understand the influence of networks on school performance and achievement, new information has emerged and more is known about the ways networks operate, the most effective practices and the critical inter-relational roles of participants needed for success.

The Center for Public Research and Leadership (2018) at Columbia University reviewed the existing research on improvement networks in education and generally found networks positively affected distributed leadership structures and overall staff performance. Few studies measure the relationship between network participation and student achievement. However, the report did identify several relevant and essential considerations for proponents of networked learning communities to consider. The report concluded critical to the success of any network was the level of relational trust among the group. Psychological safety promoted better engagement and eventually improved outcomes of the group. Additionally, time was also identified as a crucial
factor as participants need time to learn, apply, adapt, and engage in network efforts directed toward continuous improvement.

**Collective Intelligence**

Research has proven group and team productivity and intelligence adds up to something much more than just the sum of its parts. The structure of networks encourages groups and teams to interact regularly, problem solve, and create. Several have written and researched the best conditions for group work and have worked to describe the phenomena of group work (Becerra-Fernandez & Sabherwal, 2008; Fiol, 1994; Hurley & Brown, 2010; Kofman & Senge, 1993). Additionally, Pujolas (2004) and Suarez (2010) elaborated further and delineated the difference between a group and a team. Groups are people working together, but teams have cooperative interaction, relational trust, united goals, equality, and friendship, which may be described as an affective bond.

Duhigg (2016) reported on Google’s Project Aristotle and the company’s effort to better understand the concept of what constitutes an effective team. Google spent 2 years studying 180 teams, conducted 200+ interviews and analyzed over 250 team attributes to identify ways effective teams operate. Prior to this study, Google assumed that having the best and brightest on the team constituted the perfect team. The team code-named the study project Aristotle as a tribute to the philosopher’s famous quote: “The whole is greater than the sum of its parts.” The study revealed five key characteristics to effective teams: (a) dependability – team members complete tasks of time; (b) structure and clarity – effective teams have clear goals and well-defined roles in the group; (c) meaning – the work has personal significance to each member; (d) impact – the group believes their work is relevant and positively impacts the greater good and the most important; and (e)
psychological safety – safe to take risks, voice opinions, ask judgment-free questions, a culture of trust.

A study on “collective intelligence” or the abilities that emerge from cooperative collaboration was conducted by Carnegie Mellon, MIT and Union College. Wooley, Chabris, Pentaland, Hashmi, and Malone (2010) indicated the existence of “collective intelligence” of a group extends far beyond the collective, individual intelligence of each group member. Characteristics such as social sensitivity, equal distribution of responsibility and not having one person dominate the group were found to be critical to the performance of groups. Additionally, the sex of participants influenced the success of groups as female groups performed better as social sensitivity appeared to strongly influence overall group performance (Wooley et al., 2010).

According to Levy (1997), collective intelligence is a form of universally distributed intelligence, constantly enhanced coordinated in real time, and resulting in the effective mobilization of skills. Surowiecki (2004) argued the case for why many together are smarter and better than the few. He cites the global and remarkable response to the severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) outbreak in Guangdong province in Southern China in 2002. The global response by multiple countries, labs and researchers may as a model for efficiency and success, as identifying this mysterious virus was an enormous feat accomplished in remarkable time, by combined labs all over the world. The identification of SARS was accomplished by not one single person, laboratory or country but by multiple teams working collectively and independently around the world. These stories, studies and research point to the relevance and the potential for networks as effective ways to accelerate meaningful improvement across schools in the United States.
**Continuous Learning**

The aim of networks is to provide the structure, systems, and supports necessary for innovation and change to take place. As such, Bryk et al. (2015), C. Chapman (2008), and Cannata, Redding, Brown, Joshi, and Rutledge (2017) discussed the process of continuous improvement and its role in networked learning. Bryk et al. (2015) explained systemic improvement in schools, using networks that focus on continuous improvement, allows the field to learn quickly and implement well rather than to implement fast and learn slowly. Many scholars promote the use of networks as a way to identify, adapt, and build to scale the innovation, ideas developed and promising interventions developed in our nation’s schools. Networks focused on continuous improvement are known as improvement networks (Cannata et al., 2017; Kerr et al., 2003; Peurach & Glazer, 2012).

These improvement networks have similar and common characteristics: they are “intentionally formed,” structured, and focused on addressing significant and difficult to solve problems (Russell et al., 2017). Through their interactions, improvement networks create knowledge, develop strategies, spread ideas, solutions, and assist members learn how to improve quickly (Bryk et al., 2015; Hannan et al., 2015). Furthermore, Bessant, Caffyn, Gilbert, Harding, and Webb (1994) defined continuous improvement as “an organization-wide process of focused and sustained incremental innovation” (p. 17). Continuous improvement may result in small incremental improvement over time or possibly breakthrough improvement all at once and rests within the idea improvement is never ending.

Management consultant and statistician, William Edwards Deming (1993), described continuous improvement as a constant effort to increase effectiveness and develop improvements as an ongoing systematic method to achieve organizational goals. Deming developed the Plan, Do, Study, Act (PDSA) cycle, which consists of four stages: Plan (establish goals and how to achieve
them), Do (implement the plan), Study (build new knowledge based on collected measures of how the plan works), and Act (create and implement a revised strategy based on new plans impelled by new knowledge) in the 1950s following on his work on the economy of post-war Japan. Thus, systematic implementation, and evaluation of turnaround efforts that focus on continuous improvement would benefit from network structures that support not only innovation and problem-solving but also interim checks that measure impact and improvement.

**Networks’ Impact on Student Achievement**

S. Katz et al. (2008) and Peurach, Lenhoff, and Glazer (2016) explored how knowledge is created and transferred in networked learning systems, yet little is known about how networks influence student achievement. There are few studies that support student achievement as a sole, comprehensive outcome from networks. This may be argued as the structure is somewhat new to education and there have not been enough studies done to directly correlate student achievement with network participation.

S. Katz et al. (2008) explored the way networks function and studied the Network of Performance Based Schools (NPBS) in British Columbia, Canada. The study looked at whether networks encouraged innovation and the development of new ideas, learning, transferring knowledge, change thinking and practice, and ultimately whether they increased student achievement. The authors found four key features have strong associations with success: (a) purpose and focus, (b) collaborative inquiry, (c) leadership, and (d) making the tacit explicit.

The Centre for the Use of Research and Evidence in Education (CUREE, 2005) conducted a thorough review of 14 studies that showed a positive impact on student achievement. The impact on students was mainly found in the achievement of targeted groups such as at-risk and special education students. C. Chapman and Mujis (2014) additionally explored the relationship between
different types of school-to-school collaboration and student achievement. The study compared a sample of schools that engaged in inter-school collaboration to a matched sample of schools that did not. The authors identified a positive relationship between school-to-school collaboration and improved student outcomes.

**The Hub or Intermediary**

Education improvement networks often identify an organizer or intermediary as the “hub” of a network. Honig (2001) defined an intermediary as “operating independently between two parties to provide value beyond what the parties alone would be able to develop or amass by themselves” (p. 67). This central and important role provides a most important function as coordination, facilitation, and organization are required for the network to function effectively (Bryk et al., 2015; Peurach et al., 2016; Russell et al., 2017). The “hub” intermediaries often provide support by coaching members on how to use improvement methods, organize learning, facilitate knowledge sharing, cultivating the network community, analyzing data, and “measuring the network” or checking in on the well-being and health of the network (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2018). These intermediaries or “hub” may be the school districts, university affiliates, educational consultants, or community-based organizations. Networks vary by a network’s context, structure, and content. There are several types: (a) the “spiderweb” structure occurs when schools in the network interact with each other and with the intermediary, (b) the “hub and spoke,” and finally, (c) the “cascade” structure, where schools interact with the intermediary or hub and then those schools interact with the other schools in the network (Wohlstetter, Houston, & Buck, 2015).

Pitcher, Bhatt, Cirks, and Gurke (2016) investigated essential systems needed for network success and found schools need support to maintain a focus on core problems. Additionally,
network leaders must develop systems, structures, and practices to support improvement, as well as to allow opportunities for cross-school learning. The authors highlighted four key elements: (a) fostering professional learning, (b) applying research-based data to practice, (c) providing coaching and capacity building, and (d) distributed leadership and high-functioning teams. These essential structures provide the opportunity for ideal conditions for networked learning to occur, evolve, and create. It is clear the role of the “hub” is critical to the success of the network as the organization, focus, function, and the systems involved in the network includes manipulating and monitoring many facets, people, and priorities.

**School Turnaround Improvement Networks**

The concept of school improvement and turnaround networks has begun to gain momentum and interest from individuals, schools, districts, researchers, and policymakers as a potential way to promote school turnaround and improvement efforts. Kelleher (2014) shared networks are in their infancy in urban schools but offer a better model of support than traditional central office models. Kim and Gonzales-Black (2018) shared most successful schools collaborate across schools within their district and identified networks as a way to change and grow. Furthermore, networks may be intentionally developed or naturally occurring through informal and episodic interactions and connections in the workplace (Peurach, 2016).

Bryk et al. (2015) explained networks may operate similarly to the theory of the *known unknowns and the unknown unknowns*, the famous concept proposed by Donald Rumsfeld, George W. Bush’s Secretary of Defense, claimed we do not know what we do not know we do not know (Profita, 2006). As schools, look for new ways to accelerate achievement many have looked to the potentially, powerful organizational structures of networks to foster and leverage improvements in schools and possibly develop to date unknown improvement strategies and initiatives. As networks
engage in such processes, they may achieve higher order goals by helping schools develop the capacity to engage in continuous improvement in an ongoing way. Networks develop the infrastructure necessary by providing teaming structures which in turn, distribute leadership across the teams to create and spread new knowledge and the development of necessary conditions needed for continuous improvement to occur (Kerr et al., 2003).

The cooperative structure and collaborative arrangement of networks appeals to the ways contemporary schools operate as they provide a dynamic manner in which to hatch innovation and muster the spirit of collective improvement, as groups work both within and across schools. Yet, cooperation and collaboration are not enough. According to S. Katz, Earl, and Jaafar (2009), networks are far more than a place to create connections and is “an important beginning but an insufficient end” (p. 44). Additionally, Rincon-Gallardo (2016) shared, when working to improve student achievement, it is not enough to just have a network but what matters is what they do, how they function. However, these structures allow for the give and take between participants that include and allow for innovation, the transfer and sharing of ideas, resources and knowledge that otherwise does not exist in formal school structures (Russell et al., 2017).

Another proponent of school networks, Harris and Chrispeels (2006), addressed the insular nature of teaching and shared networks provide opportunities for the dissemination of both “good process” and “good practice,” and assist in overcoming the traditional isolation of schools. Improvement networks hold promise for turning around our nation’s schools but many potential challenges exist among networks, and they should not be viewed as a “silver bullet.” There are many possible ways networks may fail, such as; educators will just “go through the motions” of continuous improvement, particularly when individuals are not in agreement with network improvement strategies or have goals that do not align with what is believed to be best for
individual’s schools. Moreover, Peurach, Penuel, and Russell (2018) referred to the concept called *ritualized rationality*, which occurs when goals are not clear and the work is perceived as another mandate, one more thing and set of directives that have little impact on the needs of the educators in the network.

A comprehensive Columbia University, Center for Public Research and Leadership (2018) study synthesized major literature, research, and current knowledge known today about how networks best operate. There are a number of key factors stand out as important ingredients of network success, including several relating to the role of intermediaries:

- Networks need clarity organization, and stability
- All network participants must be committed to the network aims
- Networks need to establish clear goals and identify important problems of practice
- Network success relies upon the ability of the network to rests develop trust and psychological safety so members can be assured a network is a safe place for the exchange of ideas so others can benefit from each other’s expertise.
- Effective continuous improvement implementation requires the use of data, test, trial, and experimentation
- Networks benefit from team diversity with varied skill sets and experiences, which together assist to solve complex problems.

The study also reported the common challenges and pitfall networks may encounter and negatively impact effectiveness and outcomes:

- Heavy top-down bureaucratic rules or high-stakes accountability may obstruct the network’s ability to function authentically and organically
• Networks not afforded enough time to work on change may lead to resistance, distrust, and a feeling of a lack of competence throughout the network.

• Using data may not be well understood by participants and may not drive changes in schools.

• A lack of understanding or agreement of the root cause analysis outcomes may divide the work between particular schools.

• Finally, common methods for evaluating the impact of interventions may not be effective and measuring the influence of treatment methods may not fully explain the efforts in the network. Members may give up on potential ideas for improvement before they have a chance to work.

Clearly networks are not and should not be perceived as the elusive remedy for school turnaround; however, imagine taking all we know about what works in school turnaround, introducing it to networked learning, and possibly discovering the “known unknown” and ultimately unlocking the challenge of national school reform and improvement (Profita, 2006).

Conclusion

Across the United States, schools, school districts, policymakers and the federal government have turned their focus on the most chronically underperforming schools by investing money, resources, policy, and strategies into an effort to dramatically improve students’ achievement and performance. This focus has adopted the idea of “turnaround schools” as a way to mitigate these challenges and overcome the equity issue that exists among our most challenged and marginalized students. This inequity has been at the heart of school reform for the past four decades. The federal government has poured billions of dollars into reform without long-term, sustainable success (Dragoset et al., 2017).
Failing schools have been described as a national emergency and crisis, as a recipient of a quality education has more opportunity and potential benefits for a prosperous and enduring future. Statistically, students attending low-performing, high-need turnaround schools tend to be; a majority of students of color, from low-income homes and achieving less than their more affluent peers. High-need students living in poverty are more likely to be enrolled in low-performing schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). Today the results remain the same, as 40% of schools stuck at the bottom stay there, only 8% of students in poverty attend schools that outperform and “beat the odds” (DeArmond et al., 2015). Poverty is a key contributor to low school achievement and a double-digit achievement gap exists between students who receive free or reduced lunch and those who do not.

Heckman (2006) shared tangible societal outcomes of quality education; higher salaries, decreased number of people arrested or incarcerated, decreased need for welfare and fewer out of wedlock births. Increasing intellectual, academic and critical thinking skills also positively impacts economic growth and stability in countries, states and cities. According to Hanushek and Woessmann (2012), providing an “education for all” and leveraging increasing and higher performance has economic benefits and positive impact to communities as well as individuals. Lack of success in school has dire consequences. People are more likely to live in poverty without a high school diploma and earn significantly less over a lifetime (McLendon, Jones, & Rosin 2011). Clearly, “differences in education explain differences in earning” (Checci, 2006, p. 167).

The success of underperforming, turnaround schools is critical to our students’ lifetime opportunities and our nations’ success and future prosperity. Research has yet to find the one best way to turnaround a school but may have identified multiple best practices and theories that may inform the future work in turnaround. Numerous research studies have begun to highlight ways
schools have adapted, innovated and designed methods, strategies, and structures that have produced gains in chronically underperforming, turnaround schools (Aladjem et al., 2010; Calkins et al., 2007; Duke, 2015; Fullan, 2006; Herman et al., 2008; Kowal & Abdleidinger, 2011; Lane et al., 2016; Leithwood et al., 2007; Peck & Reitzug, 2013). Furthermore, Zavadsky (2013) emphasized building these systems that share best practices and effective strategies to scale across all schools struggling to improve is essential.

This growing body of research is critical as educators and policymakers consider the next steps in school reform, school improvement, and school turnaround policy. With the passing of ESSA, the federal government has abandoned the mandated models of school reform and returned the obligation and responsibility to each state. In addition, this law continues to promise to provide equity and effort as our nation works to improve schools and provide our most vulnerable and disadvantaged with the quality experiences and resources they greatly deserve. “With this bill, we reaffirm that fundamentally American ideal—that every child, regardless of race, income, background, the zip code where they live, deserves the chance to make of their lives what they will” (U.S. Department of Education, 2015).

The true, authentic stories of successful turnaround schools offer much to the conversation of future reform. Our search for a “silver bullet” will never be realized as schools are unique and complex. Multiple variables must be considered when initiating a turnaround effort. We know more today than ever before about how people and schools learn and organize through the study of successful turnaround case studies. These meaningful, shared experiences will collectively have a profound impact and promise to inform future work of school turnaround.
Chapter III: Methodology

The purpose of this qualitative, case study was to examine and better understand the impact a multischool turnaround network had on school turnaround and improvement efforts in a large, urban, school district. This study specifically focused on the roles of both principals and central office administrators, the impact of adopted practices and the experience of members of the Turnaround Network. The study investigated both, what factors, structures, strategies and practices were perceived to have positively influenced the network and additionally what challenges and disadvantages existed within the network. Additional information is needed to improve turnaround outcomes across the nation and the evidence gathered will provide insight into how the interplay between collaboration, sharing of ideas and working on common problems led to multisite, cross school improvements and turnaround in this school district. This qualitative study provided an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of a networked learning initiative.

Richards (2005) described qualitative data as something that is complex and that cannot be expressed in numbers, but rather consists of descriptions and narratives that are context bound. There is limited knowledge available regarding the impact of networks and a better understanding of how networks may impact school turnaround efforts is needed. Most recently researchers and school leaders have moved closer to understanding this phenomenon of school turnaround success by learning from successful school turnaround stories, examination of practice, and investigating new organizational structures such as networks in schools across our nation (de la Torre et al., 2013; Lane et al., 2014; Vince & Dunn, 2015).

Benbasat, Goldstein, and Mead (1987) explained there has been much debate on which research methodology is best—positivism (truth must be scientifically verified) or interpretivism (subjective interpretation of reality)—and shared there is not one single research method better than
another. A case study approach best suited this study to determine whether school turnaround can be accelerated and promoted through the use of a network can be best understood by investigating the facets and “inner workings” of the integrated dynamic of the continuous learning cycles of the network by gaining insight into the perspective of participants (Stone, 1978; Yin, 1984). Moreover, Benbasat et al. (1987) presented and provided a comprehensive case study definition:

A case study examines a phenomenon in its natural setting, employing multiple methods of data collection to gather information from one or a few entities (people, groups, or organizations). The boundaries of the phenomenon are not clearly evident at the onset of the research and no experimental control or manipulation is used. (p. 370)

This case study examined the Turnaround Network, and provided a complex, comprehensive research approach that allowed an in-depth exploration of the turnaround network phenomenon to gain insight into and learn from the experiences of network members and leaders. Understanding and gaining insight into specific facets of the network activities such as; problem-solving, knowledge creation, innovation, leadership and collaboration about school turnaround efforts among members of the network will be most valuable.

The Burke-Litwin performance change model (Burke & Litwin, 2012) provided the framework for the study and the Massachusetts Turnaround Practices (Lane et al., 2014) and effective elements of school turnaround and networked learning will provide the iterative focus and background for this study.

The Burke-Litwin performance and change model (Burke & Litwin, 2012) provides a framework for an organization to understand the different drivers of change and performance. The Burke-Litwin model argues the 12 dimensions are all interrelated and a change in one ultimately will affect all of the others. The Burke-Litwin performance and change model also ranks the
elements in order of importance from environmental factors as the greatest influence of change followed by mission, strategy, leadership, and culture. Changes outside the organization are likely to have influence on other high-leverage dimensions that are considered transformational elements of the model and ultimately powerfully impact the organization. The model is based on knowing and understanding how factors that may influence change can be understood and using that information to support decision making and improvement.

These levers and perspectives will help to explain and describe the experience and impact of a multischool network focused on turnaround efforts. The organizational learning processes, environmental factors, leadership, mission, strategy and culture of the turnaround network were evaluated to better understand the experience of participants, outcomes of the network and the specific roles and leadership of central office administrators who were network leaders.

Research Questions

As our nation’s underperforming schools continue to grapple with ways to improve; it is imperative policymakers and educators alike understand the factors that influence success in school turnaround. The purpose of this qualitative, case study was to examine and better understand the impact a multischool turnaround network had on school turnaround and improvement efforts in a large, urban, school district. This study specifically focused on the roles of both principals and central office administrators, the impact of adopted practices and the experience of members of the Turnaround Network. The study investigated both, what factors, structures, strategies and practices were perceived to have positively influenced the network and additionally what challenges and disadvantages existed within the network.
The central questions of the study include:

1. How did the network support central office leaders and principals in their turnaround work?

2. What were the various conditions, practices, and factors that contributed to the success of the network?

3. What were the perceptions of both principal and central office members about the advantages, disadvantages or challenges of network membership and participation?

Yin (2014) stated the case study method is most appropriate when the research question begins with: “How?” or “Why?” However, a research question beginning with a “what?” is also accurate and appropriate when a relativist / subjective approach is used. It is with this underpinning that research questions were designed to better understand the phenomena of school turnaround.

**Case Study Overview**

Case study research, according to Flyvbjerg (2011), has been around for as long as history has been recorded as “much that we know about the empirical world has been produced by case study research” (p. 302). Case studies are defined in various ways and one standard definition does not exist. Yet, Gerring (2005) referred to case study as “an intensive study of a single unit for the purpose of understanding a larger class of (similar) units” (p. 342). Simons (2009) defined a case study as follows:

Case study is an in-depth exploration from multiple perspectives of the complexity and uniqueness of a particular project, policy, institution, program or system in real life. “A case study examines a phenomenon in its natural setting, employing multiple methods of data collection to gather information from one or a few entities (people, groups, or
organizations). The boundaries of the phenomenon are not clearly evident at the onset of the research and no experimental control or manipulation is used. (p. 21)

Yin (1994) asserted case studies are an empirical inquiry that investigate a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context and argues case study research allows for a holistic investigation of “real life events such as; organizational processes, neighborhood changes, international relations and the maturation of industries” (p. 13). Therefore, the case study approach is best applied when contextual conditions, elements and facets of an event are to be studied as is the case in this investigation and study. Additionally, a case study method is also appropriate when a contemporary phenomenon is being studied and has many actors, elements and entangled components to assess, which again correlates to the aim of this study. Case studies have been used successfully across a variety of disciplines and have been particularly useful to research with practice based problems (Galliers & Land, 1997). Finally, Montealegre and Keil (1995) shared in-depth case studies provide a comprehensive approach that analyzes complexities of historical and social phenomena.

Rationale for the Qualitative Case Study Design

Yin (2014) shared a case study investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident. This case will explore a contemporary issue as research has yet to uncover what works in schools undertaking transformation and turnaround. This Turnaround Network project is most interesting as outcomes from the first year of the network indicate most of the underperforming, least improving schools in the district made significant progress and improved enough in only 1 year to avoid being identified as needing state intervention and assistance. Massachusetts’ schools that had accountability percentages of 5 or lower were identified for state
and district turnaround. Only one of the 14 schools participating in the network was identified as needing intervention and most performed well enough to avoid that designation despite being perilously close the prior year (Massachusetts Department of Education, 2018).

In Table 1 and Table 2, Two-Year Accountability outcomes of network schools’ performance are reported. In 2017, the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) was rewritten and changed to assess student skills and knowledge that better represent the Common Core Standards. As such, Table 1 shows early accountability performance of the Turnaround Network schools based on their performance with the new assessment and the network participation.

Table 1

Two-Year Accountability Percentage Progress, 2017-2018 and 2018-2019

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Schools</th>
<th>Slightly Improved</th>
<th>Significantly Improved</th>
<th>Remained the Same</th>
<th>Decreased Slightly</th>
<th>Decreased Significantly</th>
<th>Length of Time in Network (years)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Massachusetts Department of Education (2019)
Table 2

Percentage of Network Schools Meeting Targets From 2017-2019

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Percent Meeting Target SY 2018-2019</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>37% Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>38% Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>65% Substantial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>61% Substantial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>51% Substantial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>65% Substantial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>62% Substantial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>64% Substantial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>70% Substantial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>68% Substantial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>66% Substantial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>55% Substantial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>50% Substantial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>67% Substantial</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Massachusetts Department of Education, 2019)

Site and Participants

The research setting is a multisite and includes 14 schools in the school district that have been labeled as needing improvement or have demonstrated slow growth over the past several years (Massachusetts Department of Education, 2019). The schools involved in the study serve high percentages of English learners (EL), students with disabilities (SWD), high needs, and economically disadvantaged populations. Table 3 provides an overview of the schools and specific student demographics.

The turnaround improvement network includes principals from 14 schools and district office administrators of a large urban school district in Massachusetts. Table 4 provides the time of principal’s tenure and experience working as a school principal. In Year 2 of the Turnaround Network the district partnered with hub coordinators and consultants from the Institute for Strategic Leadership and Learning (INSTLL) as part of the network initiative. This network was selected for this case study because of the promising results after the first year of implementation. Purposeful
sampling was used as the sampling strategy for this case study; “purposeful sampling... is a strategy in which particular settings, persons, or activities are selected deliberately in order to provide information that can’t be gotten as well from other choices” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 88). Members of the network include 19 turnaround leaders, both principals and central office managers.

Table 3

Special Populations of Participating Turnaround Network Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Schools</th>
<th>ELs</th>
<th>Students With Disabilities</th>
<th>High Needs</th>
<th>Economically Disadvantaged</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>36.5</td>
<td>23.8</td>
<td>89.7</td>
<td>76.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>51.7</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>95.9</td>
<td>79.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>62.0</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>91.0</td>
<td>70.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>41.4</td>
<td>21.2</td>
<td>93.3</td>
<td>76.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>51.7</td>
<td>23.8</td>
<td>96.2</td>
<td>77.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>45.4</td>
<td>21.3</td>
<td>94.1</td>
<td>75.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>46.9</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>93.5</td>
<td>76.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>52.9</td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td>94.7</td>
<td>76.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>40.7</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>89.7</td>
<td>71.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>45.4</td>
<td>20.1</td>
<td>94.8</td>
<td>78.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>46.0</td>
<td>21.5</td>
<td>90.1</td>
<td>68.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>35.2</td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>87.6</td>
<td>63.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>41.4</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>91.4</td>
<td>71.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>56.1</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>96.8</td>
<td>76.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Network</td>
<td>46.6</td>
<td>19.3</td>
<td>87.1</td>
<td>74.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District</td>
<td>31.7</td>
<td>20.9</td>
<td>80.1</td>
<td>59.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>18.4</td>
<td>48.7</td>
<td>31.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Massachusetts Department of Education (2019)

Table 4

Network Principals’ Years of Experience as a School Leader

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1-3 years</th>
<th>4-9 years</th>
<th>10-15 years</th>
<th>15-20 years</th>
<th>20+ years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total = 6</td>
<td>Total = 1</td>
<td>Total = 3</td>
<td>Total = 4</td>
<td>Total = 0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Members of the network were invited to participate in the study as they had firsthand knowledge and individual experience as members of the Turnaround Network. The Manager of Instruction and School Leadership, Manager of Curriculum and Professional Learning, Manager of Instructional Technology and Digital Learning, Manager of Special Education and the Director of English Language Learners were invited to participate in the study along with the 14 turnaround principals of the school district. These aforementioned members of the Turnaround Network will be able to provide various perspectives and share experiences about ways the network impacted their turnaround work. The semi-structured interview process allowed for an opportunity to collect open-ended data, explore participant thoughts, feelings and beliefs, and delve deeply into the inner workings on the phenomenon of the Turnaround Network to best serve the aims and goals of this study.

**Network Beginnings**

In 2017, the school district, facing many schools struggling to meet new and more robust accountability standards began a new endeavor and initiative. The Turnaround Network was designed to meet and address the magnitude and broad reaching needs associated with turning around underperforming schools in the district. Several schools were identified as potentially at risk for state designation of “needing intervention, or the lowest 5% of schools across the state” by the district (Massachusetts Department of Education, 2018). In Year 1, informal network meetings were held monthly and common problems of practice were identified, strategies were suggested, developed, and leveraged across network schools. School visits were conducted intermittently, between network meetings, to observe practice. Site visits were conducted by cross principal teams and central office administrators and ultimately the central office team provided constructive feedback for schools as they developed improvement plans. These reports were generated and
guided by the structure and “look fors” of the Massachusetts Turnaround Practices (Lane et al., 2014).

In Year 2, the district launched the Turnaround Network as a formal network. With the help of educational consultants from INSTLL a theory of action was developed. An artifact review articulated the network theory of action as such, “if professional learning structures (PLCs) were of high quality, then instruction in all classrooms would improve, and include the elements of high-quality instruction, which would then be readily observed across all networked schools and student achievement would increase.” A Google form was created to collect data and principals and other evaluators had common criteria for rating and ranking both PLCs and classroom observations. The data was generated monthly and discussion about high-quality structures, observation outcomes and other data was collected and reviewed collectively with all network members.

This fast and quick improvement trajectory of some of the network schools may be helpful and replicable in other schools and districts if better understood. The strategy of inquiry for this case study embraced qualitative research methods. Essential elements of qualitative research that provided a holistic account of this phenomenon was examined through a case study design. Research and interviews took place with network participants, both principals and central office administrators with the permission of the superintendent of the school district.

The lived experiences and perceptions of participants assisted in understanding the elements that led to network-wide improvement. Merriam’s (1998) pragmatist constructivist perspective shares thick descriptions are best accomplished “through meanings and understandings developed socially and experientially” (Harrison et al., 2017, p. 6). It is through this perspective this study will attempt to describe and understand the phenomena of a Turnaround Network in a large urban school system.
Data Collection

Case studies are typically referred to as qualitative inquiry and are oriented and serve exploratory, explanatory, interpretive and descriptive aims (Creswell, 2014; Merriam, 2009; Stake, 2002). Case studies depend upon the collection of varied data in a systematic and comprehensive manner. Exemplary case studies use field, record feelings, and document these using analytical notes. This researcher applied best practices and took “ancillary notes and marked key points of interest” (Seidman, 2006, p. 114) to accurately and authenticity capture the words of the participants.

Prior to collecting data, permission was sought from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Northeastern University to conduct the study. The main source of the data included semi-structured interview questions with principals and central office administrators involved in the Turnaround Network. Additional artifacts and qualitative documents such as: agendas of meetings, data collected by the network, INSTLL documents, observations during network rounds, internal formative student assessment data and Massachusetts Department of Education (DESE) documents were included in the data collection to measure and evaluate improvement and impact. Additionally, the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) results of all schools in the network was collected and analyzed. The 1993 Massachusetts Education Reform Law, state law M. G. L. Chapter 69, section 1I, mandates all students in the tested grades who are educated with Massachusetts public funds participate in MCAS; Massachusetts Department of Education (2018). Additionally, Eisenhardt (1989) shared, “Archives, interviews, questionnaires and observations are typical and usual data used in case study research” (p. 534).

The multiple methods used in this case study included individual interviews, analysis of documents, and observations, which provided a triangulation of data across the aforementioned
measures. Yin (2014) suggested adopting rigorous data collection methods and promotes categorizing qualitative data that can be used as quantitative data triangulation to circumvent errors. In addition, Yin (1984) identified data collection methods must include the following: (a) direct observation of activities and phenomena and their environment; (b) indirect observation or measurement of process related phenomena (i.e., surveys, questionnaires); (c) structured or unstructured interviews; and (d) documentation, such as written, printed, or electronic information about the case (p. 78).

Yin (2012) espoused research demands the seeking of rival explanations throughout the research process, and robust data collection provides that opportunity. Data collection should involve a deliberate and vigorous search for “discrepant evidence,” as if you were trying to establish the potency of the plausible rival rather than seeking to discredit it (M. Patton, 2002; Rosenbaum, 2002). This researcher remained neutral and open to all information that explained network progress that had not been expected or considered previously. Rubin and Rubin (2012) emphasized the need to listen intently and be open to and ready for the unexpected ways the conversation may develop. In-depth qualitative interviewing provides these opportunities so “researchers explore in detail the experiences, motives, and opinions of others and learn to see the world from perspectives other than their own” (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 3).

This researcher conducted a series of semi-structured interviews with members of the Turnaround Network, and each participant’s unique perspective and authentic experiences helped to describe and explain the participant’s point of view and assist in the process of sense-making and understanding the ways the Turnaround Network impacted the turnaround work undertaken in both the school and at the district level. Prepared open-ended questions were developed to investigate the factors, elements and strategies perceived to be valuable to the turnaround network. An interview
protocol was used to record ideas thoughts and generate follow up questions based on participant responses and to remain fixed on the explicit purpose of the interview (Creswell, 1998).

Additionally, an interview protocol was an important tool and served as a means to ensure the interviewer was prepared, asked the right questions, and was focused on the most important information from the interviews. The interview protocols helped to ensure the interviewer had a guide to assist the interviewer in remaining focused on the essential, key points addressed throughout the interview. The protocol reminded this researcher to relay important information to the interviewee, such as stating (or restating) the purpose of the interview, what will happen to the information obtained, and any confidentiality concerns. Additionally, Seidman (2006) recommended interviews range in length from 45-60 minutes in length. All interviews were recorded with permission, and all records, names, contact information, audiotapes, and information pertinent to these interviews and research were kept confidential and stored in a locked area.

Participants names, names of schools, and other identifying factors were identified by pseudonyms.

**Data Analysis**

Much importance must be placed on the processes of data analysis in qualitative research. Marshall and Rossman (1999) described data analysis as the process of bringing order, structure, and meaning to the raw data collected. This activity of making sense is often a messy, nonlinear process and is often described as the application of both deductive and inductive logic (Best & Khan, 2006). According to Creswell (2014), data analysis includes “preparing the data for analysis, conducting different analyses, moving deeper and deeper into understanding the data, representing the data, and making an interpretation of the larger meaning of the data” (p. 183). The semi-structured interview data from the network participants were first transcribed and then thoroughly analyzed and coded for common themes regarding perceptions and experiences related to network
performance, sharing ideas, knowledge sharing and collective or continuous learning based on the aims and goals of the network.

This researcher explored the dimensions outlined in the Burke-Litwin conceptual framework initially but was also be open to other emergent elements, concepts, and themes as they occur. As Drapeau (2002) shared, it is critical researchers are aware of their own subjectivity in qualitative research. According to C. Ratner (2002), “Subjectivity guides everything from the choice of topic that one studies, to formulating hypotheses, to selecting methodologies, and interpreting the data” (p. 1). In conducting this research, the researcher remained aware of personal biases that may have impacted objectivity.

During the reading of the transcripts, systems were put into place for the reading of transcripts, such as coding for different themes, notes, and use of organizational tools to collect emerging concepts and ideas. To protect the confidentiality of participants, pseudonyms were used for schools, districts, and participants. Baxter and Jack (2008) purported case study research requires researchers to collect and analyze data concurrently, “it is not one step and then the next” (p. 554). Making sense of data, according to Tuckman and Harper (2012), involves an inseparable relationship between data collection and data analysis. According to Miles and Huberman (1994) provided the following analytical “moves” for qualitative research:

- Giving codes to the initial set of materials obtained from observation, interviews and documents;
- Adding comments and reflections (memos);
- Identifying similar phrases, patterns, themes, relationships, sequences and differences;
- Developing a small set of generalizations
- Link the generalizations to constructs or theories (p. 9).
According to Seidman (2006), interviews must be recorded, transcribed, coded, and analyzed for common themes to identify trends and patterns. Codes are beneficial as they help the researcher arrange data in categories and a systematic order. Additionally, Grbich (2007) described the act of coding and posited codifying occurs when codes are applied and reapplied to qualitative data, “segregated, grouped, regrouped and relinked in order to consolidate meaning and explanation” (p. 21).

**Presentation of Findings**

Baxter and Jack (2008) espoused reporting the findings of a case study is a complex and challenging proposition, as “putting a complex phenomenon into a format that is easily understood by the reader is a daunting task” (p. 555). One of the practical difficulties of the analysis of case study evidence for research is the vast amount and variety of data collected, especially as “strategies and techniques for analysis of case study data are generally not well defined” (Yin, 1994, p. 102).

Providing a descriptive analysis that describes the purpose of the study, the aim of the study, how the information was gathered and organized into sections in the results component of the report was provided. In the results section, information regarding methods of investigation that included a rigorous description of the analysis and procedures followed by the findings interpretations and implications of the study subsequently followed. According to E. Patton and Applebaum (2003), “The ultimate goal of the case study is to uncover patterns, determine meanings, construct conclusions and build theory” (p. 67). As reported by Yin (2003), there are three general analytic strategies for analyzing case study evidence: relying on theoretical propositions; thinking about rival explanations; developing a case description. Miles and Huberman (1994) also recommended analytic manipulations of data through various methods such as: putting information in different arrays, creating matrix categories, data displays (flowcharts, graphics), and putting information in
chronological order. These manipulations and analytic strategy allow the researcher to tell the story, provide explanation and to explore a phenomenon considered in the case study.

Case study research should ultimately provide an in-depth, well-articulated description in clear and specific terms the findings and implications of the research. This orderly yet descriptive approach provides readers with insight. In this case, this researcher told the story of the experience and impact a turnaround improvement network had on school improvement and turnaround in respective network schools and additionally to better understand the phenomena of networked learning to inform and support district turnaround efforts.

Trustworthiness

Measures must be taken to ensure research is reliable, credible, valid and trustworthy. Researchers are bound to principles that ensure ethical, integrity and be self-aware of potential limitations, biases or predisposed vulnerabilities. As stated in Babbie (2010), “observer subjectivity” and reliability are of concern when a single researcher is the source of interpreted data and information in a study due to the impact of the researcher’s close association with the subject. Additionally, the validity or the extent at which requirements of scientific research methods have been followed during the process of conducting research are critical to the authenticity of the research process. Oliver (2010) shared validity to be a mandatory requirement for all of studies. According to Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2007), there are different forms of research validity and describes research validity as criterion-related validity, construct validity, internal validity, external validity, concurrent validity, and face validity. It is critical to understand, although threats to research reliability and validity can never be totally eliminated, researchers need to find ways to minimize this situation and avoid potential pitfalls.
This researcher confronted many possible conflicts conducting research in this study. First, as being the Manager of Elementary Education for my school district some potential contrary bias could interfere with the validity of the research process. It was critical to not allow conflict and bias to interfere with the process and the outcome of the research. To avoid these potential barriers, it was important to articulate and convey this bias prior to the study. Creswell (2009) wrote, “Self-reflection creates an open and honest narrative that will resonate well with readers” (p. 192). Additionally, this researcher also has led other successful turnaround effort in previous roles and this experience may also provide some bias toward how this study was interpreted and reported. Background and experience must also be disclosed and well understood to provide a balanced and unbiased position to the findings of the study.

This researcher has also worked closely with many participants of the network; all were assured all information and insights provided and shared are strictly confidential. Due to the researcher’s role as supervisor, all participants were guaranteed anything disclosed would be protected and would not be a threat to their standing in the organization, as researchers are bound by privacy rules and research principles. Finally, this researcher ensured facts from the study were authentically and accurately presented in the findings by remaining aware “subjectivity guides everything from the choice of topic that one studies, to formulating hypotheses, to selecting methodologies, and interpreting the data” (C. Ratner, 2002, p. 1).

Conclusion

The purpose of this case study was to examine and better understand the impact a multischool turnaround network had on school turnaround and improvement efforts in a large, urban, school district. This study specifically focused on the roles of both principals and central office administrators, the impact of adopted practices and the experience of members of the
turnaround network. The study investigated what factors, structures, strategies, and practices were perceived to have positively influenced the network and what challenges and disadvantages existed within the network. Fourteen schools were identified as the lowest performing, least improving in the school district and in 2 years of the network experiment, most of the schools performed well enough not to be considered not needing urgent state intervention. A more thorough understanding of this phenomena may assist other school districts facing a multiple school turnaround needs. Much was learned from investigating the intricacies, elements and components of this specific turnaround network project.
Chapter IV: Research Findings

This chapter provides a description of the research results of a case study, which examined the experiences of principals and central office managers of a large urban school district involved in a large, multischool turnaround network. This purpose of this study was to examine and better understand the impact a multischool turnaround network had on school turnaround and improvement efforts in a large, urban school district. This study specifically focused on the roles of both principals and central office administrators, the impact of adopted practices and the experience of members of the turnaround network. The study investigated both, what factors, structures, strategies and practices were perceived to have positively influenced the network and additionally what challenges and disadvantages existed within the network. School turnaround is a term the network uses to refer to schools that must significantly improve student outcomes over a relatively short period of time. The participants in this study provided rich, detailed, first-person accounts of their experience in the network.

The overarching investigation for this study asked what can be learned from the development of a multischool, central office, principal leadership network focused on school turnaround? Specifically, the study sought to answer the following questions:

1. How did the network support central office leaders and principals in their turnaround work?
2. What were the various conditions, practices, and factors that contributed to the success of the network?
3. What were the perceptions of both principal and central office members about the advantages, disadvantages and challenges of network membership and participation?
The Turnaround Network was in its third year of operation at the time of the study and by that time had grown from a smaller group of turnaround principals in Year 1 (2017-2018) to now include 14 turnaround principals and several key central office members. By Year 3 (2019-2020), the network had expanded to school teams and included principals, assistant principals and coaches of the turnaround schools. In Year 2 (2017-2018) and Year 3 (2019-2020), the network was led by INSTLL and the consultants worked collaboratively with key central office managers in the development of agendas, network activities and co-planned all network initiatives. The INSTLL consultants were turnaround experts and had previous experience and expertise in the use of school improvement networks. A review of artifacts from the Turnaround Network indicated the network began in Year 1 (2017-2018) as a support to only turnaround schools in the district and was designed to provide ideas, share expertise and provide solutions to school specific issues. The network was organized around the Massachusetts Turnaround Practices and activities were designed to develop cross school practices such as Response to Intervention (RTI) initiatives, specific instructional models such as Readers and Writers Workshop, common assessments and Self-Regulated Strategy Development (SRSD).

In Year 2 (2018-2019), the network significantly changed and the informal network became formal, was led by consultants, had a theory of action and established network strategies and practices. The artifacts indicate, in Year 2, schools were to establish PLCs, CPT or GLTs, code and observe classroom instruction using classroom observational rubric electronically by submitting scores on a Google form and regularly participate in cross school walks. The network adopted four main categories to characterize and improve instruction: Targeted Learning Goals, Effective Use of Time, Cognition (DOK), and Formative Assessment. Within these large broad categories were
descriptors and “look fors” that defined what should be happening in effective classrooms and conversely described that conditions in less effective classrooms may look like.

In Year 3 (2019-2020), the artifact review indicated a refinement of the classroom observation rubric had occurred, and regular and more effective coding practices had developed as more observations were coded and scores were more closely calibrated. The review of artifacts additionally specified, when regular network meetings were held, the subsequent month a cross-school walk was held at a specific school. During cross-school walks, the host principal created schedules for observations, shared the “school story,” and provided key areas the network would be asked to observe and provide feedback about. The network members used the school’s Google form and coded classroom instruction as groups after discussing what was observed. Additionally, in Year 3 (2019-2020), INSTLL staff began to attend cross school walks, helped to synthesized findings, and provide guidance on implementation science.

Following the observations, the network team met shared findings and provided both areas of success and needed improvement to the host school. The following month both the central office members and INSTLL created agendas and activities that included data tables to analyze and infused themes and needs from previous meetings and cross school walks into the network meeting. This chapter summarizes the information shared by the participants of the interviews, examines the perceptions of network members and identifies key factors, conditions and practices through deep analysis of data collected, themes that emerged.

Summary of Study Site, Participants, Interviews, and Data Collected

The participants for this study included central office administrators and turnaround principals from a large, Massachusetts, urban school district. The district is large and has more than 50 schools and program sites. Fourteen elementary schools belong to the district’s elementary
school’s Turnaround Network. The participants of the study were selected based on their experience with the Turnaround Network. This network includes a large group of schools facing a dramatic need for acceleration and improvement of student achievement outcomes. Participants are both male and female, and their school leadership experience ranged from first-year principal to veterans of 20 years. While school leadership experience varied, most participants had spent at least 5 years in the school district in prior roles.

All members of the network were invited to participate in the study. In all 10 members participated in face-to-face interviews which included seven principals and three central office managers were interviewed.

**Leadership Profiles**

- L.S. was asked to take over a chronically low-performing school, had previously led a top state performer in another district. During L.S.’s time at the school, she moved the school out of the lowest 10% in the state and has steadily increased each year. Prior to L.S.’s tenure, the school had consistently performed in the bottom 5-10% in the state. L.S. has since been asked to take over another underperforming middle school.

- G.S. was promoted to principal following a decision to move the former principal to another position in the district. The school was in chaos and had been on a steady decline for several years. Within 1 year, G.S. settled and stabilized the school, and recent MCAS indicated this school was one of the district’s most improved schools.

- S.Q. was asked to take over a very large, underperforming elementary school that had several leadership changes over the past several years. S.Q. was charged with the task of accelerating student achievement as the school had been unable to recover from a dramatic decline in scores under a previous leader.
• E.P., a seasoned and experienced leader was asked to take over a failed turnaround effort. The school had readily declined despite state intervention. Under E.P.’s leadership, the school dramatically improved and made enough progress to be released from underperforming status in just one year. The school is no longer in the bottom 10% of schools in the state.

• C.P., a veteran school-based leader, was asked to take over an underperforming school, in the bottom 10% in her first principalship. She is considered a highly skilled, instructional expert. In her first year, she dramatically moved the school out from the bottom 10% in the state. Prior to this, the school had steadily declined and had once been identified as a Level 1 school under the state’s former accountability system.

• V.H. has been the principal for the past 4 years at his school. Prior to this, he was the assistant principal, and following the resignation of the prior principal, he was promoted to principal. His school is in the bottom 10% and has not yet made enough improvement to be moved out yet.

• M.G., a long-time educator, has worked in multiple capacities as an educational leader. She has been a lead teacher, coach, assistant principal, and is now a principal of a turnaround network school. Her school is not in the bottom 10% and has made steady growth over the past 3 years. Prior to this, the school had been chronically and consistently underperforming.

• O.Q., a long-time district leader, has worked for over a decade at school turnaround efforts in the school district. She is well versed and considered an expert in school turnaround. She led the district’s prior successful Level 4 work since 2010, and all district schools identified were successful in moving out of this status.
D.L., a district leader with instructional technology expertise, joined the district team 3 years ago from another district. She has worked in many educational capacities, teacher, coach, and is now charged with advancing innovation and technology across the district.

S.B., a district leader with many years of instructional and leadership experience, has worked in central office for several years and works closely with all departments and schools in the district.

The researcher interviewed 10 network participants that included three central office managers and seven principals. The interview participants were asked several questions related to the research questions outlined previously. Additionally, the researcher shared the transcriptions with each participant and provided them with an opportunity to correct any discrepancies. The researcher analyzed the transcripts and established emerging themes and patterns, using a multiple-step coding process that included in vivo coding, then descriptive coding, followed by categorization and theme development.

**Data Collection and Analysis**

Participants of this study participated in semi-structured, face-to-face interviews lasting between 45 to 60 minutes. The semi-structured interview questions were designed to better understand the network experience and were considered from the perspective of several components of the Burke-Litwin performance and change model (Burke & Litwin, 1992). Specifically, the study looked at both transformational and transactional elements of the Burke-Litwin performance and change model. External environment, leadership; mission, vision and culture; and work unit climate; were investigated and analyzed for impact regarding the perspective of the network outcomes and experience of participants. Interviews were audio recorded and professionally transcribed using Temi.com. Once transcriptions were complete, data analysis began.
Data analysis for this study began by reading each transcript multiple times and recording observations, comments, notes, and reflections. This is considered an important aspect of Saldaña’s (2015) coding process. Saldaña considers coding as a link between data and an idea. Patterns, similarities, frequency, and sometimes in vivo coding were used in the development of codes, categories and themes and conceptual similarities. A table of codes, categories, patterns, and themes with narrative quotes associated with each theme was eventually developed. Transcripts were repeatedly reviewed, and audiotapes were listened to repeatedly to reveal major themes and subthemes. Ultimately, a table of major themes and subthemes with corresponding narratives was constructed. According to Grbich (2007), when codes are applied and reapplied to qualitative data, you are codifying—a process that permits data to be “segregated, grouped, regrouped and relinked in order to consolidate meaning and explanation” (p. 21).

In the following section, the researcher presents the overarching themes resulting from the interviews with network participants. The researcher used data from each interview transcript to better understand the research questions posed. Many codes and categories from the code book have been captured throughout the chapter and help corroborate and link interview statements with themes.

**Research Question 1: How did the network support both central office and principals in their turnaround work?**

Four important themes emerged relative to ways the network supported both central office and principals in their respective turnaround work (see Table 5). The themes intersect both groups, central office and principals, as does the perception regarding success of the network experience and their ability to work on turnaround efforts in their respective roles.
Table 5

*Themes from Network Participants to the First Research Question*

| A team approach was adopted and all members assumed responsibility for working collaboratively on turnaround initiatives as directed by the network to improve turnaround efforts at schools. |
| Leadership of the network was essential and provided structure, focus and guidance to improve turnaround efforts at schools. |
| A common vision, purpose and uniform expectations were established and consented to by all participants to improve turnaround efforts at schools. |
| The network focused on continuous improvement and established consistent effective turnaround practices for all schools to improve turnaround efforts. |

**A Team Approach was Adopted and All Members Assumed Responsibility for Working Collaboratively on Turnaround Initiatives as Directed by the Network to Improve Turnaround Efforts at All Schools**

Central office members and principals shared the decision to organize turnaround efforts among low-performing schools in the district was well developed and received. Many shared, as most of the schools were facing similar challenges, the idea to share ideas and combine efforts was critical to their success as working in a turnaround school is complex, demanding work. The theory of action for the network was to improve each school’s use of PLCs, leadership and data collection to improve classroom instruction; to measure what worked and share best practices; and to become highly effective learning organizations, all focused on leveraging turnaround practices and implementing network initiatives with fidelity. The network participants explained the district’s consultants, INSTLL, operated as the head or the hub and developed this vision with the input of central office and principals. These two groups mutually defined the network’s key improvement and engagement structures, and the specific capacity building function of the network, which
included school-based PLCs, turnaround meetings, classroom observations, and cross-school walkthroughs. A central office leader shared, “Including all stakeholders in the vision and scope of the work provided buy-in from the beginning.” “We definitely had a much better plan and there were solid improvements made following early network meetings” (S.B., 2020, p. 11).

Participants shared during the first year the network met monthly and turnaround principals shared stories, ideas and participated in problem-solving strategy sessions. Positive relationships and a collegial culture of cooperation and teamwork emerged. “I truly look forward to those meetings, sharing ideas with like-minded people was refreshing” (M.G., 2020, p. 7). Several network members shared facing similar challenges brought them closer as a group. Yet, the concern was that the network, while a good first start, and pulling together offered some support the network needed a more focused effort. The realization after Year 1 was each school, while different had similar challenges but still operated independently and spent tremendous effort individually solving similar problems. This researcher reviewed comprehensive site visit reports conducted to better identify what challenges existed in schools in the spring of Year 1.

The district used a format internally developed but adapted from the Massachusetts Turnaround Practices (2014) in consultation with INSTLL as a framework and included multiple classroom observations, interviews, and focus groups to best understand the conditions in each school involved in the network during Year 1. It was decided committing to developing common strategies across all schools in the network could be a potential change idea that would lift school achievement, support school leaders, and assist central office managers in their work to support numerous schools needing dedicated central office support.

In Year 2, participants shared the network included 11 schools and the district partnered with INSTLL to assist in helping to organize the network. Conditions were set and all participants
were expected to develop effective professional learning structures, which, in turn, would hopefully improve instruction in their respective schools. Instructional walkthroughs were conducted to measure this impact and data were collected on the established 3-4 criteria categories: Targeted Learning Goals, Effective Use of Time, and Cognition or Webb’s Domain of Knowledge (DOK) by school leaders. At network meetings schools analyzed the walkthrough ratings by school and shared experiences with the improvement strategies. A principal shared this was especially helpful as “another set of eyes was looking at the same thing and either verifying what you think or maybe they saw something different” (E.P., 2020, p. 6). Numerous cross-school walks were conducted and principals and central office leaders calibrated their skills and developed common and similar coding skills. A network participant shared “getting used to the tools and remembering to code were hard that year but when I went to the network meetings and saw how many others did, I doubled down to increase my data” (C.P., 2020, p. 4).

In Year 3, tools were refined, three more schools joined the network and systems became more effective. A principal shared the expectation for Year 3 would be “there is no learning curve to using the tools, it should be seamless and we should get more and better data” (V.H., 2020, p. 8). Document analysis verified the theory of action continued, improved tools were used, and meetings and cross-school walks were continuously conducted. During the interviews, participants agreed the network had supported their individual turnaround work. Although the time investment was substantial, they felt, without the network, they would be “working in isolation and trying things that may or may not have worked” (S.Q., 2020, p. 10). Another shared, “Getting used to the expectations [improved PLCs, classroom observations, network meetings and network collections] was a lot at first” and struggled with balancing time (L. S., 2020, p. 7). Participants regularly referenced teamwork, collegiality, support, partnerships, and developing relationships as key
outcomes of the regular network activities. For example, one principal shared, “As a new principal I was quiet and listened more than spoke as I was so uncomfortable. But after a few months I felt completely at ease and I honestly cannot image what I would have done without the network in my first year” (G.S., 2020, p. 4).

In all, the participants suggested the network provided rich engagement experiences that fostered collaboration, teamwork and quality relationships among all participants [both principals and central office]. It was shared these factors helped all participants in their turnaround work. Principals reported the network promoted positive interpersonal relationships and increased opportunities for participants to engage with colleagues about turnaround work. One participant said, “Prior to the network I was all alone and tried things but did not have anyone to bounce ideas off, now we are so much more intentional and focused but being with people going through what you are is so helpful” (E. P., 2020, p. 8). Another principal shared, “We are not just working together, we’re forming relationships as partners, we have taken an extra step beyond just working with somebody” (V.H., 2020, p. 6).

**Leadership of the Network was Considered Critically Essential as the Iterative Structures Provided Focused Goals, Directed Whole Network Efforts and-Provided Necessary Structure to On-going Turnaround Efforts at All Schools**

First and foremost, all participants stressed the leadership, organization, the theory of action, and the focused goals of the network were critical to the success of the initiative. The organizer or hub [INSTLL] was a critical aspect of the success of the network. The school district while committed to the idea of network, had not ever designed this platform for professional learning, partnered with INSTLL, who had not only extensive turnaround experience but also had significant experience in the area of networks and education. One principal stated, “How lucky were we to
have some of the best minds in the field of school turnaround partnering with us and the central office staff have actually done what we are trying to do” (M.G., 2020, p. 2). A principal shared, “Everyone is there for the same goal and everybody’s sharing ideas and listening to people, working together trying to figure this all out” (E.P., 2020, p. 3). The participants felt the network got it right, focused on the right things and created a powerful process for a multischool turnaround.

The network focused on developing effective PLCs that would essentially improve planning and ultimately result in better developed and implemented lessons. The participants shared the rubric and coding were important as measuring for improvement were critical to the success of the network. A principal shared, “We strived to do a few things very well and eventually those big things will come together” (C. P., 2020, p. 4). A few principals shared they would have been lost without the network as the work is overwhelming and having a clear direction provided a “streamlined strategy.” “We worked on universal strategies and ideas to help each school not just one school at a time” (M.G., 2020, p. 6). A principal also shared change was really hard to see when the network was in its “infancy” and he was not quite sure where things would head until his school started implementing the “turnaround concepts with a laser-like focus” and it was then he began to see progress (V.H., 2020, p. 5). Until then he had been “putting out fires” and had not been adequately able to address the instructional deficits in his school. A central office manager shared, prior to the network, schools did not know which way to turn, “didn’t know which direction to head, there was nobody telling you whether you were doing this correctly or not” (S.B., 2020, p. 8).

Participants mentioned frequently the structure of the network was well developed. Many shared the meetings, school-wide walks, and cross-school walks were helpful. One principal shared the meetings were hard “like a college class” as the network delved into data and worked
collaboratively to solve some complex challenges (E.P., 2020, p. 5). Each shared the benefit of the cross-school walks as seeing other schools and examining practice together using the rubric helped to improve their own evaluative skills. One central office manager shared the district worked “hand in hand with the consultants,” but the district was very involved in and was consulted to help to develop agendas, co-plan the development of the network learning activities, and overall gatekeepers, but outside consultants were absolutely critical in “keeping things tight, on track” (O.Q., 2020, p. 9). A principal explained this and shared the consultants “steer[ed] conversations back and would step in and streamline when needed . . . we would have talked and moved further away from the goals and purpose of each meeting without them” (L.S., 2020, p. 5).

Another central office manager explained, with so many schools needing assistance, the network gave a regular opportunity to come together, “bring professionals together around common problems of practice . . . time was limited and rather than go school to school, we worked as a group” (O.Q., 2020, p. 7). Another central office manager shared, “Having INSTLL lead this work allowed for us [central office managers] to participate as learners which was a new face for central office” (D. L., 2020, p. 10). However, all central office managers agreed this was not easy work, and each dedicated tremendous time to planning, disaggregating, and collecting data, discussing next steps, and organizing meetings, walkthroughs, and co-creating agendas with INSTLL, the network consultants. Network members shared having a written and documented record of agendas, guiding documents, theory of action, guiding principles and system documents and forms were important facets of the network’s ability to function effectively. Several stated it helped all of these things were on every handout and “reminders of what we all agreed to do” (M.G., 2020, p. 3).
Additionally, several network members shared the regular pattern and schedule of meetings was productive. The network met formally one month and then spent the next month participating in cross-school walks. In each meeting, the entire network looked at data across schools about classroom walkthroughs, PLCs and STAR data, the district’s computer-based achievement assessment, to identify change, trends and solidify next steps. The classroom observation tool and the PLC tool were identified as especially helpful and helped principals collect data they had never collected before and explained, without the network, “We would never all get together and discuss these things in detail, we used to just work alone and not share the way we do now” (G.S., 2020, p. 8). The tools created common opportunities to look across schools at three to four specific instructional criteria: Targeted Learning Goals, Effective Use of Time, and Student Cognition (DOK), and for some schools, formative assessment. Formative assessment was a voluntary selection while the previous three were required. Principals and leaders learned to code and overtime “look fors” were established and defined as a network.

Network members clarified the network aims are comprehensive and complex and required clear communication and commitment to following through after the meetings. Although the administrators emphasized they believed the participation in the network was beneficial, each shared it was more successful because central office members participated as participants and learners. “Having your sitting boss there, you know, also working, made you feel like it was a team” (C. P., 2020, p. 4). One central office administrator explained, “I’ve never been a principal of a school so I am probably learning more from the principals than they are from me” (D.L., 2020, p. 6). Yet, a central office manager shared it has caused some destabilization to her work, anytime you add something, it is something” (O.Q., 2020, p. 7).
Additionally, the central office administrators and principals expressed the network initiative was a high priority in the district and all work was organized around the goals, procedures and aims of the network. One central office manager shared, “My schedule is created solely around the turnaround meetings and another stated the central office administrators and principals perceived the network as successful, meaningful and “some of the best work of my career” and “the most valuable thing I have participated in as a leader” (D.L., 2020, p. 8). Yet, admit the time dedicated to the network is substantial and the demands of a turnaround principal are all consuming and sometimes off-network expectations, such as walkthroughs, coding, PLC attendance, and meetings, are challenging and difficult to manage.

The principals and central office managers agreed most of the issues across the network schools were similar (low academic achievement, poverty, trauma) but also offer each school is unique and has individual contexts but also agree the strategy and foundational working theory of the network is a good match for their needs. Turnaround work requires adaptive approaches and one central office manager likened the network efforts to the PDSA cycle, “testing and trying new ideas” to create better conditions for turnaround success across the network schools (O.Q., 2020, p. 10). Members shared their voice was important and believed co-creating this network has made a difference. “We share our ideas and improve based on the feedback we give” (S.B., 2020, p. 11). One principal provided an example of a way members voice has benefitted the network, that the rubric was “modified and improved” based on the experience of the members of the network using it and making suggestions for improvement.

Finally, several principals mentioned the collaboration with central office was a partnership but felt the central office ensured the success of the network by providing specific guidance and a dedicated presence. Both principals and central office staff shared the central
office takes this initiative very seriously and consistently communicates expectations, encouragement and support. “We are expected to code about 15 classes per week, at first it seemed a lot but it is very simple and provides me with great information” (C.P., 2020, p. 9).

In sum, the network members identified the network leadership as a critical aspect of the network’s success. The network leadership supported principals in developing a strategy for improvement in their turnaround schools and provided credible guidance in establishing effective turnaround practices. The environment in turnaround schools was described as complex and leaders of these schools felt the structure of the network provided timely, focused, professional collaboration that improved their ability to effectively implement strategies to improve school performance. Additionally, central office managers tasked with overseeing 45 schools, with limited time, shared the focus of the network provided a common universal structure for support which according to both principals and managers afforded more time together working on aspects of turnaround. However, all shared the network is still in its beginning and is improving each year but refinement and deepening of the work is needed. The members shared the foundational structure, the theory of action, and operational systems are intact and running well, but the adaptive, nuanced work of the network is not yet completely underway.

A principal shared there are many ways the network functions effectively but shared one of the most helpful was identifying key instructional practices. This principal shared, “Building these routines and identifying high leverage common practices helped me focus” (L.S., 2020, p. 6). A central office manager shared “putting the turnaround practices in action” was always something the district strived to do but creating this structure of same type schools, working together, using similar strategies to solve complex problems has been a better approach (O.Q., 2020, p. 6). A principal shared, “We used to have PLAN meetings . . . where principals got
together but the difference here is that central office was deeply involved and similar schools that face and deal with high-need populations worked closely together” (E.P., 2020, p. 8). Another shared, “I used to have to sit and listen to my colleagues discuss problems and would think to myself “I wish that was my biggest problem: Why am I here? How does this apply to my work?” (C.P., 2020, p. 11). The network focused on the common challenges schools faced, and this strategy was well received by participants.

**A Common Vision, Purpose and Uniform Expectations were Established and Consented to by All Participants to Improve all School Turnaround Efforts**

All participants agreed communication on vision, purpose, and expectations were all important aspect of the network but many confessed it was not always easy to follow through once network meetings ended. A principal shared, “I had every intention of using the forms and knew I was supposed to but I would get so busy and did not get as many done as I was supposed to” (E.P., 2020, p. 10). Additionally, another principal explained, in the beginning, not all members fully took responsibility for their part in the network: “I used to get frustrated because I would do all of my walkthroughs and when I went to the meeting I saw a colleague did not do theirs and I was like really, why do I have to do this but they don’t?” (L.S., 2020, p. 6). Participants shared central office leaders took a supportive stance, and instead of pointing out walkthrough numbers were low, asked “what they could do to help get this moving.” This was a new approach and focused less on compliance and more on growing and learning.

One principal shared he was terrified to go a network meeting as he had not coded many walkthroughs that month, so a week before the meeting he coded over 25 classroom observations to get caught up for the month. He said, he learned a lesson, first, it was never the intent to compete over the numbers, “the integrity of it was gone” and “of course during that meeting we discussed
the high number of classroom visits that were recorded the week before the meeting was much higher than the other weeks” [the network saw a big bump the week before the meeting]. So, the network leaders and participants, co-developed reasonable expectations about what each school team could do. “I liked that they saw it as a problem and worked with us” (V.H., 2020, p. 7).

Ultimately, members stated they helped each other and became accountable to expectations of the network their colleagues. One principal shared, “There has never been a time that I did not learn something new but I also felt that I helped others too” (S.Q., 2020, p. 5). One central office manager stated:

Getting started was messy and while we had an idea of where we wanted to go we remained open to allowing things to develop organically and naturally and additionally . . . this approach to support was actually “unsettling” as it was a shift from top-down approaches of the past and other central office managers struggled with giving up control. (O.Q., 2020, p. 11)

Another central office manager shared “getting the network structures and systems up and running took time and as the vision became clearer, we saw principals buy-in but that seriously took a while for some” (D.L., 2020, p. 9). Earlier on in the process, the district began the process of developing the strategy and objectives of the network collectively with the principals and consultants from INSTLL. A central manager explained:

The birth of the network came from a desire to provide comprehensive support to our most needy schools but also realizing this one school at a time approach was kind of backwards. We swooped in only when the state designated a school as in need of assistance. We thought what if we intervened before things got so bad? (O.Q., 2020, p. 10)
The plan was to organize like-type schools, leverage the turnaround practices and design meetings where principals and central office members worked together at improvement. Each school looked at their Turnaround Site Visit Report written in the spring of the prior school year and, after a thorough analysis, found similar needs and determined the agreed upon collective next steps. The group selected the establishment of PLCs as a common strategy, determined criteria for success and selected monitoring of classroom instruction as the second priority of the network. Over the course of the next few months, the group created a coding system for instructional walkthroughs using Google forms and the data were then used to discuss progress and refine procedures. A principal shared, “Originally, the data was all over the place.” We conducted multiple cross school walks and huddled after observations to begin to build a common understanding” (G.S., 2020, p. 9).

Central office managers shared building principal trust and investment in the beginning was an essential component, and principals shared, at first, they were not sure about the intent of the network initiative but ultimately saw it was focused on sharing ideas, collaboration and looking for solutions to pressing problems of practice. One principal shared, “Oh man, we’re the worst schools, so that is why we are part of this. But that really wasn’t it. You know that is how you feel initially” (M.G., 2020, p. 3). Participants discussed feeling as if they were among friends, accepted, and comfortable over time. Members shared this new approach was an improvement from the top-down approaches of the past and felt central office understood and recognized the challenges of school turnaround it is different and more complex. A principal shared “What I liked about it was it gave us something to focus on, I was until this point guessing at what to try next” (E.P., 2020, p. 3). The principals contended, beyond setting expectations for the network, what was especially helpful were the cross-school walks. “this is when it all came together for me” shared one principal, “seeing the ways other schools operate and used our system to improve was valuable” (S.Q., 2020, p. 5).
One principal suggested the district lacked some communication around the strategic vision, and expressed frustration about the focus of the network and some of the expectations and explained, “I am a convert now but I was resistant to this everyone doing the same thing idea” (C.P., 2020, p. 6). Yet another said the expectations were crystal clear but the reality was his school was a very busy place and other things became a priority. Most participants reported working collaboratively and improving together at each school using similar practices was especially helpful. “It should have been a no-brainer that we were conducting PLCs, and we were, but when I really critically examined them I saw many deficits” (V.H., 2020, p. 4). Another principal shared “We worked at getting better at a few things and this made this really difficult work a bit easier” (L.S., 2020, p. 8). Principals shared the network was critical to their success and felt the network had the right balance of give and take.

Most participants shared the time dedicated to the meetings and off network tasks was demanding but also felt there were more upsides than downsides. Every participant discussed the value of collegial relationships and the closeness that developed over time among participants. Positive interpersonal relationships contributed to the overall good feeling at meetings and district support was explained as partners and friends working together. One principal shared, “We were of course working to improve our own schools but I was also excited for my colleagues when we saw bumps in data and it never felt competitive” (E.P., 2020, p. 7).

In all, participants stated the vision, purpose and the strategy was well defined and “things improved as we went along.” The central office managers shared the network initiative has provided a new and improved way to support school leaders and “solve real problems in real time but also to have some coherence to our approach” (S.B., 2020, p. 9). Members stated that sharing information and collectively working together to improve schools was an innovative approach and
that the frequency of the meetings and walkthroughs strengthened the commitment and buy-in from participants. However, members also shared, as they get better, they have a keener eye for coding and have uncovered bigger issues in their schools. Most principals discussed the lower level of student cognition in walkthroughs and struggle with just how to improve this. Members also discussed the challenging contexts that exist in their schools and the sense of urgency, the responsibility and overwhelming pressure that exists in some of these schools, and the support of this network provided much needed intervention and a we are all in this together sentiment. Ultimately, the network provided support, guidance, and stability in each member’s turnaround effort and provided resources and insight into what impact of the school’s efforts. “So far staying the course has worked for us” (O.Q., 2020, p. 11).

Finally, some members stressed this work is beginning to change practice for teachers as all are familiar with the coding parameters, but, as the network deepens and evolves, they imagine bigger school teams that include teachers will be part of network meetings as a possible next step.

The Network Focused on Continuous Improvement and Dedicated Time to the Relentless Focus on Improving and Getting Better by Collecting Data and Developing Consistent Effective Turnaround Practices for All Schools

The central office leaders and principals reported the network provided a uniform platform and context for managing turnaround improvements in their respective schools. Setting conditions for classroom instruction across multiple schools provided an opportunity for all schools to share in similar experiences and have opportunities to refine and develop strategies that improved instruction in all schools. Principals shared a deep knowledge of what good teaching and learning looked like was an important part of the work of a turnaround leader and the classroom observation rubric helped to capture it well.
As mentioned previously, the network focused on Targeted Learning Goals, Effective Use of Time, Cognition (DOK), and, in some schools, Formative Assessment. The coding process consists of administrators and school-based leaders coding on a scale from 1-4 with each having a unique description of what should be happening or not, how many students were engaged and a quick look fors key that helped to make sense of the observation. All participants unequivocally agree this focus of measuring in a common way supported turnaround improvements in their schools. “The tools were key, we use our phones, it is quick and we check in all the time to see what is happening in classrooms” (M.G., 2020, p. 9). A central office manager shared, “We look at data on the back end and find connections between data and the turnaround practices . . . to analyze data across the network . . . there was a lot of work to getting these tools going and formed a little support group and met people off network to organize bookmarks in their folder” (D.L., 2020, p. 12). A few participants shared ways in which the network modified the criteria for the walkthroughs after using them and thinking changes were needed. Additionally, participants shared the decision to do this was transparent and included the entire network.” One principal said the network relied on input from members: “Our opinions and voice were important” (S.Q., 2020, p. 4).

Members also shared having a common understanding or calibrating was essential and was taught and developed through multiple school walks. One principal shared, “Central office did not take over conversations and listened more than they spoke at debriefs after group observations, I think that was on purpose” (C.P., 2020, p. 10). Principals shared they gained valuable insight following these conversations and a few principals shared following a few cross-school walks their ratings went down as they think they were noticing more, “we moved beyond, wow the teacher posted an objective to well that objective is not a targeted learning goal and this is why” (G.S., 2020, p. 8).
The start of the network was slow. The direction was to set a schedule for PLCs, sit in on them and begin to observe to see if these planning sessions are resulting in better instruction. A central office manager said, “We were amazed that some schools had not created professional collaboration time and PLCs did not exist” (D.L., 2020, p. 3). The following network meetings were focused on creating both the PLC and the classroom observation rubric, and installing these Google forms on the phones of all principals before they left the meeting. The direction from the network was try it, come back and share your experience. The network had a “mixed bag” of results, some used it, some did not. The network shared the data and developed an awareness that much more work was needed and most members reported they needed more support to integrate this technology into their day-to-day work. Even though it did not smart smoothly, members shared they are glad that continued work on developing expertise using the tools was provided and expected. One principal said, “You can’t just throw the baby out with the bath water every time something doesn’t work immediately” (L.S., 2020, p. 6). The participants also shared prior to the tools, they had no real credible data to say whether things were working or not. The tools were universally considered a pivotal aspect of the network efforts. A principal explained, “I found using the tools and collecting data to be the most important part” (V.H., 2020, p. 7).

Additionally, the cross-school walks were overwhelmingly credited by all participants as a valuable component of the turnaround work. A principal shared, “So I think that the group walkthroughs, when we went in as teams of principals, that was really helpful, there was honest feedback, the code of trust, made a difference” (L.S., 2020, p. 10). Many shared the cross-school walk experience was a positive learning process, “just being able to leave your building . . . with principals in the exact same situation and figure things out was just what we needed” (C.P., 2020, p. 11). Yet, all said these walkthroughs had always in one form or another happened in the district, the
difference now was there was a specific walkthrough rubric and coding process. Many shared this was not the first time they had used look fors in walkthroughs, but it was the first time they had used a coding system and entered data consistently over a period of time. A few members mentioned collecting the data was an important piece but knowing what to do with the data was the challenge. “Creating highly effective classrooms is the ultimate goal but getting there is a process” (E.P., 2020, p. 8).

Furthermore, principals shared measuring PLCs was also important work. Until now one participant stated, “We understood the need for PLCs but we just kind of had them and did not monitor or measure for impact” (S.Q., 2020, p. 6). The PLC data were shared in the network meetings and principals were able to home in on what activities were accomplished over multiple grades, subjects and content. A central office manager shared, “It was an entirely new concept, to collect data on PLCs and then look at the data, trends and themes across the network and individual schools to refine and improve practices” (S.B., 2020, p. 11). A principal shared, “Following a network meeting it was obvious to me that my school was not holding as many PLCs as other schools so I went back and reworked my school schedule to make sure my teachers had the same opportunity as others” (L.S., 2020, p. 13). Having the opportunity to use data to adapt and improve were valuable components of the network initiative.

The network participants shared the value of the multistep way the network learned and adjusted. Several mentioned holding regular meetings where participants share experiences was important as well as the network’s mechanisms for co-creating and setting plans in motion that tested improvement theories in schools. A central office manager stated, “The criteria and definition of highly effective instruction is well defined but the challenge now is getting these practices up and running in our schools” (O.Q., 2020, p. 10). During walkthroughs to date most participants shared
schools are focusing on improving instruction, using the DOK to design effective lessons, encouraging learning at the higher levels (3s and 4s) but consistency across the network has not yet been found. One principal explained, “We hover in the 2s when it comes to coding for rigor, this has been hard to move for us” (G.S., 2020, p. 8). However, one network participant shared, “We are moving the needle slowly, conditions are more coherent and instruction is definitely better” (M.G., 2020, p. 11).

In all, the network participants shared the network’s design promotes reflection and improvement and the use of tools and data was described as critical to the improvement process of the network. Additionally, the identification of key and specific instructional practices was seen as essential and created a condition where all participants were working collectively on the same things.

Research Question 2: What were the various conditions, practices, and factors that contributed to the success of the network?

Three important themes emerged related to the different ways the network supported both central office and principals in their respective turnaround work (see Table 6). The themes intersect both groups, central office and principals. These themes describe the perceived conditions, practices, and factors the network provided to support turnaround efforts in all schools.
The network provided a positive environment for collaboration that resulted in a culture of collegiality, trust, and supportive relationships among all members who supported improved turnaround efforts at all schools.

Professional collaboration was relevant as like-type schools, dealing with similar challenges and issues, worked together as a group to improve turnaround efforts at all schools.

Participants learned and developed specific expertise to provide intervention for the specific needs of schools to improve turnaround efforts at all schools.

The Network Provided a Positive Environment for Collaboration that Resulted in Culture of Collegiality, Trust, and Supportive Relationships Among All Members who Supported Improved Turnaround Efforts at All Schools

Each member shared one of the most important aspects of the network was the way in which the network activities promoted a culture of collegiality, trust and authentic, supportive relationships. Principals and central office members unequivocally shared amicable interactions among members was evident and contributed positively to the overall efforts. Each and every interview emphasized the feeling of support fostered comradery and a positive environment. One principal said, “The number one benefit of the network was collegiality, is being able to meet and you know, not being in silos, not feeling like you’re alone and really kind of all working together to make sure everybody improves” (E.P., 2020, p. 12). Another shared their experience as a first-year principal: “Everyone took me under their wing, made sure I was okay, and made a very comfortable environment” (G.S., 2002, p. 2). Another member shared, “We all have the same goal, know the urgency, and are here to support each other which was different than the support that was provided.
other years when the state came in did a walkthrough and provided feedback that ‘was all over the place’ and created a sense of nervousness at the school” (S.B., 2020, p. 10).

Several participants mentioned the trust among members was a critical aspect of the network. Several members referred to “safety” and relational “trust” as conditions they had come to expect at network meetings. “We were there to be honest because we had a lot to figure out” (D.L., 2020, p. 3). However, there were a few times principals stated they felt less likely to share and that the district may not have understood how important trust was to the process. “DESE would sporadically attend network meetings and I don’t think the district considered the negative impact.”

The influence of DESE brought a different light, as much as they put it out there that they are a resource they are judge and jury. So, it’s different than working with your colleagues. It changed the dynamic, they’re not your colleagues. The dynamic, the conversation and honesty, spilling the beans changes. (L.S., 2020, p. 11)

Another principal shared another time that network trust was violated:

At one cross-school walk a few other principals attended and shared during the exercise. A few of us were annoyed as, they were not part of this, did not understand our work, came in and provided feedback that was just fluff. We brought it up to administration and it never happened again. (C.P., 2020, p. 6)

Yet, most shared personal accounts of how solid relationships forged over time and that the quality of the interactions resulted in a group of people who liked each other, shared freely, had genuine positive feelings about each other. A central office manager articulated, “I mean it’s like a serious collegial atmosphere, we joke around with each other. Other places feel competitive but here there is no competition, they’re in it to help each other and that is a shift I have seen” (D.L., 2020, p. 12). A principal shared quality feedback and a commitment to each other was important:
“There is a personal piece now, whatever you share, you want to make sure it is good because you are not just doing it for another colleague” (V.H., 2020, p. 7).

Members shared a perception of teamwork as a powerful component of the network initiative. Cross-school walks were overwhelmingly identified as powerful levers for change as participants shared insight into instruction but this work together furthered the relational aspect of the network team. Cross-school walks were held monthly and these frequent interactions helped interpersonal relationships by developing capacity and frequently engaging in both professional and personal ways. A principal recounted how important this work was to the overall effort. “We started as just colleagues and we grew to be friends, the network created a team-like attitude about our work together. I really enjoy spending time with these people.” (S.Q., 2020, p. 11). The teamwork aspect supported school turnaround efforts as members frequently solicited advice and guidance outside of the network meetings from one another. A principal described a time three network principals met over the summer vacation once a week to help one another get set up for the upcoming school year.

Additionally, many members remarked these rich relationships that developed among participants created a culture of genuine respect for one another. “Turnaround is hard, it cannot be done alone.” A central office member stated meetings and sharing ideas had impact and members developed credibility or became known for doing specific things well: “When I see my colleagues . . . people I respect and have regard for, they know we are not here because we are doing a terrible job but because we have challenges to overcome” (S.B., 2020, p. 4). Additionally, principals shared the central office did a good job ensuring the network was focused on improvement not competition or blame. “Facing common problems . . . brought us closer . . . it was a safe space” (E.P., 2020, p. 8). A central office manager shared the relationship between principals was strengthened: “I have
better relationships with network principals because . . . I see them more, they are not afraid to call, we are on the same page, speak the same language and have the same experiences” (D.L., 2020, p. 7).

Trust was a common topic across all interviews, both principals and central office. One principal cautioned, “If you don’t trust the environment, you’re not going to move too far with anything” (L.S., 2020, p. 10). However, a central office member shared an interesting perspective: “Trust and collegiality among central office members was an off shoot here, we [central office] worked together on something important and came together, and it has unified as, the smaller group that worked on this project” (D.L., 2020, p. 11). Members also shared building community developed over time and the focus of the network changed and developed as time went on. Starting the network by creating a space for collaboration without a prescribed agenda assisted in developing time for network principals and leaders to share what was specifically challenging about their work.” Sharing ideas with colleagues was helpful, we had never had a forum like this before. It was usually more telling than asking from central office” (M.G., 2020, p. 8).

According to many members Year 1 was critical, “It was lower stakes, we got to know each person, it wasn’t kumbaya either, personally I got a lot out of that year, I stole a lot of ideas!” (L.S., 2020, p. 6). A principal stated, “Central office was led by former turnaround people, they understood our needs” (E.P., 2020, p. 3). Another shared, “We did not feel like all the bad schools together, we felt a different kind of support, it was like a therapy session sometimes” (S.Q., 2020, p. 12). While all stated they were all working on the same initiatives, uniform instructional strategies, data collection and PLCs, the network allowed for autonomy and difference in implementation. The central office offered trust and participants felt being trusted helped to formulate trust for the leadership.
A central office manager shared this approach was very “difficult” for some district leaders to “listen to the school, see what they need, and look at the ways central office can intervene, grow and improve, it is not only for school to get better it is for us too” (O.Q., 2020, p. 8). Many principals interviewed shared central office support was better as it was a partnership and Turnaround Network principals had voice. “I feel that being part of this made me and my school a priority to the district instead of the problem child.” If I had a need it was immediately addressed or at least acknowledged” (C.P., 2020, p. 11).

However, central office members said this is still early in the process of change for central office, giving up authority to promote autonomy for schools has been a major challenge. Compliance and autocratic decision making exist in central office and these interactions continue to present as an obstacle. Yet, a central office manager shared, despite this resistance, the smaller central office team works to reduce the “noise that gets in the way . . . it’s just the way we now do business now” (S.B., 2020, p. 9).

In sum, principals shared the conversations and discussions or the “give and take” of the network between central office and schools was important. While the central office controlled the agenda, principals were continuously asked for input. All members shared the network is the right work and providing more for those schools facing overwhelming challenges is what should have happened all along. A central office manager shared the district has learned a lot over the years about turnaround and the Massachusetts Turnaround Practices (2014). In fact, the district has moved four schools out of Level 4 status, and she lamented, “It took things becoming so bad before help arrived” (O.Q., 2020, p. 6). Additionally, while collegiality, cooperation and community were continuous themes throughout all interviews, all participants described that the network has unified central office and principals, and that common goals, an authentic commitment to each other has
forged strong partnerships. Yet, central office members disclosed, while collegial relationships exist, there is much work left to do.

**Professional Collaboration was Relevant as Like-type Schools, Dealing with Similar Challenges and Issues, Worked Together as a Group to Improve Turnaround Efforts at All Schools**

Principals referenced that decision to group like schools with common problems and challenges together as beneficial to their turnaround work. Many referred to the benefit of sharing common experiences and comparable school conditions as helpful to their turnaround work. A principal shared, “Turnaround is high stakes, we have to figure this out and we don’t have a minute to waste” (E.P., 2020, p. 5). Many shared professional collaboration time with other principals of less involved schools was not as relevant to their needs. “Meeting with other principals is fine but we usually have more superficial conversations” (M.G., 2020, p. 9). Additionally, principals shared the professional conversation and collaboration of the network provided timely guidance, direction and focus for the work “Prior to this we were not sure which direction to turn or we were doing this right” (T.S., 2020, p. 11).

All described turnaround as complex and stated it is quite different than other schools. “There is a strong sense of urgency and everyone is looking at you to figure this out” (S.Q., 2020, p. 7). Members described the complex conditions in these schools such as poverty, trauma, low achievement, lack of staff capacity and appreciated the opportunity to share ideas about how to address these compelling contemporary issues. “As turnaround principals, we have to not only address academic needs but also to meet these social emotional needs” (V.H., 2020, p. 3). A central office manager described the role of a turnaround principal as the most challenging because the clock is ticking and there are numerous issues to address all at once. However, she warned taking on too much or introducing one change idea after another would not provide the coherence needed.
Principals describe the responsibility and the sense of urgency as factors that impact the principalship in turnaround schools. A principal shared “I feel like I wear many hats . . . a big part is culture where people believe that they can do more than they think they can” (S. B., 2020, p. 11). Another felt “the complex conditions are significant and sometimes cripple the school.” He furthered explained, “Behavioral issues in combination with low academic growth impact classrooms in significant ways” and believed these conditions affect learning year after year, so “if procedures are not in place and staff don’t know how to handle and deal with challenges you stay stuck every year, dealing with the same issues” (V.H., 2020, p. 8).

Principals and central office managers also discussed that the network provided a positive forum to deeply discuss these unique challenges and conditions and felt the leadership had the right balance of experience, academic research knowledge, and an ability to relate relevant information regarding turnaround. “Anyone leading a turnaround network, has to have seen it, done it.” I imagine that these people are hard to find, but our district is building a strong group of turnaround leaders through this initiative (M.G., 2020, p. 3). The group also shared the end goal is not really just to turnaround a school, as the job is not done when the school is out of “danger.” “What is important here is that we are setting up conditions for success, not just get out of the bottom 10%” (O.Q., 2020, p. 13).

Both principals and central office managers shared the network provided space to address the needs of turnaround schools separate from the all district meetings that focused on more general issues. “Our principal meetings had never been specifically focused on turnaround topics, it was more compliance, introducing a new initiative, those kinds of things” (L.S., 2020, p. 7). Another member shared, “They left us alone to figure things out. I am not saying the district did not help but popping in and checking in but it is different than what we have now” (E.P., 2020, p. 6).
Additionally, the participants felt solely focusing on academic achievement and building structures was the right move despite the myriad of social-emotional factors each principal reported as a challenge in their respective schools. Academic achievement was seen as the priority each participant identified as the number one responsibility of a turnaround leader. “I would have to say that student achievement and growth are the measures we use to see if what we are doing has been successful, so prioritizing and turning these schools around means that most of our focus has to be academically focused” (D.L., 2020, p. 6). Yet, most also shared safety, culture, pedagogy and relationships are equally important but are components that can be built while the school works at providing better instruction. “Kids need to feel safe, adult learning environments must be comfortable” (V.H., 2020, p. 4). The participants shared the instructional focus grounded the network as without the vision, tools, and structure the network provided, the network could have “gone off track” and failed to launch if anything different was done. A principal shared:

We worked together, agreed to try similar things, not always willingly and came back to discuss how it went over and over. I think that it was smart not to abandon the activities after we met and complained about things. The central office was firm and in the end, it was the right thing to do. (C.P., 2020, p. 8)

Lastly, the participants universally shared the experience was better because everyone in the room was working in schools that shared similar challenges. “Knowing that you are sitting with colleagues who shared your experience was important” (E.P., 2020, p. 4). A few suggested, rather than the network meetings becoming gripe sessions, they actually helped build a “can do” attitude and were a source of inspiration. “I am not going to lie, in the beginning I saw it as one more thing but now I look forward to these meetings, I get ideas, get excited and bring that can-do, enthusiasm
back” (M.G., 2002, p. 9). Moreover, each participant felt the network built a culture of high expectations.

Additionally, participants shared the time was solely dedicated to the turnaround, there were no other district initiatives discussed. Members felt this time was used well and was designed to solely discuss the turnaround network activities, look at data and plan moving forward. The cadence of the network meetings and off network activities was predictable and attendance was required. A principal shared, “It was timely, by the time another meeting rolled up, I needed to connect with my colleagues as new things had popped up at my school and I couldn’t wait to talk to them” (L.S., 2020, p. 12). Participants also shared, during “down time” or table talk time, members talked off script about individual issues and received guidance and suggestions from each other. This was also seen as important as the formal agenda component of the network. A principal shared, “What I liked most was the time to talk, share, connect and I guess network” (E.P., 2020, p. 9). Another described a time when she needed help understanding a special education procedure and was embarrassed to ask outside the network. “I felt it was ok to ask anyone at my table for advice, there was no judgement there” (S.Q., 2020, p. 6).

Yet, a few raised important considerations and questions such as; limiting the group to alike schools may not provide a breadth of perspective; is turnaround the right concept, should it be about sustainable solutions instead; what happens when one of our leader’s leaves the school or the district, shouldn’t this network grow beyond just principals; what is the long game for this initiative, is this effort sustainable for both principals and central office? But for now, all shared the network is working now and is made better by the common, uniform focus and shared experience of leaders leading these efforts in school.
Participants Learned and Developed Specific Expertise to Provide Intervention for the Specific Needs of Schools to Improve Turnaround Efforts at All Schools

Principals and central office managers communicated the importance of the specific and deliberate actions the network took to provide intervention to turnaround schools. The network provided a structure that consisted of each school investing in PLCs and or professional collaboration teams, adjusting, adapting, conducting classroom observations, coding data and sharing. These steps took many forms, according to several principals the first step was to create a better description and understanding of what should happen during professional collaboration. One principal shared:

At first, we were asked to build a schedule where each grade level could meet at least one time per week together, and I thought good, I have PLCs down but then we were asked to use the new criteria and code the activities. While coding I learned how loose the PLCs were. Just having them was not the goal but using the time to support better teaching required a tremendous amount of work and we are still working on this. (E.P., 2020, p. 9)

Another principal shared allowing principals to have input into what the criteria should be was a good plan but in actuality they needed guidance so the network planning team provided a series of ideas to choose from, this was seen as helpful. “We were so overwhelmed I don’t think anyone has their wits about them” (G.S., 2020, p. 4). Additionally, principals shared the network planning team recognized the need for structure and information not necessarily the creation of knowledge in the earliest days. A central office manager stated, “We used things [documents] the district and our consultants had created to begin with to provide something substantial and quality to start from as we worried that requiring the principals to design something they did not fully understand yet would lead to a network flop” (O.Q., 2020, p. 12). The network planning team
provided possible classroom observation criteria and principals shared they vetted them together and decided which would be smart first steps for their respective schools.

Ultimately, four major areas were identified as focus instructional areas: Targeted Learning Goals, Effective Use of Time, Cognition (DOK), and Formative Assessment. The classroom observation tool provided guidance about what to look for but the true challenge came in the disparity in interpretation among network participants. The network planning team recognized this need and developed cross school walks to calibrate and provide a forum for principals to discuss and eventually develop a more common interpretation versus such extreme differences we saw in the early walkthroughs. A central office manager provided a description of the cross-school walkthrough protocol as such:

During cross school walks the network principals would visit a school, use their phones with the Google forms saved on the home screen, observe a classroom for 7-10 minutes, huddle outside the classroom in a group and spend time discussing what they observed in relation to the rubric and come to consensus with a code (D.L., 2020, p. 11). Central office managers worked side by side with principal groups and listened in but “only jumped into the conversation when things were going sideways.” “We decided to participate but be careful not to take over the conversation” (S.B., 2020, p. 10).

In the beginning of the network coding was high, classrooms were given many 3s and 4s. As the months went by the data changed as coding which was formerly 3s and 4s looked like 1s and 2s. A principal explained, “I noticed I was looking at the criteria in the wrong ways, I learned so much from the debrief conversations.” Another expressed the negotiation following the observation with others was the “most valuable time” and “stretched” her thinking but stated she did not always agree with the group decision and felt “ok about seeing things differently” (E.P., 2020, p. 7).
Participants universally expressed the data and tools were critical aspects of this network. One principal shared, “I thought it was unnecessary at first because we basically observe teachers every day but I was wrong. The perspective was different as it was focused on whole school trends and measuring whether our improvement efforts were having impact” (M.G., 2020, p. 6). Every principal and central office member articulated using classroom observation and PLC data was considered one of the most effective practices the network adopted as participants stated, “It grounded our talk from this is what I think to this is what the data says” (S.B., 2020, p. 8).

Eventually, the network began the work of unpacking what good practice among each domain looked like and specifically focused on what the teacher was doing, the activity and what the students were doing. Some participants described a district guiding document, the High-Quality Teaching and Learning Document (HQTL), and shared the network focus clipped a few strategies and worked to get better at a few things instead of a comprehensive list of things. This was explained as a very helpful network activity and began the more challenging work improving instruction in a more reasonable way. A principal shared, “Understanding high-quality instruction is essential to our success, after all I think that less effective instruction probably got us where we all are” (V.H., 2020, p. 5). Another stated, “We cannot ask people to work any harder, it is not easy in these classrooms, somehow we need to find a way to make this job reasonable for people” (L.S., 2020, p. 9).

In sum, participants felt they had developed expertise in observing instruction and were able to share these newly arrived at insights with staff. “I would go back and use PLCs to adjust what we do based on what I saw at other schools or learned at network meetings” (M.G., 2020, p. 10). A central office manager felt, despite the enthusiasm, “we are far away from where we want to be, this is the beginning” (O.Q. 2020, p. 13). Yet, another principal explained instruction is improving at
her school: “It is evident, not only by the data but by the work the students are producing” (S.B., 2020, p. 6). Another shared, while instruction is better, her school is “stuck with DOK.” She is having a hard time building this awareness and capacity and “could use some help from the network with just how to do that” (L.S., 2020, p. 12). The participants reported the intervention provided by the network supported all principals and central office managers in pursuit of turnaround efforts. Providing a framework for improvement, by choosing high leverage strategies was seen as an effective model and no one felt the network focused on the wrong interventions and developed capacity in a thoughtful and thorough manner.

However, several ideas and themes emerged as possible next steps; the network will need to provide more guidance about the “how to,” such as lifting DOK and help principals equip teachers with the ability to shift from low-scoring lessons to higher scoring lessons. Some wondered about the negative notion of “group think” and hoped the network would be careful moving forward to ensure this condition does not over take the network and the uniformity does not become a system than lacks creativity and individuality.

In all, strategies and the interventions created by the network were seen to be unequivocally helpful in establishing an intentional turnaround effort and a differentiated effort that was different than what the district was providing for all other schools.

**Research Question 3: What were the perceptions of both principal and central office members about the advantages, disadvantages or concerns of network membership and participation?**

Three important themes emerged related to the concerns members held about network participation in this turnaround network (see Table 7). Both central office and principals shared
various concerns regarding the future of turnaround network, the sustainability of the network and the effort and time required to adequately operate successfully in their respective roles.

Table 7

Themes From Network Participants to the Third Research Question

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The network activities are time consuming and involve a considerable investment of effort by leadership [principals and central office], this in addition to other non-negotiable district mandates are challenging to balance.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The network aims, goals and priorities were negotiated, some level of coercion was involved and some leaders just went along with the group and have concerns about the lack of individuality through the adoption of sameness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The network success required multiple moving parts, participants are concerned about investing additional effort and energy and worry about sustainability and the future of the network.</td>
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The Network Activities are Time Consuming and Involve a Considerable Investment of Effort by Leadership (Principals and Central Office), This in Addition to Other Nonnegotiable District Mandates are Challenging to Balance

Both principals and central office managers described their involvement in the turnaround network as considerable and significant. Principals explained the network required bimonthly meetings that lasted about 3 hours each, 15 classroom visits per week, weekly PLC attendance and time interpreting data, planning and adjusting and monthly attendance at cross-school walks. Central office members also shared there has been a significant amount of time dedicated to all network activities. Yet, all shared turnaround work was not an option and they would have to be involved in improvement efforts regardless. Central office members shared the one school at a time improvement method formerly used by the district was also time intensive as school visits were conducted at least once a month but agree network planning and attendance is a timely commitment.
Principals explained turnaround planning was usually conducted only with their manager and was focused around establishing best practices, using data and sometimes observations were conducted but usually there was a discussion in the office about issues the principal presented and the manager worked as a fixer. All agree the system is better now but there is a noticeable difference in time spent fine tuning turnaround efforts. All agreed this is a positive change, as it brings whole school improvement to the front and center of every discussion and interaction. One principal described the difference:

We were never asked what specifically we were doing to reduce the achievement gap other than use the [Massachusetts] turnaround practices as a guide and write a School Accountability Plan. But now we are expected to do certain things and are transparently accountable for doing it. There are many ways the district can see what we are doing our walkthroughs, the data collection. (S.Q., 2020, p. 8)

However, many members shared this network has been disruptive to their schedules, and, while it is important, it is not the only big project or initiative they are involved in. In fact, most members were somewhat critical of the district’s habit of “piling on” initiatives. A member shared “It is very hard to truly balance everything, we have literacy meetings, culturally-responsive practices training and more. I use a Google calendar and luckily get reminders from calendar invites for things. It is way too much” (C.P., 2020, p. 11). A central office member stated, “We try to remind others about adding more to schools, especially turnaround schools” (S.B., 2020, p. 9).

Several principals shared it is simply not possible to adequately keep up with all the demands and are often confused about when district meetings are being held. The communication is not effective, despite the fact Managers for Instruction and School Leadership publish a weekly newsletter and the district has created and shared a district Google calendar with all school leaders. Principals and
managers feel the communication about the network is better and are not confused about responsibilities about attendance at meetings and activities.

The time commitment for network activities is involved and one manager shared if other managers knew more about the network, she believes they would be less likely to add on to already overwhelmed schools. “I am frustrated at times because what is more important than these schools, I cannot see a way that not involving yourself in the network as a district leader is ok” (D.L., 2020, p. 11). Principals share a core group of central office managers regularly attend and commit to the network but admit some drop in sporadically and are not as involved. A central office manager shared, “I oversee all schools and if the other [nonturnaround] schools are overwhelmed imagine how our turnaround schools feel, we need to do better (O.Q., 2020, p. 10).

In summary, the turnaround network requires a significant investment of time and the nature of the work requires dedicated attention to specific time-consuming tasks but members believe the time spent is worthwhile. However, the other work, initiatives, trainings the district provides combined with turnaround activities is all consuming and extremely challenging to both principals and managers. Managers describe ways they work to reduce the noise and requirements of turnaround schools but central office members who do not attend turnaround meetings and activities continue to pile on, and this is causing confusion, frustration, and disillusionment. A manager shared the “district is aware of this sentiment and have recently begun work on aligning all central office managers efforts” to avoid overwhelming schools but admits “it is slow going, we are still piling on and it is not getting any better” (D.L., 2020, p. 12).

*The Network Aims, Goals and Priorities were Negotiated, Some Level of Coercion was Involved and Some Leaders Just Went Along with the Group and Have Concerns About the Lack of Individuality Through the Adoption of Sameness*
Members shared the network adopted uniform strategies for improvement and that the universal strategies assisted the network as a group develop expertise and create a coherent system for at scale, multischool improvement. All members interviewed stated this was an important and effective action of the network. Developing systems, a vision, and purpose for the work were critical steps and most agree were done with the group and by the group. However, central office members all shared they went into the network with a “good idea of what should be done” and analyzed Turnaround Site Visit Reports for all schools and found common themes across all schools prior to the launch of the network.

Principals reported the first network meeting consisted of all schools creating a poster about their school regarding the findings of the report and the INSTLL consultants walked teams through a sense-making activity where schools distilled information into smaller “buckets.” A matching exercise across schools was conducted about similar challenges and the teams then posed potential solutions. Ultimately PLCs and professional collaboration was identified as a potential move to accelerate growth in all schools. Additionally, improving instruction by leveraging common practices across schools was also lifted into the plan by the end of the day.

However, central office managers admit they needed to create “bounded rules” and provide examples of evidence-based practices to “get it right from the beginning.” We used a classroom walkthrough rubric developed by INSTLL prior in our district Turnaround Walkthroughs and we felt “they were spot on” and presented this to the group as an example from which to use. “I think the principals liked it and thought it was good” (S.B., 2020, p. 7).

A few principals when asked if they thought the network focused on the right things, remarked early decisions were made by central office managers and “sort of given to us.” Another principal shared, “We were not sure why we were there and knew our schools were in trouble and
this was the result of our most recent decline or lack of growth on MCAS” (G.S., 2020, p. 8). Yet, all interviewed felt it was the right work and a much-needed forum. “We were not sure what else to do, it was not like we weren’t being creative and working hard other years we just hadn’t found the sweet spot” (V.H., 2020, p. 9).

Central office members shared the early days were about “establishing systems and getting the network up and going and we did not have the luxury of time.” A principal shared, while they agreed to participate, “they did not think they had an option and could not say I am not doing that” (M.G., 2020, p. 11). “We were kind of what do they call it voluntold but it was all good stuff so I just went with it” (C.P., 2002, p. 11). An issue was raised about everyone doing the same thing came up several times in the interviews and while these are effective practices one principal shared, “I only wanted to focus on one criteria but then worried if I did I may be hurting my school, because what if it is the other stuff that had more impact?” (E.P., 2020, p. 11). Another stated, “I hope these things we are dedicated to do the trick” (V.H., 2020, p. 8). Additionally, a seasoned principal shared a concern about “group think” and expressed the network activities are appropriate for now as they are setting systems and routines in place but future work may need to do more differentiated.

In sum, despite the control exercised by central office in the early development of the network, participants described it was a solid plan, a strong start, and members believe they are part of something meaningful and purposeful. It is anticipated more divergent practices will develop over time, and the network will eventually be run by its internal members; however, for now we need a decision-making body [INSTLL]. Both principals and central office members expressed the network is still new, it is developing, and we are better but “far from where we need to be.”
The Network Success Required Multiple Moving Parts, Participants are Concerned about Investing Additional Effort and Energy and Worry about Sustainability and the Future of the Network

As discussed previously, members universally shared the turnaround network has been a positive experience and believe the activities have begun to improve conditions in their respective schools. Additionally, members have previously shared the extensive time required to manage all network responsibilities and the described ways multiple actors, principals, central office managers, and consultants worked cooperatively to plan and execute network functions. The network has created great change in the way people work in the school district. Several principals referred to the effort and time expended and central office managers shared the disruptive manner the network caused to the notion of supervision and support in the school district. Moreover, all members believed this is important and effective work and must be continued.

However, principals shared the district’s practice of piling on has complicated improvement efforts and has overwhelmed schools. Several principals when asked what next steps for the network should be responded they hope the district sticks with this and does not abandon this as each had put significant effort into the network. A central office manager said, “We are not where we need to be, I think we just continue, stay the course as this was not designed to be a quick fix” (O.Q., 2020, p. 11). However, a few principals shared, to sustain this and make this manageable, the district would have to distribute and disseminate the information and provide other staff access to the network.

I think that in order for his to run smoothly, other staff must be involved. A central office member shared, “We are stretched tight, but our network initiatives are growing they now
include all middle and high schools . . . this is some of the best work I have ever done and we must keep it going. (S.Q., 2020, p. 13)

A central office member suggested the district should create a position dedicated only to this initiative and have one lead member from central office spearhead the effort as all lamented they are overloaded with responsibilities.

In sum, the members invested so much into the network activities and strongly believe the network is on to something and a much better option to turnaround support than previous years but “stretched thin” principals and central office members will need additional support in future years to leverage network activities and realize the actual potential the network offers.

Summary of Findings

This case study was of a multischool turnaround network in a large urban school district. The researcher conducted 10 semi-structured interviews including seven turnaround principals and three central office managers. In addition, the researcher examined network documents and district materials to triangulate the data from the interviews conducted.

The themes from principals and central office relative to how the network supported both central office and principals in their turnaround work included:

1. A team approach was adopted and all members assumed responsibility for working collaboratively on turnaround initiatives as directed by the network to improve turnaround efforts at schools.

2. Leadership of the network was essential and provided structure, focus and guidance to improve turnaround efforts at schools.

3. A common vision, purpose and uniform expectations were established and consented to by all participants to improve turnaround efforts at schools.
4. The network focused on continuous improvement and established consistent effective turnaround practices for all schools to improve turnaround efforts.

The themes from principals and central office relative to what were the various conditions, practices and factors that contributed to the success of the network included:

1. The network provided a positive environment for collaboration that resulted in a culture of collegiality, trust and supportive relationships among all members that supported improved turnaround efforts at all schools.

2. Professional collaboration was relevant as like-type schools, dealing with similar challenges and issues, worked together as a group to improve turnaround efforts at all schools.

3. Participants learned and developed specific expertise to provide intervention for the specific needs of schools to improve turnaround efforts at all schools.

The themes from principals and central office relative to what were the perceptions of both principal and central office members were about the advantages, disadvantages, or concerns of network membership and participation include:

1. The network activities are time consuming and involve a considerable investment of effort by leadership [principals and central office], this is addition to other nonnegotiable district mandates are challenging to balance.

2. The network aims, goals and priorities were negotiated, some level of coercion was involved and some leaders just went along with the group and have concerns about the lack of individuality through the adoption of sameness.
3. The network success required multiple moving parts, participants are concerned about investing additional effort and energy and worry about sustainability and the future of the network.

To summarize the themes, principals and central office administrators emphasized the importance of leadership and the critical role of the hub or organizer to the network’s success. The hub consultants from INSTLL, in partnership with the central office team, provided the strategic planning and the organizational structure necessary to support the network’s ability to foster deeper collaboration, and the development of processes and the identification of turnaround practices. Throughout the process, participants articulated how the network promoted a positive, trusting environment that fostered strong relationships which in turn promoted a culture of collaboration and cooperation. The network strategically aligned all activities, with structures, processes, and practices toward whole network improvement.

However, network membership was not without concern. Participants reported a commitment of this level, required a tremendous amount of time and effort. The district, while supportive of the network continued to add other initiatives on top of the network expectations and this left schools overwhelmed and stressed. Additionally, participants shared the conditions of the network while mutually agreed upon and reported to be beneficial to schools are a tremendous commitment of time, effort, and resources and participants shared a concern regarding the sustainability of this initiative. Overall, the network project was reported to be a success, as it provided support and contributed to the school’s ability to implement turnaround strategies in a specific, coherent manner but there was some concern all schools are unique and have individual needs the network initiative did not account for.
Chapter V: Discussion of the Findings

Revisiting the Problem of Practice

There seems to be an endless supply of underperforming schools, as soon as one school begins to climb out, another school takes its place among lowest achieving and the cycle continues. Improving and sustaining turnaround improvement in the United States’ lowest achieving schools has proven to be a most formidable task as 40% of underperforming schools remain low despite many well-intentioned attempts at improvement throughout the years (DeArmond et al., 2015). School turnaround is a complex issue and to date we have been unable to find the one, right, best way to improve our nation’s most chronically underperforming schools. However, the good news is we know these schools can improve and we have well-established turnaround practices that have provided a framework but there is not a one-size-fits-all or magic formula to apply to ensure success (de la Torre et al., 2013; Lane et al., 2014; Vince & Dunn, 2015). Furthermore, most schools receive intensive intervention after conditions have deteriorated into an emergency situation. What research has yet to shed light on is ways to build turnaround knowledge, skills and competencies across multiple schools or to scale.

Thus, the purpose of this study was to examine and better understand the impact a multischool turnaround network had on school turnaround and improvement efforts in a large, urban, school district. This study specifically focused on the roles of both principals and central office administrators, the impact of adopted practices and the experience of members of the turnaround network. The study investigated both, what factors, structures, strategies and practices were perceived to have positively influenced the network and additionally what challenges and disadvantages existed within the network. Also, better understanding the organizational structures, factors, elements, and supports the network perceived as necessary and useful to their turnaround
work will benefit many schools working at turnaround. Hence, the findings from this study may provide a set of recommended strategies, practices, or systems of support district and school leaders could employ to foster and promote multischool turnaround efforts in their own respective schools or districts.

**Review of Methodology**

The purpose of this qualitative, case study was to examine and better understand the impact a multischool turnaround network had on school turnaround and improvement efforts in a large, urban, school district. This study specifically focused on the roles of both principals and central office administrators, the impact of adopted practices and the experience of members of the turnaround network. The study investigated both, what factors, structures, strategies and practices were perceived to have positively influenced the network and additionally what challenges and disadvantages existed within the network. To meet the purpose outlined previously, the study was framed by the following research questions:

1. How did the network support central office leaders and principals in their turnaround work?
2. What were the various conditions, practices, and factors that contributed to the success of the network?
3. What were the perceptions of both principal and central office members about the advantages, disadvantages or challenges of network membership and participation?

As such, this research study investigated how central office leaders and principals understood and perceived the network’s operational and organizational structures and support as it related to their turnaround efforts. To achieve the goals of this study, the researcher selected one urban district in its third year of implementation. The research design included 10 semi-structured
interviews with central office administrators and turnaround principals. The interviews provided network members the opportunity to share their perceptions and experiences of the Turnaround Network initiative and associated network processes and structures.

Additionally, central office leaders and principals provided documents, including network agendas, school walkthrough forms, network data samples and network work samples and other artifacts related to the network initiative. Through the semi-structured interviews, the participants engaged in dialog and shared their opinions with the researcher regarding the Turnaround Network experience. As the case study methodology is best suited to studies that examine a specific phenomenon within the boundaries of its natural context, the researcher selected central office administrators and turnaround principals from the Turnaround Network to help to better understand the research questions framing the study (Stake, 1995).

After the interviews, the researcher transcribed the discussions using Temi.com. and then coded the transcription data into codes, categories and themes by using in vivo and descriptive coding to develop themes aligned with the research questions. The researcher also reviewed and analyzed the Turnaround Network documents and artifacts to triangulate the data with the information extracted from the interviews. Finally, through careful review and analysis, the researcher developed findings from the identified themes.

**Document Analysis**

Several Turnaround Network documents that included network agendas, school walkthrough forms, Turnaround Site Visit reports, network data, planning forms, work samples and network guiding documents, network data, MCAS and STAR data, and other artifacts related to the network initiative were reviewed. As such, an extensive data collection and thorough document analysis for this study was done to seek convergence and corroborate findings of the study.
Additionally, multiple Turnaround Network documents were analyzed and reviewed so to corroborate participants interview responses. Document analysis is an important component of qualitative research that requires purposeful planning. This document analysis provided a process of triangulation that created a confluence of evidence that strengthens the research’s credibility (O’Leary, 2014). Primary data sources included interview transcripts, Turnaround Network guiding documents, meeting agendas, Turnaround Network classroom observation and PLC data, Turnaround Network presentation materials, Turnaround Site Visit (TSV) reports, and cross school walk artifacts from the 3 years of the network (2017-2018, 2018-2019 and 2019-2020).

Valuable insight was gained from the analysis of the multiple documents associated with the Turnaround Network and provided an opportunity to cross check information, learn about major initiatives of the network, technical details of how network meetings and activities were structured, historical decisions and main organizational players and roles. Network documents articulated specific and intentional efforts to develop leadership skills, guide and support turnaround efforts, maintain a focus on continuous improvement, sharing and creating ideas, developing capacity and calibration exercises and evaluating progress through the analysis of data. The network documents also enriched the exploration of particular interview responses that ultimately resulted in the development of themes and findings for the study. As such, the document analysis provided evidence of the work to date of the network and assisted in the identification of the major findings of the study.

In the following sections of this chapter, the researcher presents a discussion of major findings, a discussion of findings connected to the theoretical framework, a discussion of findings aligned with the literature review, final analysis, recommendations, significance of the study, limitations, and considerations for future research.
Discussion of Major Findings

After careful review of the themes that emerged from data collection and review in Chapter 4 of this study, four major findings surfaced including:

1. Network leadership (hub) was critical to the turnaround network’s success as it provided the “just right” balance of focus, structure, guidance and direction yet provided loose, lateral co-creation and co-production opportunities and activities.

2. Networks must establish clear goals and develop consistent practices that focus on instruction and are relevant to the needs and contexts of the participating turnaround schools.

3. The Turnaround Network’s success depended on strong, relational trust and collegial interactions that enable the network to authentically share ideas, solve complex problems and develop expertise and provide benefits of membership.

4. Turnaround networks must emphasize continuous improvement by testing ideas through the use of quality data and establish processes for calibration, analysis and implementation.

Network Leadership (hub) was Critical to the Turnaround Network’s Success as it Provided the “just right” Balance of Focus, Structure, Guidance and Direction Yet Provided Loose, Lateral Co-creation and Co-production Opportunities and Activities

Throughout the interview sessions, the administrators emphasized the importance of the hub’s leadership, structure, guidance and the set direction for network activities. The participants frequently mentioned the strong impact the hub (INSTLL) had on the overall experience of network activities. Participants additionally shared the commonly developed theory of action and common practices were emphasized in all sessions and activities but continuous improvement and
development of novel ideas and strategies were equally important aspects of the network work. Overwhelmingly, the participants expressed the positive influence the hub (INSTLL) leadership had on keeping network activities focused and supportive of continuous improvement, strategic planning and goal setting. Many also reported this was not always the case and the network has improved as time has gone on. A central manager reported, “In the early days of the network, conditions were still being set and the goals and purpose were there but we were waiting on buy-in, that was really important” (D.L., 2020, p. 6). Additionally, participants shared the credibility of the hub leaders were very important to building buy-in as INSTLL is well known for leading research in the field of school turnaround and also demonstrated expertise and strong command and knowledge of turnaround strategies.

Repeatedly, the participants shared the leadership of the network included the hub and a few key members of central office and espoused the central office was instrumental in ensuring network expectations and activities were implemented in schools. It was shared the success of the network depended on central office leaders working cooperatively with hub leaders and principals to establish network turnaround practices in all schools. Overwhelming, participants agreed effective network leadership was necessary to achieve the intended goals and objectives of the network.

**Right Balance.** The participants shared multiple ways in which leadership of the network impacted overall network success. The hub leaders, INSTLL, were universally viewed as instrumental and highly competent. Participants shared the hub organizers provided credible guidance, structure, and direction of the network. The network adopted consistent practices across all schools and network organizers supported implementation, analyzed and disaggregated data and encouraged participation from all members. The hub leaders, INSTLL, provided a consistent structure to the network meetings and focused discussion and network activities on continuous
improvement. Network meetings were co-planned with central office members and agendas were developed together and were based on observations from off network walkthroughs, data analysis and furthering network goals and aims.

The network’s central office leadership team shared they spent significant time co-planning with hub [INSTLL] leaders to develop plans for structured meetings that included a review of all network data (classroom observations, PLC ratings, and STAR data) as a way to measure improvement over time. Additionally, members shared the hub [INSTLL] leaders were well respected by all network members, were well versed in turnaround research and provided the right balance of guidance and autonomy to members. “The INSTLL team is the real deal and we needed them to keep us focused” (L.S., 2020, p. 8). Leadership frequently solicited input from members and customized meetings based on feedback from the network participants.

Overwhelmingly, participants reported, while there was structure there was ample opportunity for input, choice and voice for all members. “The leadership of the network did not tell us what to do specifically, but asked us what we thought” (M.G., 2020, p. 3). Alas, leadership was perceived to be a key, critical factor to network success. However, members shared the network was vulnerable to collapse if the hub [INSTLL] leaders were not able to return or if key central office leaders left as the network is still in its development. Furthermore, turnaround principals shared they had developed excellent relationships with both the hub leaders and central office administrators and were doubtful if this could work in the future without these specific leaders.

**Co-creation and Co-production.** The turnaround principals and central office administrators shared the design of the network tools, ideas, and processes such as the theory of action, classroom walkthrough rubric, PLC rubric and ultimately the goals and aims of the network was a collaborative enterprise. Network leadership solicited input from members and frequent
adjustments and changes were made to network activities as a result of this input. Members participated in refining classroom observation tools, defining high-quality instructional moves and practices and using data to adapt and adjust network priorities. Members shared meetings were collaborative and each meeting provided ample time to learn new things, create new strategies, and share expertise across the network. "I am not sure whether I learned more from Chris and Brett [INSTLL] or from my colleagues? I never walked away without being inspired and motivated to share new things with my team" (G.S., 2020, p. 5).

The participants explained the current iteration of the network’s overall plan, outlined clear goals, which were published on all network materials. This helped to keep the network time focused and supportive of the aims and goals of the group. Yet, central office members shared, while meetings were planned with a clear focus on continuous improvement and collaboration, there was also some control and necessary input from central office leaders. A central office member shared, "We noticed an issue with inconsistent coding across schools in the data so we would bring that to the meeting and talk about it and try to push and nudge when necessary in a way that Chris and Brett could not as we were their bosses" (O.Q., 2020, p. 10). Additionally, a central office member shared this was “the district’s most important work” (D.L., 2020, p. 5).

Network leadership intentionally built time in all meetings that promoted freedom, analysis, reflection, and sharing of ideas across schools. Network leaders ran meetings that were both tight and loose. The participants shared they enjoyed both and believed, to be effective, these meetings needed to be a balance of give and take. The members shared the leadership’s ability to create space and time for learning and sharing was the just right balance and was a strong reason why the network was perceived to be effective.
All members suggested “the network met their needs” and the “leadership promoted much needed collaboration.” As such, the participants emphasized, because the network provided the necessary leadership, all members “bought in” and benefitted from the mutual exchange of information. For example, a turnaround principal explained, “I wouldn’t say I was completely sold in the beginning, as I could not see where this was going but over time we became a team and we came together because of the visionary leadership provided in our network” (S.Q., 2020, p. 7). Hence, findings suggest leadership provided opportunity for co-creation and co-production support improved network experiences for members.

**Turnaround Networks Must Establish Clear Goals and Develop Consistent Practices that Focus on Instruction and are Relevant to the Needs and Contexts of Participating Turnaround Schools**

Repeatedly, all participants shared the network was a new approach for the district as all prior professional learning had been focused on all district schools versus organizing only turnaround schools together. Each shared common problems existed among all turnaround schools and each had been working hard individually, in isolation without making tremendous progress. “Before the network I stopped and started a million different things, we had whiplash” (E.P., 2020, p. 2). Members shared the commonly adopted practices and strategies gave focus to their turnaround work and “this felt different and was refreshing . . . acknowledged that our work is hard and different than other schools” (S.Q., 2020, p. 2). Turnaround principals shared the network’s support was extremely helpful and many shared was critical to their ability to begin the improvement process. Principals shared other district professional development was not seen as helpful as it was not related to turnaround needs and at times the “piling on” of initiatives from the district was distracting and overwhelmed already very stressed schools.
Turnaround principals and central office members agreed setting and committing to uniform network strategies was an important component of the network as all schools were working simultaneously to improve the same practices across all schools. Calibration activities, cross-school walks in off network months supported the implementation of these practices and assisted all members develop skill and expertise. Rich discussions among members about the tools following a classroom observation were reported by turnaround principals as critical to the network’s success. However, members reported early on there was some variance in the degree of implementation and commitment to the goals of the network. Some principals fully participated and coded classrooms as requested and others did not. A principal shared, at first, things were “a little dicey . . . but over time members committed to the goals” (V.H., 2020, p. 5). Network participants reported data were transparent, as all network data were shared with all members. Central office pushed and encouraged principals to adopt network goals and eventually nudged the reluctant members forward toward full implementation. In sum, grouping like-type, turnaround schools with similar challenges and contexts and establishing common goals and practices was seen as a valuable approach to supporting turnaround improvement.

**Clear Goals.** Network members reported clear communication about network goals was important to the success of the network. Each participant shared the challenging conditions that exist in turnaround schools and believed the network provided a framework for improvement in their schools relieved some of this pressure associated with leading a turnaround school. Turnaround principals shared they felt a tremendous sense of responsibility and spoke frequently regarding the urgency of turnaround work and found the network goals to be in line with their own personal goals for their respective schools. The members shared the communication and messages they received from the district and network leaders about network goals was sufficient,
noting the decision to create a consistent platform for a multischool turnaround initiative was *smart* and *much needed*.

Furthermore, network members reported network leadership provided explicit expectations and ample opportunities for network members to set goals and implement plans to adopt these turnaround practices in their schools. Network goals were specific and members shared all schools were to work with staff to create effective PLCs that would impact improved instruction that was measured repeatedly using network classroom observation tools. Overall network progress was continuously measured at network meetings and as progress was tracked internal, systems were developed to adjust to network needs as they arose. The turnaround principals and central office members expressed they regularly set goals and implemented consistent practices across schools as a critical part of the network effort.

**Consistent Practices.** The turnaround network adopted four consistent turnaround practices—Targeted Learning Goals, Effective Use of Time, Student Cognition/DOK, and Formative Assessment—as four key conditions that would be measured, improved, and used to define high-quality instruction across all schools. These practices were modified and adopted from the *Massachusetts Turnaround Practices* (Lane et al., 2014). The turnaround principals and central office managers shared a major focus of the network was to establish structures and processes to develop educator expertise so to ensure high-quality instructional practices were consistently employed in all schools. “We developed a classroom observation rubric with look fors to help shape our ability to rate and code what we were seeing” (G.S., 2020, p. 6).

Additionally, central office managers and turnaround principals reported administrators engaged in ongoing (weekly and daily) observations and coding using the network developed tools. The network participants shared the established practices of the network created a culture of shared
ownership and improvement throughout the network. As such, network participants engaged in ongoing efforts to develop expertise in the acquisition of high-quality instruction and the development of common and uniform turnaround practices at all schools.

**Turnaround Network’s Success Depends on Strong Relational Trust and Collegial Interaction that Enable the Network to Authentically Engage, Share Ideas, Solve Complex Problems and Develop Expertise and Provide Benefits of Membership**

Network principals and central office managers reported the conditions of trust, comradery, and teamwork were integral to the success of the network. Providing network meetings was a beginning to developing a turnaround team that worked in tandem toward common goals. Central office managers reported they adopted a different style and “led from the side” and adopted a “learner’s stance” (D.L., 2020, p. 3). Additionally, they reported principal input was valued, and credit was given for effort, innovation and participation. Principals confirmed this and shared the central office was extremely supportive and respectful of principals’ perspectives and suggestions for improvements. “Everything we asked for was considered and on the table” (C.P., 2020, p. 8).

Additionally, central office highlighted good practice and found ways to include multiple members and this “built our confidence.” A principal shared, “Usually no one notices our schools, we are the ones with the bad scores, the attention in the past had been on the top performers. I can’t say I didn’t roll my eyes at those meetings” (M.G., 2020, p. 4). Network leaders viewed the turnaround principals with respect and recognized skills and expertise each member brought to the network. The open and honest conversations were seen as helpful in building the team. “It wasn’t feel good stuff, if someone threw out something kind of crazy, we did not agree on every issue, but always brought it back to the goals and the agreements we had made” (L.S., 2020, p. 4). The
principals shared the central office provided support, “reduced the noise,” and helped solve problems for schools that made the network effort doable.

Moreover, the morale was high, there was a level of excitement during the meetings. “Once we began to solve and create pathways to improvement and saw change we became reinvigorated” (E.P., 2020, p. 9). Hence, trust was considered a critical aspect of the networks ability to work well together, solve complex problems and continue to innovate and develop expertise.

**Engage, Share Ideas, Solve Complex Problems and Develop Expertise.** As previously indicated, the network members agreed the network infrastructure supported their ability to lead turnaround efforts and improve their instructional practices in their respective schools. Most network members reported the network activities provided members with the opportunity to regularly engage, discuss, share ideas related to turnaround work and they had never had this type of opportunity before. In fact, several shared some concern about what would happen if the network were to end and shared it would be difficult to continue their work. Many shared the collegial, team-like environment created ideal conditions for sharing. One principal shared, “We are a large district with many elementary schools, but the network principals are tight, we care for each other and rather than compete like before we root for our colleagues” (C.P., 2020, p. 6).

The cross-school walks were seen as critical to the network’s success. Members shared the value of these sessions. The process was described as, “During cross-school walks one school would host, present their current work and principals and central office managers provide specific feedback . . . usually glows and grows” (S.Q., 2020, p. 9). Additionally, many shared this was a time to share ideas, often ideas were “stolen” from the host schools and rich discussion occurred following classroom observation and over time coherence and consistency about feedback and coding became more evident. However, central office members reported we are far from where we
need to be, this is still early on in the process” (O.Q., 2020, p. 8). As noted earlier, the network created the conditions for collaboration and teamwork, but the openness, trust, leadership, and asset-based perspective of leaders provided a culture of innovation and progress that supported the network’s ability to solve complex problems and develop expertise.

**Benefits of Membership.** Network members shared the turnaround network provided many opportunities for participants they identified as valuable. Many shared the access and exposure to innovative ideas, national turnaround experts, and opportunities to engage with colleagues were valuable components of the network initiative. The joint meetings provided a steady flow of information to infuse and improve the network and these meetings were said to have advanced the skills of principals and promote cross school collaboration and cooperation.

Each turnaround principal shared the network has been instrumental in their respective turnaround work and provided a much-needed strategy and structure for support. They additionally shared, without the network, they did not believe they would have such a well-designed improvement plan and feel the network is focusing on all the right things. The joint, cross-school projects that provided a common structure for improvement across all turnaround schools are a time consuming and an ambitious effort. However, principals shared, while they give up time and effort, they get back much more and are willing to give to get. Central office leaders shared an interesting perspective and stated each was obligated to assist with turnaround in all of the network schools regardless, and the network, while a significant time commitment, is a much better use of time as each school is getting the same information, the same attention from managers, and specific consideration based on turnaround work.

Furthermore, participants shared some unexpected personal and professional benefits to belonging to the network group. Members shared a better sense of belonging, happiness, increased
commitment to the school district, felt appreciated, valued and cared for.” These feelings were considered important aspects of the network effort and seen to be important as several said they were “burnt out,” “overwhelmed,” “isolated,” “felt like a failure,” “looking for a different job,” “unsatisfied in their current position” prior to the network initiative. Following the network initiative each also shared they feel “much better about my role,” “motivated,” “supported,” “excited,” “encouraged.” and “rejuvenated.” Hence, network members found a great benefit to network membership and shared multiple benefits that were both professional and personal.

**Turnaround Networks Must Emphasize Continuous Improvement by Testing Ideas Through the Use of Quality Data and Establish Processes for Calibration.** Both turnaround principals and central office managers reported the data procedures in the network were well developed and a foundational component of the work. When asked what components or elements of the network were most effective, several shared the data and tools ranked very high with them. As mentioned previously, the network developed tools, with rubrics and codes with supporting look fors, saved on the members phones and all entries were collected on backend reports. These data sets provided an opportunity for the network to accelerate improvement as turnaround requires quick and immediate progress and using the data points assisted turnaround principals by providing information needed to plan and adjust. Additionally, the data offered a means to improve the turnaround process by allowing a look at not only what was working but also what was not working. The network used data to build on success and learn from pitfalls and or mistakes.

The network adopted a continuous improvement mindset and leaders used data to help justify the investment members made in the theory of action and improvement. The data led members toward buying-into the network initiative as one turnaround principal shared, “I saw great value in the data, I had never tracked high-quality instruction in a qualitative way, it was always
subjective and we often did not always find the right points to make in giving feedback” (E.P., 2020, p. 10). Additionally, a central office manager reported, “Using the backend data assisted our team in determining specific additional supports for schools . . . such as DOK workshops, Manager Walkthroughs and sometimes we saw models for the network schools...places where things where working best” (D.L., 2020, p. 11). Another manager shared data provided opportunities to celebrate and the tools helped us key in on places and areas of growth.” Yet, all members agree everyone is still getting used to the tools and interpreting what it means to “code a 3 instead of a 2” (S.B., 2020, p. 9).

The network had established effective calibration tools and had regularly scheduled cross-school walks and managers worked with principals to work through calibration challenges. The network members reported there are no changes they would make to the tools now and they spent a significant time refining the look fors last year and the tool works better for all. The network’s theory of action assumes all school’s PLCs will be tracked and school leaders will be involved in guiding, coaching and planning and ultimately these changes will result in improved instructional capacity across all schools. Participants shared, to date, there has been an increase in high-quality professional collaboration in each school, and instruction has come far but realized progress is not enough as dramatic improvements are needed. Participants shared “sticking with” the goals and the intention of the network is important to them as they see this opportunity as a “being the thing” that moves their school and that “listening” to data will be necessary in the future.

**Discussion of Findings in Relationship to the Theoretical Framework**

The researcher used the Burke-Litwin performance and change model (Burke & Litwin, 1992) as the theoretical framework for the study, in order understand, analyze and to examine the findings of this study. This theoretical framework was chosen as it aligned well with the research
design and purpose of the study. The Burke-Litwin change model examines organizational change and provides insight into how changes in 12 key elements of the organization's design can impact one another and overall performance. The Burke-Litwin performance and change model provides a useful framework from which to analyze what needs an organization has what impact changes in one area have on all the other areas. The Burke-Litwin performance and change model framework provides important insight into the change through the lens of both transformational and transactional factors.

Before engaging in data collection, the researcher identified certain propositions regarding turnaround work that aligned with the Burke-Litwin performance and change model (Burke & Litwin, 2012):

1. Turnaround schools are complex and challenging and heavily influenced by outside pressure to improve quickly, have an extreme sense of urgency, environmental pressure to create change, and need structures and systems to be developed to change.

2. Turnaround leadership is a complex phenomenon and turnaround leaders must purposefully integrate opportunities for collaboration, relevant instructional support, and remain focused on improvement.

3. Turnaround schools must organize around a vision and strategy that is goal-oriented and focused on data.

4. Turnaround schools benefit from increased professional collaboration that enhances individual skills and expertise and additionally promotes engagement, motivation and commitment to the aims of turnaround work.

In the following section, the researcher will further discuss the Burke-Litwin performance and change model (Burke & Litwin, 1992) along with the aforementioned propositions and their
connection to the results of this study. The Burke-Litwin casual model of organizational performance and change describes the complexity and uncertainty of change as “the number of variables changing at the same time, the magnitude of environmental change, and the frequent resistance of human systems create a whole confluence of processes that are extremely difficult to predict and almost impossible to control” (Burke & Litwin, 1992, p. 523). As such, the interplay between these factors and variables, consistent patterns of organizational change exist and can be observed in organizations through this model (Burke & Litwin, 1992).

The Burke-Litwin is composed of 12 components, each element represents an important facet within the framework of an organization (Burke & Litwin, 2012). The components and their definitions, as stated by Burke and Litwin (1992), are listed next with examples of organizational change that occurred in the turnaround network.

1. **External environment.** The external environment includes outside influences or situations that impact the organization. For the network, the external environment was a significant influence as, the threats were numerous; DESE accountability status, low test scores, declining morale, and lack of resources. This led to the district reorganizing support and creating a networked learning initiative for all turnaround schools in the school district.

2. **Mission and strategy.** Mission and strategy are what the organization believes is the priority and purpose of the organization. Strategy is the plan to achieve the purpose and goals of the organization. The network was comprised of 14 schools needing dramatic improvement that adopted the network’s mission, a theory of action and a clear strategy which resulted in improvements in all schools.

3. **Leadership.** Leadership provides overall organizational direction and serves as models
for employees. The network leadership, the hub [INSTLL] and the core central office
management team had extensive turnaround experience. Two key central office
managers had each been part of leading successful turnarounds and the INSTLL
consultants are well-known, renown researchers and authors. The network provided
credible and experienced leadership and fostered specialized leadership among
turnaround principals.

4. **Culture.** Culture is described as the overarching explicit and implicit rules, values, and
principles that exist and guide organizational behavior. Culture is “the way things are
done.” The network adopted specific values and principles that were focused to improve
turnaround schools that promoted teamwork and collaboration.

5. **Structure.** Structure is the composition, arrangement and organization of part or
elements into the organization’s specific areas, that include, levels of responsibility,
decision-making authority, communication, and relationships. The turnaround network
developed specific structures such as, monthly turnaround meetings or cross school
walks to assure effective implementation of the organization’s mission and strategy.

6. **Management practices.** Management practices consider the behaviors of managers and
the activities managers are involved in and how they interact with the organization. The
central office managers created and co-designed the network with both INSTLL and the
turnaround principals, thus creating “buy in” from turnaround principals. Additionally,
the managers spent significant time with the network and dedicated time, resources and
commitment to seeing the network thrive.

7. **Systems.** Systems are policies, procedures, and mechanisms of work. These systems may
include the organization’s reward systems, management information systems, goal and
budget development, and human resource allocation. The turnaround network set goals and benchmarks for improvement and continually were assessed progress.

8. *Climate.* Climate relates to the employees’ experience in the work environment. It may include, how employees experience collaboration, how much trust exists, the relationships with colleagues and bosses. It was reported in multiple interviews the network functioned as a positive, community, where trust was built from open, honest and authentic interactions between all members, leaders and participants.

9. *Task requirements and individual skills/abilities.* Task requirements and individual skills/abilities describe the requirements of a specific job and the fit it has with the skills and knowledge of an employee. In the turnaround network, all professional development was aligned with turnaround initiatives and practices to provide targeted, relevant support for turnaround principals.

10. *Individual needs and values.* Individual needs and values relates to demands and expectations employees have about their work. It concerns the opinion employees have about their work and the work environment. It was frequently reported turnaround work was extremely challenging, but the network supported their ability to be effective in their roles in the school district. Participants felt “valued” and “their ideas were important.”

11. *Motivation.* Motivation concerns inspiring and motivating employees to meet organizational goals. In the interview sessions with network participants, they shared they felt “connected” to the work and “re-energized.” Additionally, they shared they found great value to membership as much was shared and learned within the meetings and network activities.
12. **Individual and organizational performance.** Individual and organizational performance considers the performance of the individual or the department in an organization. Individual and organizational performance was continually monitored in the turnaround network as data across individual schools and the entire network were consistently analyzed.

**Turnaround Schools are Complex and Challenging and Heavily Influenced by Outside Pressure to Create Change, and Need Structures and Systems to be Developed to Change**

Burke (1994) suggested the transformational environmental factors are the most important driver for organizational change. The school district recognized the need to support schools and to find ways to assist schools deal effectively with the outside pressure, the need for accountability and improvement the most importantly capitalize on the need to change and improve through the development of a turnaround network. Participants spoke frequently and consistently about the numerous challenges and issues they faced in their turnaround work and often shared deciding what to do and how to proceed with their turnaround work was confusing as there were so many issues to address all at once. The district believed harnessing the need to change and transforming these schools could be best accomplished by co-creating structures and systems across schools to help schools deal effectively with external and internal issues and challenges. The turnaround schools in the Turnaround Network transformed their schools’ practices with the district’s support when the district paid attention to the specific needs turnaround schools face when dealing with environmental pressure and complex conditions turnaround leaders confront by creating and envisioning a networked learning initiative.
Turnaround Leadership is a Complex Phenomenon and Turnaround Leaders Must Purposefully Integrate Opportunities for Collaboration, Relevant Instructional Support and Remain Focused on Whole School Improvement

Burke (1994) articulated the important role leaders have in the improvement and change process. In fact, leadership, a transformational variable in the Burke-Litwin performance and change model (Burke & Litwin, 1992) is a critical and important component as it provides direction to the rest of the organization. Turnaround principals are leaders in important positions as they are responsible for developing a vision, a strategy and motivating the rest of the organization to achieve, change, and improve. The district in this case recognized all change must begin with the principals and reorganized their offices to work as a central office team to assist principals in the development of leadership skills, technical and instructional skills through the network initiative.

The turnaround principals in the study shared the network provided information about how to leverage turnaround practices in their respective schools and provided detailed accounts about how the network supported their turnaround work, enhanced their skills and helped them to be more effective in their roles as turnaround leaders through continuous and frequent professional collaboration opportunities. Additionally, central office participants described how they shifted their own leadership practices to meet the needs of their principals and schools. A central office manager shared the district shifted from one school at a time support to a networked learning structure, which also required “the central office [to stop] telling schools what to do and [begin] to listen to what schools need” (O.Q., 2020, p. 8). The school district focused on and invested in providing leaders with the knowledge, skills, and technical expertise to turnaround complicated schools by focusing on supporting, developing and expanding leadership capacities of already talented principals.
Turnaround Schools Must Organize Around a Vision and Strategy that is Goal-oriented and Focused on Data.

Burke (1994) identified mission and strategy and culture as important transformational elements of organizational improvement. Burke described this element as the purpose of the organization, which also includes the processes for improvement. In this case, the networked schools worked collaboratively to create change. The strategy, in broad terms, was to galvanize a network of school and district leaders to work collaboratively to provide conditions for improvement and success across all turnaround schools.

Ultimately, the vision of the network helped to develop a sense of belonging and unanimity of purpose. A principal shared, “I was not sure this could be done, well I knew the way we were working was not effective, but somehow having everyone believe in the network vision helped cement us as a group” (M.G., 2020, p. 7). Another principal shared, “The tone of our meetings was serious as we were working on serious stuff, the goals we set for ourselves were high” (G.S., 2020, p. 4). The network culture was strong and members shared a commitment and shared the responsibility for implementing network activities and “felt connected to each other.” The district understood, for the network to have the best chance of success, it would be important to be clear about the norms of behavior and values that would be accepted and expected within the network.

When a participant was asked about the mission and vision of the network, she shared, “The goal is that we all have breakthrough growth and make dramatic improvements. It won’t be good enough if only a few of us improve” (C.P., 2020, p. 6). A central office manager reported, “Having a vision, strategy and a theory of action certainly provided clarity about roles, purpose and how we would work and engage together” (S.B., 2020, p. 7). In this case, the district realized the mission
would give meaning to this work and create structures for network activities to have concrete and clear direction for the turnaround network activities.

**Turnaround Schools Benefit from Increased Professional Collaboration that Enhances Individual Skills and Expertise and Additionally Promotes Engagement, Motivation and Commitment to the Aims of Turnaround Work**

The transactional elements of the Burke-Litwin model are the elements of an organization that are important, but unless the three transformational factors, leadership, mission and strategy, and organizational culture are intact, improvements in these areas may be temporary (Burke & Litwin, 1992). The network however, provided some essential and critical transactional elements of the Burke-Litwin performance and change model. Structure for the turnaround effort consisted of specific clarity around roles and functions, communication, and decision-making regarding professional collaboration and overall network work.

Additionally, the turnaround network systems were well developed and designed to include processes and procedures designed to guide network activities. Cross-school calibration walks were considered effective systems to ensure network leaders were coherently using the network tools. One principal shared the walkthroughs provided clarity and practice using the tools and refining our practice. One of the most notable transactional elements, work climate, or the attitude and morale of the people working for the organization was reported to be extremely high in the network. Turnaround principals and central office managers both agreed interactions among members was positive and grew over time. The relational aspect of the network promoted a deeper commitment, enthusiasm and motivation for the work. In this case, the district worked to provide professional collaboration that served the aims of the network but additionally helped to forge strong
relationships among participants which in turn positively impacted the overall perception of the network initiative.

**Discussion of Findings in Relation to the Literature Review**

The literature presented in Chapter 2 focused on defining and identifying the most effective turnaround practices and models for schools in turnaround and introduced the idea of networking as a potential solution to the current challenge of how to build these practices to scale. The findings from this study affirm the majority of the research and literature presented in Chapter 3. In the following section the researcher will further explain turnaround and network, cross-practice themes and identify four themes and connections between the findings of this study and the relevant literature. Chapter 2 focused on the following key areas to inform this study of Turnaround Networks’ best practices:

1. Deliberate leadership, skilled facilitation, focused on development and growth.
2. Focusing on ambitious learning goals directly linked to high leverage practices and quality instruction.
3. Developing strong relationships of trust and relatedness by frequently interacting and collaborating.
4. Continuously improving through systems and cycles of inquiry, data and accountability.

**Deliberate Leadership, Skilled Facilitation, Focused on Development and Growth**

The literature clearly defines leadership as a critical, integral, and essential aspect to all organizational success. The literature on specific turnaround leadership suggests effective leadership is a nonnegotiable when it comes to organizational change and improvement (Duke, 2015). Furthermore, turnaround principals face challenging complex, contexts and require unique skill sets and must possess the ability to motivate, inspire, and encourage others (Hargreaves et al.,
In fact, leadership is so critical to turning around a school, Bryk et al. (2010) and Duke (2015) espoused turnaround cannot happen without a leader who possesses the right balance of skill and will. Successful network leaders must support and maintain a keen focus on the core problems that plague the system and develop distributed leadership to establish high-functioning teams that can spread the newly acquired information, knowledge, and innovation to their schools (Bryk et al., 2015; C. Chapman, 2008). The network learning model offered an opportunity for turnaround principals to learn together, share experiences and ideas and develop these critical leadership attributes and capacities that are necessary to turnaround work.

The data collected through interviews and document reviews exposed significant validation that leadership was a profoundly important aspect of the turnaround network initiative. Leadership was surfaced as a finding in two ways; first, as the manner in which the network was led and second, in the skills and competencies emphasized by the network for leaders. Principals shared the network was led by knowledgeable and competent leaders who possessed knowledge about turnaround leadership that was continuously shared with principals at network activities. Evidence from the study surfaced, pointing to the fact that central office managers and the hub [INSTLL] consultants were responsible for the network development and that their extensive experience in turnaround helped to define the initiative as one that infused opportunities for turnaround principals to improve their own leadership skills.

Specific efforts were made to expose the turnaround principals to the current turnaround improvement models so to support each school in their improvement work through better understanding successful turnaround practices. Multiple studies emphasize the importance of the leadership and the district paid careful attention to the need to develop specific turnaround expertise, which is quite different than the work of a principal in a non-turnaround school. To
effectively lead a school through a transformation schools must focus on specific turnaround practices. In this case, the district adopted and modified the *Massachusetts Turnaround Practices* (Lane et al., 2012; Lane et al., 2013; Lane et al., 2014; Lane et al., 2016) to synthesize competencies and skills principal of turnaround schools must internalize and cultivate. All network activities were designed to encourage and to advance principal capacity to lead their schools successfully by adopting key and specific leadership practices. Principals in the network established communities of practice in their schools that fostered teaming, share leadership and promoted collaboration. In fact, the participants in this study identified leadership competencies as one of the important elements the network focused on that assisted them in their day-to-day turnaround work. A new principal shared, “I am much more equipped . . . have more information and knowledge . . . than I used to have. Looking back, I was going with my gut” (E.P., 2020, p. 5).

In sum, the network focused on setting conditions for successful turnaround. The network provided support for principals and assisted in the development of the necessary leadership attributes required for turnaround work. Participants shared the network emphasized and worked to create establish a sense of urgency, expected principals to hold high expectations and believe all students are capable of learning. Additionally, the network provided opportunities for principals to develop expertise and better understand what effective schools function like and have intimate knowledge of what constitutes good instruction. Possibly most important was the network members had opportunities to develop a deep understanding of how important deep, trusting, collegial relationships are to the process of turnaround. The interviews shared the network meetings focused on all of these areas and these were seen to be essential to the ongoing work but this work is far from complete and deeper implementation will be needed in the future.
As previously stated in this chapter, the school district adopted and modified the Massachusetts Turnaround Practices (Lane et al., 2012) as a foundational, framework for the network initiative. The literature review validated that turnaround schools must hone in on specific and intentional turnaround practices to improve. A central office manager stated it had always been the intention of the district to infuse these turnaround practices into schools but “until now the effort had mostly existed on paper.” The manager shared the idea of the network was not only to expose turnaround principal to the effective turnaround practices but “to demonstrate what they look like in schools” (O.Q., 2020, p. 7).

The findings of the study confirm the network worked to develop a vision and begin to create conditions in each school where high-quality instruction was available to each and every student. Papa and English (2011) espoused, “The key to turning around a low-performing school is to focus on instruction” (p. 13). In fact, multiple studies argue effective instruction is the most important component of school turnaround (Palardy & Rumberger, 2008; Sternberg, 2002; Zahorik et al., 2003). To establish these conditions, the network worked hard to identify high-quality instructional elements and used the distributed intelligence and experience of the turnaround principals to help shape, create and adjust instructional rubrics and looks fors.

The network focused on developing intentional turnaround practices that included (a) all lessons anchored by robust learning goals, (b) teacher’s use time effectively in which there would be evidence of high-quality instruction, and (c) students are engaged in work that includes cognitive challenge and lastly teacher’s check in on student understanding continuously. These defined expectations for rigorous and consistent instructional practices across the network and offered a
uniform platform from which provide feedback and professional development. Thus, findings of this study assert the network’s ability to hone in on improving instruction and establishing strategic, intentional practices across schools provided a much needed structure and forum for improvement. Yet, all agreed there is much more to do and that the schools are still actively working to realize their improvement goals but in all the findings in this study align with the literature on the topic, that true turnaround cannot occur without high-quality instruction.

**Developing Strong Relationships of Trust and Relatedness by Frequently Interacting and Collaborating**

The study revealed the network assisted the school district in leveraging change across multiple schools through the provision of frequent opportunities to collaborate and share. The participants reported the network cultivated a positive, trusting environment in which to accelerate improvement. Studies have shown the work environment has a strong impact on school turnaround success, and schools that collaborate more have been more successful in their turnaround efforts. Cucchiara et al. (2015) reported schools that collaborate, interact intentionally and communicate frequently fared much better. Additionally, Kim and Gonzales-Black (2015) shared schools that frequently interact and share with other schools in networks have had more success than schools that work in isolation. The literature review confirmed culture, relational trust, collegiality, and positive interactions are so important to school improvement that leaders must attend to this if they expect to accomplish anything significant. However, improving is much more than meeting and talking together. Fullan and Quinn (2016) warned groups are powerful but can be powerfully wrong, so schools must create expectations and structures so professional collaboration can be most effective.
The network focused intently on developing structured professional collaboration opportunities across all schools [PLCs, CPT or GLTs] and these provided guidance and direction to schools working to improve. Principals reported “things were better” and weekly meetings have had professional and personal benefits. “I feel like I know my team better, I know them as teachers of course, now I know them as people and I think that is helping us” (G.S., 2020, p. 9).

However, the greatest reported change from the study was the sense of belonging and comradery reported by turnaround principals. Prior to the network principals shared they felt isolated and disconnected from each other and central office. Furthermore, participants reported relational trust was now high and each communicated a strong sense of value and commitment. This was also seen as a shift as previously turnaround principals shared they were “overwhelmed” and “overworked.” This tone and sentiment of positivity was also shared by a central office manager:

I feel very connected to the turnaround principals, the meetings have been a wonderful opportunity for me to develop better, more genuine relationships with them and as a result we are able to sometimes discuss very difficult things without defensiveness as I think that trust is there. (O.Q., 2020, p. 9)

This perception of “togetherness” also translated in being more productive in meetings and in the work together. A network participant shared the network is “tons of work . . . with people I really like, so it is enjoyable and something I look forward to” and “has led to changing the difficulty of turnaround work . . . more satisfying and less frustrating” (V.H., 2020, p. 8).

Thus, the perceptions and reports of network participants confirm and overlap the findings of the literature referenced in this section of chapter five. A culture of trust, psychological safety
and collegiality helped turnaround schools in the network overcome challenging circumstances and adopt improvement mindsets.

**Continuously Improving Through Systems and Cycles of Inquiry, Data, and Accountability**

The use of data is critical to turnaround success. Schools working to improve must make strategic, informed decisions frequently and must use data to “reliably guide action.” Turnaround schools must focus on measuring student progress, and achievement by establishing procedures and protocols for reviewing and analyzing data. The literature review supported the network participants perspectives regarding the value and importance of data and student achievement measures. Bambrick-Santoyo (2012) emphasized data are a “super lever” for struggling schools and multiple participants described the data analysis and the network tools as critical to their work. The network established practices for measuring and coding classroom observations, PLCs and triangulated this data with student achievement data and by doing such identified themes, individual student growth, and analyzed student specific needs.

Additionally, the network adopted the Plan, Do Study, Act (PDSA) cycle of continuous improvement model for improvement (Deming, 1993). As such, the network tested ideas, and verified their impact through data analysis. This data process provided participants with information that proved to be helpful in their turnaround work. A principal shared, “The data part of the meetings was by far my favorite, I was able to see in numbers what I was seeing in the classroom” (S.Q., 2020, p. 6). Multiple network studies confirm data were integral to network success as effective continuous improvement implementation requires the use of data, test, trial, and experimentation. Numerous network participants shared the use of network tools was instrumental in “getting into the deeper work of improvement.”
In sum, the network used strong data practices, and participants shared monitoring, measuring, and assessing impact was critical to engaging members in continuous improvement efforts. The findings from this study validate the literature and confirm the integral and critical role data play in school turnaround.

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this qualitative, case study was to examine and better understand the impact a multischool turnaround network had on school turnaround and improvement efforts in a large, urban, school district. This study specifically focused on the roles of both principals and central office administrators, the impact of adopted practices and the experience of members of the turnaround network. The study investigated both, what factors, structures, strategies, and practices were perceived to have positively influenced the network and additionally what challenges and disadvantages existed within the network. The research study used an instrumental single case study to understand the following research questions:

1. How did the network support central office leaders and principals in their turnaround work?
2. What were the various conditions, practices, and factors that contributed to the success of the network?
3. What were the perceptions of both principal and central office members about the advantages, disadvantages and challenges of network membership and participation?

A large, urban, school district, involved in a multischool turnaround effort, was selected as a site for this study. The researcher conducted 10 semi-structured interviews with turnaround principals and central office administrator who had been involved in a turnaround network between 1-3 years. The researcher collected data at both the school and district level from interviews and
document analysis of turnaround network activities. The researcher transcribed the data, engaged in a multistep coding process, and developed resulting themes. Finally, the researcher analyzed the themes aligned with Burke-Litwin performance and change model (Burke & Litwin, 2012) theoretical framework and the review of the literature.

In summarizing the case study findings, it is important to begin with the early decisions the district made to venture into networked learning as a turnaround intervention for multiple schools in turnaround, dangerously close, and other schools with low performance and low growth over multiple years. This large, urban school district has high performing schools, low-performing schools and some in the middle but the number of schools needing intensive support was many and central office was lean. There are two managers for up to 50 sites and schools.

The district has also had excellent success in turning around former Level 4 schools, which were those schools that represented the lowest performing, in the bottom 5% in the state of Massachusetts. These schools received intensive district support, additional funds for interventions, and unique autonomies used to change practices so to accelerate student achievement. In all, four schools were deemed Level 4 in this district over a period of 5 years, and every school was successful in moving out. Not all schools have remained as successful, one is thriving, another is steadily improving, and two others are struggling to maintain their growth and progress of the past (MA, DESE, 2019). The district chose to wrap three of these schools into the Turnaround Network, along with 11 other schools that are also struggling to meet increasing demands, higher performance targets and adjusting to new computer-based testing requirements. Each of these schools serves challenging populations, with high percentages of low income, high needs, special education populations, English language learners and other unique challenging conditions.
All schools reported being safe and orderly, and student behaviors and school culture as positive and productive. All principals reported it took considerable effort to accomplish this and it took up much of their time and maintaining it was a priority. The principals also reported the district has provided excellent resources, professional development and support but nothing to provide them with ways to manage the complexity of managing and leading a turnaround school. The network began as a means for the central office managers to offer much needed turnaround support to a large group of schools and for the schools and principals to get the attention and consideration they needed to accelerate improvements. The central office managers drew on past success with the former Level 4 schools and recalled the focus the district gave to those schools. In an attempt to replicate the intentionality and emphasis on the Massachusetts Turnaround Practices (Lane et al., 2012) in the design for the network, the managers looked for a consultant to help build this new initiative in the school district. Ultimately, the school district hired INSTLL as the network hub or intermediary, as they had renown knowledge of turnaround practices, improvement science and networks.

In summarizing this case study, it was evident the turnaround network was perceived as a positive initiative as it provided much needed support, expertise, direction, and resources, and provided community to a group of schools that were overwhelmed, under pressure, and failing to create the right conditions for whole school success. The network focused on the development of specific turnaround strategies and supported schools in their ability to begin to actualize these in their respective schools. The network focused on Massachusetts Turnaround Practice 1: Leadership, Shared Responsibility and Professional Collaboration and Turnaround Practice 2: Intentional Practices for Improving Instruction (Lane et al., 2012). Within these broader categories, the study revealed the network activities supported leveraging strategic turnaround actions that included the
provision of effective turnaround leadership; the establishment of teaming and collaboration structures to improve instruction; collegial relationships; and improving instructional practice through data, coding, and analysis.

The network both provided and promoted effective turnaround leadership. Turnaround leaders are unique and specialized. The school district recognized that these types and kinds of principals are hard to find and the understanding of what constitutes effective leadership in a turnaround school is a profile of a highly competent, resilient, adaptive leader. The network aimed to provide turnaround principals with the “right” information, access to experts in the field, direction for school improvement, and the development of specific turnaround leadership competencies. The network worked collectively to identify solutions to persistent problems and apply newly acquired knowledge and skills in actionable ways in their respective schools.

Hallinger and Heck (2010) and Seashore Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, and Anderson (2010) explained turnaround leadership is characterized by specific qualities, understandings and attributes and, for turnaround schools to be successful, principals must hold high expectations, create a sense of urgency, have expertise in instructional best practices and masterfully work well with people, establish trust, and have a collaborative, operational mindset. To successfully turnaround the schools in the network, it was decided the network leadership would equip, train, and develop capacity of the principals by leveraging the tenants and components of turnaround research and specifically the Massachusetts Turnaround Practices (Lane et al., 2012) to give turnaround schools the best chance of success.

In addition to the aforementioned leadership practice, the network focused on three other major turnaround practices. The Turnaround Network focused on the definition and establishment of high-quality instruction (Targeted Learning Goals, Effective Use of Time, Cognition/DOK, and
Formative Assessment); effective and productive common planning time; and robust data collection and analysis processes. The theory of action of the network emphasized the use of common planning time (PLCs or GLTs). It was assumed if schools held regular and effective collaborative meetings, where instructional components were described and refined, then instruction would benefit and begin to improve. Common planning time rubrics were developed and teams coded activities, content and frequency of meetings as part of the network data collection system.

Classroom observations were another major component of the network. Principals, assistant principals, and coaches each coded at least five observations per week. The network identified criteria and schools worked at improving instruction based on results of the data. Principals also participated in cross-school walks with the network principals and the central office managers. Through this participants developed skill and consistency with coding and over time most ratings and coding were calibrated. Through these aforementioned exercises the network established several strategies for successful turnaround. The network used multiple data sources to monitor improvement; provided ongoing professional development to establish shared understandings; designed, examined and worked to improve core instruction; and used collaborative teaming structures to drive improvements and structure conditions for turnaround success.

Network participants shared the relational trust built overtime supported the overall network’s perception of success. The network organizers, hub intermediary (INSTLL), and central office managers emphasized and developed a trusting and collegial environment in which principals reported “they liked to work together” and shared responsibility for the network goals and aims. The tight alignment of the network goals and consistency in which meetings and activities were scheduled assisted the network evolve and develop skills over time. While the network activities, practices and routines appeared to be highly routinized and prescriptive, they supportive an
alignment across all schools that reduced variability across the network. To make highly complex work manageable, measurable and specific, the network identified strategic and potent turnaround practices that had great potential to provide the necessary structure for turnaround success. It should also be noted the network is still in its infancy and while robust structures were built a deepening of the work will be necessary in the future. Understanding and developing capacity and skill among the identified practices will be necessary as the network progresses.

The network had many benefits as it gave structure and support to principals, provided a more efficient way for turnaround supervision and support as managers reported more quality time and consistent messaging and many promising practices have begun to influence change in these highly complex schools. Turnaround is a complex phenomenon and there is no one way to turnaround a school and the lessons learned from this turnaround network were many. However, as promising as many of the aforementioned practices, ideas and suggestions were there are several other pitfalls identified that could derail an initiative such as this.

Participants shared various concerns about time, turnaround networks take time, the activities, the expectations, the meetings. With so many demands, the district must be prepared to provide turnaround schools with the time and autonomy to focus on their work and not overwhelm with other initiatives that distract these schools from their primary focus. “Piling on of demands” was referred to in some interviews and presented as a potential threat to network and turnaround success. Another worry and concern of some network participants was sustainability, as participants worried the network would not be sustainable if key members left (INSTLL, central office, principals).

In all, participants shared the turnaround network was extremely helpful to member’s individual turnaround work; leadership, relational trust, a team mentality, a relentless focus on high-
quality instruction, and the unique use of data and tools provided the right balance for their improvement work.

**Limitations**

This study may have been impacted by several limitations. The generalizability and scalability of the results of this study may be limited due to the size of the population, the relatively small number of principals, and central office managers who participated in the study were representatives from several schools but only one school district and one formal network. Additionally, the voluntary participation may have elicited responses from principals and central office managers who are more interested and/or positive about the school turnaround network than others who did not participate. Another limitation to the study is the researcher is a leader in the school district studied, as such members of the turnaround network who participated in the study may have moderated their responses and this may impact the relevance of their responses.

**Significance of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative, case study was to examine and better understand the impact a multischool turnaround network had on school turnaround and improvement efforts in a large, urban, school district. This study specifically focused on the roles of both principals and central office administrators, the impact of adopted practices and the experience of members of the Turnaround Network. The study investigated both, what factors, structures, strategies and practices were perceived to have positively influenced the network and additionally what challenges and disadvantages existed within the network. The study was conducted using the Burke-Litwin performance and change model (Burke & Litwin, 1992), as the theoretical framework and it was through this lens themes were disclosed, emerged, and highlighted the network member’s perceptions of the school district’s turnaround network. The results were in agreement with the
Theoretical framework and were supported with current research in the literature review. Yet, also lean toward the fact success is so much more than what schools do and more about the people and they how work together.

The school reform and turnaround efforts of the past and present have fallen short of their goals and have yet to identify the solution this persistent problem of improving America’s low-performing schools. Low-performing schools are a national crisis as these schools often serve our most vulnerable and needy students. However, we also know struggling schools can be turned around as there are several cases of turnaround success. Lane et al. (2016) posited specific actions of leaders can influence high yield gains and position schools for improvement. Our nation’s future depends upon the success of our schools, but our most important obligation and responsibility of all is to provide high-quality schools for every child.

The Turnaround Network initiative is significant as it addressed specific, intentional ways a school district can provide support to multiple schools in need of intensive intervention and support. The network framed their improvement approach by paying close attention to turnaround research, by grounding structures and practices in both network research and facets of improvement science. Participants shared the Turnaround Network focused on whole school improvement but was intentionally focused on looking beyond turnaround; as the goal was always much bigger than just improving, it was about accelerating achievement and providing students with high quality. The criteria and conditions for success of the network also referred to as “the big buckets” were designed to encourage and emphasize movement away from rote, low level, learning activities toward big picture, loftier goals. A central office manager reported the obvious “If we do not change, we stay the same, and we continue to fail kids” (O.Q., 2020, p. 10).
During the interviews, network principals and central office managers shared turning around a school is a beginning step, but establishing the foundation for great teaching, innovation, and achievement is the goal. The participants agreed it is not about MCAS test scores and more about preparing our students for the future. Schools have been designed and continue to operate much as they have for the past century and network participants shared they have taken steps to move beyond the norm and embraced new progressive, educational efforts.

Members provided many examples of ways the network held high expectations and began to restructure schools to provide higher quality, less traditional structures for lessons. For example, several principals and central office managers referenced the way the network schools have begun to shift, to look at rigor through the lens of the DOK, increase student engagement and discourse [through the of the Effective Use of Time domain], expect more and design lessons that are far reaching [through the lens of Targeted Learning Goals] and suggested collaborative projects, technology enhanced instruction, and integrating culturally responsive teaching practices have begun.

Each school referenced types of projects that elicited excitement from students, and staff and engaged students at the higher end of each of the four network domains. These types of projects involved students conducting research, designing, analyzing data and creating presentations. The cross school network forum, provided the opportunity to discuss and push toward better quality lessons such as the ones described previously. The participants did mention seeing a lesson coded with a score of 4 was very rare; the network average was closer to 2.5 and much work was still needed to be done in this area. Thus, network members recognized focusing on improving instruction and providing high-quality learning experiences would be essential to transform schools.
All participants revealed, without the structure of the Turnaround Network, they would not have been able to operationalize such a structured and focused turnaround effort. Principals shared while the network provided guidance and structure, the greatest benefit was the time to share ideas, perspective and expertise and the most challenging was the amount of time the network activities required. The Turnaround Network initiative provided a structured, focused and collaborative approach to turnaround. This study may benefit any district or school involved and facing a need for transformation and turnaround.

This study includes discussion of the systems and structures necessary to support turnaround and provided information regarding the way the network focused on leadership, instructional expertise, collaboration and data. Further, this study examined practices such as common planning time, cross school walks and specific criteria and domains of high-quality instruction and the monitoring of effective PLCs. Examining the perspectives of network participants was important, as, although there is some research on the impact of turnaround practices and networks, there is limited research on the impact of multischool turnaround network. Consistent themes and findings emerged from the study and many practices, strategies and findings associated with this case study may prove useful to other school districts faced with a multischool turnaround effort.

Recommendations

After careful review of the research findings, the researcher offers the following recommendations for district and school leaders to consider:

1. Set a vision, a strategic plan, and benchmarks. Set goals and priorities for a year at a time getting better takes time and practice.

2. Start small and slow to go fast and deep. Keep network learning focused and manageable but intentional.
3. Use the group to change the group. Collaboration is key!

4. Do a few things well. Focus on specificity, intentionality and precision.

5. Interact with openness and honesty as success relies on establishing trust.

6. Continuous improvement is ongoing and not fixed.

7. Culture of accountability. You can’t improve what is not measured: Data are key.

8. Go out to get better within. Regularly have network principals visit other schools. Bring in ideas from outside the network that are working in other places for consideration.

9. Consider sustainability from the start.

10. Last and possibly most important, leadership matters in every way.

**Future Research Considerations**

The results of this case study pinpoint the need for further research into the phenomenon of school networks, as presented in the following list:

1. Conduct a longitudinal research study on other networks that have been operating for several years to learn and explore different network models and to see where success has taken place and understand and to see if length of operation has any correlation to success.

2. Conduct qualitative research on the impact of relatedness among network members to investigate how the relationship between networks members effects the network’s progress and ability to succeed. Discovering successful practices may help school district’s and leaders to establish effective school networks.

3. Survey other network leaders to identify key network practices (including instructional, operational, management, and leadership structures). These practices can be analyzed to determine which provided the best results for improving schools. Those best practices
could then inform other school districts using networks to improve their schools.

4. Conduct a large-scale, broad qualitative survey of school districts across the country that use school networks. To know more about the type of network model used, their organizational structure, management style, focus areas, instructional practices and their methods for supporting schools. The results from this study could provide guidance to other districts that are considering adopting a network approach.

5. A comparison research study on other models of school networks in other school districts to compare results and explore how different networks organize, operate, collaborate and learn and to identify which type works best.

6. Research technology enhanced and synchronous network models to determine if broadening school-school networks from face to face to technology adapted has positive outcomes.

**Personal Comments**

I have had the opportunity and privilege to work in public education since 1988 and serve the community in which I live; this has always been so much more than just a job to me. My four children were educated in the public schools in my school district and my husband also works as a middle school principal in this school system. Furthermore, two of my now grown children teach in the district, so to say we are committed and invested may be an understatement. I have been a classroom teacher, curriculum specialist, assistant principal, principal of two schools, and, most recently, a central office manager. I currently oversee 33 elementary schools and all turnaround efforts in our school district, elementary, middle, and high schools. In 2010, I was assigned to a Level 4 school. The superintendent called and asked me to take over one of the first Level 4 schools in the state. It was the best decision I have ever made.
I was a successful principal at my prior school, our school was one of the top performers in the city, and we were a Blue Ribbon nominee, had a waitlist for enrollment, provided high-quality learning experiences and had an incredibly talented staff and empowered and engaged parent involvement. The school I walked into was filthy, chaotic, stressed, and nothing like I had ever seen before. I quickly realized what I used to do as a principal may not work as well here so I had to find a way, as the students had been victims of an inadequate education for far too long.

In 2013, our school exited Level 4 status and in 2014, was identified as a Level 1 school. I learned many lessons from these years in a Level 4 school. First, a committed group of people who work well together and have great trust and respect for one another can overcome great challenges. Second, all students deserve our very best, and critically underperforming schools need the best people, curriculum, resources, and support. There was no shiny magic that contributed to our turnaround success story but hard, deliberate work, lots of failures, but luckily more successes.

In my current position, I am responsible for supporting multiple turnaround schools and the complexity of matching interventions and strategies from school to school has been a challenge. Throughout my career I have seen fads, old things become in things again and initiative crazed schools desperately looking for answers. However, I have yet to see anything quite like the power and potential of school networks. The turnaround network initiative has harnessed the collective effort of multiple school leaders, to work together and identify some of our district’s most challenging problems. Today conditions are improving, student achievement is accelerating and our schools are transforming and improving. We have a long way to go but it feels like the change has begun.
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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Permission Letter Superintendent of Schools

Dear Superintendent Binienda,

As you know, I am currently enrolled in a doctoral program at Northeastern University and am in the process of completing the dissertation stage of the program. My research is focused on the impact a Leadership Turnaround Network has on the achievement of 11 of Worcester’s turnaround elementary schools.

Through the qualitative method approach, I will investigate the experiences of participants of the Turnaround Network (TN) and gain insight into the perspectives of various stakeholders that participated in the network: district office administrators, and school leaders. Their stories will help to better understand the factors and elements of the network that were of particular value and will lead to meaningful insight into the key elements of this process. Through a case study model, the research process will involve designing questions and procedures, collecting data, interviewing a sample of participants, and developing general themes inducted by the analysis of data.

I believe this case study will serve to benefit Worcester Public Schools as well as other under performing schools in the Commonwealth and nation alike. The goal is to outline how a multischool turnaround effort was effected by a Turnaround Network and how it may be replicable in other districts with under performing schools.

If you have any questions regarding this study, please contact me directly at (508) XXX-XXXX or via e-mail at xxxxx@worcesterschools.net or the chairperson of my committee, Dr. Christopher Unger at Northeastern University, (617) 909-1360. Thank you in advance for your time. I look forward to hearing from you regarding this request for permission.

Sincerely,

Marie Morse

Manager of Elementary Education, Doctoral Candidate, College of Professional Studies
Northeastern University, Boston, MA
Dear [Turnaround Principals/Administrator],

My name is Marie Morse and I am a doctoral candidate in the College of Professional Studies at Northeastern University. As part of my dissertation research, I am conducting a study about the impact that a Turnaround Network (TN) may have had on school turnaround efforts among the turnaround elementary schools of the Worcester Public Schools.

To gather data about this research, I am inviting you to participate in my study. You have been asked to participate in this project because you have a wealth of in-depth knowledge about the TLN and your insight will be helpful in obtaining information regarding the impact of this initiative. Your input regarding your experience, perceptions, network initiatives, successful strategies and practices will be helpful in obtaining information for this case study.

I will maintain confidentiality at all times; I will assign each participant a pseudonym. All documents related to this study will include only this pseudonym. After the semi-structured interviews are transcribed, I will provide you with an opportunity to verify the accuracy of the transcription.

I would like to include up to 10 turnaround principals and district level administrators to participate in the study group. If you are interested in participating or have any questions, please email me at morse.m@husky.neu.edu.

If you agree to volunteer to participate, we will discuss the purpose of the study, expectations of participants, and review and sign the informed consent form prior to the start of the focus group. There is no pressure for you to participate, and you may withdraw from the study at any time.

If you do not email me to volunteer, I will not contact you again regarding this research. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me at xxxxx@husky.neu.edu.

Please be aware that agreeing or not agreeing to participate in this study will have no reflection on your work within the school district, whatsoever. Also, any participation in the study will be completely confidential; names and other personal information will not be used.

Please respond via e-mail to xxxxx@husky.neu.edu if you are interested or have any questions. Thank you in advance for your time.

Marie Morse
APPENDIX C
Signed Informed Consent Document

Northeastern University, College of Professional Studies
Investigator Name: Principal Investigator, Dr. Chris Unger, Student Researcher, Marie Morse
Title of Project: A Turnaround Network
Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?
You are being asked to participate in this study because of your experience with the district’s Turnaround Network initiative as a turnaround principal or a district-office administrator. Your unique experiences will help inform the benefits and challenges turnaround networks.

Why is this research study being done?
The purpose of this study is to examine the turnaround principals’ and central office administrator’s perceptions of a turnaround network with an emphasis on understanding ways leadership, mission, strategy, organizational structures, systems and supports and strategies implemented to support the collective turnaround initiatives in the school district. In addition, the purpose of the research is to identify and suggest actions, strategies, and factors that support the successful implementation of turnaround networks as a way to improve turnaround efforts in schools working at accelerating achievement. Finally, the purpose of the research is to provide insight into strategies that other turnaround schools and districts may benefit from using.

What will I be asked to do?
I will ask principals and district office administrators to participate in semi-structured interviews that I will audiotape. In addition, I may ask you follow-up questions to clarify your focus group responses. Finally, I will provide you the opportunity to review the transcript from the interview to ensure I captured your thoughts accurately.

Where will this take place and how much time will it take?
The semi-structured interview will last approximately 60 minutes, with potential opportunities for participation in follow-up questions, not to exceed 75 minutes combined. Interviews will take place in a location you choose.

Will there be any risk or discomfort to me?
There are no significant risks involved in being a participant in this study.

Will I benefit by being in this research?
There are no direct benefits for you. Because of your participation, the school and district could gain valuable information that it may use to improve the program for the purpose of improving student achievement in turnaround schools. Further, your insights have the potential of informing similar districts in their turnaround efforts.

Who will see the information about me?
Your part in the study will be completely confidential. I will use for all study participants. Only I, the researcher, will be aware of the participants' identities. No reports or publications will use information that can identify you in any way.

Your participation in semi-structured interviews will be confidential. I will maintain the data and audio recordings and will not share any data or recordings with others. I will use only first names during interview sessions and in transcriptions. I will use pseudonyms in reports, and will destroy all audio tapes following transcription.
I will remove all personally identifiable information from any documents, including student work samples and lesson plans, which you elect to share.

In rare instances, authorized people may request to see research information about you and other people in this study to ensure this researcher follows proper research protocols and processes. I would only permit people authorized by organizations such as Northeastern University Institutional Review Board to see this information. I will never share identifying information with anyone at the Worcester Public Schools.

**If I do not want to take part in the study, what choices do I have?**
You are not required to take part in this study. Participation is voluntary. If you do not want to participate, you do not have to sign the consent form.

**What will happen if I suffer any harm from this research?**
There are no significant risks involved in being a participant in this study.

**Can I stop my participation in this study?**
Participation in this study is voluntary. Your participation or non-participation will not affect other relationships (e.g., employer, school). You may discontinue your participation in this research program at any time without penalty or costs of any nature, character, or kind.

**Who can I contact if I have questions or problems?**
Marie Morse
Phone # (508) XXX-XXXX
E-mail: xxxxx@husky.neu.edu

Chris Unger, Ed. D.
College of Professional Studies
360 Huntington Avenue (BV 41)
Northeastern University, Boston
Cell # 857-272-8941
E-mail: c.unger@northeastern.edu

**Who can I contact about my rights as a participant?**
If you have any questions about your rights in this research, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 490 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. Tel: 617-373-4588, Email: n.regina@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.

**Will I be paid for my participation?**
There is no compensation for participation in this study.

**Will it cost me anything to participate?**
There is no cost to participate in this study.

**Is there anything else I need to know?**
You must be at least 18 years old to participate in this study.

I have read, understood, and had the opportunity to ask questions regarding this consent form. I fully understand the nature and character of my involvement in this research program as a participant and the potential risks. If selected, I agree to participate in this study on a voluntary basis.

**I agree to take part in this research.**

Signature of person/parent agreeing to take part

Date

Printed Name of Person Above

Date
APPENDIX D

Administrator Interview Protocol

Institution: _____________________________________________________

Participants (Title and Name): ______________________________________

Researcher: _____________________________________________________

Date: _____________________________________

Location of Focus Group: ____________________________________

Previously attained background information

Research question: The overarching research question for this study is to understand how a leadership turnaround network impacted a multischool turnaround effort. The aim will be to understand the experience from the perspective from the Turnaround Network membership, to identify key factors and strategies and learn how culture, goals and collaboration led to improvements across multiple schools.

Part I: Introductory Question Objectives (5-7 minutes) to begin after signed informed consent is collected

Introductory Protocol

I want to thank you in advance for your time and your willingness to participate in this focus group, I am a doctoral student at Northeastern University and this focus group is part of the requirements for my doctoral dissertation. I have selected you to speak with me today because I identified as someone who has a great deal to share about the experience of the turnaround network in your district. My research project focuses on the experiences of district administrators and turnaround principals and their experiences as members of a school turnaround network. Through this study, I hope to gain more insight into your experience as a member who was regularly involved in the Turnaround Network as it relates to collaboration, sharing and learning competencies among members. I hope that this will allow me to identify ways in which we can better support schools, and principals involved school turnaround work.

Because your responses are important and I want to make sure to capture everything you say, I would like to audio tape our conversation today. Do I have your permission to record this focus group discussion?

Thank You. I am turning on the recorder now.

I will also be taking written notes during the interview

I can assure you that all responses will remain confidential and I will only use a pseudonym when quoting from the transcripts. As such, it is important that you not share the responses from other members of today’s focus group with people outside of this room. I will be the only one privy to the tapes, which I will eventually destroy after they are transcribed. To meet our human subjects’ requirements at the university, you must sign the form I have with me. To summarize what is in this document, it states that: (1) all information will be held confidential, (2) your participation is voluntary and you may stop at any time if you feel uncomfortable, and (3) we do not intend to inflict any harm. Do you have any questions about the focus group process or this form?
We have planned this focus group meeting to last about 60 minutes. During this time, I have several questions that I would like to cover. If, at any time, you are uncomfortable with a question or need me to rephrase, please feel free to let me know.

**First, I will begin asking you questions about your role at the school.**

1. What is your administrative role?
2. How long have you been in this role?
3. What are your typical responsibilities in this role?
4. How long have you been an administrator for this district?

**I will now ask you some questions about the inner-workings of the network, the structure and systems, the network efforts, the aims and goals, the learning process and the sharing of ideas, professional development opportunities, the responsibilities you have as a member of the network. I would like to hear about your experience in your own words. Your responses may include both academic and nonacademic elements as appropriate.**

5. In your own words, can you describe the district’s Turnaround Leader’s Network (TLN) initiative in your school district? In your answer can you describe the purpose, makeup, function and goals of the TLN? Can you describe your role within the TLN? Can you share your thoughts about belonging to the TLN?
6. Describe the most helpful, beneficial and also challenging part of belonging to the TLN? What things are most important to you? Can you provide examples of ways the TLN was helpful to you? Are there ways the TLN could be better?
7. How do you know if the TLN is making a difference and how do you know or evaluate success?
8. What was your previous support for turnaround schools like before the TLN? How is it different now?
9. What, would you say were the most influential aspects or key and essential strategies or major initiatives undertaken by the TLN?
10. Can you describe how the TLN shares ideas and works collaboratively? What are ways the TLN shares expertise? How do members interact?
11. Do you have any additional questions or comments that you would like to share?

During the discussion, the researcher is interested in the following look fors:

- Description of the district’s TLN initiative.
- The key high leverage strategies or factors employed by the TLN that supported improvement?
- The perception of the participants involved in the TLN.
- The structures and systems of support in place that have helped with TLN goals and aims.
- The challenges of the TLN if any, that were not helpful.
- The role of the social systems of the TLN, the leadership and the relationships among members.
- Shifts in pedagogical practices as a result of the TLN?
- The frequency, types, and impact of multiple engagements the TLN has afforded members.
- Perceived benefits and/or downsides of the TLN
- How participants feel about the TLN membership.
- Role of the TLN in fostering and supporting innovation, sharing and cross school improvement.

Thank you for your participation today and for being willing to answer my questions. I will review our interview discussions. If I have any follow-up questions or need clarification, may I reach out to you? If you have any further questions, please reach out to me.

Thank you for your participation in this important study. I am ending the recording.