

TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF TRANSFORMING UNDERPERFORMING SCHOOLS BY
FOCUSING ON THREE SPECIFIC CONSTRUCTS: STUDENT MOBILITY, TEACHER
RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION, AND A CULTURE OF HIGH EXPECTATIONS VIA
RIGOROUS CURRICULUM

A Dissertation

Presented to

The Faculty of the Education Department

Carson-Newman University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

By

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May 2018



Dissertation Approval

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Abstract

School districts across the United States struggle with transforming chronically underperforming schools so that they become high performing and sustain academic growth. The research district for this study has devoted more than 30 years to transforming underperforming schools, but with mixed results. Some early district initiatives were highly successful at transforming underperforming schools that sustained success for decades. The same district has also experienced nationally recognized success in schools that are now again among the lowest performing in the state. Some district schools, heavily resourced by federal and local grants, experienced very little improvement after a five-year effort to disrupt chronic underperformance. This was a qualitative study of perceptions about the phenomena associated with each transformation effort. Change theory informed interview questions for district leaders, funders, and teachers, hoping to determine the value they placed on three specific constructs as preconditions for future school turnaround initiatives. Three levels of coding were used to analyze data from interviews and a review of artifacts about three initiatives from 1986 to 2012. The purpose of interviews was to surface implications and themes that could inform recommendations for further study. Findings included themes of teacher self-efficacy, decreasing the negative impact of concentrated poverty for underperforming students, and the role of rigor and enrichment in underperforming schools.

Acknowledgements

Three years ago, my colleagues Lindsay Starnes and Cherrye Robertson announced, “We’ve decided to study for our doctorates. Do you want to join us?” I have retired twice now, and I have no aspirations for any work other than the joy I get collaborating with new principals and teachers in programs at our local public education foundation, but without hesitation, the lifelong learner in me answered, “Yes”!

Thank you to Lindsay and Cherrye, to my colleagues and friends at the Public Education Foundation, and to friends from the Cornerstone Literacy Initiative for your encouragement. Thanks also to everyone in my hometown who has called me Dr. Varner for years, forcing me to earn this degree so that I no longer have to make a public correction.

I realized during the last three years that I still have something important to contribute to the field of education, and so I thank all of my professors at Carson-Newman University for introducing me to what I didn’t know I didn’t know, and for helping me look at past learning with fresh eyes and intention. My professors and classmates have all made me want to be a better educator because there is still so much I can learn.

Above all, I want to acknowledge my deep gratitude to my dissertation chair and committee. You know so well how easily students can stumble on the last lap of the journey. Thank you for the perfect balance of push and praise that kept me going when competing responsibilities were calling my name. Thank you Dr. Julia Price, Dr. Debra Bentley, and Dr. P. Mark Taylor for insisting on my best.

Although graduation will mark a happy ending to this chapter in my life, Dr. Price, I am keeping your many notes and letters to remind me to stay the course when I begin my next project. Don’t be surprised if you continue to get “Thank You” emails after I have reread one of your inspiring quotes.

Dedication

My parents never earned college degrees, but my siblings and I never doubted their intentions for us. They valued education and made incredible sacrifices so that each of us could have access to a great future. We grew up with family values, time together every day, love of learning, and lots of opportunities to discover our gifts and passions. We also learned through our parents' examples, that service to others is what lifts us closer to God. I personally benefitted from approaching every challenge in my life, knowing that I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me (Philippians 4:13).

So many friends have helped me along the way on a journey that continues to be extraordinary. One special friend, Ruth Holmberg, newspaper publisher and granddaughter of Adolph Ochs, was once asked the secret to her success. Her response was, "Choose your parents wisely." I guess I did!

I dedicate this contribution to the field of education in memory of my parents, Ernest E. Varner, Mrs. Peggie Sadler Varner Bullard, and Rev. Andrew J. Bullard, Jr. They still inspire me daily.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Introduction and Background of the Study

The premise of structured cause analysis, a problem-solving process, is that every problem has a cause. Once the cause of the problem is identified, the solution is imminent (Jozwiak, 2004). School districts nationwide face the problem of chronically underperforming schools, and for decades they have sought to understand the causes. Poverty is a daunting challenge for schools, especially those with high concentrations of low-income families. However, simply identifying poverty as a cause of chronic underperformance without understanding its complexity has made it immune to simple solutions such as more money and more time on task (Leithwood, Harris, & Strauss, 2010).

Low expectations and lack of accountability have also emerged as causes of chronic underperformance, especially in schools with high poverty, but the higher standards and stricter accountability of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) produced results that lagged far behind intentions (Darling-Hammond, 2007). School Improvement Grants (SIG) awarded to states in 2007 were an attempt to have districts identify their causes and solve problems with one of four models: transformation, turnaround, restart, or closure. Although billions of dollars were granted to support solutions, a U.S. Department of Education report found lessons to be learned, but no significant achievement results (Dragoset et al., 2015)). Meyers (2017) suggested that there is much to learn from failing schools, and hesitancy to examine the root causes of school failure can result in districts implementing and supporting turnaround plans that have little chance of sustaining any short-term gains.

The Complexity of Poverty

Studies on poverty and its effects on students have been well documented in the literature so that issues of the poor could be addressed with public policy or social interventions (Mohan &

Shields, 2014). Chronic poverty can create environments that undermine the development of self and capacity for self-efficacy (Jensen, 2009). Adverse childhood experiences can also cause social, emotional, and cognitive impairment, risky behaviors, disease, disability, and even early death.

Despite President Lyndon Johnson's war on poverty launched in 1964, more than 46 million Americans, including more than eight million children, still lived in households with incomes the government considered inadequate at the time of this study (Shields, 2014).

Pawloski (2014) stipulated that poverty has a more negative long-term impact on academic performance than continued exposure to cocaine. Payne (2005) alerted educators and others to the reality that the impact of poverty is not merely lack of financial resources, but also the threats to emotional stability, mental skills, physical health, support systems, role models, and clarity regarding the hidden rules of living with poverty.

Dike (2017) documented the destructive impact poverty has on children's brain development, learning, and academic performance. Behavior research has also noted that children of poverty can develop psychiatric disturbances and adaptive social functioning at a greater rate than their affluent peers (McCoy Frick, Loney, & Ellis, 1999). Atzaba-Poria, Pike, and Deater-Deckard (2004) found that one problem created by poverty fosters other problems, causing an endless list of causes and negative consequences for poor children.

This early negative impact can contribute to an achievement gap that widens as students get older. Ansell (2011) described the achievement gap as the disparity that shows up in grades, standardized-test scores, dropout rates, and college completion rates of students of poverty. Herrnstein and Murray (1994) asserted that gaps in educational attainment resulted from differences in students' genetic makeup and natural ability. Other studies discounted that

argument, and proposed that achievement gaps are the result of environmental factors and opportunity gaps in the resources available to poor children (Ansell, 2011). Ansell's study supported findings that children in poverty whose parents provided engaging learning environments at home began school with advantages compared to other poor children. Thus, this research details implications for teachers and leaders of high-poverty schools as they select appropriate intervention strategies.

Hope for High-Poverty Schools

Research indicates that engaging learning environments in the home make a difference. Thus, it can be assumed that engaging learning environments in the school could help close the achievement gap between children of poverty and their more affluent peers. Kannapel, Clements, Taylor, and Hibpshman (2005) found that nearly all the low-performing schools across the United States are high-poverty schools, but they also noted exceptions to the pattern of low-income/low-performance. Among the characteristics of low-income/high-performance schools were high expectations communicated in concrete ways, and intentional recruitment, hiring, and assigning of teachers with a strong work ethic and enthusiasm to work with students of poverty.

Acting on the assumption that low-income/high-performance schools are possible, DuFour and Eaker (1998) proposed a promising strategy for sustained, substantive school improvement. They proposed school-wide professional learning communities with a compelling vision and the commitment of collaborative teams. Carter (2000) studied No Excuses Schools with their seven defining traits of high-performance, including addressing discipline issues along with rigorous and regular testing. Muijs, Harris, Chapman, Stoll, and Russ (2004) agreed with strategies advanced by others, but also focused on creating an information-rich environment in a positive school culture. In schools with 90% poverty and 90% minority students, Reeves (2005)

reported 90% achievement by adding an emphasis on non-fiction writing, frequent assessment of student progress with mid-course corrections, and collaborative scoring of student work. Suber (2011) identified alignment of instruction with assessments, focused professional development, and reduction of teacher attrition as critical to high performance.

These strategies have produced encouraging results. Between 2006 and 2017, new approaches to school turnaround intensely scrutinized failing schools because the new approaches held promise for sustained success although data indicated these approaches still needed improvement. Research by the Bridgespan Group (Iyengar, Lewis-Lamonica, & Perigo, 2017) focused on three types of partnerships and five design strategies that appeared to be gaining traction.

Research Problem

As recently as 1967, Churchman identified the challenge of turning around chronically underperforming high-poverty schools as a “wicked” problem with many causes difficult to resolve (Leithwood, Harris, & Strauss, 2010). Kannapel et al. (2005) referenced the failure of most public schools to teach poor children as a national tragedy and a national disgrace, and reported that 50% of low-income 4th graders and 16% of low-income 8th graders struggled with basic math. Kannapel et al. also noted that about 12 million of the 20 million low-income children in K-12 schools struggled to learn basic skills. A study of foundation investments in school turnaround efforts (Iyengar et al., 2017) reported that funders have grown weary of failed efforts from districts. The report cited opinions of 289 members of the Philanthropy Roundtable, a leading network of charitable donors, who indicated a lack of confidence in conventional school districts to turn around underperforming schools.

Given the universe of strategies and their pervasiveness in the literature, one might

conclude that districts need only choose those that filled their improvement gaps, and solutions for sustained success would follow. This, however, has not been the case in school districts such as the one chosen for this study. In 2000, eight of the lowest performing elementary schools in Tennessee were in the research district. After a \$5 million foundation investment supplementing district funds, and five years of school improvement strategies, the eight schools showed growth higher than all other elementary schools statewide. However, by 2016, seven of the eight schools were again among the lowest performing in the state (Tennessee State Report Card, 2016). An \$11 million school improvement grant (SIG) was earmarked for five schools in a single feeder pattern in 2011 (two elementary, two middle, and one high school), but this led to minimal achievement gains after five years. In 2016 the research district was threatened with state takeover of these chronically underperforming schools.

Some researchers have concluded that positive change and sustained success can occur (High-performing, High-Poverty Schools: Research Review, 2005), but other studies have asserted that the only way to address root causes of chronic underperformance is to make significant changes in schools (Fullan, 2006). Leithwood et al. (2010) determined that success stories were incomplete if the schools featured in those stories struggled annually to sustain improvements. Hitt and Meyers (2017) stipulated that the test of time is the true measure that a school has turned around.

Fullan (2006) found that the many strategies advocated by researchers were effective in fostering school improvement, but school improvement differs from transformation. Transformation occurs when a school becomes high performing and remains high performing (Leithwood et al., 2010). Fullan further suggested that many popular reforms have little chance of sustained success without significant change led by a critical mass of educators who are aware

of best practices regarding change and refine these practices over time. Kotter (1996) noted that the organizational change needed for long-term success is difficult because organizations are typically limited in their knowledge about how to plan and implement change.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to expand upon strategies that improve achievement. According to Hilt and Meyers (2017), one of the turnaround myths is that school achievement in the short term is a vital sign of mission accomplished. Research documents many strategies that work in the initial stages of school turnaround but provides fewer findings on strategies that sustain success (Leithwood et al., 2010). Thus, this study attempted to determine teachers' perceptions of strategies that contribute to sustained success. The study began with a working definition of sustainability. Sustainability was defined as sustaining conditions for high student performance over time. Sustainability is not about the durability of a school to withstand external pressures or simply maintain interventions. A business definition of sustainability listed three characteristics that also seem applicable in a school setting: longevity, maintenance of core principles or purposes, and responsiveness to external needs (Bateh, Heaton, Abrogast, & Broadbent, 2013.)

From the many strategies that were implemented in the research district, three common strategies among schools that had sustained student achievement for up to 30 years were isolated for this study. These particular constructs were isolated to determine teacher perceptions regarding their significance. In a group of magnet schools, the first launched in 1986, district policy addressed needs such as controls for student mobility and enriched curriculum. The schools' openings were preceded by a district and community leaders' marketing campaign that attracted highly effective teachers. Some magnet schools that opened five years after the

launching of the first school have maintained student achievement goals for as many as 20 years. In schools that showed spurts of growth from 2000 to 2005, teacher recruitment incentives were offered, precipitating some elements of culture change ancillary to the recruitment of effective teachers. In 2012, five schools designated as Innovation Zone schools were granted some autonomy, but no other of the district policies extended to schools in previous reform efforts. A 2012 article on a local foundation website indicated that autonomy would allow the five iZone schools to make dramatic changes. None of those changes mirrored changes in schools that became magnet schools. None of the five Innovation Zone schools showed significant achievement gains after their five-year attempts at turnaround.

Research Question

To address the problem of why some turnaround efforts in the research district were successful while others were not, the researcher investigated perceptions of the impact of three strategies implemented in successful turnaround schools. The following research question drove this study:

What are teacher perceptions of transforming underperforming schools by focusing on three specific constructs: student mobility, teacher recruitment and retention, and a culture of high expectations via rigorous curriculum?

Rationale for the Study

At the time of this investigation, the research district was poised to initiate new reform designed to improve chronically underperforming schools. This district selected a new superintendent who appointed a team of successful principals, teachers, and district staff to lead school turnaround efforts. The superintendent also invited community members to partner in the district's latest attempt at sustained success. Because so many school districts face the dilemma of chronically underperforming schools, this study had the potential to inform the field about

teacher perceptions of what Leithwood et al. (2010) found was an under-researched component of the school turnaround process—sustaining success.

Researcher Positionality Statement

The researcher is a retiree of a school district where she was a teacher, middle school principal, and high school principal. She was a teacher and assistant principal of one of her district's highest performing schools before being asked to lead the district's lowest performing high school. She holds a Master's degree in Secondary Education: English, an Educational Specialist degree in School Administration, and an Educational Specialist degree in Educational Leadership. After retirement from the school district, the researcher worked for 12 years as the Director of Leadership Development for a national literacy initiative serving underperforming schools. She currently works with her local education foundation, coaching new teachers and principals.

The researcher's connection to the study is her deep interest in helping to turn around chronically underperforming schools. These schools are found in most districts, and her district is no exception.

Definition of Terms

For this study, the following definitions were used to provide clarity.

Change theory suggests mapping out or filling in what has been described as the missing middle between what a program or change initiative does and how the interventions lead to achievement of desired goals. This is accomplished by first identifying the desired long-term goals and then working to identify all the conditions and/outcomes that must be in place for the goals to occur (Center for Theory of Change, 2016).

High-performance/achievement is the status of schools that have reached at least 60% of state and federal goals. Schools in the No Excuses study reached 65% of academic goals (Carter,

2000), and in 90/90/90 schools, students reached as high as 90% of state and federal achievement goals (Reeves, 2005). Schools in the research district were praised for high performance when reading scores rose from 53% proficient in 2003 to 74% proficient in 2005.

High-poverty schools are those with more than 50% of students on free and reduced lunch (Dragoset et al., 2015). The literature review for this study identified a range of 75% poverty in No Excuses Schools to 90% poverty in 90/90/90 schools (Reeves, 2005). The schools in the research district had between 75% and 99% poverty at the time of the study.

Poverty was defined by Jensen (2009) as a chronic and debilitating condition that results from multiple adverse risk factors and affects the mind, body, and soul.

Student engagement was defined for this study as the attention, curiosity, interest, optimism, and passion that students show when they are learning or being taught. This relates to the level of motivation these students have to learn and to progress in their education (Olson & Peterson, 2015).

Student mobility or transience can include any time a student changes schools for reasons other than grade promotion, but in general it refers to students changing schools during a school year (Sparks, 2016).

Sustainability is defined as high student performance over time. It is not the durability of a school to withstand external pressures or simply maintain interventions (Leithwood et al., 2010).

Transformation/Turnaround were used as interchangeable terms in this study and should not be confused with definitions of model options for federal grants where transformation referred to a leadership change in the school and turnaround meant up to 50% of faculty had to be rehired. Turnaround refers to the dramatic and comprehensive change in a low-performing school that produces significant gains in achievement within two years and experiences changes that are

simultaneously readying the school for the longer process of transformation into a high-performance organization (Wallace Foundation, 2017).

Summary

Districts are obligated to educate all children. While districts may assert that challenges are complex and daunting, and resources are not equal to the challenges, it is still essential that all children are educated (Improving Basic Programs Operated by Local Educational Agencies, 2015). Districts must show evidence that all schools are achieving the high standards mandated by state and federal legislation. Unfortunately, many districts in the United States have chronically underperforming schools resistant to the best practices and additional resources from the local, state, and federal level. Yet some schools, including high-poverty schools, identify and effectively address the challenges that may be unique to them. Some schools make the short-term gains needed, and subsequently transition from schools struggling to improve to schools that continue to achieve at the same rates as their state's highest performing schools. This study sought to elicit teacher perceptions of the types of strategies that have contributed to sustained high performance, a desired school change, in their district.

The review of literature detailed in the second chapter was written to accomplish three purposes. One was to provide a historical context for issues of poverty and their impact on education. Those issues were critically instructive for the study. The review also highlights numerous research findings about initiatives that achieved some measures of success between 1990 and 2017. The third section of the review of literature scrutinizes three significant challenges that surfaced in the research on chronically underperforming schools. These challenges prompted investigation of the three constructs--student mobility, teacher recruitment and retention, and student engagement. The third chapter describes the methodology utilized for

this study and how teacher perceptions were collected and analyzed to validate findings (Ary, Jacobs, Sorensen, & Walker, 2013). The final chapters report those findings and note implications for further study.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Historical Context

In 1967, Churchman referred to chronically underperforming schools as a “wicked” problem. Fredericksen (1984) added that the problem seemed to defy routine solutions, it changed over time, and then it resurfaced after districts thought they had successful solutions. Mead (2012) identified high-poverty underperforming schools as the most vexing problem facing public education at that time. Between 1989 and 2003, more than 30 jurisdictions nationwide attempted to improve their low-performing schools with limited success.

According to O’Brien and Devarics (2013), the 1994 Improving America’s Schools Act required states to take action to turn around low-performing schools, but the results were less than encouraging. The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) created stricter accountability and urgency with sanctions, but NCLB punishments produced no better overall results. The federal government then followed with a different strategy, Race to the Top (RTT) incentives of \$4.35 billion designed to spur innovation, and School Improvement Grant (SIG) funding totaling \$3.55 billion. The incentive grants required schools to choose one of four models or combinations of these models as their promising practices. The practices associated with the four models were clearly articulated as *transformation* (new leadership and professional development for existing faculty), *turnaround* (new leadership, 50% of staff new, and new governance structure), *restart* (close and reopen with transfer of control to another entity), and *closure* (students dispersed to other, higher performing schools). Evaluative reports showed that practices associated with the models were loosely followed, and gains could not be attributed to a specific model. The results also clarified that with only one or two years of data, it was premature to draw a causal link between RTT, SIG funding and school performance.

With the election of President Donald Trump in 2016 and the appointment of Betsy DeVos as Secretary of Education in 2017, states had an opportunity to craft new school turnaround options under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) signed by President Obama in 2015 (Camera, 2017). Previous turnaround plans funded by the Obama administration failed at turning around many of the nation's chronically underperforming schools.

In the 1960's, President John F. Kennedy issued a call to arms in a race to the moon with mathematicians and scientists to lead the way. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 was to prepare students for their role (Mixon & Stuart, 2009). President Lyndon Johnson declared a War on Poverty, a year earlier in 1964, and promoted federal involvement in equal education opportunity, including Head Start. President Jimmy Carter established the Department of Education in 1979. In 1983, President Ronald Reagan elevated the importance of school performance and supported the recommendations of *A Nation at Risk*. President George W. Bush promoted the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001. Yet, chronic underperformance in high-poverty schools persisted (Levin, 2004).

Poverty and Education

In every district in the nation, correlational studies had affirmed the strong relationship between poverty and academic performance as students of poverty underperformed compared to their peers, year after year regardless of grade level or subject area (Sirin, 2005). Statistics now show that educated people earn more. A better quality of education improves economic growth, opportunities, and income. Education is also consistently linked to wider social benefits that improve economic development for the poor, such as improved health care for children and greater participation in the work force for women (van der Berg, 2008).

The causes of underperformance, however, diminish the opportunities education promises for students of poverty. Residential mobility in the early grades, for example, has been associated with lower math and reading scores in 3rd grade that are never made up (Voight, Shinn, & Nation, 2012). In a study of Philadelphia students, researchers found that instability in both home and school environments was associated with some of the poorest educational outcomes (Fantuzzo, LeBoeuf, Chen, Rouse, & Culhane, 2012). Darling-Hammond, in her speech at the 2011 Save Our Schools march (Straus, 2011), addressed inadequate funding and its outcome—cutting staff or staffing high poverty schools with revolving doors of new or untrained teachers. Darling-Hammond also blamed inadequate funding in high poverty schools for eliminating art, music, PE, counselors, nurses, librarians and libraries, and for focusing reform on testing that identified teachers as failures and schools for closure. Parrett and Budge (2011) later repeated her cautions, declaring that children of poverty are as worthy of attending good schools as their more affluent peers, and much is known about what it takes to transform schools into places that better meet their needs.

Theoretical Framework: Change Theory

Change theory was chosen as the theoretical framework for this study because it supports the goal of transforming underperforming schools into high performing schools that remain successful. Change theory rejects the practice of simply choosing strategies that have promise and subsequently implementing these strategies. Instead, it provides a comprehensive description of why a desired change is expected to happen (referred to as “the missing middle”). Change theory encourages educators to identify their long-term goals and then work back from these goals to identify the conditions that must be in place to achieve those goals (Center for Theory of Change, 2017).

Some credit Carol Weiss with popularizing the term “theory of change” after an Aspen Institute roundtable where participants wrestled with why complex programs are difficult to evaluate. The conclusion they drew was that many programs were poorly articulated and lacked clarity about how the change process would unfold. This lack of clarity caused insufficient attention to the conditions that should have been established in the early stages to accomplish the long-term goals (Anderson, 2004). The many illustrations of theory of change that followed could be better understood through the lens of this early work.

Fullan (2006) offered a perspective regarding three flawed theories of change: standards-based reform, professional learning communities, and quality leaders. Identification of world-class standards in literacy and math, a curriculum based on standards and aligned with assessments, and a serious investment in ongoing professional development are all important, but they do not constitute a theory of change because those actions do not address school or district culture. Districts that implemented standards with pressure and support were misguided in believing this would improve achievement on a large scale. Theories of action must include a study of the conditions under which continuous improvement can happen, and the change of culture that creates those conditions. District failures are evidence of these missing conditions.

Kotter (1996) offered eight steps to help organizations think seriously about the conditions that must be in place to begin and stay the course in the difficult and evolutionary process of change. Change begins with a sense of urgency about both the challenges and opportunities. The process must be led by a coalition of leaders who take each step seriously and have the ability to encourage the team throughout the journey. The team is then charged with creating a vision, clearly communicating it, and rallying others to collaborate on the goals that will help achieve the vision. These leaders must be clear about the conditions that must be

addressed in advance and the barriers that need to be moved. Empowering others to act on the vision is critical. Leaders at all levels must be relentless about changing systems and structures that undermine the vision. They must encourage risk-taking, along with nontraditional ideas, activities and actions. The team must articulate and plan for visible short-term improvements that are routinely celebrated. Once short-term improvements can be predictably repeated, the organization must transition to sustaining change and succession planning for leadership roles.

A Recent History of Transformation Initiatives for High-Poverty Schools

While the federal government was funneling dollars to states to support the more than 5,000 underperforming schools nationwide (U. S. Department of Education Approves 16 States' Plans, 2015), researchers and practitioners were also trying to identify the silver bullet strategies that would reduce the impact of poverty, interrupt chronic failure, and create conditions that would keep previously low-performing schools on a trajectory for continuous improvement. Studies have indicated that positive change and success can occur even under the most challenging conditions (High-performing, high-poverty schools, 2005), and there is no shortage of strategies.

According to Cooper, Ponder, Merritt, and Matthews (2005), a study of data-driven reform in low-performing high schools, identified a number of common themes among successful school turnaround initiatives: (1) Personalization - Building relationships and using those relationships to meet student needs, (2) Coherency - Identifying essential knowledge, giving that knowledge priority status, and aligning priorities with assessments, (3) Time - Using flexible scheduling practices to meet student needs, (4) Technology - Providing adults and students with the tools for an information society, (5) Professional Development - Continuing high-quality adult learning, and (6) Leadership - Collaborating to achieve the school/district

vision. Jensen (2014) identified five strategies for school turnaround: establish strong leadership with high expectations and the ability to raise expectations, recruit and retain effective teachers and focus on teachers learning from each other, develop effective learning strategies and effective measurements, and engage parents and the community. Jensen's fifth strategy was a change in school culture. This change to a positive school culture must occur before other changes will occur.

Murphy and Skiller (1992) offered an administrator's call to action, listing necessary preconditions to transform schools. Districts need an agreed upon and widely disseminated school system policy committing all staff to a high-quality education for all students. This policy should be complemented by a clearly communicated accountability system with clear goals and clear measures of progress. Providing a high-quality education requires a district to decide in advance to provide all staff with high-quality professional development. That precondition addresses a joint role of principals and district. Two other preconditions further define the role of principals: in each school principals should share decision-making authority, such as the review and evaluation of new and existing practices. The district should also give principals and school leadership teams flexibility in deciding how their school will be staffed. Finally, a district should identify and revise or eliminate all policies that are barriers to the effective implementation of promising school programs. Developing a plan to actively engage parents and have parent representation on the school planning committee, another precondition, should help principals and school leadership teams monitor the policies that prevent schools from implementing promising programs. Research abounds with lists of the conditions that must be in place for the changes that transform failing schools into high performing schools. Yet some districts find these

strategies insufficient to achieve continuous improvement, and schools continue to look for the best practices, or combinations of them, that lead to lasting success.

Professional Learning Communities

According to DuFour and Eaker (1998), the road to positive change for schools begins with a vision that provides direction and a target that beckons. That vision is then supported by a mission statement that answers the questions, Why do we exist? What are we here to do together? and What is the business of our business? While the answers to these questions for high-poverty schools would reflect the same high expectations held for affluent students, Parrett and Budge (2011) suggested that teams in high poverty schools would do well to question their knowledge and beliefs about poverty. Accordingly, district should attempt to eliminate policies and practices that have the potential to unintentionally manufacture low achievement.

Other researchers supported the PLC approach to school improvement that called for a focus on a school's vision and mission. In a study of differences between mission statements of high-performing and low-performing schools, Slate, Jones, Wiesman, Alexander and Saenz (2008) reviewed 100 Texas elementary school mission statements posted on school websites and found that the mission statements of high-performing schools were more likely to include themes of academic success, challenge, citizenship, empowerment, partnerships and social development than low-performing schools. Only 4% of low-performing school mission statements in the study included a challenging environment.

No Excuses Schools

Carter (2000) described seven defining traits of high-performance promoted in high-poverty No Excuses Schools: principals must be free from bureaucracy, principals use measurable goals to establish a culture of achievement, master teachers bring out the best in

faculty, rigorous and regular testing leads to continuous student achievement, achievement is the key to discipline, principals work actively with parents to make the home a center of learning, and effort creates ability. These schools worked on what needed to change: the way the schools involve parents, train teachers, train their students, test their students, and spend their money.

Parents in some high-poverty schools could be disruptive, but No Excuses Schools sought to engage these parents so that they would feel invested in their child's education. Ernestine Sanders, principal of a No Excuses School in Texas, shared her belief that the school is responsible for transforming a parent's attitude and ensuring strong parental commitment (Carter, 1999). Many of the No Excuses Schools required a written contract or covenant with parents that had to be signed or followed to prevent their children from losing privileges. Elements of the contract included the school's mission and non-negotiables, the school's expectations regarding parent responsibilities and school discipline, and the school's list of penalties for non-compliance. Parents, students, and teachers all signed this contract.

Since teachers in some No Excuses Schools are not required to have graduated from a traditional higher education program or to be certified, principals have asserted that their teachers are effective because their training is school-based (Boyd, Maranto, Rose, 2014). Principals describe themselves as different from leaders of other high-poverty schools who may be satisfied with filling teaching positions as soon as possible. No Excuses principals conduct their own training and insist on fidelity to that training. Principals of these No Excuses Schools approach recruitment as a year-round process. One principal indicated that he would interview 100-150 teachers before making a decision about a single position, and indicated he looked for skills sets rather than credentials. The teachers who filled those positions said they worked long hours in No Excuses Schools, but their schools were effective (Reeves, 2005). These teachers also

worked similar hours in their previous schools, where numerous students failed.

Standardized testing continues to face scrutiny in the United States, but this is not the case in No Excuses Schools. Principals in No Excuses Schools disagreed that standardized tests reward what Straus (2015) termed as only one particular manifestation of human intelligence. In like manner, these principals did not agree that high-stakes testing stifled higher-order thinking and forced teachers to merely teach to the test. Rather than make the excuse that tests are biased against children of poverty and flawed in other ways, No Excuses principals stated that poor test scores reflect poor teaching. No Excuses supporters of standardized testing indicated that they needed standardized test results to benchmark their programs, and they welcomed the comparison to progress at the national level. These supporters shared the belief that no test is perfect and the trend to eliminate national tests is misguided. Instead of excuses, principals of No Excuses Schools promote frequent testing to diagnose teaching gaps.

90/90/90 Schools

Reeves (2005) conducted a study of Wisconsin schools with a 90% poverty rate and a 90% minority population. Students were able to achieve 90% proficiency on state reading standards or in another subject area. The following criteria were the focus of 90/90/90 Schools: clear curriculum choices, frequent assessment of student progress, multiple opportunities for improvement, an emphasis on nonfiction writing, action research and mid-course corrections, and collaborative scoring of student work.

In a 90/90/90 school, emphasis on achievement was noteworthy. Data charts, graphs, and tables illustrating student achievement progress, including weekly progress reports, were posted throughout buildings and in trophy cases (Kearney, Herrington, & Aguilar, 2012)). Typically, schools identified five areas that most needed improvement rather than every area revealed by

assessments. Schools could choose from a variety of literacy programs, but all focused on reading and writing, anticipating that those areas would impact other areas. The preference for written responses on assessments was particularly helpful in diagnosing problems across subjects.

To ensure high expectations, 90/90/90 Schools relied on external scoring of assessments. Teachers exchanged student work with teachers outside their department, and principals exchanged student work with other schools. Teachers were trained in collaborative groups, scoring student work to create inter-rater reliability of at least 80% agreement, for example, on whether work represented proficiency or progress toward proficiency (Reeves 2005). The principal was directly involved in the collaborative scoring of student work so that he/she could discuss student progress in specific terms during regular parent, student, and school conferences. Teachers were also encouraged to regularly display student work so that all could benefit from teaching and learning.

Innovation Zones

Shortly after the introduction of NCLB, districts in the United States began new approaches to school turnaround called Innovation Zones. In these zones, the district's lowest performing schools experienced a range of innovations designed to raise academic scores quickly, but also effect school turnaround. Since 2006, schools in Chicago, Denver, Indianapolis, Memphis, and Springfield have achieved some promising results using one of three turnaround approaches and five common design features. The three approaches are school autonomy, district-led partnerships with the state, and a third-party-led partnership (usually a non-profit) with the district and the state. All three approaches require some autonomy that must be granted by the state (Iyengar et al., 2017).

The five design strategies common among schools required goals much more ambitious than merely improving enough to move from the list of chronically underperforming schools (Esdal & McDonald, 2011). Some districts chose moving to the top 25% of high performing schools. Other strategies included guaranteed autonomy (and required policies in place to survive superintendent transitions), opportunities to attract better-prepared teachers and offer going professional development, focus on school feeder patterns so that students benefited from a higher quality of K-12 instructional supports, and a sustainability plan launched early, not just as foundation or federal funds ran out.

Innovation Zone initiatives in Chicago and Indianapolis showed they were particularly interested in developing their teacher talent pipeline. Chicago's Academy for Urban School Leadership (AUSL) had begun a teacher residency program, planning to supply a few teachers to Chicago's underperforming schools each year (Chicago Teacher Residency, 2017). Impact on student achievement in those schools was disappointing, although the schools were getting a few better-prepared teachers. In 2006, Chicago Public Schools asked the AUSL to take over one of its lowest-performing schools, infusing this school with a critical mass of its teacher residency graduates. Within 10 years, this school moved from the district's lowest rating to its highest. Subsequently, the AUSL has become the manager of 31 neighborhood schools with an average free and reduced lunch population of 92.5%. Approximately 67% of those schools have moved from the state's lowest to its highest rating, and others are approaching the national average in math and English language arts achievement.

AUSL continues to show significant progress (Iyengar et al., 2017). Most schools received the "good standing" rating in 2015-2016, and growth in previously underperforming schools is now outpacing the district. However, these schools are still not reaching college-ready

goals. Data indicate that 50% of students from two underperforming high schools move in and out during the school year. This percentage includes students from underperforming schools outside the iZone. Thus, these students do not benefit from improved instruction in their earlier years.

Memphis decided to focus on following students K-12 rather than work in individual struggling schools. The goal was to ensure students in a feeder pattern had consecutive years of high-quality instruction to get them college and career ready. The Memphis iZone focused first on elementary and middle schools, and then followed the students with reform into high school. Zimmer, Kho, Henry, and Viano (2015) found that Shelby County Public Schools' strategy was yielding positive results in iZone schools, with elementary schools showing 8% growth per year. The Shelby County School Board made a commitment to guarantee sufficient autonomy. The community's approval of a model that retained district control over schools seemed to be the right complement to support other strategies. Memphis continued to look at lessons learned and resist the urge to expand. The iZone schools preferred, instead, to share their lessons learned with other schools in the district. In 2016-2017, the district made it clear that the prize was still the ambitious goal of moving iZone schools to the top 25% in the state.

In 2011, Massachusetts mandated improvements for three underperforming middle schools in Springfield. Early efforts showed minimal growth, and three additional middle schools fell into the state's bottom percent in the years following. Springfield then opted to engage in a third-party partnership with the state, the Springfield Education Association (SEA), and the Boston-based non-profit, Empower Schools. In 2014, Springfield Public Schools established the Empowerment Zone with its new partner, Empower Schools (Empowering Schools Through Partnership, n.d.). The district also chose the mantra "built to last" and began with the end in

mind—accountability and a sustainable funding plan. This partnership began with a five-year contract and both managerial and operational autonomy within the zone. Autonomy included discretion over curriculum and working conditions, and career ladders that provided extra pay for teachers. The Empower Schools team helped recruit outstanding teachers, provided technical support for schools that needed operational help, and recruited leaders to collaborate on designs for new middle school models. The Empower Schools team also became an additional layer of expertise contracted to meet school needs that large school districts found difficult to meet.

Sawchuk (2017), reporting about the Gates Foundation’s 2017 shift in educational funding, indicated that a quick return on investments is difficult for districts dealing with the many challenges that must be addressed in struggling schools. While sustainability may be an aspiration, without additional funding, districts often do not have the money in the budget to sustain achievements until the growth has continued long enough to produce data that make compelling turnaround cases. Levin (2004) noted that it was difficult to draw generalized conclusions from the use of specific strategies. Successful strategies seemed to address a specific context of a particular school rather than a model generalizable or easily adaptable to similar schools of poverty. There also appeared to be a limit to what schools could do to overcome the effects of poverty on education. This may hold an element of truth, but that limit may not totally preclude success for far more students. According to Iyengar et al. (2017), the good news is that funders are beginning to have renewed confidence that school turnaround is possible and are looking for the five design features that are gaining traction in these districts.

Five Myths About School Turnaround

To further encourage districts to identify causes of low performance and address them in chronically underperforming schools, Meyers and Darwin (2017) exposed five myths of school

turnaround. They caution against the “one simple solution myth,” noting that poverty’s impact on schools is a very complex problem with no single solution that is sufficient to increase student achievement long-term. While chronically underperforming schools are typically mandated to show progress in two-three years, it is a myth that fundamental, lasting change can happen quickly. Schools can experience short-term growth spurts, but underperforming schools need both a short-term and a long-term plan to sustain gains. A transition year, which should be used to transition from focus on change to focus on continuous improvement, should be implemented once schools yield good results after multiple years of reform.

It is a myth that there is nothing to be learned from failing schools. The most important learning from failing schools is that to address failure, a team has to understand failure. A failing school, for example, has much to teach about the disruptiveness of constant distractions such as those caused by student mobility (Rumberger, 2015) or student behavior in schools that do not offer an engaging curriculum (Skinner & Belmont, 1993). It is also a myth that turnaround is the problem of individual schools, not districts and states. Taking responsibility for failing schools by enacting policies and providing supports a school cannot accomplish alone is new to districts and states. This could be why so many past efforts to turnaround underperforming schools have failed to last. Perhaps the most daunting myth is that school turnaround is impossible. School turnaround can happen (Tennessee State Report Card, 2016). It happened in the research district with schools sustaining achievement scores above the district average for more than 30 years.

A Starting Place for Turning Around Underperforming Schools

The critical component of any turnaround effort is attention to teaching and learning with accelerated student outcomes over multiple years (Iyengar et al., 2017). Teaching and learning are certainly the most essential of the five design features common among the whole school

turnaround efforts outlined in this review. Teaching and learning are what professional learning communities hope to elevate and what 90/90/90 and No Excuses Schools also celebrate. The three constructs chosen for this study were chosen because they seem to make highly effective teaching and learning possible every day in some schools in the research district. Capturing teacher perceptions of the three constructs and their importance helped determine if these constructs merit further study as preconditions for school change. Before focusing on these constructs, it is important to briefly highlight two other strategies that are important, but insufficient if selected as single levers for change. These two strategies are effective leadership and parent/community engagement. These strategies were not addressed in the interview questions for this study, but were noted if volunteered by a respondent. Nonetheless, the two important elements of school turnaround are worth referencing here because they are both basic and essential.

Leadership and Turnaround Schools

There is no research indicating that school turnaround is possible without highly effective leadership (Murphy & Meyers, 2008). While a number of studies have addressed interventions for the school as a whole, Fech (2009) scrutinized the characteristics of successful leaders of high-performing, high-poverty schools. A study of principals in Chicago schools identified five themes: a commitment to building relationships, understanding the community and the culture, providing professional development programs, and creating structures and procedures for collaboration and support. These principals connected all of the above to the mission and vision of the school. Other studies already referenced in this review have commented on aspects of principal leadership that support Fech's findings: Carter's (2000) study described the principal's role in establishing a culture of achievement; Suber's (2011) study of characteristics of high-

performing, high-poverty schools and the study by Muijs et al. (2004) listed the characteristics a principal must establish as essential to teamwork. These research studies also identified the following commonalities among successful principals: teacher empowerment, relationships, and setting an example for all stakeholders.

Johnson (1999) conducted a study to determine the impact of district involvement in the improvement of high-poverty schools and found that in some instances the district played a major role in the school's improvement efforts. In other instances, the district played a modest role. Reeves (2005) advocated that the district role was to support requests made at the school level. For 90/90/90 Schools, the district office was asked to grant permissions for the schools to operate more autonomously; for example, leaders were asked to change district-mandated goals and strategies that were not effective.

According to Meyers and Darwin (2017), it is a natural inclination to think about the single lever of an extraordinary leader, but school turnaround is complex and requires a systemic approach. For a school to perform poorly enough to require a state-mandated turnaround, numerous problems must have manifested. At its root, the cause may be a failure to identify problems as they emerged and respond effectively when these problems were less daunting. While it may be tempting to rely on a single-lever heroic effort to fix the problem, and while in the short term an extremely effective leader may inspire hope, addressing the full range of challenges for a chronically underperforming school requires the attention and intention of more than a great school principal armed with knowledge of best practices.

Parent and Community Involvement

Much of the work aimed at improving high-poverty schools occurs as a result of interactions between educators and children during the school day, but studies also show an

important role for parents and the larger community. Findings by Burney and Beilke (2008) supported work with faculty on understanding the impact of poverty, including the consideration that although poverty may not be a rationalization for low levels of family involvement, poverty must be understood as a powerful barrier to family involvement and student achievement. Lopez, Scribner, and Mahitivanichcha (2001) indicated that lack of family involvement should not be interpreted as lack of concern. They discouraged blame and encouraged inclusiveness with creative ways to better involve children of migrant workers. The findings suggested implications for all children of families affected by poverty and transiency. Getting to know each family's life story was a recurrent theme that emerged. This emphasis helped schools assess the multiple needs of families and allowed them to understand first-hand the hardships families faced on a daily basis. Gorton, Alston, and Snowden (2009) suggested adding an important role for families to the mission and vision of a turnaround school.

A Closer Look at Three Constructs and Their Potential Impact on Turnaround Schools

With so many different potential causes for a school's inability to break through the barriers of poverty to high performance, it was important to isolate three issues known to negatively impact student performance and to explore solutions. Doing so helped frame questions to determine teachers' perceptions of their significance. Because some turnaround schools in the research district have remained effective, as described by Leithwood et al. (2010), it made sense to choose three strategies implemented in these schools to accomplish three long-term goals: student attendance stability, retention of effective teachers, and an engaging school culture where students have access to a rigorous curriculum. The three constructs chosen for the study were also constructs that required some district intervention.

Construct 1: Reducing the Negative Impact of Student Mobility

The United States is becoming an increasingly mobile society, and many children are adversely affected by the decisions their parents have to make. Student mobility (or transiency) in K-12 education refers to a change in schools for reasons other than promotion (Sparks, 2016). Particularly, this mobility means a change during the school year. In 1994, the United States Government Accountability Office issued a report that one in six 3rd graders had attended at least three schools since the beginning of 1st grade. Since most of these students were low-income minority, inner city, migrant or limited English-proficient students, the report recommended that mobile students have access to Title I services. In 2007, the U.S. Government Accountability Office noted that the number of Title I Schools that fell short of making adequate yearly progress increased from 2,790 in 2006 to 4,500 in 2007, with student mobility cited as one reason for the increase (Dalton, 2013).

The most common reasons for student mobility are residential moves related to parents' financial instability. A 2007 Early Childhood Longitudinal Study reported that 31% of 8th graders had changed schools three or more times since kindergarten. The study also reported that the moves were more likely among students who were urban and poor, causing these students to fare worse in schools than their non-mobile peers. A 2015 New York University study found that 327 minority elementary students changed schools at least once between kindergarten and 4th grade, and 40 students changed schools three or more times (Sparks, 2016).

In a study of 13,000 Chicago students, Kerbow, Azcoitia, and Buell (2003) found that students who had changed schools four or more times by 6th grade were a year behind their classmates. The same study determined that families who did not own their own homes comprised 39 percent of those with highly mobile students. Contrary to what some may believe,

this was not just because families in poverty were unable to pay the rent and were forced to move. Some moved because they could save money by responding to free rent and low rent deals offered by landlords (Smith, 2011). In some cases, the transients were immigrant families, moving frequently, looking for financial stability and better opportunities for their children (Navarez-La Torre, 2012). Homeless families face particular struggles because homeless students are more likely to change schools multiple times within a single year. A June 2016 report from the U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development indicated that students of previously homeless families remain more mobile than other students because they may be moving back and forth between relatives and friends (Sparks, 2016).

Challenges for Students Who Move

Students who change schools at regular intervals through promotion sometimes have difficulty making the transitions, and this is one reason why some districts structure the early grades as K-8 schools. Highly mobile students struggle even more. Students who are highly mobile routinely face challenges keeping up with academics. Even in an era of standards and demanding consistency, students struggle with the different ways subjects are taught as they change schools (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2010). These students also face low standardized test scores requiring interventions that may leave gaps in remediation as they move from school to school.

In addition to academic challenges, students deal with a range of emotions related to their move. Schafft (2003) ascertained that some highly mobile students enter school with social and educational needs. Students have difficulty making friends and socially integrating into the school. Another serious problem is that transient students may have trouble trusting adults, including teachers (Grove, 1999). These students may not feel comfortable enough to take

chances or to fail. Beesley, Moore, and Gopalani (2010) reported similar findings, adding that highly mobile students require more frequent disciplinary action. A study by Rumberger (2003) revealed that children in families who move frequently were more likely to experience psychological and behavior problems than their more stable peers. Rumberger's longitudinal study of 4500 students in California and Oregon from 7th grade to high school found that repeated moves in elementary schools increased the risk of violent behavior in high school by 20%.

Highly mobile students have also reported feeling lost because they were navigating terrain that had already become familiar to other students (Rhodes, 2017). They were overwhelmed with learning new names, developing new trusting relationships, and understanding the culture of their new schools. These students were still grieving the loss of the friends they left behind, and they were also feeling frustrations that sometimes manifested as aggressiveness. Highly mobile students were known to have frequent discipline problems leading to suspensions, especially when they felt other students were challenging them, and they did not want to appear weak.

Challenges for Schools

Not only does student mobility negatively impact the students who are changing schools, but transiency also has extensive, often hidden consequences for the schools where these students relocate (Kerbow et al., 2003). Some of the challenges include poor attendance rates, high dropout rates, lack of parental involvement and school contribution, lack of community cohesiveness (making it difficult to influence a culture for education), loss of consistency in educational impact, and low predictability for school budget planning (Smith, 2011).

Highly mobile students are typically students of poverty moving among schools of poverty. Teachers inclined to help must overcome obstacles, including the time lapse before they are aware of transient students' needs. Student records follow students from school to school, but Grove (1999) determined that it could take as much as a month for student information to reach teachers at the new school. The teachers of incoming students may not know for weeks if the students should be in special education or language programs. Although advancements have been made with technology, some teachers still may not know what a transient student was doing at his/her previous school when the child shows up at the classroom door.

Not only are transient students vulnerable, but also a high level of transiency within a school was found to negatively impact the stable children's academic and social progress. Nevada addressed transiency with a new state curriculum and new standards to make learning more uniform throughout the state. When a student moved from one school to another within Nevada, that student found the same material being taught at about the same time at the new school. But Kerbow et al. (2009) found that even the most innovative school-based programs are not effective for transient students coming and going in a high-needs school.

Nevada reported that school policies could significantly reduce the challenges associated with student mobility (Sparks, 2016). Policies instituted in Nevada included better student data transfer employing longitudinal databases with personal student identifiers to improve tracking and timeliness of information transfer; quick turnaround for student records allowing transfer of data ensuring that when students (such as those in military families) entered a new school, their prior placements in honors classes and any prerequisites were accepted; and flexible enrollment guidelines that relaxed attendance boundary policies so that students who moved were not required to change schools, but could either finish the school year in their current school or

remain there until promotion.

Fisher and Frey (2017) suggested simple processes other than the first day drop off that leaves students feeling alone and teachers wondering what they should do other than offer the new student a seat. These suggestions included an initial tour of the school and the early assignment of a friend. Comey and Pettit (2012) reported on a collaboration of school district, government agencies, and non-profit housing counseling agencies working together to find solutions that reduced the negative impact of student mobility.

The magnet schools established between 1986 and 1997 in the research district all have district policies that allow schools to close enrollment early. No new students may enroll into or transfer to these schools during the school year. Teachers in these schools know that they will not have the challenges associated with student mobility experienced by their colleagues in traditional schools. Magnet schools have maintained student achievement scores at or above the district average for as many as 30 years (Tennessee State Report Card, 2016). Teachers interviewed for this study were asked to share their perceptions regarding the significance of such a policy for turnaround schools.

Construct 2: Teacher Recruitment and Retention

Mixon and Stuart (2009) determined that policymakers should implement actions that seek to recruit and better prepare teachers. Simon (2013) produced figures that 3.5 million public school teachers in the United States leave their schools each year. Roughly 60% of the turnover results from teachers transferring between schools and about 40% leaving the profession. Glazerman and Max (2011) found that teachers with more seniority and teachers with high need credentials, such as science and math, received preference in teaching assignments and had advantages when competing for openings. Simon (2013) reported that in 2001, the turnover rate

of highly effective teachers in high-poverty schools was 50% higher than the turnover rate in low-poverty schools.

Glazerman, Protik, Teh, Bruch, and Max (2013) researched the Teacher Talent Initiative in 10 districts across seven states and determined that financial incentives successfully attracted high value-added teachers to fill vacancies in high-poverty elementary schools, and the transfer incentive had a positive impact on tests scores in math and reading. The incentive also had a positive impact on retention rates that continued after the final payout. The findings showed that Teacher Talent Initiative teachers did not leave their schools to return to their original schools or to transfer to other schools at a rate that was higher than the average rate of transfers in the district. An opportunity for further study in connection with the research district is to review the data on percentages of teachers who stayed in high-poverty schools after the final payment of teaching bonuses during an elementary school reform initiative. Artifacts indicate that during the five years of elementary school reform between 2000 and 2005, the research district had a “no steal” policy where principals of higher-performing schools were not allowed to recruit highly effective teachers who had transferred to underperforming schools for incentives. While not documented, the common perception is that highly effective teachers were recruited and left underperforming schools after 2005.

In July 2014, the U.S. Department of Education announced that it would require all states to develop equity plans to ensure that all students had access to excellent educators (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). That aspiration was problematic for districts because it had become increasingly more difficult to hire excellent teachers. It was especially difficult to recruit these teachers to high-poverty schools. Subsequently, districts have had to become innovative to recruit top teaching talent. One of those innovative strategies has been recruiting non-education

majors and training them through alternative certification programs such as Teach for America and teacher residencies. To recruit veteran teachers who are highly effective, bonus pay has been somewhat effective. With both options for alternative certification, Teach for America and teacher residencies, retention has been the bigger problem.

Teach for America

While teacher quality is not the only assurance of educational equity in America's public schools, it is considered a high-leverage strategy by numerous impact studies on closing the academic achievement gap. According to the 43rd Annual Phi Delta Kappa Gallup Poll, Americans embrace the notion that teacher quality matters and support the idea of encouraging the nation's top students to become teachers (Lopez, 2011). In 1989, Teach for America (TFA) originated as an undergraduate thesis on educational inequity written by Princeton senior Wendy Kopp (Teach for America, 2016). Kopp sought to address inequity and the long-term effects of poverty, racism, and other injustices while school districts were facing a national teacher shortage. Kopp's plan was to recruit high-performing college graduates to teach in high-need urban and rural schools. After graduation and considerable initial fundraising, Kopp gathered 100 part-time student recruiters from 100 universities to begin Teach For America. Currently the organization boasts more than 50,000 alumni.

Teach for America's geographical reach has grown significantly over the past 25 years. (Teach for America, 2017). Originally serving only six regions, Teach For America is currently active in 52 regions, including parts of the Greater Nashville area and Memphis, Tennessee. In 2013, TFA generated its largest to-date applicant pool, with 57,000 people applying to the program. TFA selected approximately 6,000 of the applicants, making its acceptance rate less than 11% and the most selective corps in its history.

Darling-Hammond, Holtzman, Gatlin, and Heilig (2005) determined that the performance of alternative program certification such as Teach for America had a significantly negative effect on student achievement. TFA alumni offered numerous scathing criticisms of the program, primarily for being unprepared to teach and being set up for failure (Brewer & deMarrais, 2015). Alumni also claimed that TFA had taken an active role in keeping them silent and marginalizing program graduates for undermining TFA.

Teacher Residency

Teacher residency is an alternative, fast track, district-serving teacher education program designed to increase the number of recruits to high-poverty schools, especially in high-need subjects. Drawing on a medical residency model, teacher residency combines a master's degree program for learning education content and pedagogy with a yearlong, in-school residency. In schools, residents practice and hone their skills and knowledge alongside an effective mentor teacher in a high poverty classroom (National Center for Teacher Residencies, 2017). Increasing the probability that new recruits will be better prepared to teach in high-poverty schools, teacher residency elements include targeted recruitment and selection of residents, rigorous selection and support of teacher mentors, intensive pre-service preparation focused on the specific needs of teachers in high-poverty schools, aligned induction support, and strategic hiring of graduates. Residency graduates commit to serving the district for at least three years after their residency. In some districts, the minimum commitment is four years after residency.

Sterling (as cited in Coffman & Patterson, 2014) compared the preparation of teachers in teacher residencies to the preparation of lawyers and doctors to explain the higher retention rates of residency programs. Teacher residencies report a 71% retention rate, which is higher than the national average for teacher retention (National Center for Teacher Residencies, 2017).

Regarding residency graduates, 89% of principals surveyed reported the following: (1) residency teachers are better prepared than traditionally prepared teachers, (2) residency graduates positively affect the culture of the school, (3) principals would hire a residency graduate to teach in their school next year and would recommend hiring residency graduates to colleagues.

Residents surveyed indicated they improved student achievement in their classrooms and they would recommend teacher residency to those who want to teach in high-poverty schools.

Research on teacher preparation and teacher effectiveness indicated mixed reviews (Lynch, 2016). Darling-Hammond who had asserted that fast-track teachers had a negative impact on student achievement, had a different opinion in a different article later during the same year. Sutchter, Darling-Hammond and Carver-Thomas (2016) recommended that districts establish teacher residency models, recruit and retain talented diverse candidates, and prepare them for the challenges of high-poverty schools.

Teacher Recruitment Incentives

Offering teacher incentives to recruit effective and potentially effective teachers for high-poverty schools is a strategy states and districts are considering more routinely. These incentives include signing bonuses, student loan forgiveness, and sometimes assistance with housing in a new city. These monetary incentives have received mixed reviews (David, 2008). Traditional teacher incentives to increase student achievement have also received mixed reviews (Levitt, List, & Sadoff, 2012). In a one-year study with Chicago teachers, one group of teachers was told teachers would receive a bonus if students' achievement improved. Another group of teachers was given the bonus in advance and told that teachers would have to reimburse funds if their students did not improve. Framing the incentive as avoidance of a loss, researchers found that

teachers who had to reimburse funds took work more seriously, and students did achieve (Fryer, Levitt, & Sadoff, 2012).

Massachusetts offered aspiring teachers a fast track to teacher certification and a \$20,000 signing bonus spread over four years to help with retention. Researchers followed 13 of the 59 bonus recipients and found that eight of 13 left the district before completing the four years. In 2001, North Carolina offered an annual bonus of \$1,800 to math, science, and special education teachers to teach in high-poverty underperforming schools (David, 2008). Lack of clarity around eligibility, a late start, and the short duration and amount of the incentive were determined to be causes for the poor response. In both the Massachusetts and North Carolina studies, researchers determined from surveys that focusing on incentives without pairing a focus on retention addressed only a small part of the problem.

North Carolina studied individual versus group bonus pay for performance. Concerned about the “free rider” effect, the district found that achievement was higher with school wide incentives than when individual incentives were given (Ahn & Vigdor, 2011). Individual teachers were incentivized knowing a harder working team would help boost their scores. As individuals, they were less incentivized without the group support. Higher performing teachers, conversely, worked harder to achieve the group incentive and also worked harder when the bonus was based on individual effort to improve student achievement.

Teacher Retention

For years, researchers have studied the issue of teacher retention. A telephone survey conducted in England and Wales to address a shortage of teachers in math, science, and English shed light on both recruitment and retention of teachers (Barnby, 2007). The survey was conducted with 246 teachers inside and outside of London, and focused on reasons for wanting

to enter the teaching profession, reasons for not wanting to teach, and reasons for wanting to leave teaching. While the results indicated that intrinsic and altruistic reasons were provided more often by teachers for choosing teaching as a career, conditions including workload and student discipline were the reasons for either not entering the profession or leaving teaching.

Heider (2005) noted in a study of Americans that nearly 540,000 teachers moved to other schools or left the teaching profession in 2000, many of them due to feelings of isolation. A study by Scholastic and the Gates Foundation revealed that teachers spend only about 3% of their teaching day collaborating with colleagues. Many American teachers plan, teach, and examine their practice alone (Mirel & Goldin, 2012). Because urban schools tend to be concentrated in cities, it is easy to overlook isolation as a root cause for the exits of highly effective teachers from high-poverty inner-city schools. Not unlike rural teachers, urban teachers can feel isolated from their highly effective peers and from schools where they can routinely collaborate with a critical mass of teachers energized in a high expectations culture.

Districts can learn much from rural schools that are creative about teacher collaboration in remote areas. For example, Maine's island and coastal communities use virtual communications to ensure teachers and students in one or two-room island schools have a rich and supportive inter-island network. They do this by creating collaborative educational and social opportunities for students and teachers across islands via technology for face-to-face learning (Teaching and Learning Collaborative, 2017). A three-year study of the professional education of teachers in the rural province of Newfoundland concluded that developing collaborative virtual teaching and learning structures had the potential to expand learning opportunities and reduce educational inequities (Stevens, 2006). Stevens reported that working in cyber cells (face-to-face groups) provided teachers with opportunities to discuss their respective

work with other teachers on-site, and provided these teachers opportunities for their students to work with other students in both actual and virtual environments. Because urban schools cannot always budget for cross-school collaboration other than annual professional development events, technology may provide an answer to the problem of teacher isolation. For students of color segregated by the geography of urban districts, virtual access to their diverse peers in other schools may be an immediate solution to a problem in need of policy remediation.

The Problem with Recruitment and Retention Efforts

Research beginning in the early 2000s has illuminated that, as important as other factors are, good teachers make a significant difference in their students' academic achievement. While preparation, recruitment, induction, and retention of teachers should be interrelated, typically there is no policy framework that links them together (Cooper & Alvarado, 2006). This causes the teacher preparation, recruitment, and retention pipeline to falter over time. Until early 2000, most efforts to ensure there were enough teachers available to fill open jobs were devoted to recruitment. This included alternative certification programs such as Teach for America and teacher residency, scholarships and loans for aspiring teachers, and increasing salaries to make the profession more attractive. Darling-Hammond, Berry, Haselkorn, and Fideler (1999) discovered that some problems were caused by the lack of a framework for policy that created a coherent infrastructure of recruitment, training, and support programs that connected all aspects of a teacher's career continuum into a teacher development system tied to national and local educational goals. Without a set of common understandings about what teachers require to perform their best work, districts are more likely to implement teaching policies on an ad hoc basis with gaps, conflicts, and ineffectiveness as inevitable outcomes (Cooper & Alvarado, 2006). Thus, the following policy recommendations were noted: (1) Teacher Preparation: Align

preparation with the needs of diverse learners, content standards, and contemporary classrooms, (2) Hiring Processes: Simplify hiring processes so that teachers are not discouraged from teaching, especially in high-poverty schools, (3) Induction and Mentoring: Ensure that all new teachers participate in quality induction and mentoring programs, (4) Working conditions: Address working conditions so that schools become vibrant learning communities for both educators and students, (5) Professional Development: Reinvent and innovate professional development so that it focuses on sustained growth and is organized around standards for accomplished teaching, (6) Pay Incentives: Ensure better pay for teachers who demonstrate knowledge and skills that contribute to improved student achievement, and (7) Design Incentives to Fill Shortages in Critical Areas: Design incentives for increasing the diversity of the teaching force and for teaching in critical shortage subjects and schools.

In the research district, two of the three reform initiatives included teacher incentives. In the magnet schools, teachers were recruited to a culture where students had to apply for admission and no new students enrolled during the school year. The perception existed that the magnet schools were for high-performing students and a curriculum was in place that supported that perception. Thus, each magnet school shifted from a high-minority, high-poverty population to a predominantly low-poverty, high-achieving population. In the reform initiative for elementary schools, a pay bonus and a tuition-free master's degree in urban education were incentives. The research district also imposed a "no steal" policy so that highly effective teachers could not be recruited to other schools during a five-year window. For the iZone reform effort, no teacher incentives were offered and existing faculties remained the same except for new teacher recruits.

Construct 3: Student Engagement via a Rigorous Curriculum

In a 2005 study, schools that cultivated a culture of high expectations for students and teachers, emphasized academics and student learning, and engaged in continual assessment and efforts to improve were considered schools on the path to high-performance (High-performing, high-poverty schools, 2005). Vygotsky (as cited in Burney & Beilke, 2008) found that student academic performance could not be separated from the context in which it occurred. To support the premise that school culture plays an important role in teaching and learning, Simon (2013) surveyed highly effective teachers and determined that those who left high-poverty schools said they were not fleeing their students, but the working conditions that impeded their chance to teach and hindered the ability of students to learn. According to Gardner (as cited in Rensulli & Reis, 1997), there are many types of intelligent behavior, including linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, musical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalist intelligence. All need opportunity to grow.

Edmonds (2014) of the Effective Schools Movement articulated what he believed about successfully teaching all children. Edmonds proposed that we already know more than we need to know to teach all children successfully. We need to reflect on why we are not currently successful. While all individuals may not know everything necessary to transform chronically underperforming schools, enough research has been done to successfully launch robust efforts. We know, for example, that student engagement is an important element of transforming high-poverty schools because it addresses two important issues: academic achievement and school discipline (Olson & Peterson, 2015). Engagement refers to the degree of attention, curiosity, interest, optimism, and passion that students show when they are learning or being taught. This determines the level of motivation students have to learn and advance in their education. Schools

of poverty with high expectations for children must spend much of the school day on basics and remediation, but schools transforming do not limit their thinking to remediation. They also offer enrichment and they demonstrate an enrichment mindset. According to Jensen (2009), an enrichment mindset fosters intellectual curiosity, emotional engagement, and social bonding. An enrichment mindset, supported in an enriched learning environment offers challenging, complex curriculum and instruction, minimizes stressors, boosts participation in physical activity and the arts, and provides students with the supports they need to achieve at high levels.

Research by Sabin (2015) indicated that the teacher has a direct role in levels of student engagement. Classroom context (the instructional quality, social/emotional climate, and student-teacher relationship), along with school engagement are significant predictors of academic achievement (Dotterer & Lowe, 2011). Ensuring engagement and opportunity cannot, however, be solely the work of individual classroom teachers. Districts must have a sense of urgency around enrichment as a vital sign of equity.

Hill, Bromell, Tyson, and Flint (2007) stipulated that a brain susceptible to adverse environmental effects, such as those associated with poverty, is equally susceptible to positive, enriching effects. Jensen (2009) proposed that students who come from good home environments thrive on good teaching, and for students who come from disadvantaged backgrounds, enrichment can have a dramatic impact on learning as well. The sole focus of school should be to enrich the life of every student. Thus, students should have access to rich, balanced, sustained, positive, and contrasting learning environments. Subsequently long-term change will occur in students' lives.

Familiar with the research that strong correlations exist between student engagement and student achievement (Dyer, 2015), the research district started laying the groundwork for greater

enrichment in high-poverty schools by adopting the goal, *Engage Every Child, Every Day*.

District leaders asked each school to find ways to achieve this goal using appropriate resources, capacity, and creativity. One high-poverty school decided to seek grant funding to establish a school makerspace as a laboratory for student engagement. Data from the 2016 Tennessee State Report Card indicated that this school was in the bottom 5% for achievement and showed no growth in value-added scores from 2013-2015. While this school's attendance rate was higher than the overall district attendance rate, the district had an average 7.9% suspension rate while this school had a 40% suspension rate. The school faculty chose to focus on student engagement to decrease discipline referrals.

Schmoker (2006) shared that of 1,500 classrooms visited, 85 % of them had engaged less than 50% of the students. Martinez and Stager (2014) suggested that the maker revolution offered insight and hope for high-poverty schools. The low-performing school in the research district decided to join other schools beginning to transform their libraries to makerspaces, partly in response to success stories from the city's conversion of a floor of the downtown public library (Goldenson & Hill, 2013).

To justify the materials for their grant request, the research district's school faculty reviewed literature to identify specific problems related to low levels of student engagement. According to Strong, Silver, and Robinson (1995), engagement is driven by four goals: success, curiosity, originality, and relationships. Skinner and Belmont (1993) identified students who are not engaged as disaffected. The descriptions of disaffected students, this faculty realized, mirrored many of the students in their school: typically passive, unwilling to try new things, and prone to giving up easily in the face of challenges. Students can be bored, depressed, withdrawn, anxious, or even rebellious toward teachers and classmates in high-poverty schools. The faculty

of this school in the research district pursued the grant, established a maker space that became a model for the district, and saw gains in student achievement the very next year (Tennessee Department of Education State Report Card, 2016).

Access to a Rigorous Curriculum

A report by the College Board, a non-profit group that creates advanced placement (AP) tests, found that opportunities to do advanced work are uneven across the United States (Toppo, 2013). A United States Department of Education panel report on educational opportunities in the United States created an even more alarming picture. The Equity and Excellence Commission found that while some white and affluent students in America are getting a world-class education, those who attend schools in high-poverty neighborhoods are getting an education that more closely approximates schools in developing nations.

During a visit to an Advanced Placement (AP) or International Baccalaureate (IB) classroom in the research district or many other districts, what one will likely see is rigorous, engaging coursework. What is highly unlikely is seeing many students of color and students of poverty (Theokas & Saaris, 2013). Although both the federal government and private businesses provide funds for AP courses for low-income students, high schools do not always offer these courses. Some high-poverty schools do not consider AP courses a priority unless they have a student demand or identify a critical mass of eligible students. Schools should do more to cultivate a culture of aspiration for rigorous coursework to attract the 600,000 students missing from AP classes (Griffin & Davis, 2017).

Districts hoping to provide more access to AP classes for minority and rural students have done so by training more teachers or have implemented distance learning (Wexler, 2015). In 2015, as part of its Year of the High School initiative, District of Columbia Public Schools

expanded AP offerings from four to six in each high school. Enrolling students in classes was one challenge; helping them pass the test was a separate challenge. Wexler reported that taking the AP class without taking the AP test had no effect on the student's ACT college entrance exams. Scores showed that 46% of District of Columbia Public School students who took the AP test got the lowest possible score, but defenders of AP for all students contended that students who took the AP and scored at least a 1 or 2 were better off than students who had not taken the advanced courses.

Rigor Through the Arts

While public schools have turned to advanced placement classes as the predominant strategy to address the lack of rigor for students (Mixon & Stuart, 2009), others have found that arts-based pedagogies add significant value because of their focus on how students learn and engage with material rather than a final arts project (Lee & Cawthon, 2015). Work ethic, self-discipline, focus, persistence, and determination are all terms associated with a student's arts experiences peripheral to arts performance or products. Thus, it can be questioned whether time taken away from test preparation and subsequently devoted to the arts is beneficial or detrimental. A 2003 study by Ingram and Seashore at the Center for Applied Research and Education Improvement, University of Minnesota, found that a three-year arts integration project had a significant impact on students' achievement in reading and math (Perpich Center for Arts Education, 2012). Other increases were in the areas of student leadership and the quality of student-to-student communications.

Walker, Tabone, and Weltsek (2011) conducted a study with randomly selected treatment and control groups of 6th grade students and 7th grade students in New Jersey. These were students experiencing arts integration with teachers hoping to improve English language arts and

mathematics achievement. Researchers instituted a longitudinal study to measure achievement gains an additional year after the initial study. Students in the treatment group (arts integration) outperformed the control group on every measure of English language arts and mathematics on state achievement tests, and treatment group students continued to outperform the control group a year later. The 2011 study also revealed that writing scores of the treatment group increased across the board on achievement tests requiring writing. Attendance of treatment group students also exceeded attendance of students who did not receive the arts integration curriculum in the control group.

Summary

Success stories about strategies for improving low-performing schools are represented on the pages of research studies, books and journal articles. Improving failing schools and maintaining that improvement, however, are continuous challenges (Meyers & Darwin, 2017). When states and districts do not change the way they support underperforming schools, or change the way they approach failure and poverty, these states and districts can only hope that short-term improvements become lasting improvements.

A vision of becoming a district of excellent schools has to be the ambitious goal of every school turnaround effort (Iyengar et al., 2017). With a goal no more ambitious than simply outperforming the worst schools in the state, districts are less likely to make the changes necessary, starting with preconditions that help move schools from chronically underperforming to schools on a trajectory for lasting success (Fullan, 2006). A partnership among school leaders, teachers, and parents is important because no school should be left to its own devices to institute school turnaround. Districts and states must understand their important roles. Additionally, no single strategy is equal to the challenges of chronic underperformance, but research also warns

against an approach that attempts too many strategies (Meyers & Darwin, 2017).

This study focused on three constructs that were components of school reform that began in 1986 in the research district. Only one of the three constructs, recruitment of effective teachers, was implemented in 2000 as the district began to reform eight of its lowest- performing elementary schools. Those eight schools experienced significant achievement growth over a five-year period, but by 2017, seven of these schools were again among the lowest- performing schools in the state (Tennessee State Report Card, 2016). In 2012, a reform effort for five Innovation Zone schools produced no significant achievement results after an \$11 million school improvement grant. None of the three constructs for this study were implemented in Innovation Zone schools. All three constructs were preconditions for the schools that have sustained achievement growth for as many as 30 years.

Since the research district was embarking on a new reform initiative to transform twelve schools included in two feeder patterns, this study proved timely. A study of artifacts from previous reform efforts and interviews to capture educator perceptions were used to determine the importance of replicating the three constructs as preconditions for school change. This work also had the potential to inform the field of education regarding sustained high-performance for chronically underperforming schools.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Description of Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is useful for studies that seek to find out, in depth, the ways people think or feel (Chenail, 2012). A qualitative study primarily uses words, as opposed to numbers for data analysis (Bricki & Green, 2007). This qualitative research study sought to inform the body of knowledge about practices that could contribute to the sustained high performance of high-poverty schools. Through the lens of perception, this qualitative research study sought to better understand the importance teachers placed (Ary et al., 2013) on three constructs that seemed to be critical to school turnaround because these constructs were established in schools in the district that have remained successful for more than 30 years.

Research Question

What are teacher perceptions of transforming underperforming schools by focusing on three specific constructs: student mobility, teacher recruitment and retention, and a culture of high expectations via rigorous curriculum?

Description of the Research Approach

Phenomenology, which can best be described as the study of phenomena, was used as the research approach for this study. Phenomenology was useful for this study because its purpose was to determine the meaning and significance of phenomena as teachers experienced them in their work. The method allowed for the collection of data that included perception and memory, along with the emotions and desires that may have been attached to those perceptions and memories (Alase, 2017). This approach also allowed the researcher to draw conclusions for further study from perceptions regarding three reform efforts and their different outcomes within a single district. Interviews and a review of artifacts were used to develop a theory about the

importance of the three constructs based on the data.

It was important to recognize the tendency toward bias because of history with the research (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) through statewide news articles. Reflective journaling was used to make personal assumptions and values transparent (Ortlipp, 2008). To further control bias, a peer debriefer was engaged to review all documents, including the journal, to provide an impartial view of the study (Hail, Hurst, & Camp, 2011). Because interviews provided much of the data, this was an emergent design. As the study unfolded, elements of the method were adjusted based on what was learned and the nature and types of interactions with the participants (Ary et al., 2013).

Description of the Study Participants and Setting

Fifteen teachers were selected for the study based on years of service during one or more of the district's school turnaround initiatives. Five teachers were selected from the school transformed in 1986, five were chosen from one or more of the elementary schools involved in the 2000 reform initiative, and five were chosen from one or more of the five iZone schools that participated in the reform initiative of 2012. The study was limited to faculty members who were working in the target schools for a minimum of three years. Teachers currently working in the schools who were also on staff during one of the reform efforts were selected purposefully. Principals who led a school during one of the reform initiatives were included in the teacher pool because of their teaching experience.

One other group was included in the study, for a total of 20 participants. Five interviewees were (1) the foundation leader who led the school transformation in 1986, (2) the foundation executive officer who was a critical partner and chief funder of the 2000 initiative, (3) A member of the district human resources team during at least one of the three initiatives,

(4) the first president of the local education foundation, and (5) the district director of the 2012 initiative. These participants were included in the sample because their perspectives had potential to be critical factors based on the role they played in determining what practices were adopted, how they were implemented, and how faculty capacity was developed to implement these practices. This small group of 20 participants allowed time for in-depth interviews. Understandably, the small sample size made it difficult to determine how far the results could be generalized (Bricki & Green, 2007).

Data Collection Procedures

For this investigation, three groups of schools were selected. One school was the first district magnet school involved in a 1986 school turnaround initiative. One school was an elementary school targeted in the 2000 initiative, and one school was a state mandated participant in the 2012 initiative. All initiatives were implemented in the research district. The researcher first read artifacts, including news articles and histories, about the efforts to turn around high-poverty schools. Current documents, including state reports (Tennessee State Report Card, 2016), were also reviewed because efforts to improve schools are ongoing. Artifacts were read to collect any mentions of change theory, controls for student mobility, teacher recruitment and retention, and engagement via rigorous curricula. Any written references to change theory or to the three constructs were added to collected data as indicators that they were considered important to successful school turnaround. An audit trail was used to document all steps of the process from the start of the project to the research findings (Ary et al., 2013). One important step was documenting the absence of any mention of the constructs in artifacts for trustworthiness of data collection.

Interviews were conducted to gather data from educators about their opinions, beliefs, and feelings related to practices associated with student mobility, teacher recruitment and retention, and school curriculum. The interviews were monitored using the audit trail to record decisions about whom to interview and why. Interview questions were informed by information in artifacts and other historical documents, and the same interview questions were asked of all participants. It was established early in the process of data collection that follow-up questions could vary based on the responses. A list of all follow-up questions was kept for analysis to determine if these questions showed bias or if they negatively impacted trustworthiness. Prior to the interviews, all participants received a one-page introduction informing them of the study and its purpose.

Ethical Considerations

Specific ethical considerations were honored during this study. Prior to beginning the study in schools, the researcher met with the appropriate district-level administrators to share an overview of the study and obtain appropriate permissions for interviews and access to any relevant documents about the three school turnaround initiatives. Particularly useful was information about teacher retention in schools that offered signing bonuses. Participants were selected after permission to interview had been given by the research district and the university Institutional Review Board. Findings were reported anonymously, and the level of the school (elementary, middle, high) was indicated only if doing so provided necessary clarity. All participants were informed that complete anonymity could not be guaranteed, especially for foundation and district leaders whose responses might be revealing (Kaiser, 2009). The name of the district was not revealed in this study. No names of schools were included in the study or

shared through other methods. As approved by participants, tape recordings were used, but only to capture interview responses for accuracy.

Data Analysis Procedures

Qualitative data analysis requires the ability to read and process text. One of the biggest challenges in conducting qualitative data analysis is deciding what piece of the data constitutes a meaningful unit to analyze (Chenail, 2012). For this study, the researcher reviewed documents and artifacts to determine the frequency with which three conditions (teacher incentives, student engagement, and controls to minimize student mobility) were referenced. A unit by definition constitutes a whole (*Collins English Dictionary*, 2011). Thus, in qualitative data analysis, a unit would be a single entity upon which the researcher directs analysis and expresses the qualities perceived. For the study of artifacts, one unit was a document of approximately 300 words. Each additional 300 words constituted an additional unit. Data were reported as frequency in the total number of units in documents read.

The analysis procedures for interview data involved more than simply charting the frequency of references. Coding was used to develop concepts from the raw data. Axial coding was used as the information was read, reread, and sorted based on meaning: words, phrases, sentences, themes, subjects' ways of thinking, and events that seemed important and appearing regularly. These initial codes were later modified (Ary et al., 2013).

During the initial coding, many codes were used and reduced later. The goal was to begin to recognize differences and similarities in the data and to begin identifying any references to the three constructs and their relationship to change theory. As primary themes began to emerge, the categories were open to revision. Analytical strategies from the work of Corbin and Strauss (2008) were used to help develop the codes. These strategies included what, when,

where, how, and why questions that had the potential for the researcher to glean deeper insights into the data.

Constant comparison was used during data collection, as well as analysis. Each data element was compared with previous elements to identify similarities or differences in responses or information gained from documents (Ary et al., 2013). After all data were sorted into major and minor categories, the researcher subsequently attempted to select themes, especially regarding the three constructs that were the focus of the study. This was also a time to use the approach of negative case analysis to determine if some data elements were discrepant from the main body of data collected. Once data had been completely analyzed and themes developed, data were subsequently interpreted and reported as themes under the heading, selective coding. The conclusions, implications, and recommendations addressed what was found, why it was important, and what could be learned from it.

Limitations and Trustworthiness

The nature of qualitative research allowed flexibility that also created certain limitations (Bricki & Green, 2007). One limitation and challenge to trustworthiness was that interview participants might have had selective memory depending on the number of years since their participation in schools, or their experiences may have differed from a colleague's experiences in the same school. Member checks were conducted so that interviewees could review transcripts to ensure their comments were accurate. This was done near the end of the study. Sample size was also a notable limitation of the study. Because the sample size was small, it was difficult to determine the extent of generalization of the findings.

Interviews were scheduled for up to 30 minutes. The interview questions were structured to help with validity. A number of the questions were informed by the review of literature and

artifacts about the three reform efforts and the three constructs. Merriam (1998) recommended avoiding highly structured interviews because rather than afford a true participant perspective, they might simply elicit reactions to the researcher's preconceived ideas about the world as context for the study. Yin (2014) cautioned that while gleaning material from artifacts, researchers must recall that these artifacts were designed for purposes other than research. This caution challenged the researcher to monitor the trustworthiness of some documents published by the funders and local news sources. Reviewing documents with a balanced perspective was also considered for trustworthiness.

Summary

The significance of the study was to determine if three constructs had potential to help chronically underperforming schools achieve unrealized, lasting success. The approach to establishing the first magnet school in the research district was a research approach that began with a review of literature, engaged a district/community leader partnership in the process of identifying goals, and then established preconditions that would increase the likelihood of achieving those goals (Gettys & Wheelock, 1994). Three of those preconditions were the recruitment of highly effective teachers, establishing a culture of high expectations, and a policy that prohibited the enrollment of new students during the school year.

Two later reform efforts in 2000 and 2012 produced different outcomes. The 2000 effort resulted in significant academic growth that did not last. The 2012 effort resulted in no significant growth. It was important to collect data from participants who were involved in the three reform initiatives to determine their perceptions of what contributed to lasting success and what did not. More importantly the perceptions were collected to make sense of what educators and community members considered essential contributing factors to successful school

turnaround. Test scores framed one narrative, but those numbers could not provide perceptions from teachers and others involved in the reform efforts. Test scores did not reveal why long term success in some schools and no lasting achievement in other schools were the different outcomes from the same district. The methodology was designed to capture data from narrative, using words as opposed to numbers for data analysis (Bricki & Green, 2007). The purpose of the study was to raise questions for further study by the research district and the field of education.

CHAPTER 4: PRESENTATION OF THE FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to understand the perspectives of participants experiencing phenomena associated with three school turnaround efforts in the research district. Less concerned with *how much* or *how many*, the investigation was more focused on the *what*, *why*, and *how* that could provide credible conclusions and compelling reasons for further study (Patton & Cochran, 2002). The phenomena investigated in this study were constructs associated with a single district's school transformation efforts in 1986, 2000, and 2012. Some schools sustained success. Some schools experienced success but became failing schools again. Some schools showed no significant growth during or after transformation efforts. This study sought to determine the value teachers placed on constructs common in the successful schools.

As described in Chapter 3, the methodology included coding of key themes based on a review of artifacts, interviews with school transformation leaders, and interviews with teachers experiencing transformation in the schools. Coding was used to surface themes and then organize, analyze, make meaning, and prioritize information (Ary et al., 2013). Open coding was used first to capture the multiple themes from texts and interviews. Axial coding followed in an attempt to categorize themes relevant to the core constructs. Finally, selective coding was used to identify themes that seemed to support conclusions and suggest recommendations.

Presentation of Participants

Five leaders of the three school turnaround initiatives for this study were interviewed to determine which constructs were addressed intentionally to accelerate achievement and transform underperforming schools. Those participants were (1) the foundation executive who led the founding of the first magnet school in 1986, (2) the foundation executive officer who was a critical partner and chief funder of the 2000 initiative, (3) a district human resources director

during at least one of the initiatives, (4) the first president of the local education foundation and principal of the school established in 1986, and (5) the district director of the 2012 initiative.

Fifteen teachers were selected for interviews based on years of service during one or more of the initiatives. Five teachers were selected from two magnet schools established in the late 1900's, five were chosen from elementary schools involved in the 2000 transformation initiative, and five teachers were chosen from the iZone (Innovation Zone) schools in the initiative of 2012.

This was an emergent design that allowed for adjustments as the study developed. From an early interview, a question arose about whether the 1986 school met the criterion for a turnaround school. Other schools in the study met the criterion of a failing school infused with new constructs to make it high performing. The school established in 1986 was a newly created school opened in the building of a failing school with declining enrollment and shut down two years before. Another participant agreed that the school established in 1986 was not a turnaround school. He suggested, however, that a successful school established in the same district should not have to be a turnaround school to provide a model of constructs that would benefit a transformation effort. Information from those early interviews precipitated the inclusion of two teachers from the 1997 magnet school with logistics based on the 1986 model.

The flexibility of emergent design also allowed some rethinking about the sample population for the teacher interviews. After the first teacher interview, a decision was made to interview only teachers in chronically underperforming schools who had experienced a turnaround initiative from its beginning. The first participant had taught in an underperforming school, but she did not experience enough of the effort in progress to describe how she was informed about intentions and their implementation. This adjustment to the sample meant that all 15 of the teachers whose interviews were ultimately coded were teachers who applied to teach in

a school transformation initiative and experienced strategies in progress. Excerpts of journal notes chronicling emergent design decisions are in Appendix A.

Teacher selection began with two approaches. Principals were asked to identify teachers who met the criterion of service in the school from the beginning of a transformation initiative. Other participants were approached at a district professional development day after it was determined that they had worked for three or more years in one of the transformation schools. The full list of potential invitees was reduced to a sample of 15 teachers who met the criterion of experiencing transformation from the beginning of one of three initiatives. Using this process meant that some teachers had experiences with at least two of the three initiatives.

Each participant was sent an email describing the topic, requesting an interview, and indicating that the district had approved the study. Prior to the interview, the participants received a one-page introduction informing them of the study, but the decision was made to withhold the identification of the three constructs. This allowed coding of any references to the three study constructs when participants mentioned one or more of these constructs before prompting questions were asked about their importance in a school turnaround effort. Each participant also received and signed the interview consent form (Appendix B).

Table 4.1 Funders and District Leaders Interviewed

Participant	Description
1	Foundation executive associated with magnet school established in 1986.
2	Executive whose foundation was a funding partner of the 2000 initiative
3	Human resources director during the 2000 and 2012 initiatives.
4	President of the education foundation; principal of magnet school established in 1986.
5	Director of the 2012 initiative

Table 4.2 Teachers Interviewed

Participant	Description
6	Teacher and principal of a turnaround school- 2000 initiative; taught in low performing schools.
7	Teacher and principal of a turnaround school- 2000 initiative; taught in low performing schools.
8	Teacher - 6 years in a turnaround school – 2012 initiative
9	Teacher - 7 years in a turnaround school – 2012 initiative
10	Teacher and principal in both high performing and low performing schools; 1997 turnaround school.
11	Teacher in both high performing and low performing schools; 1997 turnaround school.
12	Teacher in 1986 magnet school; taught in high performing and low performing schools.
13	Teacher in 1986 magnet school; taught in high performing and low performing schools.
14	Teacher and principal in high performing and low performing schools; 1986 magnet school.
15	Teacher in 2000 and 2012 turnaround schools; taught in low performing schools.
16	Teacher in 2000 and 2012 turnaround schools; taught in low performing schools.
17	Teacher in 2000 and 2012 turnaround school; taught in low performing schools.
18	Teacher in 2012 turnaround school; taught in low performing schools.
19	Teacher in 2012 turnaround school; taught in low performing schools.
20	Teacher in 2012 turnaround school; taught in low performing schools.

An audit trail (Appendix D) includes details about the interview schedules and findings.

Research Question

What are teacher perceptions of transforming underperforming schools by focusing on three specific constructs: student mobility, teacher recruitment and retention, and a culture of high expectations via rigorous curriculum?

Coding Artifacts and Leader Interviews

Coding is one of the essential steps in organizing, analyzing, and making sense of data (Basit, 2003). For this study, the researcher read a number of documents and news articles about the three school transformation initiatives in the research district and began with open coding of any themes that emerged. The rationale for beginning with artifacts was to determine if any of the three research constructs were intentions mentioned in literature or leader interviews. Determining if there were specific references to Change Theory was also prioritized (Taplin, Clark, Collins, & Colby, 2013), especially identifying preconditions for the 2000 and 2012 initiatives based on the success of the 1986 initiative. For the review of artifacts, a number of general articles and reports about Tennessee's struggles with chronically underperforming schools, as well as success stories, were read to determine if the themes of student mobility, teacher recruitment, and culture of high expectations were addressed.

Ultimately, two documents were coded for each transformation initiative in the research district. Two of the documents were peer-reviewed reports. For the two research reports that could not be authenticated as peer reviewed, one was a widely distributed report (Silva, 2000) on the 2000 initiative, and one was a less widely distributed report on the initiative by an alternate team of researchers who uncovered challenges the foundation preferred to study before releasing the document. Two of the documents were relevant single chapters from published books about school turnaround mirroring the efforts of the research district. These were chapters in books by Leithwood et al. (2000) and Zimimer et al. (2015).

Attracting highly effective teachers was a theme across all documents, with one article explaining that teachers were the solution critical to sustained turnaround (Leithwood et al., 2000). References to high expectations were repeated in some artifacts and absent in others.

Four mentions of rigor and high expectations were found in a single peer reviewed journal article about the school established in 1986; 23 references to high expectations were charted in a 29-page document about high-performing high-poverty schools (Kannapel & Clements, 2005), and 18 references to high expectations were charted in a 32-page document about turnaround leadership (Hewitt & Reitzug, 2015). The words “high expectations” were absent from the 12-page report by Silva (2000) on the initiative that began in 2000 in the research district. References to high expectations and rigor were also absent from articles that touted innovation and autonomy for iZone schools.

Poverty and its impact on students were common themes across artifacts, but most documents did not specify student mobility as a manifestation of poverty that should be addressed. While poverty was mentioned more than 40 times in the article by Kannapel and Clements (2005), the authors noted that teachers’ treatment of students on free or reduced lunch in high-performing schools was similar to treatment of advantaged students. They attributed the success of these students to strong academic programs and a high expectations culture for all.

Leaders of the different initiatives were asked to respond to questions in a semi-structured interview that began with the prompt: “What were your initial intentions to help transform underperforming schools?” Early themes for schools that have remained high performing included effective teachers, diversity, and a high-expectations school culture. Participant 1, for example, wanted the schools to embrace a model of Socratic inquiry that focused on thinking, reading, writing, speaking, and listening through discussion rather than paper and pencil drills. Participant 4 recalled a faculty and student body that was curious and willing to question their own ideas as they sought to understand the ideas of great writers. For schools in the 2000 and 2012 initiatives, initial themes included effective teachers, robust

professional development, extra staff supports for students, and accountability. Participant 5 indicated, “Since we could not lure highly effective teachers away from high performing schools, we decided we needed to build highly effective teachers from the existing faculties.” From the beginning, data coding included a list of intentions for schools established in the late 1990’s and intentions for schools targeted for turnaround in the 2000’s. These are some of the themes from artifacts and interviews with leaders:

Table 4.3 Intentions of School Leaders and Funding Partners

Schools established in the late 1900’s	School turnaround initiatives in early 2000’s
Highly effective teachers	Highly effective teachers
High expectations	Significant improvements in achievement
Accountability not referenced	High Accountability
Rigor (Paideia)	Innovation (iZone)
Diversity	Diversity not referenced
Effective teachers learning to teach new Paideia model	Effective teachers learning to remediate student learning deficits
Experienced teachers	Experienced teachers
Experienced leadership	Strong, experienced leadership
Diverse, involved parents	Involved parents
Magnet focus: Paideia, performing arts	Best instructional practices for addressing student achievement deficits
Additional staff supports to address poverty not referenced.	Additional staff support to diminish the impact of poverty
Marketing campaign to attract teachers	Financial incentives to attract teachers
Enrichment, rigor during the school day	Extended day enrichment (iZone)
High-performance school	Remove schools from the bottom quartile of state list of underperforming schools.
Community Partner Collaboration	Community Partner Collaboration

Coding Teacher Interviews

The semi-structured interview format (Appendix C) for teachers began with an open-ended question designed to allow unsolicited references to the three study constructs before the focused questions that followed. The initial question for teachers was, “What, in your mind, are differences between chronically underperforming schools and high performing schools?” The question was framed this way because some of the teachers had never worked in a high-performing school based on demographic data collected at the time of the interviews. Ten teachers had only worked in underperforming schools. Five teachers had worked in underperforming schools and high-performing schools.

Follow-up questions, when needed, prompted teachers to talk in specific terms about the differences between students, teachers, and the school culture. In response to the initial question, themes included poverty vs. affluence, differences in school environments, parent involvement, and accountability. Two teachers who had only worked in underperforming schools mentioned strong leadership. Two of the five teachers who had worked in both underperforming and high-performing schools mentioned visionary leadership. After the initial question, focused questions on the three research constructs followed.

Construct 1: Student Mobility

The Tennessee Education Research Alliance at Vanderbilt identified student mobility as a top priority on its agenda for driving improvement in low-performing schools (TERA, 2018), further validating its importance for this study. The search of artifacts identified the negative impact of poverty, but did not specifically mention addressing student mobility intentionally in 1986, 2000, or 2012. Because two schools established in the late 1900’s were magnet schools with a specific number of student seats available and an ample waiting list, student mobility was

not a concern. Participant 4 indicated that in magnet schools, very few students were enrolled late term as families withdrew, usually because of a parent's job transfer to another city.

Participant 10 was a teacher who became a principal of a high-performing suburban school after her years in underperforming schools. She shared that student mobility was less a problem in schools perceived to be high performing. Affluent parents, she said, would often buy homes in zones of high-performing schools to ensure enrollment. If students were not zoned for a high-performing high school, parents typically enrolled them in private schools.

Participants in underperforming schools shared a different story, speaking about the impact of student mobility and its companion problem, chronic absenteeism. Participant 6 described her experiences with student mobility this way: "It's a situation that really wreaks havoc when trying to achieve goals with a student." Most teachers (8 of 10) in chronically underperforming schools mentioned student mobility, transiency, or high rates of absenteeism in response to the opening question. Those teachers described high-performing schools as "stable" when they discussed high-performing student populations. In response to a question asking whether student mobility occurred rarely or routinely, all 10 participants from underperforming schools answered, "routinely," although they defined routinely differently. Participant 16 defined routinely as four or five students a year. Participant 9 defined routinely as once a month. Several teachers shared that the same student would leave school only to return months later; therefore, some participants were unsure about whether to count this as absenteeism or student mobility. High school participants shared that student mobility for some groups was less a problem because older students could manage transportation after a move. For underperforming high schools, the typical transfers were students emigrating from other countries or those in the juvenile justice system, returning to school after incarceration. Participant 7 shared that some of

the students emigrating from other countries spoke no English and had never attended school before enrolling at her elementary school. Middle and elementary school teachers talked about student mobility resulting from poor families moving from rental to rental, staying with relatives until conditions improved, or moving from homeless shelters. Participants were quick to report that new enrollees were frequently behind by several grade levels; some were discipline problems dismissed from magnet or charter schools. Typically, new students entered with other challenges, adding to an already vulnerable population. Participant 17 recalled that in February 2017, her school enrolled 17 students from other underperforming schools. She shared that the pattern is one of underperforming students moving in and out of underperforming schools.

Another question sought to ascertain the value teachers placed on addressing the problem of student mobility. When teachers were asked to identify their top three priorities for school turnaround, only four participants listed student mobility among their top three. When probed, teachers detailed the enormity of the task and lack of solutions. One leader who led the first successful magnet school could think of no ways to address the problem and responded that it was not a problem he had to address. Six of 10 participants from chronically underperforming schools were not aware that district policies prevented new student enrollment during the school year for magnet schools. Teachers in underperforming schools also repeated that they perceived student mobility as a major problem, but did not list student mobility among their top three priorities for transforming underperforming schools because they considered it a problem too difficult to solve. Parent involvement, additional school staff support, and resources were among the responses these participants said were more significant than chronic absenteeism and student mobility.

Construct 2: Teacher Recruitment and Retention

When participants were asked to describe the differences between teachers in chronically underperforming schools and high performing schools, most participants teaching in chronically underperforming schools noted what they believed to be common characteristics, such as dedication, strong work ethic, and desire to make a difference for students. New teachers were often recruited to underperforming schools where veteran teachers started before transferring to other schools. The five teachers from consistently high performing schools responded that chronically underperforming schools have some effective teachers, but they also have many inexperienced teachers and teachers less passionate about teaching and learning. Two of the 10 teachers who had only taught in underperforming schools shared their perceptions that teachers in high-performing schools may be compliant and traditional because of their experience. These teachers in high-performing schools may not recognize the need for change or innovation.

Artifacts and interviews with transformation leaders revealed that the research district's effort to create high-performing public schools in the late 1900's was an attempt to attract diverse families, including affluent parents who usually chose private schools. Recruiting highly effective teachers was essential. The magnet school established in 1986 introduced a rigorous model for teaching and learning based on Mortimer Adler's *The Paideia Proposal* (Adler, 1982). The performing arts magnet school offered opportunities for advanced coursework with a performing arts curriculum for a population of new and former students admitted by audition.

For the school established in 1986, the executive director of the funding foundation and the newly recruited principal spent a year planning and searching for highly effective teachers from the district and surrounding region. According to the funder, the draw was not a signing bonus or other financial incentives. The attraction was the chance to teach in an innovative

environment with colleagues who were entrepreneurial in their thinking about how to prepare generations of students to contribute to a democratic society. They would be teachers who had read *The Paideia Proposal* and were intrigued by its possibilities.

The principal of the new school established in 1986 shared that he was looking for teachers who were not just effective because they had excellent evaluations and high student achievement scores. He was looking for teachers who were also curious and lifelong learners. The result was a first faculty that included no new teachers, and only one teacher with less than five year's experience. Likewise, the turnaround school that closed in June and reopened in the fall of 1997, a performing arts magnet, recruited the best of its former faculty and new teachers with established credentials in the arts. Similar to the school established in 1986, most teachers, according to Participant 11, were highly effective veteran teachers.

In response to questions about retention, Participants 12 and 13 applied when the 1986 school was established and remained there until retirement. Participant 11, who teaches in the performing arts magnet, has taught there since 1997. She indicated that not once during her tenure has she considered transferring to another school. Participant 10, who also taught at the performing arts magnet, transferred only when she was promoted to assistant principal and then principal of a high performing suburban school.

By contrast, leaders of the 2000 and 2012 initiatives detailed financial incentives to attract highly effective teachers to chronically underperforming schools. These incentives included a signing bonus, reduced interest rates on home mortgage loans, a no-cost master's degree, and an additional performance bonus for growth in student achievement. Highly effective teachers also had a safety net, according to Participant 3. They could return to their previous position if they were not happy with the transfer after the first year.

To recruit new applicants for the 2000 initiative, more than 300 teachers in the district's eight lowest performing schools had to re-apply. Some artifacts suggested that the response to incentives was overwhelmingly positive. According to Participant 2, perception suggested that the schools experienced "a flood" of highly effective teacher applicants. The reality was that only a small number of teachers from other schools took advantage of the incentives. Artifacts revealed that two-thirds of the teachers hired for the new schools were former teachers re-applying. Re-applying teachers who met the necessary criterion received bonuses. Teachers participating in the interviews for this study recalled that it was demeaning to be forced to re-apply for their jobs. After being re-hired, however, most said they felt validated for their previous work and acknowledged for their willingness to continue in some of the district's most stressful schools. Four of the 10 teachers interviewed benefitted from the no-cost master's degree. Two other teachers had master's degrees but received the signing bonus. Participant 15 stated that teachers felt most validated when student growth outpaced student growth averages in the district after five years.

Participant 3 indicated that chronically underperforming schools would always be the training grounds for new teachers in the research district, so retention was a greater concern than recruitment. The professional development and the additional support staff available during the 2000 initiative were mentioned as key reasons for the dramatic growth in student achievement over a five-year period. Principals of higher performing schools were cautioned not to recruit ("steal," as Participant 3 framed it) effective teachers from the 2000 initiative schools during the implementation period. That unofficial district policy briefly improved retention. Participants in the 2000 initiative said these cautions were not long-term retention strategies; thus, they noted teacher retention as a top priority.

Participants teaching during the 2012 initiative had similar responses about recruitment and retention. Efforts to attract and keep highly effective teachers were less than successful. Participant 5 of the 2012 initiative said she learned while attempting to recruit teachers from across the region, that even bonuses of up to \$20,000 were not enough to attract potential educators to teach in the district's iZone schools. The district did not caution principals to refrain from recruiting outstanding teachers from iZone schools, so retention was again problematic.

Teachers shared that the pressure to raise achievement scores during a short period of time with students who were multiple grade levels behind was too much stress year after year. Two teachers who participated in both the 2000 and 2012 initiatives indicated that early professional development was helpful because periods of success were evident. The schools ultimately received national recognition for that success. Responses indicated that professional development that was subsequently offered was excessive, of poor quality, and delivered improperly. Two teachers shared during their interviews that they had already applied and been accepted for transfers to other schools. One teacher with seven years of experience explained that she asked her principal to allow her to teach a different grade level because she aspires to become a district literacy coach. She thought learning to teach different grade levels would better prepare her. He refused, so she transferred to a different school. Participant 8 expressed that he was transferring because he was weary of teaching the prescriptive lessons of underperforming schools. "I just want to teach in a school where they will let me teach," he said. Similar to their colleagues from the 2000 initiatives, teachers from the 2012 initiative listed teacher retention as a priority.

Construct 3: Culture of High Expectation via Rigorous Curriculum

When participants were asked to discuss school culture, some respondents from

underperforming schools tended to use the word “environment” instead of “culture” and described environment as a place rather than the behaviors and attitudes characteristic of a place (*Collins English Dictionary*, 2011). Participant 20, for example, discussed a struggling new teacher. The new teacher was described as someone with a strong work ethic and desire to help urban students, “but she is not a good match for this environment.” Participant 8 shared that he would be leaving the school where he had taught for six years, his entire career, because he needed a change from the stressful daily environment of a high poverty school.

When pressed about the environment, teachers who had only served in underperforming schools spoke most about the challenges of working in a school of concentrated poverty. Participant 15 stated, “There are behavioral challenges with a large majority needing mental health services. About 5% of the school population has extreme behavior issues, while others can be managed with the right strategies.” Participant 19 added, “You might need a school counselor, behavior specialist, social worker, etc. to provide wraparound services.”

Teachers from high-performing schools and low-performing schools had differing points of view regarding teacher perceptions of high expectations as a priority school turnaround strategy. Participant 6 said, “There are options for curriculum in high-performing schools due to having high test scores. They have proven themselves, so they have some flexibility in what they utilize in curriculum. There are numerous extracurricular activities due to funding and other resources.” Participant 8 indicated that students of poverty are so far behind that most of the work of underperforming schools is remediation. Participant 18 added that underperforming schools are driven by the urgency to get off the list of failing schools, and the curriculum of skill and drill is mandated and heavily monitored by the district. Participant 6 shared that even though underperforming schools have some students who could do more rigorous work, there is an

overwhelming focus on remediation. Underperforming schools often lose high performing students to high performing schools for that reason.

“The stigma of underperforming schools is that students have major discipline issues along with parental issues or no support from parents,” said Participant 9. “It’s hard to combat these issues if you can go to another school and not have to deal with that.” When teachers were asked if they thought the number of arts classes, enrichment clubs, and rigorous high school classes offered in high-performing schools (as listed on their websites) contributed to fewer discipline problems and suspensions, Participant 17 responded, “Those schools can do that. Their students come to school with rich backgrounds. They come ‘cable ready’ so they have time during the school day for enrichment classes. Students are not several grade levels behind, so they are ready for rigorous coursework.”

Participant 10, who had taught in both high-performing and low-performing schools, said she felt the enrichment offerings were important, but because underperforming schools needed to maximize instructional time, schools with many students below grade level had to find other methods of enrichment. Recalling her time as a principal of a school that began at 9:00 a.m., she realized that most students had arrived by 8:30 a.m. She added 15 minutes to the morning schedule and encouraged teachers to lead enrichment clubs each morning. She attributed those clubs to decreases in discipline problems. The 2012 iZone schools added extended day classes for students and led evening enrichment classes, partnering with community organizations to provide outlets for students’ energy and talent. Teachers who had always taught in underperforming schools consistently responded that every moment of the school day was needed for instruction. Any extra time during the school day would be better used for tutoring and other academic supports.

Regarding discipline problems that led to high numbers of suspensions in underperforming schools (Tennessee State Report Card, 2017), teachers who had taught only in underperforming schools responded with the need for social emotional support staff for students rather than the enrichment courses offered in higher performing schools. “Discipline is about more than the child breaking a rule. You have to get to the root to determine the behavior and it takes certified people to make those decisions,” said Participant 16. “I think you need to have at least a couple of these people on staff to provide those wraparound services to pull the parents into the situation for accountability.”

Teachers who had taught in both underperforming schools and high-performing schools tended to agree that enrichment courses, like the arts, were not the single solution, as detailed in this response by Participant 4: “Students need to be engaged, and that engagement is not the result of the arts or other enrichment courses alone, but the integration of the arts into regular classes.” When teachers who had taught in high-performing schools were asked about discipline problems, they attributed the small number of discipline issues to the school’s diversity and the culture of high expectations.

Participant 4, who did not view enriching, engaging courses as key to addressing discipline issues, indicated that if he were tasked with leadership of an underperforming school with major discipline problems, he would begin with trust building. “The first step would be trust and sharing. I would have the agreement not to hold regular school for about a week. I would be working with teachers and students and asking students, ‘How will we trust each other, and how will we talk to each other?’ I would do this in a very structured way to create a place we could live together and own together.”

Coding teachers' responses about implementation of practices in schools that had sustained high performance and schools that had not, revealed many of the same themes. There was some alignment with intentions, although teacher perceptions of implementation did not always reflect those intentions. Table 4.4 displayed below was designed to code the differences as a step toward determining if the three constructs for the research study were perceived to be important to the success of schools that remained high performing.

Table 4.4 Teacher Perceptions of High Performing vs. Low Performing Schools

High performing schools (Late 1990's)	Low performing schools (Early 2000's)
Effective teachers	Mix of effective and ineffective teachers
Mostly experienced teachers	Many new teachers
Teachers attracted by marketing of curriculum, culture	Teachers attracted with financial recruitment incentives
Low teacher turnover; teachers retired from schools	High teacher turnover
Economic diversity	Concentrated poverty
Low student mobility, low absenteeism	High student mobility, high absenteeism
Students at or above grade level (described as "cable ready" students)	Students multiple grade levels behind
Student enrichment during the school day	Student enrichment before or after school
Stable environment	Stressful environment
High level of parent involvement	Low level of parent involvement
High expectations culture	Discipline issues; high suspensions
	Extra support staff to address student issues
Visionary leadership	Strong leadership
District magnet policy-controlled student mobility	No policies, practices addressed student mobility
Accountability targets routinely met	High accountability; pressure to meet targets; struggles to meet targets.

Axial Coding and Selective Coding: Teacher Priorities for Transforming Schools

The leaders of school initiatives all began with the intentions to either create a new school with a high expectations curriculum or turn around chronically underperforming schools to achieve sustained success. Teachers were asked to respond to a final interview question, “What would be your top three priorities for a successful school turnaround initiative?” After focus questions about the three constructs for the study, this question attempted to determine which of the three constructs being investigated would appear on teachers’ priority lists.

Axial coding was used as the research progressed to reducing multiple themes and coding these themes around core ideas (Ary et. al, 2013). This required constant comparison to identify related themes, and then interpreting data without bias to determine if the data could be linked to the three constructs under investigation. Some interpretations occurred to determine if a response was some other iteration of a construct when the construct was not specifically mentioned, as in the case of student mobility. Deciding how to select the code that would reflect what teachers were considering in their responses to questions about teacher retention meant reading their responses repeatedly. This led to identifying teachers’ beliefs regarding changes if they worked in higher performing schools.

In the process of reducing codes, teacher recruitment and retention was consistently noted as a top priority by the respondents. Themes included attracting highly effective teachers, developing new and existing teachers, allowing teachers more flexibility in how they teach, and providing academic and social emotional support staff to help teachers in underperforming schools meet the needs of students. Teachers recruited to high-performing schools felt validated as effective teachers. When achievement growth in the 2000 initiative schools received national attention, teachers in those schools said they felt effective, some for the first time in their careers.

The theme of financial incentives to recruit effective teachers to chronically underperforming schools surfaced during the initial interview questions, but it was not a theme expressed for the final question.

Teachers were unanimous in their response to policies and practices that would diminish the impact of concentrated poverty; however, fewer than half (five) chose student mobility as a top priority. Three teachers chose parent involvement when asked, “What would be a higher priority than addressing student mobility?” Five teachers chose increasing diversity so that inclusion in a high expectations program of study would address most problems without the need for social services. Most participants suggested that district policies similar to those granted to high-performing magnet schools would help a faculty and community dealing with the negative impact of concentrated poverty. Teachers could not imagine, however, how a district could extend these policies to all schools. “Where would troubled students go?” asked Participant 16.

All teachers who had taught in both high-performing and low-performing schools included a “culture of high expectations” as a top priority. They were adamant in their different responses that students of poverty achieved and would continue to achieve in such a culture, even if these students continued to struggle academically. When asked about the disparities between curriculum offerings in low performing vs. high performing schools, teachers who had only taught in low performing schools again mentioned the urgency to focus on instruction. Social and medical services were more a priority than enrichment courses and rigorous coursework. “The arts,” Participant 18 said, “are only important to students of affluence zoned to underperforming schools.” When asked about other priorities that would positively impact the culture or environment of a school, themes included more teaching and learning resources and more community involvement. Two participants mentioned visionary leadership, indicating that

inexperienced principals often led the most challenged schools. “These new principals began with grit and perseverance,” according to Participant 14, “but not enough experience to benefit from visionary leadership”.

As turnaround strategies were planned, funders and leaders prioritized recruitment and retention of effective teachers. Teachers concurred, with 100% agreement that teacher recruitment and retention was a high priority construct. One research question that emerged during coding was, “Should the teacher category focus more on retention instead of recruitment and retention?” Questions also remained about whether school culture was a separate theme. Was it a retention strategy, a strategy for recruiting effective teachers who could change the culture of a school, a strategy for improving student behavior, or all of the above?

From the repeated responses, diminishing the negative impact of concentrated poverty was a priority. The construct of addressing student mobility was just one among other high priority strategies teachers named, such as emotional supports for troubled students. Therefore, it was important to review the data to accurately reflect results prior to moving to conclusions and recommendations. A lingering question was, “How might the strategies that attracted diversity and affluence to high-performing schools inform district policy decisions to address schools with concentrated poverty?”

Table 4.5 shown below reflects a reduction of the themes that emerged to describe teachers’ perceptions of high priority constructs to transform schools into high-performing schools. Selective coding evolved from axial coding in Table 4.5. This selective coding helped identify concepts that could support conclusions and recommendations.

Table 4.5 Teacher Priorities for Transforming Schools

Open Codes	Axial Codes	Selective Codes
Recruitment of highly effective, experienced teachers	Different definitions of “effective” in high-performing and low-performing schools	Threats to teachers’ feelings of self-efficacy and evidence of effectiveness in turnaround schools
District mandated professional development to “build” effective teachers		
Failed strategies to attract effective teachers with financial incentives		
Teacher capacity to handle many challenges		
Retention in high performing vs. low performing schools	High teacher turnover vs. Low teacher turnover	
Practices that made teachers feel ineffective or effective		
Teacher supports to help manage challenges; diminish stress		
Teacher autonomy: “Let me teach” vs. prescriptive lessons		
Student mobility, chronic absenteeism	Multiple challenges associated with concentrated poverty Difficulty distinguishing high priority vs. low priority challenges	Student (and teacher) mobility make school-based improvements difficult. Identify and address challenges caused by concentrated poverty
Discipline issues and high number of suspensions in turnaround schools		
Number of students multiple grade levels behind		
Parent involvement		
Medical, emotional support staff		

Open Codes	Axial Codes	Selective Codes
School culture variations among turnaround schools	<p data-bbox="613 380 971 520">Different definitions of successful performance: Off the state priority list vs. Top state quartile.</p> <p data-bbox="613 600 1003 705">Different perceptions of the role of rigor and enrichment's impact on achievement.</p>	<p data-bbox="1089 527 1382 596">“High performing” as goal for all schools.</p> <p data-bbox="1062 638 1406 707">Conditions necessary to achieve high performance.</p>
Different goals for different schools		
Removal from the bottom percentile as highest expectation for some turnaround schools		
Multiple challenges associated with concentrated poverty		
No time for enrichment during the school day; limited population for rigor.		

Summary

The three constructs for sustaining success in turnaround schools were chosen because they were common among successful school turnaround efforts in the research district. The district's first charter school was not a part of this study, but it remains a school of concentrated poverty that has sustained success for six of its nine years. It also has the three constructs in place.

Considering the rationale for the selection of the three constructs, this study sought to collect data on whether the three constructs were among the preconditions of school change necessary to turn around underperforming schools. Relevant artifacts were reviewed and leaders were interviewed to make this determination. The study then sought to acquire teacher perceptions through semi-structured interviews asking whether they thought the three constructs should be top priorities in a turnaround initiative. Some responses were predictable, such as the

urgency to ensure that highly effective teachers taught in underperforming schools. Some responses were unpredictable, such as a focus on preparing teachers to teach in a climate of high student mobility rather than addressing the causes of student mobility. (District policies for schools established in the late 1900's limited student mobility because seats were not available during the school year.) Some responses prompted lingering questions, such as the perceptions of teachers in chronically underperforming schools that rigorous and enriching activities limited instructional focus. Reducing the codes through axial coding and selective coding involved reviewing the raw data and organizing it into categories that would facilitate interpretation as the research progressed to conclusions and recommendations.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

School districts nationwide face the problem of chronically underperforming schools, and for decades they have sought to understand the causes. Poverty seems to be a major cause because many of the chronically underperforming schools are also high-poverty schools. The research district presented interesting phenomena for this study. Most of its chronically underperforming schools are high-poverty schools; however, two high-poverty schools have sustained success. One has sustained success for 13 years and one for six years. Both have been celebrated for strong academic growth. The research district also boasts about raising the achievement of eight of the lowest performing elementary schools in the state to high academic growth, outpacing the district average within a five-year period. Sadly, seven of those schools are now underperforming again. The research district began establishing magnet schools in 1986. Thirty years later, the first magnet school continues to be high performing. Other magnet schools have achieved mixed results. Some remain high performing and some are among the lowest performing schools in the state. The lowest performing magnet schools are also the district's high-poverty schools.

A review of the chronology of school transformation in the research district raised an important question about what the district has learned in the last 30 years. Magnet schools that opened in 1986 and 1997 have remained successful. The 2000 initiative evidenced spurts of significant academic improvement, but now seven of the eight schools are again low performing. In 2012, the research district opened a new magnet school that continues to grow in both enrollment and academic success. That same year, an initiative to transform five chronically underperforming schools with \$11 million in school improvement grant funding resulted in five

years with no significant academic improvement. Change Theory was selected as the theoretical framework for this study to determine if it provided answers to the question, “Why did some school transformation efforts in a single district succeed when others failed?”

Problem Statement

For this investigation, the focus of inquiry was the differences in outcomes for a single district transforming underperforming schools. Why did some efforts succeed in sustaining success and others failed? What might a district learn from answering that question?

In 2017, the research district was focused again on school transformation, targeting 12 chronically underperforming schools in two feeder patterns. This district had now been transforming underperforming schools since 1986 under four superintendents. The new superintendent turned to the community and educators past and present to identify problems and inform solutions. Community conversations and surveys surfaced numerous themes, with repeated calls for more parent involvement, effective teachers, additional funds for school resources, facility renovations, stronger leadership, and greater attention to the whole child. Some constituents called for a return to old structures like vocational training and neighborhood schools. Others wanted to advance technologies that better prepared students for the future. Some attributed failures to historic problems of segregation and little access to the district’s promise of a great education for all.

This research study was an attempt to collect data that might reveal topics for further study. The process was designed to investigate leader intentions and ascertain the perceptions of 15 teachers who experienced the implementation of different school transformation strategies. Fullan (2006) asserted that the only way to address root causes of chronic underperformance is to

make significant changes in schools. That assertion prompted interview questions about changes that may have contributed to sustained success in some schools.

Research Question

To address the problem of why some turnaround efforts in the research district were successful while others were not, the researcher investigated perceptions of the impact of three strategies implemented in the successful turnaround schools:

What are teacher perceptions of transforming underperforming schools by focusing on three specific constructs: student mobility, teacher recruitment and retention, and a culture of high expectations via rigorous curriculum?

Discussion

Beginning with the assumption that the overarching goal for improving performance was the same for all turnaround schools—improved student achievement that led to high performance thereafter—this study sought to elicit intentions and strategies from artifacts and interviews. The data included perceptions from teachers experiencing the implementation of transformation strategies at the school level. The methodology used was open coding of initial themes, axial coding, and selective coding. Reducing themes through axial coding required analyzing, organizing, and prioritizing data. Selective coding required framing summary statements that reflected what was found, why it was important, and what could be learned from it (Ary et al., 2013). The three constructs that were specific to the study were chosen because they were common among schools that sustained success. A review of the data showed the extent to which that was accurate. Selected details follow as the summary statements about each construct.

Student Mobility

Research from the review of literature for this study revealed that student mobility negatively impacts students who are frequently changing schools, but it also has hidden

consequences for the schools where these students relocate (Kerbow et al., 2003). Some of the challenges include poor attendance rates, high dropout rates, lack of parental involvement and school contribution, lack of community cohesiveness (making it difficult to influence a culture for education), loss of consistency in educational impact, and low predictability for school budget planning (Smith, 2011).

The artifacts reviewed and the leaders interviewed did not mention addressing student mobility specifically, but their intentions to attract economic and racial diversity to magnet and turnaround schools became strategies that diminished student mobility's negative impact. The teachers interviewed who had worked in both high performing and low performing schools agreed that not having to address student mobility issues made teaching less challenging. Teachers who had only taught in underperforming schools described the problem as one that explained why students were often several grade levels behind. One participant summarized several responses about student mobility by stating: "It's a situation that really wreaks havoc when trying to achieve goals with a student."

Interestingly, however, when teachers were asked to name the top three priorities the district should consider in attempting to turnaround underperforming schools, few listed student mobility as one of their top three. In follow-up questions, they shared responses that evidenced the importance of this data. Most of the teachers shared that student mobility was too enormous a problem for schools to address due to the numerous challenges in underperforming schools. This was telling because six of the teachers did not know that in some schools, district policies on enrollment prevented new students from enrolling throughout the year. The school did not have to solve the problem. Teachers did not express any indications that student mobility, described by researcher Russell Rumberger as similar to second hand smoke (Burnett, 2017), was a

problem perhaps they considered more urgent in their day-to-day work than their other priorities, such as parent involvement and more technology.

Teacher Recruitment and Retention

The intentions relative to teacher recruitment and retention were consistent in two initiatives in the early 2000's: Recruit effective teachers with incentives and the incentives will retain them. This was not the case. Incentives like signing bonuses, low-interest mortgage loans, a no-cost master's degree, and performances bonuses attracted a few effective teachers, but not the "flood" of teachers that leaders and funders were expecting for the 2000 initiative. For the 2012 initiative, bonuses of up to \$20,000 were not enough to attract teachers to five low performing schools, according to Participant 5. That same year, however, highly effective teachers applied in large numbers for the opportunity to teach in an innovative new school opening in the same district.

Once axial coding began for grouping teacher comments around the core construct of teacher recruitment and retention, analyzing data became an exercise in understanding what the responses indicated about the problems of recruitment and retention. Artifacts revealed that in 2000, the district required 300 teachers to reapply for their jobs. Participants said having to do so was demeaning, but the ones who were rehired felt affirmed. During a five-year period, teachers received what they described as high-quality professional development, and as a result, by 2006 these teachers and their schools received national attention for surpassing the district average in academic growth. Their comments suggested that these teachers believed they were now the effective teachers the district needed.

In summary, teachers in the research district perceived that new schools with innovative curricula hired teachers who were already considered effective. Underperforming schools were

staffed by many new teachers and veteran teachers saddled with students' low test scores that labeled them as less effective. When participants said they felt teachers in underperforming schools were just as dedicated, committed, and capable as teachers in high performing schools, they also detailed the differences in challenges in high-poverty schools that seemed to mask the similarities. Transferring to other schools for teachers in low performing schools was their chance to demonstrate effectiveness. "If I could just teach," said one participant from a high-poverty school, adding that his effectiveness would not be eclipsed by prescribed lessons.

A Culture of High Expectations via Rigorous Curriculum

According to the website of the magnet school that opened in 1997 in the research district, "[Our school offers students] an opportunity to explore their gifts and talents. Arts programs in communications, music, dance, theatre and visual arts, plus a well-rounded academics program, direct students in a progressive pathway to a bright future." The principal of a magnet school that opened in the research district in 2009 stated the following in a news article regarding curriculum to be offered: "Whether students are learning through dancing or debate, painting or poetry, graphic design or film editing, students who take part in high-quality, rigorous and meaningful experiences often become engaged and excited learners who achieve strong outcomes. Schools should be places where students love to learn and teachers love to teach".

Participants who had only taught in underperforming schools mostly agreed with Participant 8, who said students of poverty are so far behind that most of the work of underperforming schools is remediation. Participant 18 said that underperforming schools are driven by the urgency to get off the list of failing schools, and the curriculum of skill and drill is mandated and heavily monitored by the district. Other participants who had only taught in

underperforming schools shared that enrichment and other extracurricular classes were scheduled before and after school because there was no time for them during the school day. None of the participants from underperforming schools discussed the contribution rigorous, engaging course additions could make to core academic subjects. No one mentioned the possibility of integrating arts and other courses into academic course work, as did one participant from a high-performing school. A lingering question developed: “Could teachers who have only taught in underperforming schools benefit from observing the impact of rigorous, enriching course work being implemented in higher performing schools?”

Conclusions

Unlike research for a quantitative study that can allow the numbers to speak, qualitative research requires surfacing what the words say and why their messages are important (Bricki & Green, 2007). The focus of inquiry for this study required the researcher to understand perceptions of three constructs common among schools that sustained success in the research district. The following conclusions were drawn by interpreting the data that started with intentions shared in artifacts and interviews of school leaders and funders. Interviews with teachers experiencing the implementation during three transformation initiatives provided insights into their perceptions of what worked, what did not work, and why.

One conclusion from this study was informed by Leithwood et al. (2010). Researchers proposed that simply identifying poverty as a cause of chronic underperformance without understanding its complexity made it immune to simple solutions. Meyers and Darwin (2017) exposed five myths of school turnaround, cautioning against the “one simple solution myth.” Identifying the single construct of student mobility and addressing it as a solution failed to acknowledge that it was one element of a complex web of issues that must be addressed in

schools with concentrated poverty. This was suggested by participants' responses that while it "wreaked havoc on a school," it would not be a top priority. Addressing student mobility as an intention had not been the priority in successful schools, but other intentions like attracting diversity and limiting the number of seats available in magnet schools diminished the negative impact of student mobility and made it more manageable for teachers.

A second conclusion gradually became more evident as the methodology progressed through the stages of open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. School leaders sought to identify and recruit effective teachers to underperforming schools with financial incentives that were largely declined. Teachers in underperforming schools shared that they had the same work ethic, capacities, passion for teaching, and determination as their peers in other schools, but not the confidence of the district. They were not sought, and they had to re-apply for the jobs they previously held. When the district rehired them and developed their instructional practices, and when these teachers and their schools received national attention for surpassing the district average for academic growth, these teachers felt effective. This suggested that teachers want to feel effective, and teacher retention, as evidenced in interviews, is not problematic when teachers continue to believe they are effective in their respective schools.

A third conclusion addressed school culture. Hill, Bromell, Tyson, and Flint (2007) found that a brain susceptible to adverse environmental effects, such as those associated with poverty, is equally susceptible to positive, enriching effects. Teachers who had only taught in underperforming schools repeatedly responded that they had no time during the school day for rigorous, enriching instruction. They had to improve achievement. Their responses indicated that rigorous, enriching, vibrant learning environments were for other schools and other students who were not multiple years below grade level. Nothing in their responses suggested that they saw

academic growth significantly impacted by the rigorous, enriching courses detailed on the websites of other more successful schools in their district. Since these teachers had only taught in underperforming schools, their responses led to the conclusion that they could imagine only two paths forward: managing the many daily stressors of a high-poverty culture or transferring to another school that promised less stress.

Implications of the Study

The results of this study have implications for districts hoping to finally transform chronically underperforming schools, especially schools with concentrated poverty. Churchman identified the challenge of turning around chronically underperforming high-poverty schools as a “wicked” problem with many causes difficult to resolve (Leithwood, Harris, & Strauss, 2010). Those causes include recruiting and retaining effective teachers, because volumes of research indicate that effective teachers and principals are key.

For schools, this study may inform how teachers and principals decide on whether they include rigorous, enriching curriculum options for students who are below grade level. What practices of high performing schools are the strategies they should embrace to complement remedial classes? What are implications for staffing when students need both supports to address discipline issues and engagement that may prevent some of those issues?

This study may also have implications for funders who are committed partners for districts attempting to transform schools. How might they use resources more effectively to support further studies of Change Theory and preconditions common among schools that sustain success?

Recommendations

This study was designed to suggest recommendations for further study for any school district hoping to solve the problem of chronically underperforming schools, especially when the commonality among underperforming schools is concentrated poverty. According to Iyengar et al. (2017), a vision of becoming a district of excellent schools must be the ambitious goal of every school turnaround effort. With a goal no more ambitious than simply outperforming the worst schools in the state, districts are less likely to make the changes necessary, starting with preconditions that help move schools from chronically underperforming to schools on a trajectory for lasting success (Fullan, 2006).

The following are recommendations are based on this study:

- Since the research is clear that recruiting and retaining effective teachers matters, districts should explore ways to increase teacher self-efficacy, identifying practices and policies that help all teachers be more effective and feel more effective.
- Districts should further investigate the key strategies that diminish the negative impact of concentrated poverty, making the responsibilities of teachers more manageable as the district takes steps to eliminate schools with concentrated poverty.
- Districts should conduct further study of the impact of rigorous, enriching curricula on high-poverty students who enter a high-performing school below grade level. What are the lessons learned from complementing remediation with rigorous, engaging coursework?

Summary

Meyers and Darwin (2017) exposed five myths of school transformation, including the myth that school turnaround is impossible. The focus of this inquiry was to elicit teacher

perceptions about their experiences during different school turnaround efforts in a single district. To guide the study, three constructs common among schools that became high-performing schools and sustained success were chosen as the topics of interview questions. The three constructs were not intended to be the solutions, but three among other preconditions of school change.

Teacher recruitment and retention challenges many school districts, so teachers were asked to help uncover reasons why. Incentives did not lure effective teachers to underperforming schools, and those recruited shared specific reasons why they did not stay. Analyzing the data coded in the interviews led to a conclusion that teachers needed to feel a sense of self-efficacy. Teachers in underperforming schools consider themselves just as capable and dedicated as their peers in high-performing schools, but the unwieldy challenges of schools serving populations affected by concentrated poverty rendered them unable to achieve results they could achieve in schools with fewer challenges.

The unwieldy challenges included student mobility, but were not limited to student mobility. It was simply one example, in their words, of the many challenges too enormous for a school to address. In some cases, teachers said they were so stressed and so consumed by the need to raise student achievement that they were unaware of district policies such as limiting late-term enrollments that could help. These same teachers' comments indicated that they were so focused on the need to raise student achievement scores that they believed there was no time to offer the rigorous, enriching curricula their peers in high-performing schools integrated into the school day.

In brief, this research documents the need for further study of strategies that increase the self-efficacy of teachers so that they are effective and feel effective in schools transitioning from

low-performance to high-performance. The research also documents the need for a district approach to decreasing the impact of concentrated poverty in chronically underperforming schools. This approach should include investigations into how rigorous, enriching curricula may contribute to the academic growth of students, even when they are several grade levels behind, to address the relationship between school culture and achievement.

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APPENDICIES

Appendix A: Research Journal (Excerpt)

Appendix B: Interview Consent Form

Appendix C: interview Questions for Teachers

Appendix D: Audit Trail (Excerpt)

Appendix A

Research Journal: Emergent Design Notes

January 23: This first interview was a test run with the funding founder of the magnet school opened in 1986. I shared with him that my research of the study district seemed to uncover practices in some turnaround schools that differed from practices in others. During the interview he asked why I characterized the first magnet school as a turnaround school. All eight of the schools in the 2000 initiative were schools that closed in June of one year and reopened the same year with new faculties and new strategies for improving student achievement. All schools were considered the same school with the same name, engaged in a turnaround initiative. This was also true of the five schools that participated in the 2012 initiative.

The 1986 school opened in the building of a failing school that was closed two years before. The new school opened with a new name, and a purpose that was not so focused on achievement because it attracted many students who were already high achieving. The participant suggested that the magnet school's purpose was so different, it might not be fair to attribute its success to effective school turnaround strategies. Addressing the student mobility, for example, was not an intentional strategy. The school had a limited number of seats and they were filled. There was no school zone requiring the admission of late term enrollees. This school's curriculum would mirror the curriculum necessary to attract private school parents.

This discussion prompted me to add two teachers from a magnet school that opened in 1997 with the addition of performing arts to its original name, and a combination of new and returning teachers and students.

February 15: When Participant 4 was asked for advice on whether the 1986 school should be included in the study, he suggested that a school's turnaround status should not matter. The research focus was change theory, using teacher perceptions about the value they placed on the study constructs to support sustained school success. The 1986 school was an example of school appearing to benefit from the constructs. It should not matter whether it was a failing school transforming from low performance to high performance.

Appendix B

Consent Form: Interview

Project: Teacher Perceptions of Constructs for Successful School Turnaround

- I..... voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.
- I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without any consequences of any kind.
- I have had the purpose and nature of the study explained to me in writing and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.
- I understand that participation involves my participation in an interview of up to 20 minutes.
- I understand that I will not benefit directly from participating in this research.
- I agree to my interview being audio-recorded.
- I understand that in any report on the results of this research my identity will remain anonymous. This will be done by disguising any details of my interview that may reveal my identity or the identity of current or retired county employees.
- I understand that disguised extracts from my interview may be paraphrased in the dissertation.
- I understand that a transcript of my interview in which all identifying information has been removed will be retained for up to three years or as indicated by the Institutional Review Board (IRB).
- I understand that I am entitled to review the information I have provided to confirm accuracy.
- I understand that I am free to contact the researcher to seek further clarification and information.

Signature of research participant

----- Signature of participant/Date

Signature of researcher

----- Signature of researcher /Date

Appendix C

Interview Questions for Teachers

1. Where have you taught in this and other districts? Total years of teaching?

2. What comes to your mind when you hear “high-performing” and “low-performing” schools.
 - Talk specifically about student mobility in high and low performing schools.
 - Talk specifically about teachers in high and low performing schools.
 - Talk specifically about rigor and enrichments in both schools.
(Why do you think school websites show fewer rigorous or enrichment courses in high-poverty schools?)

3. During the _____ initiative, what did you understand as the long term and short term goals?
 - What for you were strengths of implementation of goals?
 - What were the challenges/or weaknesses in implementation?

4. If you were making recommendations for transforming a school that sustained success, what would be your highest priorities?

Appendix D

Audit Trail (excerpt)

Date(s)	Activity	Findings
Jan. 5, 2018	Began recruiting participants during system wide professional development	Initial pool of possible participants.
Jan. 16, 2018	Emailed principals for names of teachers who taught at 2000, 2012 initiative schools.	Teachers contacted via email willing to participate; tentatively scheduled interviews at school dismissal times.
Jan. 22-Feb. 2	<p>Reviewed relevant artifacts district's school transformation history:</p> <p>Collected info from news articles. Per chair: Do not cite to protect anonymity of district.</p> <p>Gained access to unpublished evaluation of 2000 initiative.</p> <p>Compared magnet articles to 2000 initiative articles</p>	<p>No mention of "change theory" in documents, but strategies detailed.</p> <p>More detailed account of challenges, such as poor teacher recruitment response to incentives. Little detail on reasons for lethargic response rate</p> <p>Attracting diversity absent from intentions of 2000 initiative.</p>
Jan. 23	Interview: Participant 1	1986 school may not fit criterion for turnaround school.
Feb. 7	Interview: Participant 2	Funder asked "hard questions, " but left decisions to district.
Feb. 7	Participant (info not coded for final report)	Taught in underperforming school, but not involved in implementation of turnaround strategies.
Feb. 9	Participant 6	Not complimentary of professional development; prescriptive teaching
Feb. 15	Interview: Participant 4	Should not matter if 1986 school was a turnaround school; constructs should be the focus as possible preconditions for successful school turnaround
Feb. 16	Interview: Participant 11	Discussed diversity reducing the impact of student poverty.