How Central Office Administrators Organize Their Work in Support of Marginalized Student Populations: Co-Construction of Policy in a Turnaround District

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HOW CENTRAL OFFICE ADMINISTRATORS ORGANIZE THEIR WORK IN SUPPORT OF MARGINALIZED STUDENT POPULATIONS: CO-CONSTRUCTION OF POLICY IN A TURNAROUND DISTRICT

Dissertation in Practice by

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Abstract

Title: How Central Office Administrators Organize Their Work in Support of Marginalized Student Populations: Co-Construction of Policy in a Turnaround District

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Purpose and Research Questions: Some educational reform efforts aim to support marginalized populations and narrow long-standing achievement and equity gaps, influencing the ways in which educators implement policy. While researchers have identified ways that educators implement policy, there is a research gap concerning how central office administrators implement policy in support of traditionally marginalized students. This study describes the policy implementation process of one central office administration team with the specific goal of supporting traditionally marginalized students, addressing two research questions: (1) In what ways are central office administrators working together to implement policy in support of traditionally marginalized students? (2) How do central office administrators balance external policy demands with internal goals when implementing policy in support of traditionally marginalized students?

Methods: This qualitative study draws upon semi-structured interviews, observations, and document review to answer the aforementioned research questions.

Findings: Central office administrators in this turnaround district organize policy work by dividing up tasks according to established goals and benchmarks, and communicating to other central office administrators regarding the progress towards meeting them. These goals and benchmarks represent the primary policy work designed to support traditionally marginalized students. Central office administrators have a shared understanding of and respect for the

turnaround plan's goals and benchmarks. Since this district is under state receivership, central office administrators face demands from the state department of education regarding progress towards meeting the goals of the turnaround plan. As part of this work, central office administrators bridge internal goals of the district to external pressures of the state Department of Education, forming a unique partnership between district and state actors.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Problem Statement and Research Question

School districts are responsible for creating the conditions for *all* students to be successful in school. As a result, educational leaders must consider the needs of *all* students when making leadership decisions. Of particular importance is the impact that these decisions have on historically marginalized populations, to assure that long lasting achievement and equity gaps do not persist. For the purpose of this study we included students of color, students with disabilities, low income students, and culturally and linguistically diverse students in our definition of traditionally marginalized populations, but it is important to note that there are many other populations that would be considered traditionally marginalized in U.S. public schools, including those who have been discriminated against based on sexual orientation or religion. Traditionally marginalized students have historically been underserved in American schools, and, as a result, are more likely to struggle academically and have an increased chance of dropping out of school (Gleason, 2010; Ryan, 2015). Given the increasingly diverse United States population (U.S Census, 2013), and school achievement as a predictor of engaged citizenship, wages earned, and later quality of life (Ferguson, 2014; Rodriguez, Jones, Tittmann, & Wagman, 2015), it is critical that educational leaders improve student outcomes by prioritizing the needs of traditionally marginalized students (Ferguson, 2014; Theoharis, 2007).

In recent years, numerous educational policies and reform efforts have aimed to support marginalized populations and narrow long-standing achievement and equity gaps in American schools (Trujillo & Woulfin, 2014). Some of the most influential and recent changes have emphasized educational accountability in an effort to ensure both equity and achievement

(Capper & Young, 2015). One such policy that significantly impacted schools is No Child Left Behind (NCLB). Authorized in January 2002, NCLB reflected the federal government's effort to improve performance and diminish achievement gaps of historically marginalized populations. The broad goal was to raise the achievement of all students, with a particular emphasis on underperforming subgroups (Brown, 2010), and to mandate districts to improve schools' performance. Under NCLB, improvement was measured based on the results of yearly, standardized assessments. While there are numerous ways for students to show what they know and are able to do, and the results of standardized assessments is only one measurement, the mandate to demonstrate improvement on high-stakes tests challenged superintendents to figure out how to improve scores. This represented a shift in the work practices and capacity of central office administrators who had previously focused largely on business and compliance functions. In order to thrive, organizations must learn and adapt (Edmondson, 2012); as school districts are no exception, they faced increased pressure to improve student achievement (Honig, 2014).

As public schools in the United States continue to serve a more diverse population and districts face pressure to improve their performance, district leaders must think strategically about how to organize their work to support historically marginalized populations, and in some cases, modify their work practices. Researchers have identified some ways that educational leaders and teachers organize their work to support marginalized students (Honig & Hatch, 2004; Honig, 2006; Trujillo & Wolfin, 2014), but much of the existing research describes the role of building level leaders, such as principals, teacher leaders, and classroom teachers. Limited research focuses on the specific practices of central office administrators that work to support historically marginalized students, and little attention has been given to district level activities

that promote effective schools and lead to improved student outcomes (Murphy & Hallinger, 1988). The overarching aim of this study was to narrow this research gap by describing central office administrators' leadership actions and practices as a school district works to educate and improve outcomes for historically marginalized populations. Specifically, we answered the following research question: *How do central office administrators organize their work in support of traditionally marginalized student populations?*

While many factors influence student outcomes, we identified four practices we predicted central office administrators would use as they work to improve outcomes for marginalized students. First, we investigated how central office administrators collaborated with one another to expand knowledge and build individuals' capacities. Second, we focused on communication and the ways central office administrators used language about historically marginalized populations. Third, we investigated how central office administrators interpreted and implemented policy mandates that are largely intended to improve educational outcomes for traditionally marginalized students. Fourth, we explored central office administrators' social network ties and to whom they turned for advice.

While superintendents must be chief executive officers of school districts, to improve student outcomes at scale they must also rely on the collective knowledge and judgment of central office colleagues (Murphy & Hallinger, 1988). For the purpose of this study, we defined outcomes broadly, borrowing from research on student learning outcomes at the university level. These outcomes included what students have learned, the knowledge and skill levels achieved, and a student's potential for future learning (Barr & Tagg, 1995). The four practices outlined enabled us to examine the ways central office administrators learned together and organized their work to improve outcomes across a school district. This study adds to the

research on school improvement and provides insight for researchers and practitioners alike on the role of central office administrators in district-wide improvement, with a particular emphasis on improving outcomes for historically marginalized populations. Describing how four specific practices are utilized in one district is useful, as it offers practitioners approaches they can apply and integrate into daily practice as they work to improve learning outcomes for historically marginalized students. Additionally, researchers may find it a valuable contribution to the research discussion on effective practices for district leaders who are educating an increasingly diverse student population and working to reduce achievement gaps.

In this study, each author presented a chapter that addressed a complementary research question, literature review, methods, findings, and discussion. Table 1 outlines each author's individual chapter and corresponding conceptual frameworks used to analyze the study.

Table 1

Individual Research Topics

Conceptual Framework	Investigator	Research Question
Communities of Practice	Kathleen Smith	How do communities of practice emerge within the central office when working to improve outcomes for historically marginalized students? What conditions foster or hinder administrator collaboration?
Social Justice Leadership-Language Awareness	Christina Palmer	What language do leaders use to talk about their work with marginalized populations? How does this language influence practice?
Co-construction	Hugh Galligan	In what ways are central office administrators working together to implement policy in support of traditionally marginalized students? How do central office administrators balance external policy demands with internal goals when implementing policy in support of traditionally marginalized students?
Social Network Theory	Julie Kukenberger	How do social networks between and among district leaders relate to turnaround efforts designed to support marginalized populations?

Literature Review

This literature review addresses three main themes: (1) traditionally marginalized student populations; (2) educational reform related to historically marginalized students; and (3) the role of central office administrators. Each major theme also includes sub-themes that have emerged in the literature.

Theme 1: Traditionally Marginalized Student Populations

Throughout the history of the United States, specific student populations have been marginalized and underserved within the public school system, and for decades there have been efforts to address discrimination and inequity on their behalf. Brown v. Board of Education (1954), a landmark case, began to dismantle the dual system of public education for students that segregated white students from black students. It was also a touchstone for the ideal of public education as a great equalizer, a concept Lyndon B. Johnson (1965) described while signing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) by stating: "As the son of a tenant farmer, I know that education is the only valid passport from poverty." This ideal is unraveling, however, as the percentage of high poverty, majority black, and Hispanic families rises (Government Accountability Office Report, 2016), and achievement and equity gaps persist.

In the United States today, we know that factors such as race, ethnicity, socioeconomic class, gender, and sexual orientation influence student outcomes (Massey, 2007). Educational disparities emerge for traditionally marginalized students in early childhood and continue throughout elementary and secondary school (American Psychological Association, 2012). According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (U.S. Department of Education, 2013), by age seventeen, the average white student scores approximately three years ahead of the average black or Hispanic student.

When studying how central office administrators, work to support traditionally marginalized student populations, one must first understand the historical experiences of traditionally marginalized student populations in U.S. schools, as these experiences have resulted in the disparities that continue today. These disparities are explained and organized into the following subthemes: (a) access to equitable education; (b) achievement gaps; and (c) school discipline.

Access to equitable education. Skiba et al., (2008) define disproportionality "as the representation of a group in a category that exceeds our expectations for that group, or differs substantially from the representation of others in that category" (p.266). Disproportionality pervades U.S. public school systems. In Massachusetts, school districts serving low-income populations have fewer resources and academic support than wealthier counterparts, impacting low-income students and, because there is a significant correlation between socioeconomic status and race, students of color. It is here that we begin to examine achievement gaps as they relate to students living in poverty and children of color, and schools with a high percentage of low-income families (McGee, 2004). Predominantly low-income districts serve approximately 25% of all students in Massachusetts, including a large percentage of black and Latino students (Rodriguez, Jones, Tittmann, & Wagman, 2015). Traditionally, demographic shifts have impacted urban areas as immigrant families settle in urban centers. These shifts can be magnified by "white flight," a term coined to describe the large percentage of middle class white families who moved to the suburbs during the desegregation movement in urban schools in the 1960s and 1970s. Researchers describe a modern version of "white flight" as white families capitalize on the availability of charter schools and school choice (Renzulli & Evans, 2005). While immigrant families historically settled in urban areas, some are now establishing

roots in suburban and rural areas, causing more districts to see a shift in demographics and highlighting the importance of focusing on equity and achievement.

The opportunity for every student to attain academic success is considered a cornerstone of the U.S. educational system. With these opportunities proving to be less abundant in under-resourced schools, however, this cornerstone is fantasy rather than reality. Less affluent communities face more challenges raising revenue through local property taxes (Rodriguez, Jones, Tittmann, & Wagman, 2015). Although these communities receive more state aid, they have less overall funding to invest in schools than affluent communities, because property taxes are lower and therefore available funds are less; therefore, lower SES communities often have larger class sizes, fewer electives, and less common planning time for educators. Each of these factors limits students' opportunities and subsequent performance.

To meet students' needs and provide educational support, schools often create processes that lead to over-identifying traditionally marginalized students as students with disabilities. Minority students are disproportionately represented in special education (Skiba, et al., 2008). Consistent patterns have shown that black students, and in particular males, are overrepresented in overall special education services, and are often categorized as having emotional disabilities (Skiba et al., 2008). Black students are also overrepresented in more restrictive environments and underrepresented in less restrictive settings. The under-representation in less restrictive settings may have a stronger impact given the importance of including students in classes with engaging and challenging academic content (Wenglinsky, 2004).

Skiba and colleagues (2008) suggest that educators who mistake cultural differences for cognitive or behavioral disabilities account for the disproportionate representation of some

minority groups in disability categories. This also explains why students whose first language is not English are also often misclassified as needing special education services. Culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students are often referred to as English language learners (ELLs) in public education. By the year 2050, this population is anticipated to double (Meskill, 2005), making it even more important that educators discern between language differences and specific learning disabilities. When examining the role of white racial identity in preparing novice English language teachers (ELTs), Liggett (2010) identified structural obstacles of physical and social marginalization that limited the academic success of ELLs.

Achievement gaps. According to Ladson-Billings (2006), "the achievement gap is a matter of race and class; and a gap persists in academic achievement between minority and disadvantaged students and their white counterparts" (p. 3). Across the United States, achievement gaps persist for historically marginalized subgroups, despite policies aimed to close gaps and mandate improvement, and despite practitioners' increasing focus on improving outcomes for underserved populations. The importance of closing achievement gaps cannot be overstated. Failing to raise the achievement level of students across the entire population means that academic skill levels will continue to slide backward, resulting in a less competitive U.S. nation (Ferguson, 2014).

Raising achievement levels is a daunting task that requires basic components, such as time, appropriate processes (methods and goals), content (relevant and rigorous), supportive context (district administrators and policies) and persistence (Gleason, 2010). According to Wenglinsky (2004), school systems can help close achievement gaps by accomplishing the following: a) reducing the disproportionate number of minorities in special education; b) exposing minority students who are achieving near grade level to more advanced and

challenging content; c) providing teachers with professional development on addressing the needs of an ethnically diverse population; d) improving teacher education to increase the responsiveness of prospective teachers to minority students; and e) addressing the achievement gap as part of the accountability system.

While Massachusetts leads the nation on many measures of school performance, gaps among racial lines are prevalent. In 2015, 40% of all black third graders in Massachusetts were proficient or advanced in reading, as measured by the state accountability assessment. This represents an increase of 4% from 2007. Improvement for black students can also be observed in math with 36% of eighth grade students scoring at least proficient in 2015, a 17% increase since 2007. Yet, despite these improvements and the fact that black students are outperforming peers in other states, black students in Massachusetts scored 12% lower than white students on the eighth-grade math assessment. Similarly, Hispanic and Latino students scored 11% lower than white students, and low-income students performed 10% lower than their more affluent peers. Across Massachusetts, Rodriguez, Jones, Tittmann, and Wagman (2015) claim the proficiency rates in math and English are lower in schools in which at least 60% of students are low-income compared to schools whose percentage of low-income students is below that threshold.

School discipline. Students of color are more likely than white students to receive school punishments (Kupchik, 2007). For decades, national, state, and district level data show that students of color have been disproportionately suspended and expelled from school at a rate two to three times higher than white students (Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002). Being excluded from school negatively impacts student achievement, in part because access to education is withheld. Disproportionate disciplinary action and identification for special

education indicate a failure to meet the mandate of equitable opportunities and outcomes for all (Zion, et al., 2015).

Black and Latino students, particularly males, perceive school safety practices as unfair, poorly communicated, and unevenly applied when compared to their white counterparts. Devine (1996) argues school security measures are implemented more often in schools serving a majority population of students of color, who are more likely than white students to be subjected to school discipline such as expulsion or suspension (Eitle & Eitle, 2004; Ferguson, 2000; Kupchik, 2007; Skiba, Michael, Nardo & Peterson, 2000). Schools rely on three security-based strategies: surveillance, school resource officers (SRO), and punishments, including zero tolerance policies. These strategies offer a response when students are in danger, but may be applied and enforced in racially unequal ways (Kupchik, 2007). Additionally, since school decision makers are predisposed to view students of color as having worse demeanors and more negative attitudes than white students, school punishments are frequently unequal (Ferguson, 2000; Skiba et al., 2000).

The overuse of exclusionary discipline with students of color has led to what is known as the "school to prison pipeline." In a pattern of discipline that can be traced back to the K-12 school environment, people of color, particularly black males, are increasingly overrepresented in the United States prison system (Dancy, 2014). Wilson (2014) studied the school to prison pipeline and identified four ways to avoid it for students of color: eliminating zero tolerance policies, personal efficacy and systemic change, community support, and youth engagement. An awareness of the range of dangerous outcomes that can be traced back to the use of exclusionary discipline may benefit district and school administrators and help in the process of replacing

traditional exclusionary discipline with alternative, yet effective, disciplinary measures (Skiba, Arredondo, & Williams, 2014).

Summary of traditionally marginalized student populations. The historical experience of traditionally marginalized students in the United States is illustrated by persistent achievement and equity gaps. These gaps exist for students of color, students for whom English is not a first language, students with disabilities, and students living in poverty, and are manifested in academic achievement, special education referrals, inaccessibility to quality education, and overuse of school discipline. Because the organization of schooling has led to these issues, change at the district level is imperative to improve outcomes for historically marginalized students. In the following section, we discuss the role of education reform in closing these gaps.

Theme 2: Educational Reform Related to Historically Marginalized Students

To address educational disparities, the United States educational system has implemented many reform initiatives. When studying how central office administrators organize their work to support traditionally marginalized student populations, it is necessary to understand the shifts that have occurred in reform efforts and how the accountability movement began. Reform efforts are organized into the following subthemes: (a) national reform efforts; (b) reform efforts in Massachusetts; and (c) turnaround schools.

National reform efforts. From the beginning, local school districts oversaw schooling in the United States, with states playing an important but secondary role. States, not the federal government, have the constitutional responsibility for providing public education in the United States and all states except Hawaii delegate this responsibility to local school districts (McDermott, 2006). The creation of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in

1965, established federal government involvement in schooling and created federal funding for education (Mehta, 2013). States were provided with supplemental federal dollars for high-poverty schools with "the hope of equalizing educational opportunity for poor and minority students" (DeBray-Pelot & McGuinn, 2009, p. 17). Through the 1990s the federal government continued to play a role in education, yet its reach was insignificant and decisions were left to states and districts (Mehta, 2013), with few stipulations and little accountability for student achievement (DeBray-Pelot & McGuinn, 2009).

A Nation at Risk (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), often cited as a critical document in education reform (DeBray-Pelot & McGuinn, 2009; Mehta, 2013), marked the beginning of the movement toward standardization and accountability (Olsen & Sexton, 2009). This report, which identified the United States as caught in a "rising tide of mediocrity," called for a new focus on excellence for all (Mehta, 2013) and highlighted increasing concern about student achievement and its impact on economic development (DeBray-Pelot & McGuinn, 2009). It made recommendations for improving education, which included a longer school day and year, additional required high school courses in "the New Basics," and increased testing for students as indicators of proficiency (Mehta, 2013). *A Nation at Risk* launched a national school reform movement, and over the last several decades, standards and test-based accountability has become central to education policy (Olsen & Sexton, 2009; Mehta, 2013). Today the federal government has more control over public education than at any other point in history (Mehta, 2013).

The standards-based movement that occurred at the state level in the 1990s paved the way for the federal move towards standards-based reform and ultimately led to NCLB. Standards-based reform set standards for what students should be expected to do,

established assessments to measure progress, and held schools accountable for progress toward goals. The Improving America's Schools Act of 1994 supported these measures, which became a federal requirement under NCLB (Mehta, 2013).

While expanding the role of the federal government, NCLB built upon the 1994 reforms to mandate that schools and districts dramatically improve performance. While deferring to states in the context of standards and measures of success, annual testing was required in grades 3 - 8 and sanctions were imposed on schools that did not improve. Adequate yearly progress (AYP) needed to be demonstrated on state tests of basic skills. The expectation was that the average student body score would improve year to year and scores of various subgroups within a school or district would also improve. These subgroups included black and Latino students in addition to students with disabilities and low-income students. The ultimate aim was to eliminate the achievement gap between white middle class students and ethnic minority students (Valenzuela, Prieto, & Hamilton, 2007). Although it is generally understood that the accountability movement, and specifically NCLB, have substantially impacted schools (Au, 2007; Booher-Jennings, 2006; Lowenhaupt, Spillane, & Hallet, 2016), conflicting narratives endure about the nature and degree of this impact. Some say NCLB ensured a focus on equity (Braun, 2004; Williamson, Bondy, Langley, & Mayne, 2005), while others say it led to greater inequities (Amrein & Berliner, 2002; Au, 2007).

Massachusetts reform efforts. Since the 1980s, a number of reforms have occurred at the state level regarding charter schools, public school choice, and vouchers, as well as standards-based reforms (Mehta, 2013). Intended to improve outcomes for historically marginalized students by improving instruction and increasing access to high-quality instruction, these reforms have challenged public schools. The standards-based reform movement of the

1990s started as a state-level reform and became the template for federal policy, and similar to the nation-wide movement, reform in Massachusetts started with concern about the performance of public schools that grew throughout the 1980s (McDermott, 2006).

Massachusetts was one of the first states to enact standards-based reforms. The Massachusetts Education Reform Act (MERA) of 1993 addressed education reform while involved in a state financial crisis that resulted in students in poor communities launching a lawsuit against the state. MERA doubled state aid to local districts and required state authorities to hold districts, schools, and even students themselves accountable for performance on standardized tests (McDermott, 2006). MERA directed the Board of Education to "establish a set of statewide educational goals" formulated to set high expectations for student performance (Massachusetts General Laws, Ch. 69, sec. 1D). The law further required a criterion-referenced assessment and gave the Board of Education power to identify underperforming schools and districts based on student assessment results. Sanctions included replacing the principal of underperforming schools, giving all teachers pink slips, and placing underperforming districts under state receivership.

Mirroring national debate, there are conflicting narratives about the impact of state reforms in Massachusetts. While advocates of standards-based reform highlight MERA as a national model and point to the rigorous standards in Massachusetts and high, standardized test scores, others emphasize that MERA has not resulted in academic proficiency for *all* students (McDermott, 2006).

Turnaround schools. School turnaround has become central to both policy and practice since the passage of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and Race to the Top (RTTT), which designates low performing schools as "in need of improvement." Once labeled, schools face a

series of sanctions including "school improvement," "corrective action," and finally, "restructuring" (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). Massachusetts publishes an annual Accountability Report that classifies all districts into one of five accountability and assistance levels. Generally, districts are classified into the level of its lowest performing school. The highest performing districts are designated Level 1 and the lowest performing are designated Level 5 (Accountability, Partnerships and Targeted Assistance, 2017). In Massachusetts, Level 5 is the most serious category and these districts must enter into receivership. Once a district enters receivership, the Commissioner names a new district leader called the receiver. The receiver has the powers of the superintendent and school committee and reports directly to the Commissioner. The receiver is held accountable for improving education across the district. Additionally, the DESE commits resources for developing research-based tools designed to support continuous school improvement. The district then develops a three-year turnaround plan with recommendations from a Local Stakeholders Group (e.g. teachers, parents, workforce, early education, or higher education) and the Commissioner of Education.

Similar to the research on federal and state reform efforts, early reports on the success of turnaround efforts are mixed (Finnigan, Daly & Stewart, 2012; Mette & Scribner, 2014) and no single strategy has proven to be effective (Mintrop & Trujillo, 2005). In order for accountability systems to work, they need to appeal to high-performing teachers and administrators. Intensifying pressure and sanctions, central to turnaround efforts, creates defensiveness and deprofessionalizes teachers, administrators, and staff (Mintrop & Trujillo, 2006; Friedman, Galligan, Albano, & O'Connor, 2009). Tremendous pressure and short timelines to reach goals correlate with limited school improvement. These features limit and

even restrict exploration and learning, which result in action plans that are unlikely to have a large impact (Finnigan, Daly & Stewart, 2012).

Mette and Scribner (2014) describe a turnaround case study in which the school principal used data to effectively identify problems and cull out ineffective teachers, but was ultimately unable to motivate existing teachers. Despite gains in student assessment scores, the intensive focus on assessment burdened teachers, overwhelmed students, and left the principal feeling that the turnaround process damaged the school's culture.

Since relationships and social ties may facilitate or constrain improvement efforts, district leadership for student achievement under receivership warrants more attention to both internal and external leadership relationship networks as they undergo intensive reform efforts (Collins & Clark, 2003; Honig 2006; Honig & Coburn, 2008; Copland & Knapp, 2006) and develop sustainable transformation (Murphy & Meyers, 2008). These networks play a critical role in identifying strategies and practices that will enable district leaders to better support marginalized student populations and strive toward eliminating achievement gaps (Massachusetts' System for Differentiated Recognition, Accountability, & Support, 2015).

Summary of educational reform related to historically marginalized students. For much of this history of the United States, local school districts controlled public education. However, shifts since the 1960s led to increased state and federal oversight in education, including a focus on accountability and standards. Today, the federal government has greater control than at any other point in history, and standards- and assessment-based accountability have become central to education policy. In Massachusetts and across the country, schools and districts that continually fail to meet improvement targets are labeled turnaround schools and districts. While turnaround schools incorporate measures intended to

narrow persistent achievement gaps more quickly, early reports on the success of turnaround schools and districts are mixed.

Theme 3: The Role of Central Office Administrators

While the constitution grants states control over school policy, school districts have almost total control over policy implementation (Saiger, 2005). Thus, it is necessary to analyze the roles central office administrators play in improving traditionally marginalized student achievement. The empirical literature surrounding this topic is organized into the following sub-themes: (a) the history of superintendents and central office administrators; and (b) the role of central office administrators in school improvement.

History of superintendents and central office administrators. The position of superintendent of schools was first introduced at the state level in 1812 in New York (Butts & Cremin, 1953). Local superintendents became more common shortly before the turn of the century, with most major cities employing a superintendent of schools by 1890 (Knezevich, 1984). The superintendent of schools, and more broadly school district central offices, were originally established "not to address teaching and learning, but mainly to bring administrative order to schooling" (Honig, 2013, p. 2). School district central offices were tasked with carrying out a range of regulatory and business functions, including managing student enrollment and tax revenue. For much of the 20th century, school district central offices continued to pay little attention to improving teaching and learning and remained focused on a set of business, regulatory, and fiscal functions (Honig, 2013).

Honig (2013) summarizes the evolution of the roles and responsibilities of central office administrators from their establishment to current day practices. She identifies three core elements that characterize the current expectation of central office administrators to make student

learning their top priority: intensive partnerships between central offices and principals; relevant, high-quality, and differentiated central office services; and leadership in teaching and learning. This represents a significant change and a new set of work practices and responsibilities for central office administrators.

Johnson (1996) writes specifically about the change in the role of superintendent, who is now expected to accurately identify problems in a school district and develop and execute effective improvement plans to solve these problems. Simultaneously, the superintendent has lost power in local curriculum policy, as state and federal governments have focused more on the issue of achievement (McNeil, 1996). This has led to the current perception that the role of the superintendent and other central office administrators is to facilitate educational reform by turning policy into actions that improve school practices and support principal leadership (Bottoms & Fry, 2009).

Bjork, Browne-Ferringo, and Kowalski (2014) also note the changing role of the superintendent since the mid-1990s and highlight the recent focus on carrying out district-level educational reform. Federal and state policies, such as NCLB, place demands on central offices to help schools improve and reduce achievement gaps. In an effort to motivate states and districts to generate innovative ideas and reforms that would accelerate improvement and close persistent achievement gaps, the Federal government created RTTT, a competitive grant, in 2009. RTTT was a part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 and funded by the ED Recovery Act. The competitive grants offered incentives to districts based on points earned for successfully meeting certain educational policies such as adopting common standards through the Common Core and implementing an educator evaluation system that rated teachers and principals using multiple measures of educator effectiveness. However, such policies do not

fully account for the mismatch between traditional central office work and new performance demands (Honig, 2013). To carry out these new performance demands effectively, the superintendent must assume five roles: teacher-scholar to lead instructional change; manager to handle finances, accountability, and policy implementation; political-democratic leader to balance the demands and needs of all stakeholders; applied social scientist to use research and tacit knowledge to inform decisions; and communicator to work collaboratively in an information-based society (Bjork et al., 2014).

The shift in the role of superintendent, and more broadly all central office administrators, from managers to instructional leaders, has impacted district leaders' responsibilities. Concurrently, the organization and size of central offices has changed to reflect the focus on instructional leadership. As the roles of central office administrators have evolved to meet the increasing challenges they face, these district leaders are better positioned to approach instructional leadership using a distributive leadership style and approach. The distributed nature of this work becomes an important aspect of educational reform and school improvement. The next section explains the influence that education reform and the focus on school improvement have had on the roles and responsibilities of central office administrators.

The role of central office administrators in school improvement. Research suggests that without effective central office leadership, reform efforts will likely fail at both school and district levels (Honig, 2013; Togneri & Anderson, 2003). Since the superintendent and other central office administrators are responsible for creating and implementing the district's goals and vision, there is a strong correlation between effective central office leadership and school improvement. As previously mentioned, the changing role of a central office administrator and the organizational structure of the central office staff, encourage and position district leaders to

take a distributed approach to their work. As a result, interactions between central office administrators increase. In fact, researchers have identified these interactions as a key aspect of the educational improvement process. Specifically, the superintendent's interactions and practices can support a district-wide approach to school improvement (Horton & Martin, 2012).

Among central office administrators, strong relationships and increased collaboration may increase output and foster school improvement. Bird, Dunaway, Hancock, and Wang (2013) identified a significant connection between a superintendent's authenticity and the application of high quality school improvement practices across the district. This authenticity is critical to create strong relationships among educational leaders in the district. Johnson and Chrispeels (2010) add that relational and ideological linkages are "essential for enhancing commitment and professional accountability and for ensuring a coherent instructional focus and organizational learning" (p. 738). This contrasts with a more traditional approach, in which districts focus on structural linkages to enforce reform efforts, by promoting a team approach that relies on relationships and interactions.

When implementing policy and educational reforms designed to support traditionally marginalized populations, a collective approach among central office administrators is beneficial (Datnow & Park, 2009). As central office administrators interpret and implement policy, they must mediate external policy demands with internal goals and priorities (Honig, 2004; Datnow, Hubbard, & Mehan, 1998). Honig and Hatch (2004) describe this mediation through a process known as policy coherence. During this process of policy implementation, schools and school districts set internal goals and decide whether to bridge (attach) or buffer (isolate) themselves from external policy demands. In this process, it is imperative that central office administrators work with each other and with building level administrators to ensure quality policy

implementation. Policy coherence is a dynamic process that involves more than simply interpreting and implementing policy; it recognizes the balancing act that administrators must perform when interpreting educational reform, some of which is meant to support traditionally marginalized students. Mediating educational policy demands is especially important in an era in which federal and state policies heavily influence district practices. Andero (2000) investigated the ways in which the superintendent's role has changed to influence curriculum policy at the local level, finding that curricular policy decisions are most productive when all constituents, including the principal, superintendent, and local school board, are actively involved. A collective approach to policy implementation has implications for policies related to all areas of school improvement focused on supporting traditionally marginalized populations.

Furthermore, there is an increasing policy demand for central office administrators to use evidence in their decision-making processes, and how districts are organized influences how they gather, interpret, and incorporate data into this process (Honig and Coburn, 2008). The number of employees, the scope of an employee's job, poor connections with other departments, and time constraints can significantly limit a central office administrator's ability to effectively use evidence, but high levels of social capital, which allow for effective communication and social ties, can mitigate this. Honig and Venkateswaran (2012) suggest that "both central office and school staff members participate in the flow of information into evidence-use processes at either level," (p. 206) and that both parties are essential partners in the sense-making process. This information flow supports evidence use when it is selective and occurs in the context of close social ties, but central office administrators may limit evidence use in schools when they set and communicate formal expectations. As a result, it is more important to create a culture that values using evidence when making collaborative decisions than to outright demand evidence use.

As central office administrators evolve into instructional leaders, they are expected to interact with and build the instructional leadership capacity of school-based administrators (Honig, 2012). Educational research has demonstrated that principals' instructional leadership is an important contributing factor to improving teaching and is linked to gains in student achievement (Hallinger, 2005; Honig, 2012; Leithwood, 2004; Murphy & Hallinger, 1988). As a result, a primary role of a central office leader, especially when supporting marginalized populations, is to support principals' instructional leadership (Honig & Rainey, 2014; Wells, Maxfield, Kiocko, & Feun, 2010). Honig (2012) identifies five ways that central office administrators support the development of principals to become effective instructional leaders at the school level: focusing on joint work; modeling; developing and using tools (e.g. protocol, checklist); brokering; and creating and sustaining social engagement. This reflects a direct need for a design-based research approach by both central office and building level administrators to significantly increase leadership practice in support of improved student achievement for all students, including those from traditionally marginalized populations (Honig, 2013).

Further reflecting on the changing role of the central office administrator is an emerging body of research that suggests that superintendents and other central office administrators collectively improve educational outcomes for traditionally marginalized students by improving the cultural proficiency of educators across the district. Cultural proficiency is defined as the honoring of differences among cultures, viewing diversity as a benefit, and interacting knowledgeably and respectfully with a variety of cultural groups (Lindsey et al., 2005). Wright and Harris (2010) determined that the superintendent could impact the achievement gap by modeling cultural proficiency, responding to data, hiring a diverse staff, and developing written policies that focus on cultural proficiency. These practices were magnified when

superintendents acted as change agents, strongly valued cultural proficiency, demonstrated collaborative relationships, and built a culture of success. In an increasingly diverse educational environment, demographic changes require central office administrators to focus on cultural proficiency. However, many districts struggle to do this effectively, collectively failing to recognize simultaneously occurring racial inequalities, further impeding success for already marginalized low income and immigrant populations (Turner, 2015).

Summary of the role of central office administrators. Taken together, this research suggests that when working for educational improvement, a distributed and collaborative approach among central office administrators is not only beneficial, but also necessary. This has implications for central office administrators working to support traditionally marginalized students. Increasing diversity in American schools has led to persistent achievement and equity gaps, mostly affecting traditionally marginalized student populations. For decades, educators have focused on narrowing these long-standing achievement and equity gaps, which also drive much of the current state and federal policy. This has required the central office to shift their focus from operational and fiscal functions to a district-wide focus on instructional leadership meant to benefit all students (Honig, 2013). Accordingly, central office administrators must focus on building relationships and fostering interactions across the district.

With a collective approach to organizing the work of educational improvement, central office administrators are better positioned to perform duties that include making decisions based on evidence, building the capacity of others, improving cultural proficiency, and implementing educational policy and reform aimed at improving student learning. This synthesis of existing literature indicates the importance of central office organization, but only touches on how this organization serves traditionally marginalized populations. This study will examine how one

district's central office administrative team organizes their work for the specific purpose of supporting traditionally marginalized populations.

Conclusion

Across the United States, achievement and equity gaps exist for historically marginalized students, limiting educational opportunities for students of color, students with disabilities, students for whom English is a second language, and students living in poverty. Despite reform efforts to narrow these achievement and equity differences, gaps have persisted. As U.S. schools become increasingly diverse, these gaps affect greater numbers of students. Simultaneously, the work of central office administrators has changed, resulting in a need for central office administrators to make student learning their primary focus. By implementing goals and reforms focused on improving student learning for marginalized populations, central office administrators may be able to play a role in narrowing achievement and equity gaps.

By investigating the ways that central office administrators work to support traditionally marginalized student populations this study adds to the scholarly research described in this chapter. Each co-author's individual inquiry provides a different lens through which to view this dilemma by focusing on the different interactions that occur at the central office level in an effort to narrow long-standing achievement and equity gaps.

CHAPTER TWO

METHODS

Introduction

This descriptive, qualitative study explored the interactions of central office administrators working in support of historically marginalized populations. Specifically, we utilized a case study methodology to conduct an in-depth inquiry of a bounded system (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Creswell, 2012). In this study, the bounded system, or case, (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2014), was a school district in Massachusetts designated as a Level 5 district, and therefore in turnaround status. A case study methodology supported our research by allowing us to investigate the practices of central office administrators while also allowing our research team to develop an understanding of important contextual conditions in this district (Yin, 2014). Specifically, we investigated how central office administrators organize their work in effort to make structural and cultural modifications that may improve the program of instruction in order to better serve all students in the district. It is important to understand who the students served in the district are, what the current reality is, and how these factors, in addition to others, impact the work of central office administrators. While other types of qualitative research would have also provided us with data needed to describe the interactions of central office administrators, they would not have anchored these interactions in the context of the district. Our aim was to capture the circumstances and conditions (Yin, 2014) of central office administrator practice in a turnaround district so that we could yield insight into how districts improve outcomes for historically marginalized students. This study was built on existing research and answers the following research question: *How do central office*

administrators organize their work in support of traditionally marginalized student populations?

Context

In 2010, Massachusetts embarked on an ambitious effort to turn around its lowest performing schools. An *Act Relative to the Achievement Gap* (2010) provided districts with the authority to change conditions that hindered previous improvement efforts and to take strategic actions designed to close achievement and opportunity gaps.

Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) classifies schools into Levels 1 through 5, based on absolute achievement, student growth, and improvement trends, as measured by standardized state assessments. Level 1 represents schools in need of the least support, those that have met their gap-closing goals, while Level 5 represents the lowest performing schools, those in need of the most support. Schools and districts designated as Level 5 are placed under state receivership. While ESE's District and School Assistance Centers and Office of District and School Turnaround provide ongoing targeted support to Level 3, 4, and 5 districts and schools (Lane, Unger, & Stein, 2016), designation as a Level 5 districts means substantial resources are allocated to the district for developing and implementing research-based tools specifically designed to support continuous school improvement. In addition, a three-year turnaround plan is developed with recommendations from a local stakeholders group (teachers, parents, the community, healthcare, workforce, early education, and higher education, as outlined in legislation) and the state's commissioner.

Our case study was conducted within a Level 5, turnaround district that was implementing a turnaround plan. In accordance with state requirements (Massachusetts Department Elementary and Secondary Education, 2016), the partnering district's original turnaround plan (2015) included five priority areas: (1) provide high-quality instruction and

student-specific supports for all students, including students with disabilities and English language learners; (2) establish focused practices for improving instruction; (3) create a climate and culture that support students and engages families; (4) develop leadership, shared responsibility, and professional collaboration; and (5) organize the district for successful turnaround. In 2016, the Receiver/Superintendent wrote a memo to the Commissioner of ESE requesting permission to modify three parts of the turnaround plan: (1) simplification of the priority area titles; (2) change Building Based Support Teams (BBSTs) to Student Support Teams (SSTs); and (3) change the titles for select staff members. Table 2 outlines the original and refined titles. The refined titles were created to both simplify the language and make them more memorable while also using select language to reinforce the district's values.

Table 2

Simplifying the Priority Area Titles

Priority Area #	Priority Area (as of 10/1/16)	Requested Priority Area Name Change
1	Provide high-quality instruction and student-specific supports for all students, including students with disabilities and English language learners.	High Quality Instruction for All
2	Establish focused practices for improving instruction.	Personalized Pathways
3	Create a climate and culture that support students and engage families.	Engaged Students, Family and Community
4	Develop leadership, shared responsibility, and professional collaboration.	An Effective and Thriving Workforce
5	Organize the district for successful turnaround.	A System of Empowered Schools

Conducting our research in a turnaround district allowed us to explore and understand how central office administrators utilize social network ties to implement policy, collaborate

with internal and external partners, and communicate the needs of students in an effort to better support marginalized populations. Furthermore, district level leadership is critical in initiating and sustaining change that leads to measurable improvement (Leithwood, 2013).

Data Collection

Data collection for this qualitative case study took place from October 2017 to November 2017. Our study was designed to be emergent and flexible, a characteristic of qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Data sources included interviews, observations, and document review. Data collection began after district and IRB approval were obtained. The initial stages of research involved review of the district's Level 5 turnaround plan, the District Review Report conducted by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE), and the district's culture and climate survey data. Prior to collecting data in the field, the researchers connected with the central office leaders scheduled to be interviewed, ensuring open communication, confidentiality, and integrity (Rossman & Rallis, 1998). Individual interviews of central office administrators were conducted in person at designated district locations. To systematically develop and refine the interview protocol (Appendix A), researchers piloted the interview protocol using a multi-step interview protocol refinement framework (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). Interviews served as the primary data source, follow up questions and document requests were communicated via email and through the district's project manager, this process allowed the research team to respond to changing conditions in the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Interviews

Typical of qualitative studies, targeted interviews directly focused on our case study research questions (Yin, 2009) were our primary source of data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). To

better understand how central office administrators interact, communicate, and implement policy when striving to improve outcomes for historically marginalized populations, we interviewed all formal central office administrators or executive cabinet members as referred by the district. Given the relatively small size of the district, we interviewed all nine central office administrators designated as the central office leadership according to the district website and confirmed by the district's project manager.

Included among the nine central office administrators was the receiver/superintendent, who was appointed by the commissioner of education in July 2015 when the district was designated as Level 5 and entered into turnaround status. Since that time the district has undergone significant restructuring and all nine central office administrators had been appointed to their roles since receivership. While one of the central office administrators had worked in the district in various roles for twenty years, all others were also new to the district, and had worked in the district for two years or less at the time of data collection. Also worth noting is two of the central office administrators had worked with the receiver/superintendent in previous settings prior to joining the district.

The interview protocol (Appendix A) was vetted and tested through a four phase interview protocol refinement process: 1) ensure interview questions are aligned with the overall and individual research questions of the overall dissertation in practice (DIP) (Appendix D); 2) DIP role play and protocol practice; 3) pilot interview protocol with central office administrators; and 4) reflection (Appendix E), analysis of feedback, and refinement of protocol. This multi-step protocol refinement process (Castillo-Montoya, 2016) supported the researchers' efforts to have a well-vetted, refined interview protocol; however, as Merriam (2009) states, researchers can

"unhook themselves from the constant reference to the questions and can go with the natural flow of the interview" (p. 103).

Question alignment. Interview data served as the primary data source for both the collaborative Dissertation in Practice (DIP) and each individual study. The interview protocol was designed to collect the data needed to answer the DIP research question and the research questions for each individual study; therefore, phase 1 was critical to ensure that all necessary data were collected while also creating a conversational flow (Merriam, 2009). The interview protocol matrix (Appendix D) maps the interview questions against the research questions (Castillo-Montoya, 2016) and was used to verify adequate data collection.

Role play and protocol practice. The research team engaged in a role playing process designed to test out the effectiveness of the interview protocol and allow for clarity and calibration of how each question should be asked to ensure the most efficient and effective data collection process. The training cycle was as follows: one team member used the interview protocol to ask the questions, another team member answered, a third team member listened, and the fourth team member observed. This cycle was repeated so that all four research team members practiced asking the questions. Feedback was collected and a reflection tool (Appendix E) was utilized to collect ideas for refinement. Once the interview protocol was refined it was then tested again.

Interview protocol pilot. Two research team member piloted the interview protocol independently with at least one, central office administrator from a district of their choice (Merriam, 2009). This process allowed researchers to try out the interview protocol in the field and test out the balance between inquiry and conversation (Weiss, 1995; Merriam, 2009;

Rossman & Rallis, 1998). A feedback tool (Appendix E) was utilized after the pilot interview to assess how the participant perceived the questions.

Receiving feedback and reflecting on interview protocol. The data collected from the researcher and field test participants was utilized to improve the interview protocol prior to entering the field in the selected turnaround school district. This process was critical for ensuring that each researcher was able to collect interview data that addressed specific research question(s) for both the collaborative DIP and each individual slice (Appendix D).

Conducting the interviews. Prior to conducting interviews, the researchers reviewed public documents to gain an understanding of the goals in the district and how the district defined marginalized students. At the beginning of each interview, participants were informed of our interest in how central office administrators interact and carry out their work in support of historically marginalized populations in the district (Weiss, 1995; Rossman & Rallis, 1998). Participants were also informed that they would remain anonymous, and that their insights may lead to recommendations for the district and the field at large. Most one-on-one interviews were approximately 50 to 60 minutes, one interview lasted 20 minutes, and one interview was taken in two parts due to a technological glitch. All interviews were recorded and transcribed by the interviewer. The interviewer also took notes during the interview on nonverbal behaviors (Creswell, 2012).

Interviews followed a semi-structured protocol (Merriam, 2009), which is provided in Appendix A. Our protocol specifically addressed questions about how policy is implemented in the district, what language administrators use to talk about marginalized populations, how administrators work together and collaborate, and the extent to which the district's leadership network facilitates advice seeking related to turnaround goals and efforts. The questions were

written to facilitate a conversation, a method that works well when participants are not hesitant to articulate and comfortable sharing ideas (Rossman & Rallis, 2003; Creswell, 2012). We began with background questions to establish a relationship and rapport (Weiss, 1995) with the interviewee (e.g. Please tell me a little about your work and your experiences in the district?). We then asked questions about relational ties and collaborative practices (e.g. Who are the people you turn to for advice related to the district's goals and efforts?) and the work the district is engaged in (e.g. Please describe some of the things you have done to build the capacity of the schools in order to better support marginalized populations?). To close the interview, we asked if there was anything else the interviewee would like to share; this allowed us to gain any additional information related to the topic that the interviewee felt was important and relevant. This also continued the theme of a conversation (Rossman & Rallis, 2003; Creswell, 2012). To ensure good data, interview questions were open-ended. If more detail was needed, follow-up questions and probes were prepared for each question (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Observations

Researchers conducted one observation of a district leadership team meeting. This observation took place after individual interviews so researchers could study actual behavior of central office administrators (Creswell, 2012). The observation lasted approximately two hours, with one researcher present. The meeting selected by the district for the observation was of the teaching and learning team and pertained to the district turnaround plan, showing group interactions related to supporting marginalized populations. Observing the meeting was intended to provide a first-hand sense of how central office administrators approach their work, and the language used when communicating about historically marginalized populations. An observation protocol was used to record information collected during observations (Appendix B).

During the observation, the researcher recorded initial notes and later expanded them into more descriptive field notes (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2001). Notes included the date, and contain a running log of the time every three to five minutes to monitor pace. Efforts were made to record participants' quotes or paraphrase statements. The researcher also recorded other details such as actions, mannerisms, and reactions. Completed field notes included a description of the environment, details of what individuals did or said, stories that were shared, and estimates for the amount of time participants actively participated.

Document Review

To enrich the data collected in interviews, we also reviewed public and private records in a document review (Creswell, 2012). While the ESE website and district website were used to find public records, central office administrators in the district were asked to provide private records. The documents reviewed included student data; this was essential to gain an understanding of the historically marginalized populations served in the district. Other documents included were the Level 5 turnaround plan for the district, annual benchmarks, and project plans that related to the areas of this study. These documents existed independent of the research process, and therefore were unaffected by it (Yin, 2009); documents were thus grounded in the real world (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), and were a good data source for triangulation of interview data.

Data Analysis

Managing the Data

Data collection and analysis were done in a simultaneous process. Analysis begin as soon as data was collected. Each researcher kept an independent research journal throughout the data collection process to record details about events, decisions, questions, and wonderings. This

supported the reliability of research findings, as it provided a record of how insights were developed (Yin, 2009). Each interview and observation were followed by a research journal entry. This entry was made within 24 hours of the event. Separate entries were written after each analysis in order to capture the investigators' reflections, tentative themes, hunches, ideas, and additional topics based on what was derived from the data set. We noted questions and emerging findings throughout the data collection process. After all of the interviews were conducted, data sets were compared with the second (Creswell, 2012; Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2009) in a recursive and dynamic data collection process. Analysis became more intensive as the study progressed and once all data were collected (Merriam, 2009). Each researcher, independently, listened to and coded all nine interviews.

Coding

Text segment coding and labeling was utilized to organize various aspects of our data in order to form descriptions and broad themes (Creswell, 2012). Two or three words were used to create the text segment codes and came directly from participants' responses and routinely repeated ideas. The coding process allowed investigators to make sense of the data, examine for overlap and redundancy, and collapse the data into broad themes by determining what data to use and what to disregard. Coding of the interviews comprised a mix of a priori and emergent codes. Table 3 outlines initial categorical codes named as follows: background information; overarching/general district information; collaboration; policy implementation; communication; and social networks.

Table 3

Initial Categorical Codes

Background Questions	BQ	Policy Implementation	PI
Overarching Questions	OAQ	Communication	C
Collaboration	COL	Social Networks	SN

A four-step process was adapted from McKether, Gluesing, and Riopelle's (2009) five-step process. This process was used to convert narrative interview data into text segments. To convert and analyze the interview data, the following steps were followed: 1) record and transcribe interviews using Rev, and store interviews; 2) clean and prepare data for importing into Google Drive; 3) import and code the interview transcriptions in Google Drive; and 4) create a Google Sheets data extract.

Interview Data Analysis

Interview data was used to explore patterns of interaction and perceptions of administrators in different district level leadership positions. All nine interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim using Rev, a mobile application and transcription service. The transcription data was cleaned for accuracy, shared with the research team, and independently coded by each researcher. First analysis began with the thematic areas from our initial categorical codes outlined in Table 3. An inductive analysis was used to allow for other themes to emerge "out of the data rather than being imposed on them prior to data collection and analysis" (Patton, 1990, p. 390). Interview data was analyzed using a constant comparative analysis method (Creswell, 2012), as well as checking and rechecking emerging themes (Patton, 1990). To ensure trustworthiness of interpretations, member-checking procedures were utilized

when needed and as emerging themes were developed (Creswell, 2012; Miles and Huberman, 1994).

Observation Analysis

Observation data analysis occurred in several phases. The first phase include a preliminary exploratory analysis, which was conducted by the researcher who conducted the observation to obtain a general sense of the data and to generate memo ideas. The researcher then organized the data (Creswell, 2012) and created field notes. The field notes were then coded using codes developed during interview data analysis by individual researchers.

Document Analysis

Collected documents were utilized to triangulate data collected in interviews and observations (Creswell, 2012). This process of corroborating evidence supported the broad themes determined and enhanced the accuracy of the study. The team utilized text segment coding and labeling to form descriptions and these broad themes (Creswell, 2012). For more information on how each author has coded during the document analysis process, please see the individual methodology in chapter three.

Representing Findings

Three key findings from our data analysis are summarized in a narrative discussion along with recommendations for practitioners, limitations, and recommendations for future research. The findings emerged as common themes as a result of a synthesis of the findings in each individual study. The research team then determined possible recommendations for practitioners, limitations, and areas for future research along with a culminating conclusion.

Study Limitations

Qualitative case study is a reliable research design, as it can describe realistic interventions in a realistic context (Yin, 2009). However, there are five noteworthy limitations that accompany our study of how central office administrators organize their work in support of marginalized populations. First, this study primarily relied on qualitative interviews with central office administrators in a mid-size turnaround district in Massachusetts, making the researcher the primary vehicle for data collection and analysis (Merriam, 2009). As a result, each of these data points were self-reported, and therefore results may have been impacted or influenced by the individual researcher's frame of reference and positionality. While our research team, consisting of central office and building level administrators, used collaborative coding to recognize and document potential biases among our research team, it is more difficult to control biases that are present among the research participants. While observation data and document review served as secondary data collection points for triangulating our results, the possibility of bias cannot be overlooked.

Second, since case study research focuses on a single unit of analysis, the scope of our research study was to examine the practices that one district uses to support traditionally marginalized students. The study did not aim to report on multiple districts, common practices, or to evaluate the district or its administrators in their turnaround efforts. Furthermore, the study did not examine the practices of principals or teachers in support of marginalized students, as there is an already existing body of research on that topic. The aim was to collect and report, based on qualitative analysis, practices and interactions among central office administrators in support of marginalized students. A larger study with more resources may be able to study

multiple districts or units of study to report on larger scale best central office administrator practices in support of marginalized students.

A third limitation of this study was time. While we collected as much data as possible, the time frame of this study was limited to less than one year. Similarly, since we partnered with a recently identified turnaround district, many of the central office administrators were new to the district. This impacted the number of interactions that occur between central office administrators, and some policies and practices in support of marginalized students were relatively newly implemented. In turn, many of the leadership actions designed to support marginalized students were in their infancy while others were still in the planning stages. Multiple years of data would be needed to show changes in student performance and support.

A fourth limitation of this study is that, while we examined the organization and interactions between central office administrators in support of marginalized students, this study did not measure changes in student achievement. In other words, this study does not measure causality. However, we have utilized four research-based lenses through which to analyze leadership practices at the central office level, with an overarching focus on interactions, which may serve as a launching point for future researchers to use in determining some measure of causality.

Lastly, since our study primarily relied on semi-structured interviews as a data source, supporting data sources cannot be relied on to provide concrete determinations. For example, observation data from one district leadership team meeting provided a glimpse into how central office administrators work in support of marginalized populations, however, it would be inappropriate to rely on these data to make concrete statements or generalizations about work habits, since the number of observations were limited to one.

CHAPTER THREE

INTRODUCTION

Summary of Team Dissertation in Practice

Public schools across the United States are becoming increasingly diverse, resulting in an increase in the number of students from traditionally marginalized populations. This shift presents a need for school districts to examine the ways in which they support traditionally marginalized student populations. In particular, central office administrators have a responsibility to create a vision, operational structures, and instructional practices that support an increasingly diverse student population. In this study, we describe the ways district administrators collaborate, communicate, implement policy, and create relational ties when working to close existing achievement and equity gaps.

The aim of this research project is to describe how district leaders organize their work to support historically marginalized student populations. This project will be of value to both researchers and practitioners as both groups are interested in exploring ways to close persisting achievement and equity gaps. By focusing on leadership actions related to communication, collaboration, policy implementation, and relational ties, we provide information about the current practices of leaders in one school district serving a diverse population. Practitioners may identify strategies to integrate into their daily practice. Researchers will find it a valuable contribution to existing research on the role of educators in supporting traditionally marginalized student populations.

Problem Statement and Research Questions

Educational leaders must consider the needs of all students when interpreting and implementing policy and reform. Of particular importance should be the impact these policies

may have on marginalized students. With the quickly changing student demographics of the United States, educators can improve student outcomes by making the needs of traditionally marginalized students the focus of their work (Ferguson, 2014; Theoharis, 2007). The U.S. census reported that in 2011, 50.4% of children less than one-year old in the United States were people of color (U.S. Census, 2013). Students of color, students with disabilities, and LGBT students are more likely to struggle academically and have an increased chance of dropping out of school (Ryan, 2016). As a result, the way that educational leaders implement policy has a profound impact on the educational outcomes of traditionally marginalized students.

Many contemporary educational reform efforts are meant to support marginalized populations and narrow long-standing achievement and equity gaps (Trujilo & Woulfin, 2014). Some of the most documented educational policies have emphasized educational accountability in an effort to ensure both equity and achievement for all students (Capper & Young, 2015). As a result, policy makers, practitioners, and researchers across the country have focused on accountability, equity, and achievement for students from traditionally marginalized populations.

Researchers have identified some of the ways that principals, teachers, and central office administrators interpret and enact policy (Schmidt & Datnow, 2005; Coburn, 2006; Spillane, 2000). However, there is a research gap concerning how central office administrators interpret and implement policy in support of traditionally marginalized populations. The purpose of this study is to bridge this gap by describing how central office administrators interpret and implement policy, with the specific goal of supporting traditionally marginalized students. Accordingly, this study addresses the following research questions: (1) In what ways are central office administrators working together to implement policy in support of traditionally marginalized students? (2) How do central office administrators balance external (state and

federal) policy demands with internal (district) goals when implementing policy in support of traditionally marginalized students?

Relationship to Team Dissertation in Practice

When examining how central office administrators organize their work in support of marginalized students, policy implementation emerges as a critical practice. Since many recent federal, state, and local policies focus on closing existing equity and achievement gaps, the manner in which central office administrators implement these policies can impact the educational outcomes of marginalized student populations. While policy implementation is one critical aspect of the organization of central office administrators in support of marginalized students, there are others. Three other important aspects of district leadership work in support of marginalized students are presented in the individual Dissertation in Practices of my dissertation colleagues, as follows: Relational Ties by Julie Kukenberger; Collaboration by Kathleen Smith; and Communication by Christina Palmer. The individual dissertation chapters complement one another in this study, providing unique lenses through which to view the organizational practices and interactions of central office administrators working to support marginalized students.

The concept of policy implementation is essential to the study of how central office administrators organize their work in support of traditionally marginalized students. Highly effective teams of central office administrators communicate and collaborate effectively, leading to the formation of strong relational ties. This is particularly important during the policy implementation process, as many of these interactions occur when district actors work to implement policy. For districts with diverse student bodies, educators must work to close existing achievement and equity gaps. Much of this "work" is framed by external policy demands that local and federal governments create but that district actors must implement. In

other words, the policy implementation process sets the stage for central office administrators to communicate and collaborate, strengthening social ties.

When central office administrators communicate, collaborate, and strengthen relational ties as part of the policy implementation process, they can positively impact and enact important policy. This helps central office administrators implement standards-based reform, balance external demands with internal goals, better understand their own practice, increase student achievement, and advance equity (Spillane, Reiser, and Reimer, 2002; Honig, 2004; Datnow & Park, 2009; Rorrer, Skrla, & Scheurich, 2008).

Conceptual Framework

In this qualitative study, I utilize the conceptual framework of co-construction as an effective form of sense making (Datnow & Park, 2009; Datnow & Stringfield, 2000; Datnow, 2000). Traditionally, the term sense making has been used in educational policy to explain the cognitive process that educators use to interpret and understand policy and reform (Spillane, Reiser, & Reimer, 2002). Weick (1995) defines sense making as an ongoing process in which people create reality by understanding the situations in which they find themselves. The sense-making process can take many forms during the process of educational policy implementation.

Co-construction is an emerging theory that builds on traditional sense making and capitalizes on its limitations by exploring the multitude of factors that influence the policy implementation process. In the context of research on reliable school reform, Datnow and Stringfield (2000) define co-construction as "how schools, districts, design teams, and states work together…for school change" (p. 9). Datnow and Park (2009) explain that both sense making and co-construction focus on the interconnections between actors, how context shapes policy implementation, and social construction that takes place at the local level when

implementing policy. While sense making tends to focus on the cognitive process, co-construction takes into consideration the role of power, both as it relates to political and cultural differences and the influence of external forces on the actions of policy implementers. Co-construction recognizes the overlap between the social and political dynamics that occur outside of the policy system, and the actual implementation that occurs inside the policy system.

Research about effective policy implementation in education yields potential benefits for schools and school districts where co-construction is a regular practice. Through effective co-construction, districts and schools can identify clear goals, balance external and internal policy demands, and work across different groups and contexts at different points in time to influence students, curriculum, and instruction more positively (Datnow & Stringfield, 2000). Datnow, Hubbard, and Mehan (1998) explain that co-construction is an appropriate way to analyze educational reform because it helps stakeholders conceptualize, "the relationship between social interactions in schools and the impact of the major structural forces that characterize, indeed contribute to, the reproduction of society" (p. 9). Since federal and state policies influence policy at the district level, the overlap between these forces is integral, to analyzing how central office administrators work to implement policy in support of traditionally marginalized students.

Co-construction is an appropriate conceptual framework to guide this qualitative study for two reasons. First, since central office administrators are responsible for policy implementation across the district, effective co-construction at the district level can yield high quality implementation of educational policies at each of the district's schools. Likewise, ineffective policy implementation at the district level will negatively impact the implementation of policy at the school level. The potential alignment, or lack thereof, between policy interpretation and implementation at the district level, and policy interpretation and

implementation at the school level, has ramifications for traditionally marginalized students. This is because the same policy, depending on its interpretation and implementation, can look different across districts, schools, or even classrooms (Elmore & Sykes, 1992). An example of this variation involves a school district that tries to close achievement gaps for state and federal accountability purposes. The district implements Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) to analyze test scores and make instructional changes. Within the district, two schools implement them differently – one facilitated by teachers and one by the principal. Within each school, two different classrooms interpret the results differently and make vastly different instructional changes, resulting in the same policy having different effects on students. This is just one example of how there can be significant variation and fluctuation in policy implementation at every level depending on the interpretation and implementation process.

Second, since many policies and reforms are designed to benefit traditionally marginalized students through the elimination of achievement and equity gaps, effective co-construction at the district level can have a significantly positive effect on the educational outcomes of this population, especially when combined with effective internal goals and practices and a high level of contextual awareness among district actors.

This conceptual framework of co-construction structured my investigation into central office administrators' interpretation and implementation of policy mandates designed to support marginalized students. Specifically, I analyzed interview responses of participants to identify and report the interactions that occur between central office administrators when implementing policy in support of traditionally marginalized students. Furthermore, I was able to understand and describe the negotiation between external policy demands from the state and internal policy goals of the district.

Literature Review

Central office administrators play an integral role in implementing educational policy in support of traditionally marginalized students. With existing gaps in equity and achievement present nationwide, research suggests that the co-construction of policy can have a measurable impact on student outcomes. After completing a narrative synthesis of the literature pertaining to co-construction of policy at the district level, I divide the literature review into two themes: (a) the role of central office administrators in policy implementation, and (b) educational reform and co-construction.

The Role of Central Office Administrators in Policy Implementation

Existing research on the role of central office administrators in the policy implementation process suggests two primary functions that relate to this study's research questions. These functions mediate external policy demands and existing internal goals and continuous development of the central office administrator's contextual awareness.

Mediating educational policy. The intersection between sense making, co-construction, and policy implementation emerges through the process of mediating external policy demands and internal goals. In order to support traditionally marginalized students, research suggests that educators must work together to establish effective internal goals and policies. It is both common and beneficial for district actors to interpret external policy in light of internal policies, goals, and vision by mediating external policy demands (Honig, 2004; Datnow, Hubbard, & Mehan, 1998). For this to happen, a strong internal set of policies, goals, and vision must exist. Datnow and Stringfield (2000) describe the importance of managing information during the goal-setting process. Central office administrators must be attentive to the power structures that exist within an organization, as not all people involved in co-construction will have a similar comfort level in

interpreting and implementing policy (Mehan, Hubbard, & Datnow, 2010). In fact, some educational leaders may have personal beliefs and values that influence policy implementation. For example, research suggests that some educational leaders with a focus on social justice may silently or overtly push a social justice message while mediating external policy demands (Theoharris, 2007; Ryan 2016), causing them to agree or disagree with policy demands based on personal beliefs.

Honig (2004) conceptualizes that policy implementation is most effective when it involves schools and school offices working together to "negotiate the fit between external demands and schools' own goals and strategies" (p. 16). This process, which Honig refers to as policy coherence, involves three steps: (1) schools create internal goals and strategies; (2) schools decide whether to bridge or buffer themselves from external policy demands; and (3) central office administrators support individual schools. Policy coherence provides a more detailed process than simply implementing state and federal policy. Instead, "policy coherence occurs as district leadership molds policies into district-specific derivatives, which represent an amalgam of external policy and internal goals and strategies" (Rorrer, Skrla, & Scheurich, 2008, p. 324).

The process of mediating policy is at the heart of policy implementation for central office administrators. Over time, researchers have described this process in many different ways. Datnow, Hubbard, and Mehan (1998) observe how educators can initiate, push, sustain, resist or subvert external policies in relation to internal goals. Honig and Hatch (2004) note that the negotiation of external and internal policy goals results in a choice for district administrators to either bridge or buffer external policy. When bridging, external policies are interpreted in a way that allows them to align with district vision and goals. When buffering, external policies are

rejected in favor of internal policies, goals, and vision. Firestone (1989) describes how school districts prioritize internal vision and goals over external demands. Spillane, Diamond, Birch, Hallett, and Zoeltner (2002) explain that district leaders can choose to adopt, adapt or ignore external policies. In other words, district leaders will attempt to interpret external policies through the lens of their own district's vision, resulting in acceptance of policies that fit the district's vision and opposition to those that do not. In some cases, policy makers at the state or federal level might expect that central office administrators will make appropriate changes to external policy to fit the needs of the district (Kirp & Driver, 1995).

The mediation between external policy demands and internal goals is a craft that educational leaders continually work to improve. Many factors can influence how an educational leader interprets and enacts policy, including personal experiences, power dynamics, and political pressures. This makes effective mediation of goals an extremely difficult practice. Many school districts may have effective internal policies that aim to improve student achievement among marginalized groups, and understanding the fit between external and internal policies is a necessary step towards effective implementation. The skill of balancing external demands and internal goals is a necessary role of central office administration in supporting all students.

Contextual awareness. A critical step in the sense-making process is for policy implementers to understand their own role as it relates to a larger context, since "a cognitive perspective contributes to our understanding of implementation of policy by unpacking how implementing agents construct ideas from and about state and national standards" (Spillane, Reiser, & Reimer, 2002, p. 419). The authors describe a behavioral construct in which educators make sense of policy based on the intersection of the policy signal, the implementing agents'

knowledge, beliefs, and experience, and the circumstances surrounding the policy and its implementation. The implementer must understand this emotional component of policy implementation in order to allow for effective sense making and policy rollout. For standards-based reforms aimed at closing achievement and equity gaps for marginalized populations, self-awareness plays an important role, as it allows a policy implementer to better understand personal roles in the implementation process as it intersects with the environment.

Datnow (2002) studied thirteen elementary schools involved in various stages of reform to investigate if reform efforts sustain over time as districts and schools undergo changes. In this longitudinal study, the author discovered that contextual features played an immense role on the sustainability and success of reforms. The findings of the study concluded that it is crucial for policy implementers in leadership positions to understand the relationship between all policy makers and implementers, be sensitive and adaptable during the policy implementation process, and consider fully the cultural diversity of the context in which they are working. Limited resources, teacher ideologies, changing district and state policies, and changes in leadership and leadership agendas resulted in only four of the thirteen schools sustaining reform efforts. These external factors can create implementation problems that impact program sustainability. On the other hand, when programs are implemented carefully and with fidelity, and are free from major implementation problems, they are more likely to succeed even if they are heavily influenced by external factors (Durlak & Dupre, 2008). As a result, it is imperative that educational leaders in the midst of reform understand how to lead in conjunction with a detailed understanding of one's local context (Klar & Brewer, 2013).

Summary of the role of central office administrators in policy implementation. Central office administrators play a critical role in the policy implementation process. By

skillfully mediating external policy demands with internally established goals, central office administrators may provide a structure conducive to effective policy rollout. Likewise, throughout the policy implementation process, central office administrators must understand their role as it relates to the larger context in which they find themselves. Since research suggests that mediating policy and developing contextual awareness strengthen policy implementation in general, these two processes are likely to improve policy implementation in support of traditionally marginalized students and correlate to more successful student outcomes.

Educational Reform and Co-Construction

Many contemporary educational reforms exist to narrow longstanding achievement and equity gaps that have resulted in the continued marginalization of underserved student populations. This is especially true for districts or schools labeled as turnaround schools or districts. Emerging research suggests that co-construction at the district level can provide one way to implement educational reform in an attempt to narrow these gaps and improve student outcomes.

Datnow and Stringfield (2000) identify stages of interpreting external policy demands, which include the "adoption of a reform design, issues of implementation, and the sustainability of reform over time" (p. 5). By collaborating during each phase, schools and school districts are more likely to be regarded as highly reliable. In his seminal work on highly reliable schools and school systems, Stringfield (1995, 1998) identified six criteria for being rated as highly reliable. Highly reliable schools and school systems have: 1) a finite set of goals that are shared at all levels of the school system; 2) a shared belief that failure to achieve these goals would be catastrophic; 3) an ongoing alertness to surprises; 4) established and maintained powerful databases; 5) a formal, logical decision analysis process; and 6) initiatives that identify

weaknesses in standard operating procedures. This suggests that functioning as a highly reliable school system begins at the central office level and relies on effective collaboration and co-construction of policy.

Recent studies suggest that co-construction has increased the quality of implementation of recent educational reforms such as No Child Left Behind, as well as comprehensive school reform and data-driven decision-making (Datnow & Park, 2009). Collaboration among central office administrators may be one way to help policy enactors use evidence-based, decision-making (Honig & Coburn, 2007). When these policies, whether externally or internally driven, are implemented effectively, they can increase achievement for marginalized students. Effective co-construction can help educational leaders understand how their emotions may effect policy interpretation and implementation. District-level leaders are institutional actors of both external and internal policies that are expected to increase achievement and advance equity (Rorrer, Skrla, & Scheurich, 2008). Research suggests that working together to interpret and implement these policies can be an effective way to accomplish these goals.

Rorrer and Skrla (2005) found that when confronted with state accountability systems, district administrators retained discretion over these policies. The authors discovered that central office administrators "actively shaped and engaged in the implementation of state accountability policies by integrating, rather than imposing accountability into the core aspects of organizational relationships, culture, policies, and practices" (Rorrer, Skrla, & Scheurich, 2008, p. 324).

McLaughlin and Talbert (2003) studied three California districts undergoing significant educational reform, and debunked three common myths that had existed regarding educational reform and policy. These myths are: teachers and principals will resist a strong district role;

turnover in top leadership positions will derail progress; and local politics will defeat an ambitious reform agenda. All districts were invested in system-wide learning, which included central office administrators. The authors discovered that when the entire school system is tasked as being a unit of change, it increases the outcomes for successful reform across the district.

Summary of educational reform and co-construction. When central office administrators work together to co-construct educational policy, they are more likely to create highly reliable schools and implement educational reforms that positively impact student achievement and equity alike. The ways in which central office administrators work together to co-construct policy will be a central focus of this study.

Conclusion

Existing research suggests that central office administrators can influence the implementation of policies in support of traditionally marginalized students in three ways. First, central office administrators can mediate external policy demands with internal policy goals. After establishing a clear set of internal goals, central office administrators can facilitate the process of negotiating a fit between external policy demands and these identified internal goals. Second, central office administrators can develop contextual awareness that involves self-reflection and an understanding of how their work as policy implementers at the district level fits in with all constituents involved in policy development and implementation processes. Third, by approaching reform and policy implementation through co-construction, they may be better positioned to successfully implement policies in support of traditionally marginalized students.

Literature is still emerging on the role of the central office administrator in implementing policy in support of traditionally marginalized student populations, but there remains a gap in the

literature that I attempt to address through this study. Specifically, much of the existing research explains the role of central office administrators in general policy implementation, but not specifically in relationship to supporting marginalized students. Since the literature suggests that some educational reforms are designed to improve outcomes for these students, I make the connection that the principles of effective policy implementation can be applied to reform efforts in support of traditionally marginalized students, as much of the research does not make this direct connection. As a result, I attempt to connect the two concepts not only in this literature review, but also throughout the entire study. In turn, the study will add value to the existing body of research by bridging the gap between the role of central office administrators in the policy implementation process, and education reform in support of traditionally marginalized students.

Methods

This qualitative case study utilized interviews and documents collected and analyzed as part of a larger research team study. A complete description of the study's methodology is presented in chapter 2. This section outlines the elements of data collection and analysis that focus on how central office administrators co-construct policy in support of traditionally marginalized student populations. It is meant to respond to the following research questions: (1) In what ways are central office administrators working together to implement policy in support of traditionally marginalized students? (2) How do central office administrators balance external policy demands with internal goals when implementing policy in support of traditionally marginalized students? I employed a qualitative research methodology to collect information about how central office administrators in one mid-size turnaround district interpret and implement policies to support marginalized students.

Context

The context of this study is a mid-size district in the Northeast that fell into state receivership in 2015 and is in year three of a robust turnaround plan aimed at supporting traditionally marginalized student populations, specifically Latino students, English Language Learners, and Special Education students. Say just a bit more about the context: stakeholders, stats about performance, organizational structure, etc.

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews. I collected data from semi-structured interviews with nine central office administrators during the fall of 2017. Participants included policy implementers labeled as central office administrators. These included: the superintendent/receiver, assistant superintendent, business manager, and district level coordinators. Each interview lasted 45-60 minutes and addressed a set of core questions related to the research questions. The semi-structured approach allowed for flexibility and probing in determining the direction of the interviews.

Using Datnow and Stringfield's (2000) definition of co-construction, I structured my initial interviews so that they described the policy interpretation and implementation processes in the following three areas: 1) the collaborative actions related to policy; 2) the establishment of internal goals; and 3) the balance of external policy with internal goals. Appendix A describes the interview protocol administered to all participants. Specific questions related to the concept of co-construction of educational policy included: (1) On what internal and external policies are central office administrators currently focused? How do you and your colleagues work together to implement these policies? (2) How are central office administrators working to balance external policy demands with internal goals?

Each of these questions provides information about central office administrators working (or not working) together to implement policy. While the questions themselves do not specifically mention marginalized populations, the benchmarks and goals of the turnaround plan in this district were focused on improving outcomes for traditionally marginalized students.

Document review. In this district, the district turnaround plan served as the primary document reviewed. This is because this document contains all of the following pre-identified documents needed to understand district policy goals and objectives fully. The turnaround plan in this district contains the district's strategic objectives, school improvement plans, and information about demographic and assessment data. Additionally, the district created an annual list of benchmarks, which are smaller goals that must be reached in order for the larger, broader turnaround plan to be successful. Since the benchmarks guide much of the daily work of the central office administrators in this district, this document proved to be useful during the data collection phase of the research. These documents provided supplemental data in support of semi-structured interview findings as well as background information on policy interpretation and implementation in the district and help triangulate findings.

Data Analysis

After collecting interview and observation data, I analyzed all responses through a detailed coding process. Coding is a "researcher-generated construct that symbolizes and thus attributes interpreted meaning to each individual datum for later purposes of pattern detection, categorization, theory building, and other analytical processes" (Saldana, 2013, p. 4). I coded responses pertaining to policy implementation, with subcodes identified for the following themes: external policies, internal policies, district goals, school goals, mediation, contextual awareness, co-construction, and marginalized students. Categories were revised and multiple

coding cycles were needed to ensure accurate coding and close identification of trends and patterns. After the coding process, I synthesized the data in response to the identified research questions about the organization of central office administrators, the policy implementation process, and the effect that each has on marginalized students.

Study Limitations

Similar to the overall research study, there are limitations pertaining to data collection and data analysis of how central office administrators co-construct policy in support of marginalized student populations. First, the sample size of this study is small. It is one district consisting of nine central office administrators. Although the sample size was small, data were triangulated across interviews and documents to present relevant findings that relate to the proposed research questions. In future studies, a larger sample size would be beneficial, including one that incorporates both district and state actors since it was not in the scope of this study to interview state actors. Second, since all interview data points were self-reported by the research participant, there is the possibility that participant bias, either in support of or against external policy, influenced responses. Possible probes were used to mitigate this bias, as well as notes on body language and tone. Additionally, since case study research focuses on a single unit of analysis, the scope of our research study is to examine the practices that one district uses to interpret and enact policy. This study does not determine widespread practices of policy implementation in support of marginalized students. It is simply not in the scope of our study as the research questions are designed for analysis of policy implementation in support of traditionally marginalized students in one district. A final limitation of this study is that while we examined the organization and interactions of and between central office administrators in support of marginalized students, it is not in the scope of this study to measure changes in

student achievement. In other words, this study does not measure outcomes. However, since many aspects of educational policy are driven by achievement and equity gaps, there will be an opportunity for future researchers to build on this research to explore outcomes.

Conclusion

This study describes how central office administrators interpret and implement policy in support of marginalized students. Using the conceptual framework of co-construction, the study explored how central office administrators work together to accomplish this goal. Semi-structured interview data described how central office administrators collaborate to establish shared goals and balance external policy demands with internal goals. Supplemental data from document review helped triangulate data collected during the interview process.

Findings

The findings of this study correspond to the guiding research questions. Section one addresses how central office administrators work together to implement policy in support of traditionally marginalized students, and section two describes the balance that occurs between external policy demands and internal goals in this district.

Working Together for Policy Implementation

The findings related to research question one are organized into three subsections: 1) shared understanding of the turnaround plan goals and benchmarks; 2) implementation of the turnaround plan; and 3) barriers to co-construction of the turnaround plan. I will address each in turn.

Shared understanding of the turnaround plan goals and benchmarks. As a district under state receivership, the primary policies that central office administrators are working to interpret and implement are contained in the district turnaround plan. The turnaround plan

contains five priority areas that include: providing high quality instruction and supports to all students, specifically special education students and ELLs; establishing focused practices for improving instruction; creating a climate that supports students and engages families; developing leadership, shared responsibility, and professional collaboration; and organizing the district for successful turnaround.

Within each of these broad priority areas, multiple specific benchmarks indicate how success will be measured, many indicating a need for better support of special education students, ELLs, and Latino students. During the 2017-18 school year, the district identified 30 benchmarks, six of which were designated as "signature benchmarks." These benchmarks are designed to serve as a series of goals that, if reached during the school year, will lead to better performance in each of the five priority areas explained in the turnaround plan. Each of the turnaround plan goals and benchmarks addresses the needs of traditionally marginalized students, some explicitly and some implicitly. Additionally, each benchmark represents the primary policies that the district must interpret and implement. Accordingly, the terms policy, turnaround plan, goals, and benchmarks are used interchangeably in the findings and discussion sections of this chapter, all referring to policies that central office administrators are working to interpret and implement in support of traditionally marginalized students.

Interview data illustrate a shared understanding of both the importance of the turnaround plan document and a general respect and comprehension of the turnaround plan and the district's goals and benchmarks. Seven of the respondents indicate a strong tie between their work and the turnaround plan. One central office administrator describes the work by saying, "It's always bringing it back to our priorities. Our benchmarks, our priorities for the work that we're doing and how it's all connected." Responding similarly, another central office administrator observed,

"The turnaround plan is a great way to communicate that…we are moving in a direction where, particularly for leadership roles, we tie it to the values of the district." This appreciation and understanding of the turnaround plan and accompanying benchmarks is an integral component to policy implementation, as a firm understanding of the policies being implemented must exist to positively influence school reform.

A majority of the interview respondents agreed that a series of established benchmarks in the turnaround plan guide their policy work. One respondent described the process of communicating and monitoring progress on benchmarks through a series of check-ins with superiors this way: "every single one of our benchmarks is accompanied by a very detailed project plan with steps and due dates …our Chief of Strategy and Turnaround meets with everyone on a biweekly or weekly basis to check in with them on how the project is going." This process of "checking in" on progress towards meeting benchmarks was recognized as a primary source of communication regarding policy implementation, and happens during meetings both small and large. Another central office administrator stated, "We'll talk about the benchmarks and progress when we have our one-on-one meetings, but really a lot of that focus is around the benchmark work." This method of consistent check-ins on progress towards meeting benchmarks ensures accountability to some degree. It illustrates a way to communicate progress regarding policy to other central office administrators, demonstrating a shared policy interpretation of the district goals and benchmarks

While some examples of how the central office administration team works together to implement policy in support of traditionally marginalized students can be found through this communication process, interview data suggest that while the policy interpretation process is shared, the policy implementation process is a more individual- or department-based process.

This means that as policy is enacted, central office administrators are working independently or with employees they supervise, but less so with other central office administrators. The following section will outline how central office administrators in this district approach the turnaround goals and benchmarks with a "divide and conquer" approach.

Enacting policy through turnaround plan benchmarks. As previously stated, co-construction involves the process of schools, districts, or design teams working together for change. This involves the relationships between actors, the context of the district, and the social construction, power roles, and external influences on internal actions among and between central office administrators. As a result, an important aspect of the co-construction process involves policy actors working together during policy implementation. While there is evidence of shared policy interpretation, check-ins concerning progress towards benchmarks are frequent, and district actors often share progress with one another, the actual work of enacting and implementing policy is more collaborative within departments, rather than among central office administrators. One central office administrator elaborated on this process of sharing information by stating, "We collaborate in terms of variety of feedback to different members of the team, whoever is producing X, to be communicated with others on the team about progress. Then we practice the basic set of talking points that need to be shared with each other."

While there is a shared understanding of the district's turnaround plan, goals, and benchmarks, there is limited evidence that suggests that central office administrators work together consistently to implement and enact policy. Rather, the policy implementation process of the turnaround plan and its accompanying benchmarks is accomplished by designating a central office administrator who is responsible for each benchmark. While some work requires "collaboration across all departments depending on the nature of the project," it is more common

for a central office administrator to works with his or her department to carry out the policy implementation process in support of marginalized students, guiding much of that central office administrator's day-to-day policy work. One respondent described the work towards meeting benchmarks by saying, "Everyone is off and running on their individual work and, although we've done a good job about really learning each other's work, I don't know deeply what's happening across the teams."

Some formal opportunities exist for central office administrators to work together to make policy decisions about enacting policy in support of marginalized students. More than half of the central office administrators referenced quarterly retreats as a time for all central office administrators to communicate with each other on progress towards benchmarks. One central office administrator described how these retreats helped to "understand more of what's going on and what my place is" in the turnaround work in support of marginalized populations. Additionally, it appears that there is collaboration on policy implementation that exists among small groups of central office administrators that is often "more formal than informal," depending on the benchmark being addressed. While some formal opportunities do exist for central office administrators to collaborate on policy implementation, one central office administrator noted, "It could be stronger and more frequent."

Each central office administrator identified at least one member of the central office team that h/she consistently works with when implementing policy in support of marginalized students, but many admitted limited knowledge as to what other central office administrators were working on at any given time. For example, one respondent said it can be difficult to be aware of each other's work "because if you're not living that world it's not something that you're dealing with day-to-day." This implies that the sheer amount of policy work that is needed to

meet each benchmark and enact that policy is all-consuming for those involved, and is not shared across the central office.

For formal communication structures, weekly cabinet meetings existed to allow for communication between central office administrators on policy implementation in support of traditionally marginalized students. Communication is important for successful co-construction of policy to ensure a shared understanding of a policy across the district. Since workflow in this district is determined by the benchmarks and who the "owner" of that benchmark is, central office administrators generally describe this meeting time as a structured opportunity to update each other on the work. Some interview respondents identified specific protocols used during this time. One administrator stated, "So a cabinet member features one aspect of the Dashboard to talk about how is everyone doing for the 11 schools, what are the measures of success, what's the current reality, what seems to be the issue, why are we underperforming on a particular area in that Dashboard. And a cabinet member presents that to the other cabinet members and then we ask questions." The benefit of this, as one interview participant explained, is that, "it really keeps everyone in line. I know exactly what's happening with Jay. I know exactly what's happening with Kristen." Another administrator explained the rationale for sharing policy updates in this way by saying, "Often we meet together, we do very preliminary bouncing ideas off each other, coming to providing reasoning behind things, understanding where each other comes from, appointing who's going to take charge of the next steps. And then going from there, opening it up for even more feedback." While more than half of the interview respondents agreed that there are benefits to sharing policy information and receiving feedback through the cabinet meetings, the cabinet meeting format was restructured in the fall of 2017 to create a weekly meeting for the Teaching and Learning Team and another for the Operational Team.

This shift represented an ongoing effort to change existing structures to ensure efficiency and progress towards meeting goals and benchmarks in support of marginalized students. One central office administrator described this shift by saying, "Originally we just had this executive leadership team called the cabinet…and what we found is we often didn't have the right people at the table to talk about those signature benchmarks. We needed to talk to the school supervisors who weren't on the cabinet." While the long term of impact of this structural change to meetings remains to be seen, this change was representative of the ongoing structural changes that are occurring in this district as an attempt to meet turnaround goals. Although this shift represented collaborative policy implementation happening among supervisors and their related teams, it eliminated one standing opportunity for all central office administrators to consistently work together on policy interpretation and implementation.

Barriers to Co-Construction of Policy. Interview responses indicate that four specific factors potentially limited the ability to co-construct policy in support of marginalized populations. Table 4 identifies the four barriers, an example of a response that explains that barrier, and the number of respondents that identified this barrier.

Table 4

Barriers to Co-Construction of Policy

Barrier to Co-Construction	Example Quotation	Number of Respondents
Role Definition/Decision-Making Capacity	"Empowering people to make decisions can be a challenge, but then people are feeling fearful of not making the right decision or don't know they're empowered to make the decision."	4/9
Time	"I think the biggest hurdle is just having the time to work with the other district level administrators to really understand the work that we do. And to carve out that time to do it because we're all so unbelievably busy for sure."	5/9
Execution	"We get a lot of discussion going, and a lot of momentum around issues, but then the execution is probably where we struggle the most. We identify an area of need, we identify an area of focus, and then not always are we very punctual in making sure there's a plan that addresses that, whatever issue has come up."	4/9
Collaboration Structures	"What we found often is like, we didn't have the right people at the table to talk about those signature benchmarks because we needed to talk to the school supervisors who weren't on the cabinet, or like we didn't have like the deputy of pupil services office at the table."	8/9

First, several central office administrators cite a lack of role definition or understanding decision-making authority in their work. Each central office administrator is responsible for the tasks that fall into h/her realm, but there may be limited overlap between central office administrators and their respective functions. Some central office administrators believe this contributed to a lack of role definition. As one administrator noted, "The work is so complex that it's really hard to understand all of it, and we need to be clear about decision rights. A lot of times I think we're in here in a culture where people are hesitant to make decisions." Another observed that this lack of role definition leads to "inefficiencies" in organizing their work to

support traditionally marginalized students. Another cited the need for, "empowering people to make decisions," but that "people are feeling fearful of not making the right decision or don't know they're empowered to make the decision." Originally, a flow chart located online indicated nine central office administrators and second tier administrators who fall under their supervision. Since then, there have been new titles and roles created or changed that may add clarity and role definition. These shifts appeared to be ongoing during our data-collection phase, indicating an ever-changing situation based on meeting turnaround goals that may be related to role definition and decision-making capacity. Each of these changes can influence co-construction as each can impact how the individual perceives the job context, how the individual learns about policy changes, and how the individual communicates progress towards benchmarks and goals.

The second, and largest barrier to preventing effective co-construction appears to be time, especially when compared to the number of goals and benchmarks established in a turnaround district. As one administrator stated, "I think the biggest hurdle is just having the time to work with the other district level administrators to really understand the work that we do. And to carve out that time to do it because we're all so unbelievably busy for sure." One respondent mentioned the fact that given that each person is responsible for a specific benchmark it is easy to be "off and running" on individual tasks, which can limit the depth of understanding of another team's work. The sheer number of goals and benchmarks presents legitimate challenges to accomplishing them in a limited time frame.

Additionally, follow-through and execution can limit co-construction and policy implementation. After a meeting, next steps are identified and it is crucial that these steps are followed in order to reach the identified benchmarks and goals in the turnaround plan. Not following identified steps serves as a major barrier to policy implementation. For example, one

central office administrator noted, "We get a lot of discussion going, and a lot of momentum around issues, but then the execution is probably where we struggle the most. We identify an area of need, we identify an area of focus, and then not always are we very punctual in making sure there's a plan that addresses that, whatever issue has come up." While not overwhelmingly identified as a barrier, a lack of execution after collaborative or communicative meetings about benchmarks was present.

A possible reason for this is the existing collaboration structures. As mentioned in the previous section, central office administrators felt that often times they did not "have the right people at the table" to solve problems at the cabinet meetings. This structure, combined with limited opportunities for formal collaboration across all central office administrators, can make it more difficult to follow through on meeting agenda items if many of the people involved are not present at the meeting itself.

Bridging Internal Goals to External Policy Mandates

School districts can either bridge or buffer themselves from external policy mandates during the policy implementation process. In this district, there is a general consensus among central office administrators that the relationship between the central office team and the Massachusetts DESE is a true partnership. Rather than a contradiction between external pressures and internal goals, the two appear to be acting as allies and collaborating to achieve the turnaround goals and benchmarks, resulting in a shared approach to policy interpretation and implementation in support of marginalized students. As one administrator puts it, policy work in support of marginalized students "is all internally driven because we know it helps and the turnaround would not happen if the parents and the community are not brought along to be able to do this together." This indicates a strong tie between the turnaround goals and the priorities of

the community. These internal values of the school district and community are then married to external goals in the partnership with the state, creating the "signature benchmarks" described by one administrator as "a combination of external and internal forces... some having to do with compliance, and some of them having to do with really meeting the needs of the students that we serve here." This process of aligning internal and external goals is an effective way to interpret and implement policy in support of marginalized students.

As such, central office administrators indicate that they have bridged, not buffered, themselves to the external pressures from the state so much so that these pressures are not considered pressures. In fact, the "pressure that is greatest is just trying to define our local policies…basic policies and procedures that most schools take for granted that were never really defined." This feeling that there is a pressing need to repair or revise existing structures while simultaneously working on the larger goals of the turnaround plan was prevalent in multiple interviews. However, central office administrators consistently felt a great deal of flexibility and independence to achieve the turnaround goals creatively and in a way that works for their local context. External pressures exist, and central office administrators feel them, but they generally believe they are working towards meeting internal goals. For example, one respondent commented on the relationship by saying, "I think what we've tried to do is take all of those external demands and really make sense of what makes sense for our kids, and what do our kids and families need? And then base our work off of that." Another commented on the relationship with the Department of Education by saying, stating that although state receivership is an "external factor," they can be relied upon for advice and feedback. The policy implementation process, as a result, is heavily influenced by local context with guidance from an external partnership with DESE. Rather than "constraining" the practice of the district, they act as

"partners…at the local level." This partnership is a unique aspect of this district and positions them well to implement policy in support of traditionally marginalized populations.

This practice of bridging district goals in support of marginalized populations with external policy demands meant to support marginalized students is a promising practice for co-construction. While I expected to find co-construction at the district level between and among central office administrators when interpreting and implementing policy in support of marginalized students, I did not predict that this practice would be found in the work happening between district and state actors. Since co-construction considers the role of power, title, and political pressures, the unique relationships between each entity during the policy implementation process may have positive implications for students who have been traditionally marginalized in the United States public education system.

Summary of Findings

The first research question in this study asked how central office administrators work together to implement policy in support of traditionally marginalized populations. On one hand, throughout the policy interpretation phase, central office administrators in this district developed a shared understanding of the turnaround plan, goals, and accompanying benchmarks. These policies have both direct and indirect implications for traditionally marginalized students. Central office administrators have a deep respect and understanding of the turnaround plan's goals and benchmarks. They generally understand the purpose of the plan, including why it exists and its intended support for traditionally marginalized students. On the other hand, during the policy implementation process in this district, central office administrators viewed the work of the turnaround plan as a series of tasks surrounding the benchmarks. These tasks were divided up across the central office team and those who work in each of the departments,

representing a "divide and conquer" approach towards policy implementation. Central office administrators communicated with each other through periodic updates on the tasks, and more frequently, to superiors on the progress towards meeting each benchmark. Time, lack of clarity around roles and decision-making authority, periodic problems with follow-through, and communication structures appeared to limit the ability of the central office team to co-construct and implement policy cohesively.

Research question two asked how central office administrators negotiate the fit between internal goals and external pressures. While it may be expected that a turnaround district would buffer themselves from state agencies and the external pressures that come with state receivership, there is a general authentic appreciation of the partnership with the state Department of Education and collaborative nature to their work that allows the district to bridge internal goals and external pressures. This purposeful and effective practice may have a positive influence on the future outcomes of traditionally marginalized students in this district.

Discussion

The research questions guiding this study relate to how central office administrators work together to implement policy in support of traditionally marginalized populations. Additionally, the study examined how central office administrators balanced external pressures from state organizations with internal district goals. To frame the study, I analyzed the policy implementation process through the lens of co-construction, focusing on how a central office administration team worked together to interpret and implement policy to improve outcomes for marginalized students.

The discussion in this section will focus on two key findings. First, central office administrators in this district organized their work around implementation of a turnaround plan

with specific goals and policies aimed at improving outcomes for traditionally marginalized populations. The goals and benchmarks in the turnaround plan were viewed as a list of tasks with specific "owners" for each task. The central office administrators communicated progress on meeting these benchmarks to other members of the central office administration team. This approach highlighted the complexities of co-construction of policy in support of traditionally marginalized populations in a turnaround setting. Second, and contrary to research predictions, the central office administrators in this district bridged internal goals with external policy pressures from state agencies, allowing for a unique partnership that highlighted elements of co-construction of policy between district and state employees. With these findings in mind, I explore the implications for educational leaders working to support traditionally marginalized student populations.

Complexities of Co-Construction of Policy in a Turnaround Setting

While research suggests that effective co-construction can benefit educational reform in support of traditionally marginalized populations, this study reveals that effective co-construction of turnaround policy in a high-needs district is extremely difficult and complex. Effective co-construction can help all district actors gain a mutual understanding of policy, focus on the interconnections between actors, impact of context on policy implementation, and the social construction that takes place at the local level when implementing policy (Datnow & Park, 2009). In this district, shared policy interpretation proved to be easier to achieve than shared policy implementation. This may have implications for other turnaround schools and districts involved in policy work to support marginalized students. There is a range of factors related to this concept that make effective co-construction difficult.

As noted in the section explaining barriers to effective co-construction of policy, the number of policies to implement combined with the need to implement each quickly makes shared policy implementation difficult. While communication and collaboration structures exist in this district that allow for policy updates, challenging policy work related to the turnaround goals and benchmarks is often divided among administrators to carry out the policy implementation process. This "divide and conquer" technique likely has benefits for efficient use of time and resources, but may create situations where educational leaders work more independently than collaboratively toward policy implementation. Given the fact that central office administrators identified time as a strong barrier to co-construction of policy, it makes sense that this type of approach would be implemented in order to relieve some of the pressure due to time constraints. Ongoing shifts in the makeup of the district's meeting schedule and participants in those meetings will likely influence the ways in which district policy implementers understand and carry out policy related to the turnaround plan. Ensuring that these communication and collaboration opportunities exist will be an integral component to ensuring a shared understanding of turnaround policy.

In addition to a structural component of policy implementation, there is a cognitive component consisting of relationships and power dynamics that influences policy implementation (Datnow & Park, 2009). Some central office administrators sensed a lack of clarity about who was responsible for certain tasks, which can influence how central office administrators interpret and implement policy. Such lack of clarity can also influence whom central office administrators contact and collaborate with for joint policy work and can limit co-construction efforts. In general, multiple people working towards the same outcome with a shared understanding of how each other's work relates to supporting marginalized populations

will allow for effective co-construction of policy. But, all administrators must clearly understand role definition for this to happen. Power dynamics, titles, defined or undefined roles, and implicit or explicit decision-making authority will undoubtedly influence policy actions. For example, even minor decisions that help facilitate turnaround work in support of marginalized students can be delayed if an individual feels like he or she always needs to vet a decision with a superior before taking action. This can result in an inefficient approach to school reform work.

For future policy work, creating collaborative structures that enable central office administrators to work together for policy implementation in support of traditionally marginalized populations will increase the likelihood that this work occurs. While approaching the "work" as a list of tasks or benchmarks to be distributed may be efficient, it limits shared understanding of the policy implementation process and its outcomes on traditionally marginalized students. Additionally, establishing and defining roles and decision-making responsibilities among central office administrators may contribute to more effective co-construction of policy in support of traditionally marginalized students.

Co-Construction of Policy with State Agencies

When analyzing the balance between external pressures and internal goals, I predicted there would be a struggle and a sense of real pressure from state (external) influences in this district. However, central office administrators consistently identified the state Department of Education as partners in the process of policy implementation and education reform meant to benefit traditionally marginalized students. This sense of partnership and trust presents an additional opportunity to analyze the co-construction of policy implementation in a different way than I intended at the onset of this study.

In some ways, there is an additional level of co-construction that is occurring between central office administrators in this district and state employees. Interviews suggest that these two groups are working together both to understand policy and create implementation plans for turnaround goals and benchmarks. One respondent identified a state employee as an extension of the central office team because of the regularity and the value of interactions with this person. The bridging that occurs between internal goals and external pressures presents a unique opportunity for this district to implement policy in support of traditionally marginalized populations.

An interesting component to this level of mediation between external pressures and internal goals is the fact that at one point in time, there was likely a great deal of pressure felt externally, before the district went into state receivership. This was under a district leadership team comprised of a different superintendent and different people in different roles with different responsibilities. During the district's slide into state receivership, those individuals likely experienced a great deal of pressure, but that pressure is not present under the current central office leadership team. At the time of this study, only one central office administrator was a district employee before the district went into state receivership. Interview data revealed that many of the new hires on the central office administrative team were successful in other turnaround districts, had previous turnaround experience, and in some cases had worked with the superintendent/receiver in previous districts. This is a sensible approach to turnaround work given the pressures of turnaround work, but likely influences the relationship between district and state employees since many people may have prior experience in a similar setting and potentially value relationships with state actors. Since many turnaround districts are working to better support marginalized student populations, prior experience in a turnaround district also

likely means that the individuals in this district have personal values and beliefs that value supporting all students. The shared appreciation for the turnaround goals indicated a general respect among the central office team for working with a state agency and for supporting marginalized student populations. As a result of these factors, a high amount of turnover among central office administrators may influence the feeling of partnership with the state Department of Education either positively or negatively.

Implications for Future Research

While this study investigated how central office administrators work together to implement policy in support of traditionally marginalized populations and how they mediate external pressures with internal goals, the findings of this study have created opportunities for future researchers to further investigate aspects of co-construction of policy by central office administrators in support of marginalized students. Since there is a lack of research in this area, this study could serve as a catalyst for future qualitative and quantitative studies on policy implementation in support of marginalized students among central office administrators.

First, since this study investigates practices in just one district, further research will be needed to determine if co-construction of policy at the district level consistently improves outcomes for marginalized student populations. A longitudinal study that follows a turnaround district throughout and after state receivership may demonstrate the effect that policy interpretation and implementation has on outcomes for traditionally marginalized students. Another possible study could explore the implications of co-construction of policy that includes the relationships between district and state workers. While this study only focused on central office administrators, further investigation of the relationship between the two entities as a form of co-construction would be a research-worthy extension of this study.

Second, there is an opportunity for future researchers to build on the finding related to this district bridging itself to an external state agency to enhance policy implementation in support of traditionally marginalized populations. This study did not include partners at the state level in the data collection phase. A similar study that examines the relationships between state and district actors may provide further information regarding policy implementation in a turnaround district and the mediation between external pressures and internal district goals. Future studies should build upon this finding to further investigate co-construction of policy in a district that bridges itself to state partners.

Third, it would be interesting to compare the policy implementation practices in a turnaround district to those in a district without this label. While both districts may be working to support traditionally marginalized populations, the sheer number of benchmarks combined with a short time frame for turnaround in this district make effective co-construction difficult. There is room for comparison of the policy implementation process between this district and a district where there may be a smaller number of goals or benchmarks.

Conclusion

As American schools become more diverse and educators work to better serve traditionally marginalized students through educational reform efforts, the policy implementation process will continue to play a large role in the educational outcomes of these students. Policy makers and educational leaders, including central office administrators, must strive to establish clear collaborative and communicative structures across the district in order to ensure a shared understanding of the policy implementation process. Central office administrators must have a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities as part of this process. In a turnaround district, opportunities for co-construction of policy in support of traditionally marginalized populations

will exist when central office administrators bridge internal goals with the external pressures of a state agency.

CHAPTER FOUR

DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND LIMITATIONS

Discussion

This study aimed to explore how central office administrators in a turnaround district organized their work in support of marginalized student populations. In doing so, our research team examined leadership actions through four distinct lenses related to communication (Palmer, 2018), collaboration (Smith, 2018), policy implementation (Galligan, 2018), and social network ties between and among district leaders (Kukenberger, 2018). Through the use of semi-structured interviews and document review, Galligan (2018) examined the policy implementation process of the central office administrators in a Massachusetts turnaround district focusing specifically on their ability to work together and balance internal and external policy demands with the purpose of better supporting marginalized students. Kukenberger (2018) considered and analyzed how the structure and flow of social relations between and among the central office administrators affect turnaround efforts and goals designed to support marginalized populations. In the same district context, Palmer (2018) explored the relationship between central office administrators' language and their support of historically marginalized students. Specifically, Palmer looked closely at how language shows commonality or disconnect in understanding and action between and among central office administrators when they work to support marginalized students. Smith (2018) studied the conditions that foster or hinder collaboration when working to improve outcomes for historically marginalized students and how communities of practice emerge among central office administrators.

Three central findings emerged following an in-depth analysis and synthesis of each individual study. First, as required by the Massachusetts system for support, central office

administrators organized their work in support of marginalized students in accordance with external, turnaround policy demands. Second, as the district transitioned into receivership (Accountability, Partnerships and Targeted Assistance, 2017), evolving organizational structures and systems posed various barriers and opportunities to accelerate improvement for these students. Third, the specific emotions central office administrators described seemed to influence progress toward signature benchmarks and goal attainment meant to improve outcomes for marginalized students in the district.

The following sections discuss these findings and their implications for both practice and future research. First, we discuss each of the three key findings regarding how central office administrators in this turnaround district organized their work in support of marginalized populations. Second, we provide recommendations for practitioners. Third, we expose the limitations of this study and provide recommendations for future research.

Central Office Administrators Organized Their Work in Accordance with Turnaround Policy

Collective findings indicated that central office administrators in this district organized their work in support of marginalized students in accordance with turnaround policy. As previously mentioned, the turnaround plan identified five broad goals that are either explicitly or implicitly designed to benefit traditionally marginalized students. A synthesis of findings from each author's individual studies revealed that as central office administrators organized their work around turnaround policy, they attempted to bring structure and focus to their work by scaffolding the amount of work needed to meet broad turnaround goals. As we discuss below, this structure offered benefits and challenges.

Central office administrators scaffold turnaround goals. Research on central office leadership suggests that school reform depends on a highly effective and efficient central office leadership team (Honig, 2013; Togneri & Anderson, 2003). Additional scholarly research on school reform designed to support marginalized populations identifies the importance of a collective approach to this difficult work (Datnow & Park, 2009). Since turnaround plan goals are rather broad, central office administrators in this district scaffolded the workload needed to achieve these goals over time. For the purpose of this study, we defined scaffolding as the creation of levels of support and clarity that attempt to simplify the work needed to reach the turnaround goals. In other words, large broad goals meant to support marginalized students were broken down into smaller, more specific action steps representing short-term actions needed to reach the long-term goals written in the turnaround plan.

The primary way that central office administrators in this district scaffolded their work was through the creation of annual benchmarks. These benchmarks were developed, revised, or created in part at the annual summer retreat for all central office administrators. During the three years of receivership, the number of annual benchmarks decreased each year. During the period of study, the district had 31 benchmarks, five of them dubbed "signature benchmarks." All central office administrators identified their work in support of marginalized students in reference to the annual benchmarks. When central office administrators were in meetings, they provided updates to each other regarding the status of their work in terms of progress towards meeting these benchmarks.

Although the annual benchmarks were more specific than the turnaround goals, central office administrators attempted to provide additional focus to their work through the creation of project plans. These plans were developed in collaboration with the Chief Academic Officer and

guided the day-to-day short-term work needed to meet the annual benchmarks. All of this work was intended to better support traditionally marginalized students in the district. Communication around these project plans flowed within departments, from one central office administrator and the team of employees that h/she supervised, with regularity. Communication about project plans from once central office administrator to another happened with less frequency.

Benefits and challenges. The approach of scaffolding the broad goals of the district turnaround plan into smaller, more manageable steps provided both benefits and challenges for the district. Since turnaround results across the country have come with mixed results, there is no single approach that researchers or practitioners have identified as the most beneficial way to approach turnaround work. Additionally, the sheer number of changes required within the short timeline provided for change places turnaround schools and districts under tremendous pressure (Finnigan, Daly & Stewart, 2012; Mette & Scribner, 2014; Mintrop & Trujillo, 2005).

With no silver bullet for approaching turnaround work in support of marginalized populations, the central office administrators in this district took a seemingly logical and efficient approach to the daunting task of overhauling a district in a three-year time frame. The primary benefit to this approach was a collective understanding of the turnaround plan and its implications for traditionally marginalized students by each central office administrator, as well as the collective value placed on the goals within the plan. It would seem that if each central office administrator shared an understanding of and an appreciation for the turnaround plan, this similar understanding and appreciation would guide the work they do on a daily basis. Additionally, the identification of signature benchmarks provided focus to the work of central office administrators in terms of identifying priorities and high leverage areas of improvement for marginalized students.

This approach also aimed to foster collaboration and communication. Through updates provided to key central office administrators, they were able to track the status of progress towards goals and benchmarks. Through periodic meetings and retreats, central office administrators updated other central office administrators who oversee different departments on the progress of their work. This gave each central office administrator some sense of the work in support of marginalized populations that occurred in other areas, and provided the opportunity for feedback.

While this process was efficient given the number of benchmarks and the relatively short time frame to reach each one, this process also offered challenges. While there was a shared understanding of the work in support of marginalized populations and some collaboration and communication across the central office, a collective approach to carrying out the work was not the focus of the central office administrators in this district. As a result, a central office administrator's understanding of how all of the work interrelated or interesected may have been limited.

Another challenge to this approach was likely not unique to this district, but coud be a shared challenge for many turnaround schools and districts working to better support marginalized student populations. The natural pressures of reaching so many goals in such a short amount of time may have limited exploration, creativity and learning among central office administrators (Finnigan, Daly, & Stewart, 2012). Instead of spending time together negotiating a joint enterprise, and then planning, testing, and analyzing interventions, central office administrators had to work as quickly as possible, while sustaining a high degree of critical reflecction, during their work in support of marginalized populations. If time was not a tremendous pressure, the central office team could likely have benefitted from more

opportunities to learn collectivelly, plan new interventions, and analyze results together, potentially resulting in more creative and focused work in support of marginalized populations.

Summary. Central office administrators in this district organized their work by scaffolding large, broad turnaround goals into smaller, more manageable benchmarks and project plans. This work was meant to support traditionally marginalized populations in this turnaround district, and the scaffolded approach guided the daily work of each member of the team. While this approach was efficient given the numerous goals and short time frame allotted for completion, it may have limited the ability for central office administrators to fully understand each other's work, and to work collectively over time to find the most creative and targeted ways to meet turnaround goals and benchmarks. We now turn to the evolving organizational structure in the district and the benefits and challenges of this structure.

Evolving Organizational Structure Poses Opportunities for Success and Challenges

Findings underscored the extent to which the central office had been reorganized since receivership. A synthesis of findings suggests that while the reorganization was intended to indirectly improve outcomes for historically marginalized populations, it provided both opportunities for success and challenges.

Reorganization of central office. As previously stated, the district went into receivership in April 2015 after being designated as Level 5 and the receiver was appointed in July 2015. Since that time, the district underwent, and continues to undergo, significant restructuring. Since entering into receivership, all of the nine central office administrators were appointed to their roles and eight of the nine are also new to the district. In addition to hiring new administrators to fill existing central office administrator positions, the district also created new central office administrator positions. The creation of these new positions, one of which

was created in July 2017, led to shifting responsibilities of other administrators. With each new administrator joining the leadership team, and at times filling a role that did not previously exist, the work of existing administrators shifted. This, in turn, led central office administrators to rethink their meeting structure.

Collaboration and joint work in support of marginalized populations occurred during meetings in the district and, at the time of data collection, there was some feeling that the right people were not always at the table for district-level meetings. This led some to feel that the efforts to improve collaboration was solely intended for school-based teams. The district made changes to the meeting structure during the fall of 2017 in an effort to build cohesion to the work of central office administrators. It is important to recognize that our findings capture a snapshot at a time of change, and do not represent the entire album of change.

Benefits and challenges. The evolving organizational structure of the central office has provided opportunities for success, as well as challenges in terms of support for marginalized students. A central office team of new administrators can be a challenge as administrators in a turnaround context are tasked with implementation of district-wide change with a limited understanding of the history and context of the work in the district. Further, relationships of central office administrators impact improvement efforts (Collins & Clark, 2003; Honig 2006) and newly formed teams have not had the time to develop relationships characterized by trust, which facilitates improvement.

At the same time, these new administrators brought new perspectives and ideas to the district, and they brought their existing networks and relationships to play as they sought external advice and support. In this district, the hiring of new central office administrators provided an opportunity to increase the diversity of central office administrators. Research points to the

importance of a diverse staff, particularly in districts serving a diverse student population or a population such as the one in the district studied, in which most students are students of color (Alim, 2005). In line with this body of research, a specific recruitment strategy was employed to attract the individuals to their new central office roles and diversify the central office to be more representative of the population served in the district. The intentional development of a diverse leadership team that is more representative of the student population served in the district should be viewed positively. With male and female administrators, two Puerto Rican administrators, one Mexican administrator, and one who is half Cuban, the administrative team could more easily approach their work to support marginalized populations with an understanding of the culture and values of families in the district (Darling-Hammond, 2015).

The work of central office administrators was organized and planned in meetings, which included cabinet meetings, quarterly retreats, and department meetings. Quarterly retreats and cabinet meetings were regarded as meetings for central office administrators to work together to create annual goals and benchmarks meant to support marginalized students, and to update one another on progress towards these goals. While participation in these meetings created clarity on district goals and benchmarks and broadly connected the work of central office administrators around improving outcomes for all students, there was a feeling that the right people were not always at the table for meetings. The addition of new central office administrators and shifting roles contributed to this challenge and at the time of data collection, the district was taking steps to ensure the meeting structure worked better for central office administrators.

Research suggests external partners can provide the tools, expertise, and other resources that support improvement and change at the district level (Farrell & Coburn, 2017; Honig & Ikemoto, 2008) and can be heavily relied on as part of turnaround efforts (Le Floch, Boyle, &

Therriault, 2008). This was evident in the district when central office administrators highlighted the multiple external partners they work with on a regular basis. One partnership that was viewed as particularly productive was the partnership with ESE. This partnership seemed to contribute to the development of new ideas and a collaborative approach towards organizing their work in support of marginalized populations. In addition, central office administrators talked about partnerships they had from their previous work prior to working in the district that they leveraged in their new roles in the district.

Summary. Since entering receivership, the central office has been and continues to be reorganized. While the reorganization was intended to improve outcomes for historically marginalized populations, it provided both opportunities for success and challenges. Hiring new administrators provided the opportunity to diversify the central office while posing challenges with regard to their collective knowledge and understanding of the district context. The work of central office administrators was organized and planned in meetings, which continued to be restructured as new administrators joined the central office team. Similar to other turnaround districts, external partnerships, in particular the partnership with ESE, was a structure that central office administrators viewed positively and that contributed to the development of new ideas.

The importance of the affective side of turnaround leadership

Turnaround work is complex and places an enormous amount of emotional pressure on central office administrators as they work to address various issues that impact academic achievement for marginalized students. The three-year period to improve student outcomes creates urgency in central office administrators as they work to meet the turnaround plan goals. Tremendous pressure and short timelines to reach goals can correlate with limited school improvements (Finnigan, Daly & Stewart, 2012).

Consistent with Mintrop and Trujillo (2006), Friedman, Galligan, Albano, and O'Connor (2009), concluded that intense pressure and sanctions critically impact turnaround efforts. These demands can also create defensiveness and deprofessionalize teachers, administrators, and staff. In this district, interview data provided evidence of these pressures among central office administrators. Central office administrators described their actions to reorganize and shift priorities, achieve and maintain compliance, and communicate changes to constituents in order to better support and serve traditionally marginalized populations.

A synthesis of findings from individual lines of inquiry revealed three prominent emotions of central office administrators in this turnaround district as they worked to support marginalized students: (1) frustration; (2) lack of cohesion among team members and, (3) the emotional toll of turnaround work.

Frustration. Findings from Palmer (2018) illuminated language of frustration when participants discussed working in support of marginalized students. This language derived from the complexity and urgency of the workload required in a turnaround district. Language of frustration included words of disappointment when discussing the inability to accomplish tasks and goals, or feelings of constraint. This came from trying to organize or meet with others to discuss obstacles or concerns. Their expressed helplessness also revealed a sense of frustration with the structural issues facing district leaders. The complexities and limited time to improve status created frustration as central office administrators attempted to tackle the issues that impacted the success of all students. Exposure to central office administrators' frustrations may compound students' inability to feel supported and negatively impact their sense of belonging.

Lack of feeling cohesive among team members. Findings from Galligan (2018) and Smith (2018) suggested time, lack of clarity around roles, and decision-making authority,

periodic problems with follow through, and communication structures limited the ability of the central office team to co-construct and implement policy in support of marginalized populations cohesively. These central office administrators found themselves reacting to issues and needing to prioritize issues during their day-to-day work. These feelings of lack of cohesion resonated when central office administrators did not have the time, clarity, or organizational structure to support marginalized populations.

Similarly, Kukenberger (2018) found that central office administrators in this district relied heavily on various external ties rather than internal ties. It is possible that this reliance on external ties is related to network instability, since there has been stability in the form of a state partnership since the district went into receivership. In general, network instability can impact the work of the central office leadership team and the district's ability to make measurable progress towards turnaround goals designed to support marginalized student populations. Research on school reform indicates that leadership turnover and inconsistent organizational structures limit and strain relational ties between and among central office administrators as they work to support marginalized populations (Leithwood, 2013).

Emotional toll. Central office administrators working in support of marginalized populations in a turnaround district expereinced feelings consistent with Theorharis' (2007) description of social justice leaders facing resistance and the meotional toll this resistance creates. Central office administrators often face resistance in a turnaround district from many stakeholders, such as teachers, administrators, students, families, and community members.

Central office administrators in this district were purposeful in their work, as they used the turnaround plan as a guide to attempt to improve student outcomes. They had to implement strategies for professional and personal self-care to keep the emotional toll from the work at bay.

When central office administrators in a turnaround district do this successfully, they can make significant accomplishments in their work to support marginalized students. The daily requirements of what can be described as a "nearly impossible" job, combined with a belief that they can and must create just schools for all students, can take an emotional toll on these central office administrators. This toll may have serious implications on a central office administrator's emotional and physical well-being and impact overall ability and capacity to affect timely change.

Benefits and challenges. Prioritizing the emotional complexities and demands of turnaround work for central office administrators is essential when supporting marginalized students. By paying attention to feelings of frustration, focusing on cohesion among central office administrators, and understanding the emotional toll that turnaround work creates, central office administrators may be able to identify and execute best practices and better meet the needs of marginalized students. One major challenge that central office administrators faced was the inability to carve out time to support professional and personal wellbeing due to the extreme demands of the turnaround plan.

Summary. Central office administrators in any turnaround district face an enormous amount of pressure and complexity as they address various issues that impact academic achievement. The three-year turnaround timeline creates urgency in their work, which provokes emotions and actions that influence their work. In this district, three prominent emotions resonated with central office administrators as they organized their work in support of traditionally marginalized populations: frustration; a lack of feeling cohesive among team members; and the emotional toll of this work over time. Frustration was shown in their language, organization, and references to lack of time to address crucial work. A feeling of a lack of

cohesion among team members related to some unclear roles, responsibilities, and decision-making authority. Lastly, an emotional toll was seen through the resistance central office administrators faced in a "nearly impossible" job that was combined with a strong will to create an environment of academic success for all students.

Recommendations for Practitioners

In light of current research on turning around low performing school districts and our research findings, we recommend that the central office administrators adopt and implement an improvement process as they work to increase positive outcomes for traditionally marginalized students. We further recommend that the district revise the turnaround plan to encompass two specific aspects: maintain focus on a few targeted teaching and learning goals and clearly define roles and responsibilities for central office administrators. Finally, we recommend that district administrators develop a structure that includes time for self-care. We now discuss these recommendations.

Adopt and Implement an Improvement Process

The district has made efforts to ensure that meetings matter and are productive. However, several central office administrators reported that despite these efforts, meetings got in the way of the “real work,” or, they were often “updates on work” that was happening in other departments even when agendas were set and protocols were used. Inevitably, time was the number one barrier to capitalizing on recurring meetings with a consistent group of central office administrators. Therefore, it is critical that the central office team evaluates how they currently utilize meeting time and whether or not they are focusing on using the time together as an opportunity to learn together. The district would benefit from adopting an improvement process and establishing meeting practices that are explicitly related to improvement cycles. This would

require the central office team to organize for collaborative work, spend time inquiring about data and current best practices to create a problem of practice, develop an action plan, implement the plan, and assess its effectiveness. While there is a number of improvement processes, the Data Wise Project, based at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, is one process that could be used for this work. Structuring meetings in this way would provide central office administrators the opportunity to negotiate a joint enterprise and support learning that is anchored in practice (Wenger, 1998).

Additionally, implementation of a clear step-by-step improvement process may improve the way district and school meetings are planned and facilitated while creating consistent use of multiple sources of evidence to drive decision making with a focus on supporting a large number of marginalized students in the district. Using a clear process and focusing on student data to identify a problem of practice and improvement strategy will likely increase instructional equity for all students and enable the central office administrative team to better support schools in a strategic and collaborative manner. This process will also aid in streamlining the benchmark goals and efforts aimed at improving outcomes for all students in the district.

Revise District Turnaround Plan

Effective district leaders focus their efforts on creating goal-oriented districts (Waters & Marzano, 2006). Since 2009, Massachusetts' state system of support, along with the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE), has worked collaboratively with turnaround districts to develop evidence-based improvement plans that include targeted benchmark goals. Similar to many districts, the turnaround process in this district began with some formal planning activities that incorporated stakeholder input and ESE guidance and resulted in a turnaround plan with many benchmarks. While an effort was made to

reduce the number of benchmarks, at the time of data collection there were approximately 30 benchmarks toward which the district was working.

Maintain focus on a few teaching and learning goals. Successful district improvement plans allow for a coherent approach to improvement that is sustained over time and does not overload schools with excessive numbers of initiatives (Leithwood, 2013). However, when a district enters into receivership, the stakes are high and the timeline is short, and navigating this pressure can be incredibly challenging. Much of the pressure felt in this district was a result of the combination of excessive goals and benchmarks and a short timeframe in which to reach them. Through identification of essential goals, this pressure may decrease to a point where collective understanding and ownership of work in support of marginalized students increase.

When everything is a priority, nothing is a priority. Reducing the number of district benchmarks may enable the district to guide their improvement efforts on explicit well-established frameworks. While there was a shared understanding and appreciation of the turnaround goals and benchmarks, there was limited evidence of collective or shared work across central office administrators in the district. By negotiating the highest leverageable teaching and learning goals for the marginalized students served in the district and focusing efforts on making progress towards the agreed upon goals, central office administrators will be more likely to work collaborativelly and build collective knowledge to impact practice in the district.

Develop explicit roles, expectations, and responsibilities. Among all school-related factors that contribute to school learning outcomes, leadership is second only to classroom instruction (Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). In this study, central office administrators reported confusion regarding their roles and decision making authority. The lack of clear processes and structures created frustration and confusion among central office

administrators. Clearly defined roles, expectations, and responsibilities for members of the central office leadership team, including a process for determining membership and distributed decision making authority, will allow the district to maximize the knowledge, skills, and motivation of each member. If this happens, it has the potential to accelerate improved outcomes for marginalized students.

As the district worked to improve outcomes for marginalized students, several shifts in the organizational structure of the central office team were made. Development and maintenance of a consistent leadership team will play a role in achieving the outcomes outlined in the district's signature benchmarks and goals. While the changes in the district were meant to increase productivity, efficiency, and impact outcomes, and appeared to be largely positive, there may be unintended consequences related to roles, responsibilities, and decision-making authority. Once roles have been clearly defined, the district should distribute decision-making authority across central office administrators. The district may also consider establishing decision making committees with representation from various stakeholder groups, administrators, teachers, students, parents/guardians, and community members, for important or significant decisions to ensure that new initiatives are integrated with existing routines and practices.

Develop a Structure that Includes Time for Self-Care

Finally, central office administrators in turnaround districts face an enormous amount of emotional pressure as they address the various issues that have impacted the achievement of marginalized populations. The importance of making space for self-care and honoring the emotional aspect of doing the work is key to success in supporting marginalized student populations. Providing time to meet with colleagues to support each other, share work, and celebrate success will go a long way. In addition, devoting protected time to talk about the

challenges in turnaround work is equally important in promoting emotional wellness and supporting self-care.

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

There are several limitations to this case study. First, although this case has provided insight into the work of central office administrators in a district in need of accelerated improvement, it is a case study of one district, which limits the generalizability of findings. We relied on data collected from semi-structured interviews with central office administrators and did not include any other district level or school level leaders. Exploration of the whole network would better represent the connections, collaboration, and language use between school leaders and central office administrators. Analyzing building level perceptions would provide additional insight into policy interpretation and implementation as well. Existing research confirms that the presence of powerful, effective school leadership is essential to turning around failing schools. Further research should include the role of the principal in a turnaround district in order to better understand how their work is organized and distributed in conjunction with central office administration.

Second**,** this study was conducted in November of 2017, two years after the district entered into receivership and one year after the Receiver requested permission to modify the district's turnaround plan. Data collected from nine semi-structured interviews, document review and one observation led the research team to the key findings and recommendations. We recognize that this was a moment in time and that the district has many organizational and structural improvements in motion. Future research could include exploration of multiple turnaround districts in Massachusetts over time. These longitudinal studies may allow us to examine the interaction between and among internal (district and school level) and external

partners (ESE, consultants, community agencies, etc.) and the effectiveness of the implementation of turnaround strategies resulting in outcomes over time.

To determine the influence of district superintendents on student achievement and turnaround strategy, additional research might focus more directly on the role of the Receiver/Superintendent. Waters and Marzano (2006) found the correlation between superintendent tenure and student achievement to be statistically significant (.19) which suggests that the length of time a superintendent remains in a district positively correlates with positive student outcomes. Understanding the impact high stakes accountability has on one person charged with leading and organizing the work may provide insight into turnaround timelines and strategies for improving student outcomes in districts that are deemed as chronically underperforming.

Conclusion

American schools are becoming more diverse at a time when achievement and equity gaps continue to persist, contributing to the marginalization of certain populations of students. In order to address these gaps, central office administrators may focus their collective reform work on supporting traditionally marginalized student populations. Especially in districts in turnaround status or state receivership, the ways in which central office administrators organize their work in support of traditionally marginalized populations is a critical, yet understudied research topic.

This qualitative case study explored how central office administrators in one mid-size turnaround district organized their work to support traditionally marginalized students. By analyzing collaboration, language, policy implementation, and social ties, this study concluded that central office administrators in one district organized their work in support of marginalized

populations in the following ways: (1) central office administrators attempted to scaffold turnaround policy; (2) central office administrators were part of an evolving organizational structure with changing organizational structures; and (3) there is an emotional component to the work of supporting traditionally marginalized students in this district. Each of these findings illuminated benefits and challenges for the district in their support of marginalized students.

Overall, this study recommends that central office administrators implement a more focused improvement strategy to guide their collective work in support of marginalized students. Specifically, this improvement strategy should define clear roles and responsibilities for each central office administrator, maintain a focus on teaching and learning goals, and develop meeting structures designed to improve student outcomes. While this study attempted to address a research gap by investigating how central office administrators organize their work in support of marginalized students, it may serve as a catalyst for future studies to systematically identify work practices that address school reform in the name of closing equity and achievement gaps.

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Appendix A

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

Introduction

"Thank you for taking time from your busy schedule to talk with me today. I am here to learn about the turnaround work your district is doing to better support marginalized students. As a district leader, you are in a unique position to help us understand this important work and we greatly appreciate your participation in this study. The interview will consist of a set of questions about your background, relationships and collaboration, and the specific work in which central office administrators are engaged.

The aim of this study is to better understand how the central office administrators in Holyoke organize their work in support of marginalized student populations. As we learn about your district we plan to analyze the interview data collected through four lenses: collaboration, policy implementation, communication, and social networks.

I want to let you know that throughout the course of this study, I will work to preserve confidentiality. We will not use your name or reveal other identifying information in study publications. At any time during this interview, you may choose not to answer a question or to stop the interview. Before we begin, please read this consent form and if you agree, sign it. Feel free to ask me any question about the study."

Signing of consent form

"For the purposes of accuracy, I'd like to record this conversation. Do you provide consent for me to record?"

"From time to time, you may see me jotting some notes on this paper for my own reference."

"Before we begin, do you have any questions about the study?"

Question Categorical Codes

BQ = Background Questions	**PI = Policy Implementation**
OAQ = Overarching Questions	**C = Communication**
COL = Collaboration	**SN = Social Networks**

Sample Questions and Possible Prompts

"To get started, please state your name and your position in the district"

Background

1. Tell me about your work and your experiences here in the district? **(BQ)**
    a. *Possible Probe: What are the primary responsibilities in your role?*
    b. *Possible Probe: What is your educational and work background?*
    c. *Possible Probe: What motivations/values inform or ground your work?*

2. When did you join the district and why? **(BQ)**
    a. *Probe: What do value most about working here?*

3. What are some district goals that are related to improving outcomes for historically marginalized populations?**(OAQ, C, PI, COL)**
    a. ***Probe:*** *How do district leaders work together to establish goals?* **(PI, COL)**

4. How are turnaround priorities communicated? **(OAQ, C, PI, COL)**

5. Some policies that we work on in education happen as a result of external pressure, either from state or national agencies. Other policies are internally driven by the people working directly in the district or the community. What internal and external policies are you currently focusing on? **(PI, C, COL)**
    a. *Possible Probe: How and why did you decide to enact these specific policies?*
    b. *Possible Probe: How do external policy demands fit or not fit with your local district goal*s?
    c. *Possible Probe*: *How do external policy demands fit or not with your personal values and beliefs about goals for schools, districts, and traditionally marginalized and underserved students?*

6. How do you and your colleagues work together to implement these policies? **(PI, C, COL)**
    a. *Possible Probe: How and why did you decide to enact these specific policies?*
    b. *Possible Probe: How do external policy demands fit or not fit with your local district goal*s?
    c. *Possible Probe*: *How do external policy demands fit or not with your personal values and beliefs about goals for schools, districts, and traditionally marginalized and underserved students?*

7. How do you and your colleagues in the central office work to balance external policy demands with internal goals? **(PI)**
    a. *Possible Probe: How have you adapted or reshaped external policy demands to fit your internal district goals?*
    b. *Possible Probe: How do you work with building level leaders to negotiate this fit and navigate possible tensions?*

8. What are the ways that you talk in the district about underserved or marginalized students? **(C)** or What language or discourse do you use when you talk about or discuss underserved or marginalized students? How does the discourse vary according to the audience?
    a. *Possible Probe: What kinds of language does the district use?*
    b. *Possible Probe: What message do you think underserved or marginalized students hear?* **(C)**
    c. *Possible Probe: Why, tell me more?*
    d. *Possible Probe: What message do you think underserved or marginalized families hear?* **(C)**
    e. *Possible Probe: Why, tell me more?*
    f. *Possible Probe: What message do you think teachers hear?* **(C)**

Relational Ties/Collaboration

9. With whom do you work with and/or interact with on a day-to-day basis? **(SN)**
    a. ***Probe:*** *How often do you interact (people stated in answer) - daily, weekly, monthly?*
    b. *Who do you turn to most on the central office leadership team? How often?*

10. Who are the people [internal and external] to whom you turn for advice related to the district's goals and efforts? **(SN, PI, C, COL)**

11. *Who are the [internal and external] people who turn to you for advice related to the* district's goals and efforts?
    Note: *for each relational tie determine closeness, duration, and frequency to determine the strength of tie.*

12. Share a time when you needed professional advice about your work tied to supporting marginalized students in the district? Why did you decide [internal or external] to seek advice? **(SN, C)**

Collaboration

13. We know from reading the turnaround plan that professional collaboration is a priority area. What does this look like at the central office? **(COL)**

14. When collaborating with central office colleagues, what processes or strategies would you say work well or support your efforts to collaborate? **(COL)**

15. What are some challenges you face when collaborating with central office colleagues? **(COL)**
    a. *Possible Probe: How might your current collaborative structure be improved?*

16. Provide a few examples of what you have done to build the capacity of the schools in order to better support marginalized populations? (**COL, C)**
    a. *Possible Probe: Of the processes or strategies you have tried, what has worked effectively? Why have these strategies or processes worked? What has not worked and why?*
    b. *Possible Probe: What efforts have been abandoned or are unsustainable?*

Closing Remarks

17. Is there anything else you would like to share? Is there anything else that I should know?

"Thank you for your time and participation in this study. Our plan is to interview each member of the leadership team. Again, all of the data collected and everything you said will be kept confidential. Over the next few months, we will be analyzing the data. If I have other questions, is it okay for me to contact you to schedule additional time? After we generate our findings for the study, we plan to share them with the district. Likely this will occur in the early spring."

Appendix B

Pre-Observation Checklist

Observation Checklist (Creswell, 2013, p. 217)			
	Did you gain permission to study this site?		Will you develop rapport with individuals at the site?
	Do you know your role as the observer?		Will your observation change from broad to narrow?
	Do you have a means for recording field notes such as an observational protocol?		Will you take limited notes at first?
	Do you know what you will observe first?		Will you take both descriptive as well as reflective field notes?
	Will you enter and leave the site slowly, so as not to disturb the setting?		Will you describe in complete sentences so that you have detailed field notes?
	Will you make multiple observations over time?		Did you thank our participants at the site?

Appendix C

Observation Protocol

Observation Field notes:		Date:
Setting:		
Participants (if applicable):		
Observer:		Role of Observer:
Start Time:		End Time:
Time	**Descriptive Notes**	**Reflective Notes** (insights, hunches, themes)

Appendix D

Interview Protocol Refinement: Phase 1

Phase 1: Ensure interview questions are aligned with research question of whole DIP and individual research studies.

Check the box to map the interview questions to the research topics/questions.

	Background	Overarching	Collaboration	Policy Implementation	Communication	Social Networks
Question 1						
Question 2						
Question 3						
Question 4						
Question 5						
Question 6						
Question 7						
Question 8						
Question 9						
Question 10						
Question 11						
Question 12						

Appendix E

Interview Protocol Refinement: Feedback on the Interview Protocol

Mark yes or no for each item depending on whether you see that item present in the interview protocol. Provide feedback in the last column for items that can be improved.

Aspects of an Interview Protocol replicated from Castillo-Montoya, 2016, p. 825	**Yes**	**No**	**Feedback for Improvement**
Interview Protocol Structure			
Beginning questions are factual in nature			
Key questions are majority of the questions and are placed between beginning and ending questions			
Questions at the end of interview protocol are reflective and provide participant an opportunity to share closing comments			
A brief script throughout the interview protocol provides smooth transitions between topic areas			
Interviewer closes with expressed gratitude and any intents to stay connected or follow up			
Overall, interview is organized to promote conversational flow			
Writing of Interview Questions & Statements			
Questions/statements are free from spelling error(s)			
Only one question is asked at a time			
Most questions ask participants to describe experiences and feelings			
Questions are mostly open ended			
Questions are written in a non-judgmental manner			
Length of Interview Protocol			
All questions are needed Questions/statements are concise			
Comprehension			
Questions/statements are devoid of academic language			