How Central Office Administrators Organize Their Work in Support of Marginalized Student Populations: Advice Networks in a Turnaround District

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HOW CENTRAL OFFICE ADMINISTRATORS ORGANIZE THEIR WORK IN SUPPORT OF MARGINALIZED STUDENT POPULATIONS: ADVICE NETWORKS IN A TURNAROUND DISTRICT

Dissertation in Practice
By

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with
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Abstract

Title: How Central Office Administrators Organize Their Work in Support of Marginalized Student Populations: Advice Network in a Turnaround District

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Background: Examining the underlying social networks of a central office leadership team in a school district focused on accelerated improvement may provide insight into the organizational structures that support or constrain improvement efforts. 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 the goal of halving the achievement gap for all students.

Purpose and Research Questions: The purpose of this individual research study is to carefully examine and analyze the structure of social relations in a school district under sanction, aiming to answer the following research question: *How do social networks between and among district leaders relate to turnaround efforts designed to support marginalized populations?* **Methods:** This study applies social network theory of central office leadership and relationships within a public school district aimed to accelerate improvement and support traditionally marginalized students. The network boundary is limited to central office administrators. In concert with the Dissertation in Practice (DIP), this individual study was designed to be emergent and flexible. Data sources include semi-structured interviews and document review. **Findings:** This study found that day-to-day, central office administrators in one turnaround district, rely heavily on a high number of external ties. The advice network is highly centralized around two key players which may constrain the exchange of advice or knowledge and ultimately slows or inhibits efforts designed to improve outcomes for marginalized student populations. High personnel

turnover and lack of network stability are to be expected in a turnaround district, however, it has a ripple effect on the district's ability to establish systems and structures that facilitate accelerated improvement for marginalized student populations. **Significance.** Organizational change is often socially constructed. Understanding which actors have positive influences and positive social relations will ensure that formal and informal network roles are identified and maximized to their full potential. Social network analysis has the potential to provide school districts information regarding the capacity of central office administrators to implement accelerated improvements.

Keywords: central office administrators, social network, advice, turnaround, marginalized student populations

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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 include 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, district 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, 2013).

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 and 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 idea 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 rise (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, Simmons, Ritter, Gibbs, Rausch, Cuadrdo, and Chung (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, 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 underserved populations' outcomes. 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, Allen & Jean, 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 the first language, students with disabilities, and students living in poverty, and are manifested in academic achievement, special education referrals, inaccessibility to quality education, and the 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 have 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 holding schools accountable for progress toward goals. 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 embroiled 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 will be 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, 2006). 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 de-professionalizes 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 state 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 The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (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 Race to the Top (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 have changed to reflect the focus on instructional leadership. As 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 creating strong relationships with 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, Roberts & Campbell-Jones, 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, driving 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, 2009), 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, 2009). Specifically, we investigated how central office administrators organize their work in an 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, 2009) 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 (DESE) 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 DESE'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 Elementary and Secondary Education 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 a 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 and document review. Data collection began after district and IRB approval was obtained. The initial stages of research involved the review of the district's Level 5 turnaround plan, the District Review Report conducted by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), 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, 2003). 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) was 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 nine central office administrators designated as leadership according to the district website and confirmed by the district's project manager. The receiver/superintendent was appointed by the commissioner of education in 2015 when the district entered into turnaround status and was not connected to anyone on the leadership team. At the time this study was conducted, the central office administrative team was comprised of eight executive cabinet members, one who had worked in the district in various roles for twenty years and seven who have worked in the district for two years or less, two of which had worked with the receiver/superintendent in previous settings. Table 3 lists district-level leaders, including: the receiver/superintendent of schools, chief academic officer, chief of strategy and turnaround, chief of family and community engagement, chief talent officer, chief of pupil services, chief finance and operations officer, director of secondary education and pathways, and the executive director of schools.

Table 3

One-on-One Interview Participants

Central Office Administrators
Receiver/Superintendent of Schools
Chief Academic Officer
Chief of Strategy and Turnaround
Chief of Family and Community Engagement
Chief Talent Officer
Chief of Pupil Services
Chief Finance and Operations Officer
Director of Secondary Education & Pathways
Executive Director of Schools

Note: The district personnel selected for this study were those listed on the district's website as "Leadership" at the time this study was conducted.

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, 2003). 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, 2003). 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).

Document Review

To enrich the data collected in interviews, we also reviewed public and private records in a document review (Creswell, 2012). While the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) 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, district strategic goals, school improvement plans, meeting minutes, letters sent by central office administrators, and memos 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 began 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 was 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 dataset. 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 were 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 4 outlines initial categorical codes named as follows: background information;

overarching/general district information; collaboration; policy implementation; communication; and social networks.

Table 4

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 were 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 4. 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 were 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).

Document Analysis

Collected documents were utilized to triangulate data collected in interviews (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 was 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 was limited to one.

CHAPTER THREE

INDIVIDUAL STUDY: ADVICE NETWORKS IN A TURNAROUND DISTRICT

Summary Dissertation in Practice

There is overwhelming evidence that achievement in school is a predictor of engaged citizenship, earned wages, and later quality of life (Putnam, 2015; Ferguson, 2014; Rodriguez, Jones, Tittmann, & Wagman, 2015). Yet ethnic and racial disparities in the United States increasingly pervade education; they are evident in early childhood and persist throughout the K-12 education of students from racial and ethnic minority groups (American Psychological Association, 2012). National and local standardized test scores designed to assess academic achievement in reading, mathematics, and science reflect persistent achievement gaps. For example, minority students repeat one or more grades at a higher rate than white student. Disparities also appear in dropout and graduation rates, participation in gifted and talented programs, and enrollment in higher education. There is significant disproportionality in behavioral markers as well: from suspension and expulsion rates to involvement in the criminal justice system (Skiba, Horner, Chung, Rausch, May, & Tobin, 2011).

School district leaders face increased responsibility to partner with community entities and other schools to close achievement gaps and better support students (Honig, 2006). In most cases, district leaders in underperforming districts are tasked with developing and implementing complex, long-range improvement or turnaround plans at the school and/or district level (Mintrop & Trujillo, 2005, 2007). Such high stakes accountability reforms typically result in technical compliance, process, and structural changes to improve student performance.

Effective organizational improvement requires effective leadership that cultivates a culture of learning and growth for all (Edmonson, 2012). School districts today are under

immense pressure to improve at an accelerated rate. Leithwood, Seashore-Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004) compiled and analyzed evidence that proved leadership not only matters but among school-related factors, it is also second only to teaching. High-quality district leaders achieve impact at scale by relying on the collective knowledge and judgment of their central office leadership team (Murphy & Hallinger, 1988). Analysis of how district leaders organize their work in support of marginalized populations will provide insight for school improvement scholars and practitioners alike into how district leaders learn and improve outcomes across a school district.

Individual Research and Research Questions

Recent research suggests that paying attention to the relational linkages or social network ties between and among district leaders through which educational reform and improvement must flow may be critical to district-wide improvement (Coburn & Russell, 2008; Daly & Finnigan, 2010). In a 2006 meta-analysis, Waters and Marzano found a meaningful and significant correlation (.19) between district leadership and student achievement, suggesting that when schools possess effective central office leaders, student achievement improves across the district. Yet, recent scholarship argues that districts must pay attention to the social relations and informal networks of district improvement if they are to avoid intense accountability sanctions (McGrath & Krackhardt, 2003; Daly & Finnigan, 2010; Johnson & Chrispeels, 2010). Daly and Finnigan (2010) further argue that tending to relational ties during educational reform may be critical to school improvement, a claim that other recent scholarship has supported (Johnson & Chrispeels, 2010; Coburn & Russell, 2008; Moolenaar, Sleegers, & Daly, 2011). Therefore, examining the underlying social networks of a school district focused on improvement may provide insight into the organizational structures that support or constrain improvement efforts

(Daly & Finnigan, 2010).

In this research, social networks refer to the sets of relationships district leaders have with others in the school district (internal networks), as well as with individuals outside of the school district (external networks). Networks can differ in size, according to the number of contacts, and range, defined by the diversity of the contacts (Collins & Clark, 2003). Networks are also comprised of social ties, which can vary in strength between each actor. Tie strength, "an important dimension of social relations," (Pfeffer, 2008, p. 1) can be assessed along with frequency and types of interactions, regardless of whether the tie is reciprocated. Both strong and weak ties may benefit an organization, depending on the goals and targets for improvement (Collins & Clark, 2003; McGrath & Krackhardt, 2003; Pfeffer, 2008; Daly & Finnigan, 2010) and the internal or external nature of the network structure and social ties (Mintzberg, 1973, Hansen, 1999).

This individual qualitative study serves as one part of a collaborative group dissertation in practice (DIP). Both the individual and group studies take place in a Massachusetts public school district recently designated as a Level 5 district, and therefore in turnaround status. The purpose of this individual research study is to carefully examine and analyze the structure of social relations in a school district under sanction, aiming to answer the following research question: *How do social networks between and among district leaders relate to turnaround efforts designed to support marginalized populations?*

Slice to Whole DIP

Since understanding an organization's overall network structure can help district leaders support change and improvement strategies (McGrath & Krackhardt, 2003; Murphy & Meyers, 2008), the overarching aim of the combined qualitative study is to explore the interactions of

central office administrators working to support historically marginalized populations. The group DIP will be of value to researchers and practitioners, as both groups are interested in exploring ways to close persistent achievement gaps. The collective study focuses on leadership actions related to communication, collaboration, policy implementation, and social network ties between and among district leaders.

Recent research identifies the key role district leaders play in school improvement (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson & Wahlstrom, 2004; Waters & Marzano, 2006; Agullard & Goughnour, 2006). However, McGrath and Krackhardt (2003) argue that the significance of one person (unit leader) within an organization for implementing change is marginal. Rather, they suggest that both the district leader (i.e., superintendent) and the leadership team members play integral roles in "successful on-time implementation" of complex, large-scale change (p. 297). Therefore, a system-wide approach can improve outcomes for marginalized populations as well as districts. Modifying formal organization structures in support of greater collaboration, communication, and shared leadership in policy implementation often requires changes in social relationships (Daly & Finnigan, 2009; Coburn & Russell, 2008).

Massachusetts' school districts under receivership develop a system-wide, three-year turnaround plan designed to close achievement gaps and improve the district as a whole. The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) provides targeted support that is critical in improving outcomes for these low-performing districts. In addition to supportive conditions, scholars have suggested that reform efforts succeed when district leaders are strategically positioned to "broker resources" (Honig, 2008), knowledge, and ideas across the district, and to bridge between the district office and building leaders (Leithwood et al., 2004). Indeed, clear and consistent communication and networked collaboration result in greater

systemic cohesive policy implementation and goal attainment (Agullard & Goughnour, 2006).

In this research, I propose that, in order for districts to improve, it is critical that central office leaders make the needs of traditionally marginalized students the focus of their work (Ferguson, 2014; Theoharis, 2007), particularly by examining reform-related social networks (Daly & Finnigan, 2011; McGrath & Krackhardt, 2003; Krackhardt & Stern, 1988). The current literature abounds with examples that district office and building-level leadership network ties matter (Copland & Knapp, 2006; Daly & Finnigan, 2010; 2011; McGrath & Krackhardt, 2003) and play an important role in mediating reform resources (Honig 2006; Honig & Coburn, 2008).

Literature Review

To provide a foundation for this study, I review four key areas of the literature as it relates to this particular study: 1) the changing demographics of the child population in the United States and the challenges district leaders face in supporting marginalized student populations while under sanction/in turnaround status; 2) Massachusetts' turnaround efforts; 3) the importance of relational linkages or social ties between and among district leaders; and 4) the role of social networks in support of district reform.

Changing Student Demographics in the United States

Frey (2011) analyzed Census 2010 data and found that the child populations of new minorities, Hispanic and Asian, grew by 5.5 million, while the population of white children declined by 4.5 million. Additionally, Frey reports that, "ten states and 35 large metro areas now have minority white child populations" (Frey, 2011, p. 8). In the United States today, race, ethnicity, class, gender, and sexual orientation influence life chances (Massey, 2007). Student population disparities in education show up in early childhood settings 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 the age seventeen, the average white student scores approximately three years ahead of the average Black or Hispanic student. To address these educational disparities across racial, ethnic, linguistic, gender, and class, the United States educational system has undergone many reform initiatives. It is widely believed that school districts are responsible for creating the conditions for all students to succeed.

Although the growing diversity of America's children sets it apart from many other developed countries, it also poses challenges for our social and political systems including education (Frey, 2011). Along with increased diversity, the needs of students attending public schools are increasing. Language differences, special education, mental illness, and behavioral needs of students are increasing. Educational leaders must consider the needs of all students, and should be particularly attuned to how their improvement strategies and decisions effect historically marginalized students.

Massachusetts' Turnaround Efforts

In recent years, Massachusetts has embarked upon an ambitious effort to turn around its lowest-performing schools and close persistent achievement gaps. In 2010, Massachusetts identified its first cohort of 35 schools in need of significant improvement. After three years, 14 of the 35 identified schools made significant gains in student achievement and attained their measurable annual goals. Another four schools demonstrated similar gains, making the combined number of schools that achieved "turnaround" in four years or less, 18 out of 35. This accomplishment is documented in a recent mixed-methods study conducted by American Institutes for Research (AIR), which found that, measured by improved student achievement, the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's (DESE's) ongoing

commitment to improving supports provided to all schools, and to the lowest performing schools in particular, is generally working (Stein, Therriault, Kistner, Auchstetter, & Melchior, 2016; LiCalsi & García Píriz, 2016). As Stein, Therriault, Kistner, Auchstetter, and Melchior (2016) noted, one aspect of this accelerated success in Massachusetts turnaround districts was the development of district systems designed to directly support, monitor, and sustain improvement efforts. Daly and Finnigan (2010) claim that "overreliance on reforms focused on technical compliance and a lack of attention to the social relations and informal networks that mediate school and district improvement," (p. 40) along with high stakes accountability measures, may limit a district's ability to facilitate the complex changes necessary to bring about effective district turnaround.

Importance of Relational Linkages

Relational linkages or social ties may facilitate or constrain district-wide improvement efforts, however, the social constructs of organizational reform are often ignored (Daly & Finnigan, 2010). For this reason, district leadership warrants more attention to both internal and external leadership relationship networks. Understanding underlying reform-related social networks in districts focused on accelerated improvement (Collins & Clark, 2003; Honig 2006; Honig & Coburn, 2008; Copland & Knapp, 2006) may provide insight as to how these linkages support or constrain the development of sustainable transformation (Murphy & Meyers, 2008). The social network structures, relational linkages, and social ties between and among key actors within an organization may vary based on the short-term and/or long-term goals of an organization. These networks may play a critical role in identifying strategies and practices that will enable district leaders to better support marginalized student populations and strive toward the goal of halving the achievement gap for all students (Massachusetts' System for

Differentiated Recognition, Accountability, & Support, 2015).

Rapidly changing demographics and students' needs pose various challenges for district leaders (American Psychology Association, 2012). As district leaders in Massachusetts struggle to support rapidly changing student populations, they may enter into turnaround status leading to an influx of new internal and external leadership (Accountability, Partnerships and Targeted Assistance, 2017). By analyzing the social networks between and among district leaders in one specific Massachusetts' turnaround school district, this study makes a unique contribution, building on prior research related to network relationships, district accountability, and reform efforts. Specifically, I hope to be able to address the way networks inform the improvement process. Developing a deep understanding of network structure can describe different types of communication patterns and relationships and how those patterns and relationships impact performance.

The Role of Social Networks in Support of District Reform

Social network analysis allows us to investigate just how much significance social networks and relations hold, as there is already ample and growing support for the claim that relationships and organizational position matter. Whom an individual knows and to whom h/she are connected can affect that person's power and influence. Tie strength defined as information sharing connections between people is measured by closeness, frequency, and duration of the relationship (McGrath & Krackhardt, 2003; Daly & Finnigan, 2010). Since the strength of a social tie is an important dimension of social relations (Hansen, 1999) and can impact the effectiveness of reform efforts (Bryk & Schneider, 2002), understanding the role of an organization's overall network structure and perspective can inform central office leadership as they work to support successful change (McGrath & Krackhardt, 2003; Hite, Williams, &

Baugh, 2005).

Multiple networks often exist in educational organizations, and they vary based on boundary specifications, district goals, internal and external relationships, and other varying factors. Hite and colleagues (2005) note, "a relationship between two administrators may entail several types of content flow" (p. 98). Indeed, a variety of different content flows and network boundaries may exist at different times and for different purposes. Intuitively, it makes sense that multiple networks would exist in an organization and that networks would be nimble and responsive to one's immediate needs. For example, if a district administrator is working to strengthen a specific aspect of the district's curriculum and/or instruction, to demonstrate success they may need to utilize a variety of information flows to network internal and/or external relationships. In the context of school improvement, multiple social networks exist, yet most of the literature regarding education and social networks focus on one network at a time.

Table 5 outlines multiple network relationships that central office leaders may need to develop depending upon the task, goal, and existing level of knowledge and skill (Hite et al, 2005).

Table 5

Network Information Flow Examples

Relationship/Network	Type of Flow	Purpose
An administrator calls on another district administrator/expert for advice in an area in need of improvement or development.	Communication flow	Advice Information
A colleague reinforces another colleague's thinking/plan.	Normative flow	Encouragement Innovation
A colleague may connect another colleague with a friend or someone who has been an innovator in the area of need.	Normative flow	Encouragement Innovation
A colleague connects another colleague with an external expert.	Exchange flow	Use of written materials/resources
A colleague may set up a meeting with either an internal or external expert that they have an existing relationship with another colleague.	Status flow	Broker meetings Use of name/reputation

Social networks are idiosyncratic (Collins & Clark, 2003), and there are conflicting views about what kinds of networks can yield positive change. Sociological theory offers two different views. Coleman's view (1988) focuses on the quality of relationships (strong ties), while Burt (1997, 2004) argues that a sparse network with many structural holes provides access to rich sources of new information (Keegan, 1974) and sparks innovation. McGrath and Krackhardt (2003), "suggest that there are different and occasionally conflicting network conditions for change" (p. 325), and Argyris and Schön (1978) teach us that, for successful change to occur, you must first change people's awareness, attitudes, and beliefs about the change. Rogers (1995)

likewise reminds us that change is a dynamic process of social influence. Taking a middle ground position, Rost (2011) claims that Burt's social capital theory complements Coleman's theory, and, like McGrath and Krackhardt, argues that a combination of network structures and tie strengths helps or hinders organizational change.

Dependent upon a district's goals and efforts, and similar to information flow, different social tie strengths may be needed and may prove beneficial to targeted improvement efforts. Interestingly, organizations need both strong and weak ties, as they facilitate access to different kinds of information and stimulate different outcomes (McGrath & Krackhardt, 2003; Daly & Finnigan, 2010, 2011; Pfeffer, 2008; Rost, 2010; Moolenaar, Daly, & Sleegers, 2011). Existing research on social networks suggests that analyzing social ties may provide critical information regarding a district's capacity to change, adding an important step to the improvement process (Daly & Finnigan, 2010). Table 6 organizes some of the various configurations and outcomes of network structure and tie strength.

Table 6

Social Network Models for Change

Tie Strength	Internal Network	External Network
Weak Ties	Promotes innovation (Hansen, 1999)	Promotes innovation (Hansen, 1999; Moolenaar et al, 2011)
	Increases access to information	Increases access to information
		More diverse information
	Less redundant information	Less redundant information
Strong Ties	Squash innovation (Hansen, 1999)	
		Rich source of new information (Keegan, 1974)
	Associated with low-conflict	
	Reinforce status quo; maximize internal information (Mintzberg, 1973)	
	Sensitive and complex information can lead to innovation (competitive advantage)	
		Increased organizational performance (Collins & Clark, 2003)
	Generate more investment - transfer of tacit, non-routine and complex knowledge (Hansen, 1999)	

Given the remarkable variance in district cultures and context (Bryk, Gomez, Grunow, & LeMahieu, 2016), I argue that schools' social networks play a key role in managing and determining effective change. Public education in the United States faces immense pressure to improve instruction amidst rapid and widespread change. Staff recruitment and retention are one

of many challenges facing district leaders as their role has shifted from traditional operations and management to instructional leadership and community engagement. A deep understanding of formal network structures and informal social networks can serve as a source of support and create social pressure (McGrath & Krackhardt, 2003), which can aid in organizational improvement, such as policy and program implementation, effective teaming, and resource attainment and allocation. Improvement requires change; better understanding the internal and external social networks and human relations in an organization allows decision-makers to lean into the variance and maximize social capital, ultimately leading to knowledge, innovation, and sustainable change (Bryk, Gomez, Grunow, & LeMahieu, 2016; Daly, 2010, McGrath & Krackhardt, 2003; Collins & Clark, 2003).

District leaders hold positions that can influence the overall effectiveness of an organization (Leithwood, Seashore-Louis, & Wahlstrom, 2004). Understanding the network structure enables leadership to know if and how critical information is shared across the district. For example, are individuals with key information central in the informal network structures? Do informal networks mirror the formal networks? Furthermore, knowing who in the district is going to whom for critical information and with what frequency allows district leaders to go to the right people in order to drive improvement. In addition to understanding individuals' positions, understanding the entire network provides insight into where there may be bottlenecks of information flow. Given that turnaround districts have specific goals and timelines, monitoring this information flow may provide critical insights into the feasibility of goal attainment and positional efficacy, thus leading to increased positive outcomes for marginalized student populations.

Conceptual Framework

Social networks can be categorized by the exchange of ideas and information within the social relationship (Scott, 2000). Therefore, interactions between and among members of an organization influence the culture and structure of an organization. Social network structures may vary according to the resources that are being exchanged between and among district leaders (Moolenaar, Daly, & Sleegars, 2011; Hite, Williams, & Bough, 2005). Network theory suggests that relationships in organizations can be identified, examined, and measured on the basis of the content, structure, and strength of existing social ties, which matter for the organization (Daly, 2010; Hite et al., 2005; Daly & Finnigan, 2010; Pfeffer, 2008; McGrath & Krackhardt, 2003). This study applies social network theory of central office leadership and relationships within a public school district aimed to accelerate improvement and support traditionally marginalized students. Although the relationships between and among leadership social networks is a relatively understood area in education (Daly, 2010), attention to the role of network structure and tie strength provides insight into the role of leadership and the enactment of effective change.

Network Structure

The structure of a network influences how information, advice, and innovative ideas flow throughout a school district (Scott, 2000). This is crucial for organizational leaders and essential for district leaders working in a turnaround district where relationships may be undeveloped or rapidly changing due to shifting resources. Networks between and among district leaders create the structures that provide bridges that span boundaries between state and local officials as well as members within an organization such as building leaders and classroom teachers (Daly & Finnigan, 2010). When strong relationships exist, the network structure can serve as a conduit for

information and ideas, however available evidence suggests that well-intentioned efforts of district leaders may be hindered if the necessary relationships do not exist or are not accessible by key actors within the organization (Collins & Clark, 2003; Hite, Williams, & Bough, 2005; Rost, 2010). The network structure is comprised of the set of relationships between people. There is ample growing support for the claim that relationships are the main focus in social network analysis; therefore, it is the relationships between and among district leaders that must be captured in the data collection and measured (Daly, 2010; Hite et al., 2005; Scott, 2000). Two major strategies have been developed to capture those relational linkages or social ties, whole (or full) network analysis and egocentric (or ego network analysis).

Whole network structure. The whole network approach does not focus on any one person or actor in an organization; the researcher selects a specific set of actors (nodes) to serve as the population for the study (Daly, 2010). Then a small number of specific social ties are measured for each relationship (pair of nodes) in the selected population. Analysis of the whole network may reveal information regarding who has access to what resources and may reveal what content does not reach certain parts of the network or organization (Hite, Williams, & Bough, 2005).

Egocentric network structure. In an egocentric network approach, the researcher begins by selecting a sample of respondents (egos). Since the whole network will not be examined, the researcher is free to take a random sampling of egos from the whole network population (Daly, 2010; Scott, 2000). This perspective places a specific administrator at the center of the network and examines the structure of his/her direct ties with other administrators (direct network) and relationships between the administrator's direct ties (Whetten, 1981). Generally, egocentric network analysis compares the number of ties and the direction in which content or ideas flow in

each ego's direct network and the actual number of ties over the number of potential ties (Whetten, 1981).

A hybrid approach was used in this study, utilizing aspects of ego and whole network analysis. The sample of participants in the study is selected from a roster containing the formal central office administrators. However, a small number of ties including, advice seeking and day-to-day reliance were selected and analyzed from the two above mentioned perspectives, whole network, and egocentric network.

Methods

Study Site and Participants

The site for this qualitative case study was a turnaround district under receivership in Massachusetts, and the target population included district level leaders referred to as central office administrators for the purpose of this study. This study focused solely on administrators, rather than teachers, in an effort to understand the district office leadership networks and their social ties or linkages (Honig, 2006; Honig & Coburn, 2008; Daly & Finnigan, 2010). District leaders play an integral role in mediating high stakes reform efforts and developing a sustainable change in underperforming districts (Murphy & Meyers, 2008).

Data Collection

This individual study serves as one slice of a four team-member Dissertation in Practice (DIP). In concert with the DIP, this individual study was designed to be emergent and flexible, a characteristic of qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Data sources included semi-structured interviews and document review. Data collection began with individual interviews of district-level administrators, which serve as the primary data source. Follow-up observations and a document review were also conducted to triangulate information collected in the interviews

and enrich the data (Yin, 2009), as well as allow us to respond to changing conditions in the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), such as participant availability.

Document review. A review of selected documents allowed for historical, supplemental data analysis in support of the semi-structured interviews and provided background information on policy enactment and implementation in the district. Of particular interest to the researcher was the district's three-year turnaround plan, which designates priority areas for targeted improvement. Organizational charts, an end of year reflection letter from the district receiver/superintendent, and the FY18 operating budget were also reviewed. A review of these documents provided the researcher with a retrospective look at the formal organizational structures (e.g. departmental organization, reorganization, workflow, meeting structures, etc.) and district priorities influencing the social networks between and among district leaders. Additionally, these documents provided the researcher with insight into the district's benchmarks and vision for the future.

Semi-structured interviews. Interviews followed a semi-structured protocol (e.g., Merriam, 2009; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Weiss, 1995) provided in Appendix A, which involved actors in formal district leadership positions as identified on the district's website and shown in Table 7. The network boundary of central office administrators in this turnaround district provided a relevant and well-defined network, members were easily identifiable on the district website and confirmed by the district's project manager. The nine confirmed members were interviewed, however, one of the interviewees, a school supervisor, clearly stated, "...I'm the only one that is not at the central office" (personal communication, November 10, 2017) therefore, that interview data has been excluded from my analysis.

Table 7

One-on-One Interview Participants

Central Office Administrators
Receiver/Superintendent of Schools
Chief Academic Officer
Chief of Strategy and Turnaround
Chief of Family and Community Engagement
Chief Talent Officer
Chief of Pupil Services
Chief Finance and Operations Officer
Director of Secondary Education & Pathways
Executive Director of Schools

Note: The district personnel selected for this study were those listed on the district's website as "Leadership" at the time this study was conducted.

Before beginning the interviews, the district was provided with our research proposal and participants were informed of our interest in how central office administrators interact and carry out their work in support of the district's historically marginalized population. Participants were also informed that they would remain anonymous and that their insights, taken together, may lead to recommendations for the district and the field at large. Most interviews lasted approximately 45-60 minutes, and follow-up communications were conducted via email. All interviews were recorded and transcribed by the interviewer, who also took notes during the interview on nonverbal behaviors. All of the data collected was equally shared among the research team and each researcher had full access to audio files, clean transcripts, and coding manuals. Each researcher maintained a research journal and process memo while coding and analyzing data.

Our semi-structured interview protocol (see Appendix A) specifically addressed how policy is implemented in the district, the language/message about marginalized students, how administrators work together and collaborate, and the extent to which the district's leadership social, advice, and information networks facilitate turnaround efforts and goals. To ensure descriptive data, interview questions were opened-ended. If more detail was needed, follow-up questions and probes were identified for each question (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Each researcher had the liberty to adjust the order of the questions dependent upon the flow of the interview.

Included in the interview questions specific to this individual study are two sociometric questions intended to measure the respondent's leadership advice-seeking behavior: "Who are the people you turn to for leadership related to the turnaround plan?" and "Who are the people you turn to for advice related to implementation of the turnaround plan?" Probes were used to encourage participants to list both internal and external actors. Additionally, participants were asked to name their central office colleagues and describe their relationship with them along with their formal position/role. District leaders were also asked to indicate who they interact with on a day-to-day basis to achieve their tasks. The interviewer could have chosen to use probes to learn about closeness, the frequency of interactions, and duration of the relationships. I indexed socio-metric questions utilizing two network indices including centrality and density.

Measures

Centrality. There are three most common measures of centrality: degree, closeness, and betweenness (Freeman, 1979). I will restrict my analysis to degree which comes in two forms, indegree and outdegree. The indegree of an actor in a network is the number of other people who choose to come to that actor in a particular relationship such as advice. Outdegree is the number

of people chosen by the actor. The indegree and outdegree of an individual actor is a good indicator of the informal status that individual holds within an organization.

Density. Density can be an important indicator of network health and effectiveness. Density measures were used to determine the percentage of frequent ties within the advice and dependence network: the density of the network is the total number of actual connections between actors divided by the number of possible connections (Scott & Carrington, 2011). A density of one, the highest possible level, would indicate that every person within the network is connected to every other person along the network measure of interest. In contrast, a density of zero, the lowest possible level, would mean that no one in the network is connected.

Data Analysis

Interview data analysis. Interview responses were used to explore patterns of interaction amongst, and perceptions of, administrators' informal leadership roles in the district. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim using Rev, a mobile application and transcription service. The transcription data were coded with the aid of Dedoose, a qualitative data analysis software package. First analysis began with the thematic areas outlined in the theoretical framework and coding manual; this analysis was inductive and allowed 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). Initial codes were defined in the coding manual along with specific examples (see Appendix B). Once initial codes were set, interview data were analyzed using a constant comparative analysis method (Creswell, 2012) to check and recheck emerging themes (Patton, 1990). In order to ensure trustworthy interpretations, some member-checking procedures, via email, were utilized as emerging themes developed (Creswell, 2012; Miles and Huberman, 1994).

Social network analysis. Network models may be used to test theories about relational processes or structures. Such theories posit specific structural outcomes which then may be evaluated against observed or reported network data. For example, suppose one posits that tendencies toward reciprocation of support or exchange of information between central office administrators in a school district should arise frequently. Such a supposition can be tested by adopting a statistical model and studying how frequently such tendencies arise empirically (Wasserman & Faust, 1994).

In this analysis, I rely on several network measures to examine the formal and informal district structure and advice-seeking networks that facilitate the work of implementing the district's turnaround plan (Daly, 2010). Using the sociometric data provided through the interview process, the degree of centrality was calculated first. Degree centrality is the simplest way to determine the most central actors in a network and is measured in two ways: in-degree centrality and out-degree centrality (Daly, 2010; Scott & Carrington, 2011).

To further examine the role of formal district leaders in a district focused on accelerated improvement, we considered these individuals' betweenness measures. Betweenness centrality measures the number of times an individual acts as a bridge along the shortest path between two other individuals (Daly, 2010; Scott & Carrington, 2011). This measure can quantify the control of one individual over the communication between others in a network (Linton, 1977; Daly, 2010, Scott & Carrington, 2011).

Uniquely, this study focused not only on the structure of multiple networks between and among district leaders, but also on various forms of information flow in a district focused on generating accelerated improvement for traditionally marginalized student populations. Examining social networks between and among central office administrators provides insight

into what leads to effective use of time and resources, particularly when accelerated improvement is critical. Individual networks were analyzed using a descriptive analysis (Yin, 2009) of semi-structured interview data to provide a qualitative description of the various roles central office administrators play within the organization. Using network theory, a software package, ORA-LITE, was used to analyze the collected social network data (Scott & Carrington, 2011). For each distinct network, the structures of both the egocentric networks and the whole network were analyzed (Daly, 2010, Hite, Williams, & Bough, 2005). Each analysis focused on the size, density, strength of ties, and directionality. The structure of each network was individually analyzed and then compared to determine descriptive and structural similarities and differences. Examining social networks in a district focused on accelerated educational improvement may provide insight into how relational structures support or constrain reform efforts.

Coding and data conversion. A multi-step process was developed based on an adapted version of McKether, Gluesing, & Riopelle's (2009) five-step process. This process is used to convert narrative interview data into numerical data for social network analysis. The interview data was converted and analyzed following these steps: 1) record and transcribe interviews using Rev, and store interviews; 2) clean and prepare data for importing into Dedoose and Google Drive; 3) import and code the interview transcriptions in Dedoose and Google Drive; 4) create a Dedoose and Google Sheet data extract; and, 5) use ORA-LITE to create datasets and ORA Visualizer to create network maps that combine node attributes with tie information. See Appendix C for a more detailed outline of this five-step conversion process.

Document analysis. Collected documents, such as the district turnaround plan, organizational charts, and the FY18 Annual Fiscal Report were utilized to support and clarify

data collected in interviews (Creswell, 2012). This process of corroborating evidence supported the broad themes determined and enhanced the accuracy of the study. Analysis of the district turnaround plan allowed the researcher to better understand designated priority areas, examine individual interactions and networks, and therefore understand the social ties of district leaders in support of the district's improvement efforts. Document analysis, coupled with the social network analysis, provided insight as to how social networks influence the work of central office administrators to set, implement, execute, and monitor district goals designed to support their traditionally marginalized student population.

Limitations

There are several limitations to this bound case study: 1) case study of one district; 2) bounded sample with the district; and 3) reliance on semi-structured interviews and document review. Although the semi-structured interviews and document review have provided insight into the social structure of a turnaround district in need of accelerated improvement, it is a case study of one district, which limits the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, this case study analyzed the social networks between and among central office administrators by only interviewing central office administrators, limiting the ability to fully analyze the directionality of external ties as well as other members within the organization such as directors, principals, teachers, and students. By focusing only on this tightly bounded sample, we may have underrepresented the connections between central office administrators and other key members of the organization. Finally, the individual study is one of four studies that collectively answer one overarching research question. Semi-structured interviews and document review were the agreed upon methods utilized across all four individual studies and in the collective study. In order to more accurately assess the social network in a school district, an online survey that is

comprised of distinct network and demographic questions generated from previous network research (Cross & Parker, 2004; Hite, Williams & Baugh, 2005) would be necessary. Despite these limitations, findings from this study provide valuable insight into the role network structure and social ties between and among central office administrators in one turnaround school district.

Findings

Three key findings of the district's central office leadership network emerged in this study. First, central office administrators rely heavily on various external ties day-to-day in addition to internal ties. Second, the overall structure of the district's leadership network is centralized around two key actors. Third, inconsistent organizational structure and leadership turnover limits and strains relational ties between and among central office administrators. The following section discusses these key findings based on analyses of semi-structured interviews and network data.

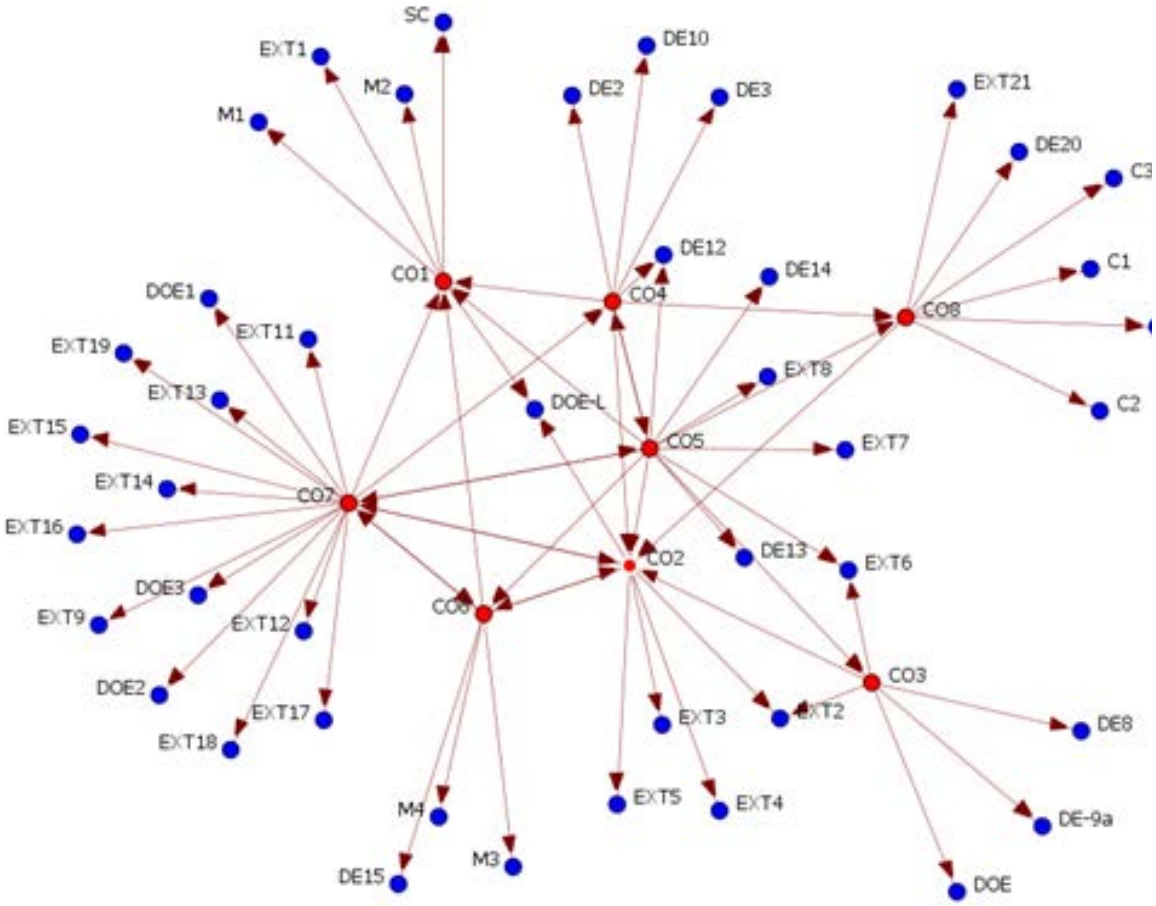
Finding 1: Dependence on External Ties

As shown in Figure 1, central office administrators in this district rely heavily on various external ties in day-to-day practice rather than internal ties. Social network dependencies occur when work processes are influenced by informal relational ties between actors. The maximum network density value is 1. This occurs when potential connections and actual network connections are equal, meaning no other connections could be made because the network is perfectly dense. However, in this study, although individual central office administrators have the highest degree of centrality, the network density (.019) is expectantly low when external actors are included. This is not surprising as external people are not expected to interact with each other. Additionally, as external actors were not interviewed, the high dependence between central office administrators and external actors may be a critical factor in the low density of the

whole network structure. However, when examining the density of only central office administrators, the density is much higher, .65. Figure 1 shows with whom each internal node, coded by red circles, works or interacts on a day-to-day basis. It further shows how certain internal actors, such as CO7, rely more heavily than other actors on external relationships, whereas CO2 and CO5 are much more reliant on internal central office administrators on a daily basis. External node DOE-L lies on the shortest path between CO1 and CO2, acting as a bridge between these two highly connected internal actors.

Figure 1

Sociogram of Whole Network Structure - Dependence -
"With whom do you work with and/or interact with on a day-to-day basis?"



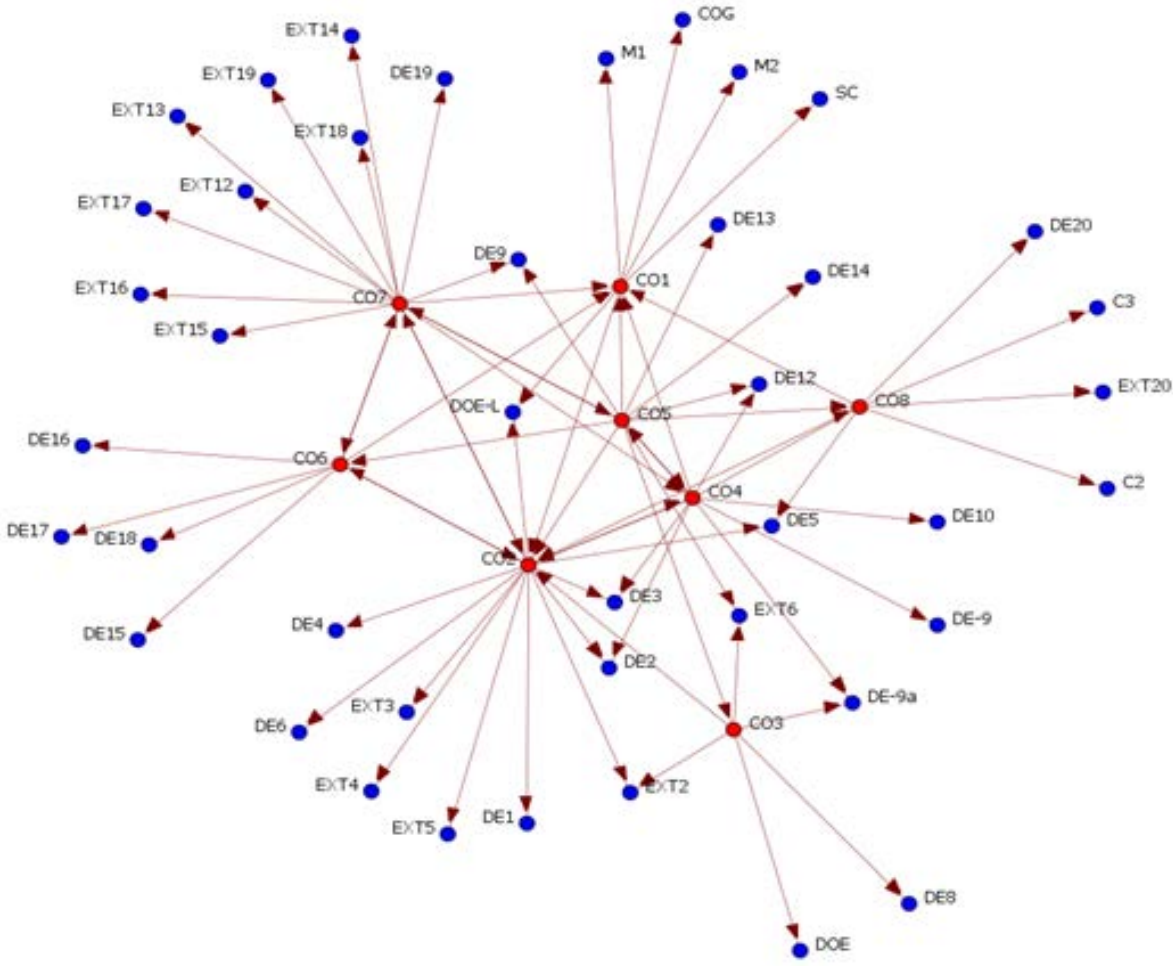
Note. Red nodes (i.e.., individuals) represent individual central office administrators while blue nodes represent external actors. The arrows indicate the ties directed to the node. C = Colleague; CO = Central Office Administrator; DE = District Employee; DOE = Department of Education; EXT = External; M = Mentor

Similar to Figure 1, Figure 2 shows the sociogram of an advice network where again, frequent external advice ties exist between central office administrators and a variety of external partners. One central office administrator described relying on external partners for advice and knowledge while describing internal ties focused more on accountability and task monitoring. Another administrator described how they process internal meetings with external partners in order to strategize next steps. One central office administrator described an example of a conversation with an external partner saying they might call and say, "...this is what I'm thinking, but how could I better set us up for more success?" Another central office administrator described their job as, "pretty lonely" when speaking about to whom they turn for advice related to the turnaround efforts and goals.

A close analysis of Figure 2 provides insight into who may be seen as keepers of knowledge and information specific to the district's turnaround goals and efforts. It also allows us to think specifically about roles and responsibilities. For example, CO2 is often asked for advice from others within the district while also seeking outside advice from external partners. This leads us to believe that this actor is highly influential in the organization, where CO3 is much more isolated. Looking at CO5, we notice the closeness of this node's connections in relation to other influential actors in the network. Understanding these nuances will facilitate efficiencies and accelerate improved outcomes for marginalized student populations.

Figure 2

Sociogram of Advice Network Structure -
"Who are the people internally or externally, to whom you turn to for advice related to the district's goals and efforts?"



Note. Red nodes (i.e.., individuals) represent individual central office administrators while blue nodes represent external actors. The arrows indicate the ties directed to the node.
C = Colleague; CO = Central Office Administrator; DE = District Employee; DOE = Department of Education; EXT = External; M = Mentor

Summary

Frequent interactions that are not part of the organization's relational networks are not going to have the same effect as those that are (Krackhardt, 1992). However, someone, even an external partner, who understands the network/relational ties within the organization will be much more able to anticipate the challenges and facilitate accelerated improvement within the turnaround district.

Finding 2: Centralized Advice and Information Ties Related to Supporting Marginalized Student Populations

Centrality is an ego-centric measure, indicating a focus on individual actors as opposed to the network as a whole. Centrality indicates if an individual is influential in a network by providing insight into the number of connections a specific actor has. Degree centrality comes in two forms: indegree, who comes to you, and outdegree, to who do you go. The maximum centrality value is 1.00, indicating that for indegree every member of the network is coming to that actor. Conversely, the minimum value is zero, meaning that there are no connections. Figure 3 is a sociogram representing the central office administrators' advice network. Each circle in Figure 3 represents a node and each node represents an individual central office administrator. The arrows indicate the direction of the advice tie. Arrows pointing at a node show indegree and arrows pointing away from the node show outdegree.

Based on data from interview responses, CO2 and CO1 are the most central actors in this advice network. For example, CO2 has the highest advice network indegree of 0.86, meaning 6 central office administrators reported going to CO2 for advice, and an outdegree of 0.43, meaning CO2 went to 3 others in the network for advice.

Table 8 shows the indegree and outdegree measures, the paths in which advice flows, for

each central office administrator in this directed network. Additionally, Table 8 shows the unscaled or actual number of indegree and outdegree ties between and among central office administrators in this network. Outdegree is the number of ties each central office administrator directs to others, in this case, the number of central office administrators they go to for advice related to the district goals and efforts articulated in the district's turnaround plan. When explaining the way central office administrators organize their work and structure meetings, one central office administrator described CO2, as "our Chief General" then went on to say that CO2 is "at everything" and that CO2 is "just kind of a given" at most every meeting. When asked who comes to you for advice, one central office administrator stated, "Nobody." However, when I analyzed degree centrality, 5 central office administrators report going to this very person for advice. This example illustrates the importance of investigating assumptions and using network data as evidence in order to better understand communication patterns between and among central office administrators.

Table 8

Advice Centrality Measures - "Who are the [internal and external] people who turn to you for advice related to the district's goals and efforts?"

Network Member	In-Degree	In-Degree [unscaled]	Out-Degree	Out-Degree [unscaled]
CO1	0.714	5	0.143	1
CO2	0.857	6	0.429	3
CO3	0.143	1	0.143	1
CO4	0.429	3	0.571	4
CO5	0.286	2	1.000	7
CO6	0.286	2	0.429	3
CO7	0.429	3	0.429	3
CO8	0.286	2	0.286	2

Note. Centrality is measured in two forms: indegree and outdegree. The unscaled column shows the actual number of internal network connections.

Density, unlike centrality, is a network level measure indexed by taking the reported ties divided by the number of possible ties. In this case, it is an examination of the total central office network. The density of this central office network is .43. This measure incorporates the pattern of interdependence present throughout the central office. By examining all possible relationships in the central office network, this density measure captures the degree to which the team as a whole relies heavily on most of its members for advice. A measure of .43, plus the visual representation in Figure 3, tells us that there are consistent links of dependence but not all members go to each other for advice about their work tied to supporting marginalized student populations.

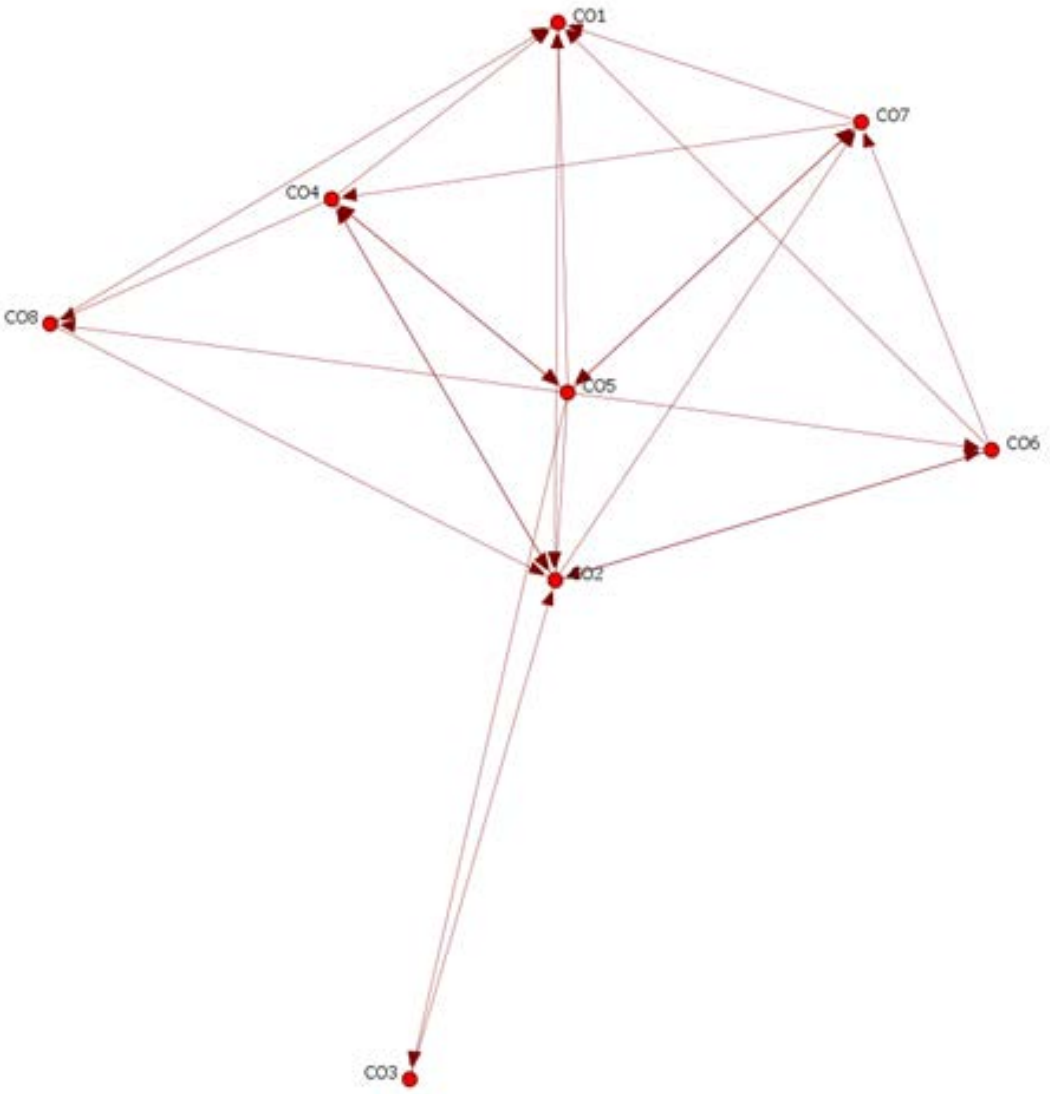


Figure 3. Advice Network: About Work Tied to Supporting Marginalized Students - Central Office Administrators

Summary

Above I examine both an ego level measure (i.e. centrality) and a network level measure (i.e. density). In terms of the ego level measure, understanding the degree centrality of individuals in the network informs organizations of who has exposure to the network and which actors have the opportunity to directly influence the work at hand. Dependent upon the task,

knowledge, and skills, it may be essential for different actors within an organization to be in positions of influence. Similarly, there may be specific actors designed to lead specific aspects of turnaround efforts or district goals, however, if they are not connected to the right actors in the network or not being accessed by actors within the network, district goals may not be realized.

Regarding the network level, calculating density by examining advice flow between and among central office administrators, captures the degree to which the team as a whole relies heavily on most of its members for advice related to goals and efforts that are specifically targeted to improving outcomes for marginalized student populations. A moderate network density of .43, tells us that not all central office administrators are going to each other for advice related to district goals. Analysis of degree centrality and network density may also provide insight into the informal network structures versus the formal, hierarchical, network structures.

Finding 3: Network Stability

Multiple interviewees made mention of the organizational and positional changes that have occurred since entering into receivership. Although pre-receivership organizational charts were not accessible at the time of this study, interview data suggest that the structure has changed multiple times since receivership in 2015. One central office administrator described the district's pre-receivership organizational structure and executive leadership team (central office administration) as "morphing" by stating, "...we morphed when [the Receiver] first came on, and he brought on a Chief of Staff, which is not a position we currently have..." The Receiver himself identified specific recruitment strategies designed to better meet the needs of underserved students in the district.

Figure 4 shows the formal pre-receiver organizational structure as reported by one central office administrator while Figure 5 illustrates the formal organizational structure of the central

office leadership team at the time the study was conducted. In Figure 4 the orange box represents the receiver and blue represent district-level administrators. The organizational chart in Figure 4 was developed by the researcher based on interview data describing pre-receivership cabinet positions. In Figure 5 the orange box represents the receiver, blue represent cabinet members (district-level), and green represents school level leaders. This figure was created by the researcher based on an organizational chart obtained from the district's website. Figure 4 and Figure 5 illustrate the structural shifts that have occurred in this network since undergoing receivership in 2015 to November 2017.

There is evidence that the instability of the internal structure may be impacting both the work of the central office leadership team and the district's abilities to make measurable progress toward their turnaround benchmark goals designed to improve outcomes for marginalized student populations. All study participants stated that systems and structures have changed several times since receivership in 2015. One administrator stated, "...not everybody knows who everybody is and what everybody does." Another administrator described the challenges central offices faces as, "...role definition and decision making authority..." and, "...being so unclear and ever-changing creates inefficiency." Conversely, the same administrator described the benefit of the organizational fluidity by expressing, "innovation and entrepreneurship are valued."

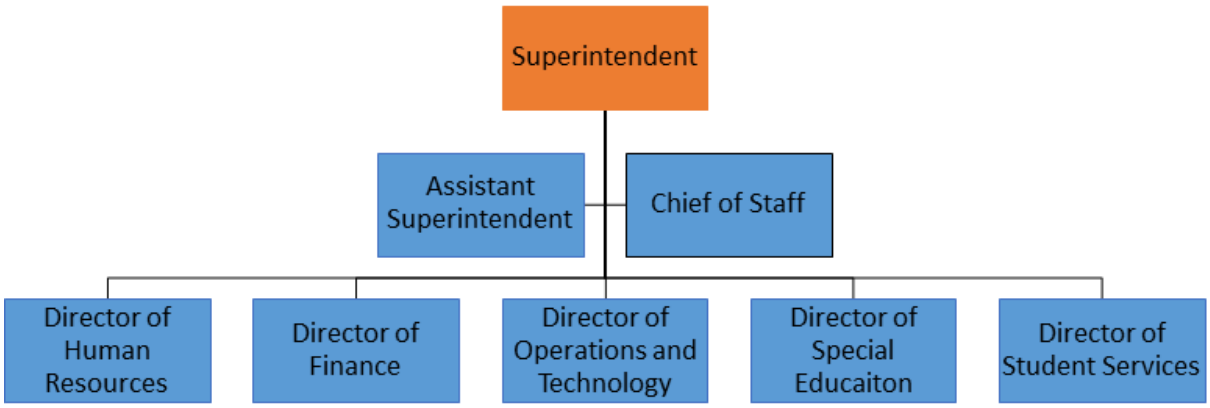


Figure 4. Formal Organizational Structure of Central Office Leadership Prior to Receivership in 2015.

As the turnaround priorities have evolved, additional positions such as Chief of Community Engagement and Chief Academic Officer were added while other central office leadership positions were reclassified, such as the Director of Special Education, which is now titled the Chief of Pupil Services. All finance and operations responsibilities now fall under the purview of the Chief Financial and Operations Officer in order to, as one respondent noted, "...combine a whole bunch of stuff on the operations side…" of the school district. Additionally, it was shared that there are further organizational structural shifts, in terms of meeting structures, scheduled to occur in the near future.

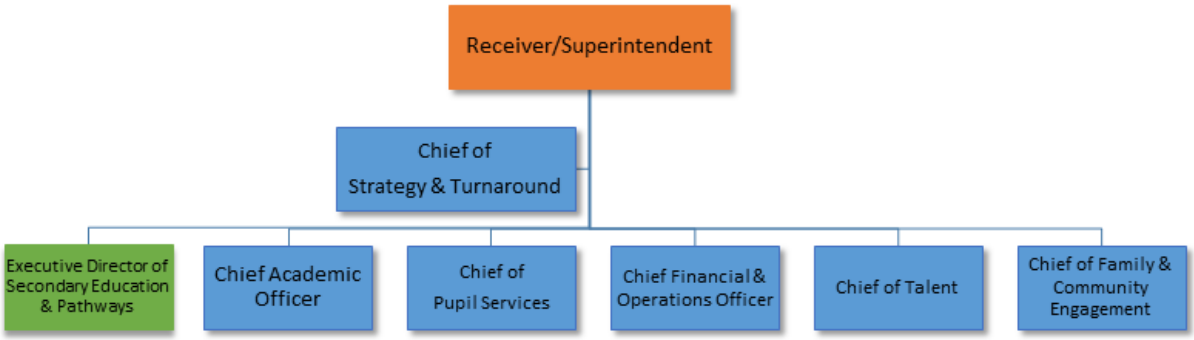


Figure 5. Formal Organizational Structure of Central Office Leadership - November 2017.

Summary

Maintaining a stable central office administrative team within a network can help individuals develop long-lasting interpersonal relationships leading to increased advice seeking and knowledge sharing behaviors. In this study, a fair amount of reconfiguration, including recruiting and hiring of new central office administrators, was apparent in the first two years of receivership. Although instability in a central office administrative team can slow progress, employee turnover is often inherent in turnaround school districts. One central office administrator described the strategy and process of reconfiguring the central office "cabinet" as intentionally hiring members who are, "...more representative of the population we serve, than what our schools look like." Some of the most recent hires include two Puerto Rican leaders, a Mexican leader, a Cuban leader, a balance of men and women, and people who are from the community as well as some who are not. The district is committed to "...hiring a staff that reflects who we serve." This strategy is aimed specifically at better serving traditionally

marginalized student populations which make up a significant portion of the school district's enrollment.

Discussion

Network mapping and analysis provide organizations access to an abundance of information pertaining to relationships, knowledge transfer, innovation, and structural efficiencies dependent upon the goals of the organization. Understanding the closeness, degree, and betweenness of social ties between and among critical district actors may accelerate improvement and enhance the overall health of the organization. Assessing role expectations with actual social patterns is a practice that has the potential to close opportunity gaps in public education.

The configuration of a network structure can determine the linkages or ties between and among various members. Organizational elements such as hierarchy, density, and connectivity effect relational ties, advice seeking patterns, and knowledge exchange (Krackhardt, 1992). The high rate of instability in this network has an impact on the ties between and among the district leaders as they work to achieve the goals outlined in the turnaround plan. As the organization becomes more stable, the network may become denser. Leadership is second only to effective teaching in impacting positive outcomes for students. Paying special attention to the density and the degree centrality will enable the organization to maximize its leadership potential.

What this study shows is that some of the key actors in the central office advice network were not being accessed by all members of the network. Depending on the role of these individuals, this could dramatically impact improvement efforts. Additionally, two key actors have a high in degree measure, meaning they are often sought out for advice, however, they rely on external actors for advice related to the district turnaround goals and efforts. Understanding

who is connected to whom and who has influence is critical to ensuring efficiency and effectiveness.

Personnel turnover is inherent in turnaround districts, particularly district level positions. Studying advice networks and other types of network flow allow an organization to better adapt to change by understanding who is connected to who and who has influence in the organization. Paying close attention to the network data can increase knowledge transfer and innovation among network members. Dependent upon the organization's goals, stronger or weaker connections may be beneficial. Stronger connections can lead to stability and status quo and weaker connections can lead to innovation and creativity.

In 2015, the district entered into turnaround status and a new receiver/superintendent, who was connected to no one in the district, was appointed by the Commissioner of Education. The current central office administrative team is comprised of eight executive cabinet members, one who has worked in the district in various roles for twenty years and seven who have worked in the district for two years or less, two of which had worked with the receiver/superintendent in previous settings. The transitional nature of the central office administrative team has left members feeling confused about role definition, decision making authority and processes. Protected time, focused on improving outcomes outlined in the districts signature benchmarks, will enable central office administrators to work and learn together. These shared learning experiences are necessary to establish and nurture relational ties among members. Inevitably, time is the number one barrier getting in the way of capitalizing on recurring meetings that occur within this consistent group of central office administrators. Therefore, it is critical that the central office team evaluates how they are currently utilizing meeting time and whether or not they are focusing on using the time together as an opportunity to learn together and create a

common understanding of the impact and success of their work. The current meeting structures have led to frustration and lack of clarity between and among central office administrators in this turnaround district. Understanding the underlying network structure can create a bridge to better understand and execute the improvement strategies outlined in the district turnaround plan and benchmark goals.

Areas for Future Research

The research on social networks suggests that this type of analysis may provide critical information regarding the capacity to change. School districts are primarily made up of people who serve people, interact with people, and design improvement processes to improve outcomes for people. Understanding the social networks within these organizations is paramount to ensuring that change leads to sustainable improvement. Attending to the scholarship on both leadership and social networks will aid school districts in carefully examining the alignment between perceptions of relationships and existing communication, advice, and knowledge. For example, an analysis of social networks between district leaders and school leaders may provide additional insight into supports and constraints related to targeted improvement efforts.

Organizational change is often socially constructed. Although leaders may perceive that they have a clear understanding of the social network of interactions around them, research suggests that their perceptions are not very accurate. While this study provided valuable insight into the networks at the district level, the restrictive nature of this study does not allow us to understand those perceptions or the direct impact these networks have on building leadership, classroom interactions, or student outcomes. As we study accelerated district improvement, we must not overlook the social constructs of organizational change. Future research should focus on the existence of relationships between central office leaders and school sites in a turnaround

setting. Examining underlying social networks and intentional efforts related to fostering and developing relationships, knowledge transfer, and innovation may provide insight into structures that support or constrain accelerated improvement efforts. Future research should utilize social network analysis, interviews, and surveys to examine how different network structures (i.e. whole network) in turnaround districts impact student outcomes and supports for marginalized student populations. Examining support patterns, communication, and knowledge network structures of central office leaders and site leaders in a turnaround setting will position district leaders to organize their work in ways that maximize organizational outcomes and enact system-wide improvement that closes opportunity and achievement gaps for all students.

Similarly, ties between and among school leaders not only provide insight into who is connected to who, but when aligned with student performance data, can shed light on patterns of evidence that may enable school and district leaders to better understand the benefits or shortfalls of targeted improvement efforts.

Conclusion

Change in public education is only effective when it leads to improved outcomes for students. As American public schools become more diverse and student needs become more complex, district leaders are being asked to do even more with less. It is imperative that we maximize our most valuable investment, our human resources to serve these needs most effectively. Understanding social networks and the roles that relational ties play in our improvement efforts will bring increased efficiencies and effectiveness to the field by allowing district leaders to empirically assess and monitor various aspects of the organization. Understanding which actors have positive influences and positive social relations will ensure that formal and informal network roles are identified and maximized to their full potential. I often

hear that “it’s all about relationships.” It’s time that public educators focus energy on developing strong, effective relationships by better understanding the relational ties within their organization. Only then will we be able to make organizational shifts that put the “right” people in the “right” places and ensure that we make improvements rather than just changes.

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 scaffold 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 scaffold 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 intersected may have been limited.

Another challenge to this approach was likely not unique to this district but could 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 reflection, 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 collectively, 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 scaffold 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 the 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 (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 de-professionalize 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 experienced feelings consistent with Theoharis' (2007) description of social justice leaders facing resistance and the emotional 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 revises 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 (DESE), 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 DESE 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 a 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 leveraged 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 collaboratively 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 (DESE, 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

Coding Manual

Code	Definition	Subcodes
Code 1. Tie strength Chp. 3, p. 98	Information sharing connections between people is measured by closeness, frequency, duration of the relationship (McGrath & Krackhardt, 2003; Daly & Finnigan, 2009	1.1: Strong tie 1.2: Weak tie
Code 2. Information flow Chp. 3, p. 99	A variety of different content flows and network boundaries may exist at different times and for different purposes (Hite et al, 2005)	2.1: Communication flow 2.2: Normative flow 2.3: Exchange flow 2.4: Status flow
Code 3. Network structure	Social network theory offers a useful and promising lens for better understanding and exploring numerous educational phenomena as work and change are ultimately conducted by and through individuals in formal and informal social systems (Daly, 2010).	3.1: Formal 3.2: Informal 3.3 Internal 3.4 External

Code 2 Aim: The intersection between theory and organizational learning is a promising intersection that may lead to better understanding the degree to which relations between actors and network structure facilitate or inhibit the process of the individual or organizational learning (count ties and assess the quality of exchanges over time).		
Code 2. Network Content	**Definition**	**Example**
Subcode 2.1: Communication flow	Advice Information	An administrator calls on another district administrator/expert for advice in an area in need of improvement or development.
Subcode 2.2: Normative flow	Encouragement Innovation Friendship/previous relationship	A colleague may connect another colleague with a friend or someone who has been an innovator in the area of need. A colleague reinforces another colleague's thinking/plan.
Subcode 2.3: Exchange flow	Use of written materials/resources Access to experts/resources	A colleague connects another colleague with an external expert.
Subcode 2.4: Status flow	Broker meetings Use of name/reputation	A colleague may set up a meeting with either an internal or external expert that they have an existing relationship with or another colleague.

Code 3 Aim: Examine the dynamic multidirectional interactions between formal structures and informal relations, which have the potential to either support or constrain the flow of resources (knowledge, expertise, advice, attitude, etc.)

Network structure: Social network theory offers a useful and promising lens for better understanding and exploring numerous educational phenomena as work and change are ultimately conducted by and through individuals in formal and informal social systems (Daly, 2010).

Code 3. Network structure	Definition	Example
Subcode 1: Formal	Much of the literature in educational reform focuses on formal structure Jobs outlined in an organizational chart	Traditional hierarchy (org chart) where the superintendent position denotes status and hierarchical superiority (Daly, 2010, ch. 14, p. 261)
Subcode 2: Informal	Informal interactions between educators as they go about their work improving instruction or engaging efforts of reform (Horn & Little, 2010)	Other actors play more influential roles

Appendix C

Coding and Data Conversion Process

Step 1: Record and Transcribe Interviews

All interviews are recorded and transcribed verbatim using Rev, a mobile application and transcription service. The data is stored using Google Drive for ease of accessibility by all DIP team members.

Step 2: Clean and Import Data

The transcribed interviews are cleaned and prepared for importing into the coding software Dedoose and Google Drive. Pauses, utterances, and repeated words that detract from the interview are removed prior to import.

Step 3: Import and Code

The transcription data is coded with the aid of a qualitative data analysis software package. We began with thematic areas from our theoretical framework, while also allowing for other themes to emerge. Once initial codes were set, researchers worked independently to identify evidence for a particular code (Creswell, 2013). Additionally, relation codes and node categories were developed to allow the node and link data to be generated and used as input files for the network analysis program ORA-LITE.

Step 4: Creating the Dedoose and Google Sheets Data Extract

Each interview was coded and each node and link relation code was assigned to a text segment; once the coding was completed, a protected Google Sheet was created using manual input.

Step 5: Create Datasets Using ORA-LITE and Network Maps Using the ORA Visualizer

A series of network maps were created in order to better understand the whole network, advice and information network structures, and egocentric networks. I first ran in-degree centrality to

determine the most central actors and a density measure to determine the percentage of frequent ties within the advice and information network: the density of the network is the number of connections between actors divided by the number of total possible connections (Scott, 2011).

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			