Central Office Leaders' Role in Supporting Principal Human Capital in a Turnaround District

Author: Eylem B. Icin

Boston College

Lynch School of Education

Department of Educational Administration and Higher Education

Professional School Administrators Program

CENTRAL OFFICE LEADERS' ROLE IN SUPPORTING PRINCIPAL HUMAN CAPITAL IN A TURNAROUND DISTRICT

Dissertation in Practice

by

EYLEM B. ICIN

with Julia James Carlson, Suzanne M. Charochak, Gregg T. Gilligan, and Sonia L. Tellier

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Eylem B. Icin

Dissertation Chairperson: Dr. Martin Scanlan

Dr. Nathaniel Brown (Reader)

Dr. Erin Nosek (Reader)

Abstract

This qualitative case study explored the role central office leaders played in recruiting, developing and retaining principal human capital in Lawrence Public Schools. One of the key strategies of central office transformation is the creation of assistance relationships with principals, which serves as the conceptual framework for this study. Data was gathered from interviews with central office leaders and principals as well as a document review. The results of the study found that central office leaders targeted principals with certain characteristics and recruited candidates from within and outside of the district. Central office leaders provided in-district professional development and engaged external organizations in the process. Work environment and a focus on cultivating local talent contributed to principal retention. Findings further indicated that the assistance relationships developed between central office leaders and principals contributed to principal development and retention through their impact on the work environment. Recommendations include continual examination of work environment and development of assistance relationships for their contribution to principal human capital. Future researchers may continue to contribute to the growing body of literature by examining these

findings and offering a longitudinal view of this practice. This strand's findings may provide insights into practices to recruit, develop and retain principals in low-performing districts.

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Introduction

In today's climate of accelerating reform, critical improvements in school-level performance cannot be realized without direct and intentional support from central office leaders (Honig, Copland, Rainey, Lorton, & Newton, 2010). In an effort to realize this change, central office leaders must shift their focus from management and operations to instructional leadership. Transforming the role of central office requires that the work practices of central office leaders be revolutionized to keep pace and adequately support school-level instructional leadership (Honig et al., 2010; Honig & Venkateswaran, 2012). The rapid rate at which educational leadership is changing underscores the need for dedicated research in this area.

Reform attempts have historically provided guidelines for states and districts to address the persistent challenges faced by underperforming schools (Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, & Luppesu, 2010; Duke, 2012). Current accountability measures require states to develop academic standards, assess all students annually in grades 3-8, measure growth for subgroups, and report achievement on a number of measures including performance, participation, graduation rates and attendance. These factors trigger actions for schools that fail to meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). Those classified into the lowest performing levels are designated turnaround schools and districts and may be subject to state takeover.

Despite the continued focus on the lowest performing schools, state and central office leaders have had little influence on improvement within and among schools (Berliner, 2011; Forte, 2010; Payne, 2008). Complex policies, inability to understand and interpret reform efforts, and the unintended consequences (e.g., curriculum narrowing and focus on test

[1] This chapter was collaboratively written by the authors listed and reflects the team approach of this project. Authors include Julia James Carlson, Suzanne Charochak, Gregg T. Gilligan, Eylem B. Icin, and Sonia L. Tellier.

preparation) of these accountability reforms hinder improvement efforts (Berliner, 2011; Hong & Youngs, 2008). Recent research on school improvement has largely focused on leadership styles and the responsibilities of principals and faculty (e.g., Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008; Marks & Printy, 2003). Less is known about the role of and interactions between central office leaders and principals. Related research situated in a turnaround context is even more scarce given the lower incidence of such a designation. Research on schools has not explicitly included the role of central office, and research on central office often does not include explicit consideration of school operations (Johnson & Chrispeels, 2010). In addition, there is less improvement at scale in cases when the central office is not deeply involved (Knapp, Honig, Pleacki, Portin, & Copland, 2014; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Walstrom, 2004; Ogawa, 1994).

In response to this identified gap, our overarching study sought to understand how central office leaders support principals as instructional leaders in a turnaround district. We examined five key turnaround components: autonomy and accountability, human capital, learning time, instructional expectations, and data use (Schueler, Goodman, & Deming, 2016; Riley, 2014; Riley & Chester, 2015). Our study focused on central office leaders' influence on principals' instructional leadership in a turnaround district. Each team member conducted an individual strand with specific research questions related to one aspect of this core focus (See Table 1.1).

Table 1.1

Turnaround Components

Components	***Team Member***
1. Autonomy and Accountability	Sue Charochak
2. Human Capital	Eylem B. Icin
3. Learning Time	Julia Carlson
4. Instructional Expectations	Gregg T. Gilligan
5. Data Use	Sonia L. Tellier

In Massachusetts, when a district is designated as Level 5, the Commissioner appoints a Receiver who is afforded the powers of a superintendent and provides him/her with autonomies to lead a successful turnaround effort while establishing a system of accountability for student outcomes. In theory, cultivating autonomy begins with a focus on human capital, namely, whether or not the leadership has the necessary competencies to ensure the instructional staff can advance student achievement. Similarly, central office leaders examine learning time opportunities to determine if the structure of the school schedule and calendar provide adequate opportunity for student learning. Then, central office leaders seek to develop a shared understanding of the importance of high expectations to ensure that they are in place within the schools. And finally, central office leaders gather evidence on student performance, analyze that data, and support shifts in instructional practice to foster student success.

Honig (2013) argues to realize the goals of today's extensive reform efforts central office leaders' must reconfigure how they support principals' instructional leadership (Honig). One of the key strategies of this central office transformation is the creation of assistance relationships with principals, which served as the conceptual framework for this overarching study. Honig (2008, 2012; Honig et al., 2010) theorized extensively about the nature of assistance

relationships. Honig (2008) describes these as distinct from mere activities of central office leaders coaching or providing information or resources to schools. Instead, drawing from sociocultural learning theory, Honig describes assistance relationships as occasions "in which participants more expert at particular practices model those practices and create valued identity structures, social opportunities, and tools that reinforce those models for more novice participants" (p. 634). Our team explored the actions of central office leaders that reflected enactment of the five high-quality practices of assistance relationships. These included differentiated supports, modeling of effective practice, use of tools, brokering and buffering, and development of networks (see Table 1.2).

Table 1.2

High-quality Practices of Assistance Relationships

Practice (Code)	*Description*
Differentiated Supports (DS)	Central office leaders tailor their approaches, including the amount of time spent with building administrators, the conversations in which they engage with them, and the tasks in which they support them. Supports are based upon experience, the needs of the principal and the issues specific to each school.
Modeling (M)	Central office leaders who frequently model for principals were identified as having a greater influence on the development of instructional leadership practices. In addition, those who paired reflective strategies with modeling increased the likelihood of positive reports regarding instructional leadership.
Use of Tools (UT)	Central office leaders utilize conceptual tools to promote new ways for principals to think, act and reflect on good instructional leadership practice. Tools included frameworks for quality teaching and learning, walkthrough and observation protocols, cycle-of-inquiry protocols, and data-based protocols to focus instructional leadership practices.
Brokering (BR)	Central office leaders provide new resources, increase understanding, and safeguard principals from external demands (e.g., reducing participation in district meetings, running interference or managing issues that might interfere with the genuine work of instructional leadership).
Networks (N)	Central office leaders facilitate principal engagement and support the improvement of professional practice through principal networks, which stimulate high-quality learning environments, fostering strengthened their instructional practices.

(Adapted from Honig et al., 2010)

Each individual strand within the overarching study of this dissertation in practice posed independent research questions, conducted a relevant literature review, and applied similar methodology. Each team member reported out on his/her findings.

Literature Review

The goal of improving educational outcomes for students in turnaround districts across the nation is an element of current educational reform. To provide a context for our study of how central office leaders support principals as instructional leaders in a turnaround district, we

reviewed three key bodies of literature. First, we examined reforms and accountability measures that address turnaround schools. Second, we considered literature on assistance relationships (Honig 2008, 2012; Honig et al., 2010) in the improvement of teaching and learning. Third, we reviewed the turnaround components necessary for improved student outcomes.

Turnaround Reform and Accountability

To understand a turnaround district, one must first understand the historical context of these reform efforts. Although early reform focused on access to public education for all students (*Brown v. Board of Education*, 1954), it was *A Nation at Risk* (NAR) (1983) that identified both the problems and complexities of our current education system. NAR characterized mediocrity in public schooling as a threat to the nation's future (Ravitch, 2010). While NAR promoted higher standards for high school graduation and college admission requirements, it ignored social and economic factors including poverty, housing, welfare and health. It likewise ignored the importance of early education on students' foundational skill development (Coleman et al., 1966; National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983; Ravitch). Despite these shortcomings, NAR focused public attention on education reform and led to the standards-based reform movement.

Federal policies and reform. Federal policy and reform aim to enact school improvement through a focus on accountability. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 introduced academic standards and annual requirements for states to test children in reading and math. From its inception, ESEA underwent seven legislative iterations, each designed with the intent of strengthening an accountability system that addresses student achievement (Forte, 2010). However, each subsequent reauthorization of ESEA has been unsuccessful at improving low-achieving schools due to a mismatch of the services prescribed and actual needs of schools as well as a lack of capacity of states to provide the necessary

supports to districts (Duke, 2012; Honig, 2013).

The first four reauthorizations aimed to provide services to poor and low-achieving students under Title I/Chapter I of the law (Bohrnstedt & O'Day, 2008). Three subsequent reauthorizations broadened the scope of the involvement of the federal government and leveraged funding to spark standards-based reform throughout the states. The Improving America's Schools Act (IASA) of 1994 outlined GOALS 2000, which targeted excellence in math and science (IASA). IASA required all districts to implement rigorous academic standards and held schools accountable for the achievement of these standards (Haertel & Herman, 2005; IASA; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2004).

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 was the primary impetus in the development of turnaround and radically transformed the accountability landscape for public schools (Cosner & Jones, 2016; Duke, 2012). NCLB was the first federal policy to mandate that *all* students in *all* schools were required to participate in high stakes testing and linked federal funds to strict accountability measures (Nichols & Valenzuela, 2013). The policy design, which included a rating of Annual Yearly Progress (AYP), provided heavy sanctions to districts and schools (Hursh, 2007; Jennings & Sohn, 2014). NCLB called for states to take responsibility for low-achieving schools and districts and to focus more attention and resources on the lowest performing schools and student subgroups. Under NCLB, schools and districts that failed to make AYP for over five years became subject increased sanctions, including takeover. In response to the requirements, states developed policies to address the urgency of turnaround and embedded in those policies specific strategies for raising achievement (Duke, 2012).

However, research suggests that accountability systems outlined in NCLB did not result in a decrease of the number of low-achieving schools (Berliner, 2011; Forte, 2010). Low performing schools became subject to tremendous pressure to address accountability and

improve student learning (Cosner & Jones, 2016). At the same time, these accountability provisions lessened the likelihood of enacting high-quality leadership practices (Finnegan & Daly, 2012).

The newest reauthorization of ESEA, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) (2015), requires states to develop policies and submit a plan outlining how each will provide comprehensive supports to the lowest-performing schools. The accountability sanctions defined in ESSA and the resulting plans formulated by individual states, including Massachusetts, will continue to transform the landscape of turnaround practices. What remains under ESSA is the framework for district accountability and the restructuring of the poorest performing (i.e., lowest 5%) schools and districts.

Education reform focused on raising standards in education. The importance of standardized curriculum and the introduction of standards-based reforms shifted the view that principals alone were responsible for school improvement (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2003). The increased attention to both school improvement and turnaround efforts extended the accountability measures from schools to districts and refocused reform on the role that leaders at both levels play (Leithwood, 2010). As a result, research began to examine the role of central office leaders in school improvement efforts (Spillane & Thompson, 1997; Togneri & Anderson, 2003).

Across states, accountability models vary (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2003). The US Department of Education, under the ESEA Flexibility Program, recommended states adopt a tiered system of accountability, focusing on the lowest performing schools (Duke, 2006; Wong & Shen, 2003). Within each reauthorization of ESEA, there remained a focus on the requirement for states to develop and maintain a statewide system for accountability (NCLB, 2001; ESSA, 2015). To better understand this shift, we now attend to specific accountability

measures in Massachusetts.

Massachusetts turnaround. The takeover process is articulated in the Massachusetts state accountability system and overseen by the Office of District and School Turnaround (ODST) (ODST, 2017; M.G.L. 603 CMR 2.06(1)(b)). The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) classifies schools and districts in five levels. The highest performing schools and districts are classified as Level 1, and the lowest performing schools and districts are classified as Level 5 (ODST, 2017). This classification, in turn, dictates a series of district and state actions designed to support school improvement efforts.

Schools and districts designated as Level 4 must create a Turnaround Plan. This plan outlines the redesign and improvement efforts in which they will engage to improve student achievement. Plans are reviewed at the end of two years, at which time a school's or district's progress is evaluated and additional actions and benchmarks are determined. The Commonwealth's plan aligns to the national conceptualization of turnaround that includes "dramatic and comprehensive intervention in a low performing school" (Kutash, Nico, Gorin, Rahmatullah, & Tallant, 2010, p. 4). Specifically, such intervention must produce gains within a tight two-year timeline as well as ready the school for a sustainable transformation grounded in heightened performance. Failure to elevate performance within the two-year period triggers a review by the Board of Education and the possibility of designation as a Level 5 District (OSDT, 2017).

Table 1.3

Massachusetts Classification System

Classification	Description	ESE Engagement
Commendation Schools	High achieving, high growth, gap narrowing schools (subset of Level 1) High achieving, high growth, gap narrowing schools (subset of Level 1)	None
Level 1	Meeting gap closing goals	Very Low
Level 2	Not meeting gap closing goals	Low
Level 3	Lowest performing 20% of schools	High
Level 4	Lowest performing schools (Subset of Level 3) Lowest performing schools (Subset of Level 3)	Very High
Level 5	Chronically underperforming schools (Subset of Level 3)	Extremely High

(Adapted from Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education)

When a Massachusetts district is designated as Level 5, the Commissioner appoints a receiver to assume the powers of the superintendent and school committee. These powers include full managerial and operational control over the district (M.G.L. 603 CMR 2.06 (1) (b); M.G.L. c. 69, § 1K). Districts slated for receivership are required to create, develop and implement a new turnaround plan that ensures they can support effective instruction and student achievement (ODST, 2017). Having discussed these different processes for establishing turnaround schools and districts – both nationally and in Massachusetts – we now turn to discuss research on practices within these settings.

Assistance Relationships

This increased accountability results in the need for the central office to transform its focus from compliance, management and operations to teaching and learning (Honig, 2009, 2013). In this overarching study, we examined this by focusing on central office leaders'

support of principals' instructional leadership.

In a study across fifteen urban school districts in the San Francisco Bay area, McLaughlin and Talbert (2003) found that district leaders play an important role in systemic change. Current research supports the findings that a weak central office role limits the improvement in large-scale reforms (Bird, Dunaway, Hancock, & Wang, 2013; Honig, Lorton, & Copland, 2009; Knapp, et al., 2010). When central office leaders effectively promote principals' instructional leadership, student achievement increases (Calkins, Guenther, Belfiore, & Lash, 2007; Duke, 2015; Leithwood, Harris, & Strauss, 2010). To this end, central office leaders must shift the focus of their work from regulatory functions to service as agents of change (Honig et al., 2010).

The conceptual framework of assistance relationships provides a lens for considering this (Honig et al., 2010). Honig et al. define assistance relationships as structured interactions between central office leaders and school leaders "in which people work together to strengthen how they go about their work" (p. 128). In their study of three urban districts, Honig et al. outlined five high-quality practices to support principals' instructional leadership capacity through assistance relationships. These practices focus on strengthening principals' instructional leadership and highlight the creation of such relationships, which are developed by differentiating supports, modeling effective practice, using tools, brokering and buffering, and developing networks (See Table 1.2).

While the research (Thompson, Henry, & Preston, 2016; Leithwood et al., 2010; Schueler et al., 2016) provides various strategies to school leaders to turnaround low-performing schools, these strategies are only viable if matched by district collaboration for sustained improvement. As Duke (2015) claims, "[w]ithout capable district leadership...even the best efforts of the most dynamic and talented school leaders may be short-lived. Sustaining

improvements in student achievement requires a coordinated approach involving *both* school and district leaders." (p. 189). Therefore, the way central office leaders support school principals is critical to turning around chronically underperforming schools and districts.

As a result, current research (Honig et al., 2010; Honig, 2012) highlights the need for central office leaders to more explicitly partner with principals in turnaround districts. Assistance relationships are integral to gaining traction in the accelerated work of school and district turnaround. Turnaround efforts are designed to be a balance of pressure and support; however, the reality is that there is significant pressure coupled with diminished support. In a case study of an underperforming urban district, Finnigan and Daly (2012) confirm that "[g]reater emphasis on district-level accountability for each school may shift the emphasis of central office from pressure to support at the school level" (pp. 66-67). Therefore, without explicit attention to the development of assistance relationships, turnaround is designed to achieve meager results at best (Finnigan & Daly).

To gauge whether and how interactions between central office leaders and principals benefit achievement of turnaround outcomes, each member of our team related the use of assistance relationships to one of the five turnaround components (Schueler et al., 2016) (See Table 1.1). While assistance relationships may benefit any number of educators and leaders working together, our team specifically considered the link between central office leaders and school principals. This link warranted close examination as it surfaced the importance of how goals and action plans must be deliberately crafted with attention to the interconnectedness of the work shared between these two groups of leaders. In short, our overarching study aimed to identify the most critical levers for change in response to the rapid acceleration of reform initiatives and mandates (Honig et al., 2010; Leithwood & Louis, 2012; Sun, Johnson, & Przybylski, 2016). In this third and final body of literature, our team unpacks the five

turnaround components.

Turnaround Components

School turnaround generally differs from school improvement in terms of depth and rate of change (Herman et al., 2008; Leithwood et al., 2010). Whereas improvement is a normally gradual process, the turnaround context demands quick and dramatic transformation. Herman et al. characterize turnaround contexts as demanding "dramatically improved student outcomes in a short time" (p. 6). Moreover, turnaround focuses on chronically underperforming schools and districts.

The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) provides specific guidance to districts identified for turnaround (ODST, 2017). Each individual strand in this dissertation in practice looked at one of these turnaround components through the five high-quality practices of assistance relationships (see Figure 1.1). Individual examination of each of these components illustrated the use of assistance relationships and the role of central office transformation in the improvement in the Lawrence Public Schools. The following sections unpack each component and its importance in school turnaround.

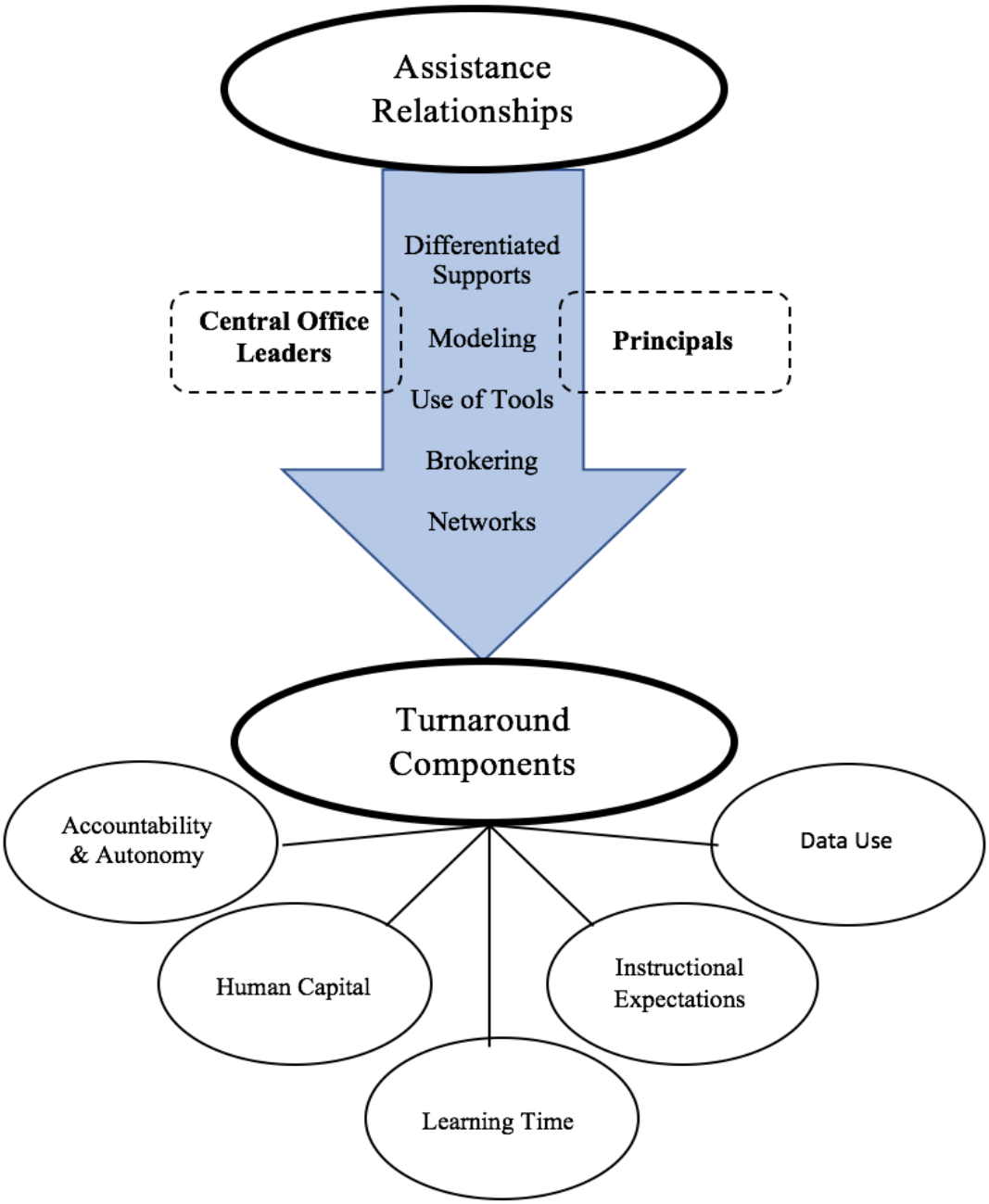

Figure 1.1. Connecting assistance relationships and turnaround components.

Autonomy and accountability. One key turnaround practice is autonomy juxtaposed with accountability. Autonomy as a reform strategy is used in turnaround schools to impact school improvement efforts (Demas & Arcia, 2015). Central office leaders grant autonomy to principals as a means to build instructional leadership capacity (Honig & Rainey, 2012).

Autonomy of principals allows school-based decisions to reflect the individual school conditions (Patrinos, Arcia, & McDonald, 2015; Honig & Rainey). This autonomy can be realized in four areas: budget, staffing, curriculum and schedule. The development of assistance relationships support this autonomy and the practices used within their schools as an important goal in turnaround practices (Honig et al., 2010).

When autonomy is paired with accountability, the process of school improvement happens more rapidly (Demas & Arcia, 2015; Honig & Venkateswaran, 2012). Aligned systems of assessment and accountability support higher and deeper levels of learning for all students. Central office leaders must balance the degree of autonomy available to schools with accountability systems that assess gains in students' academic performance. Schools are granted increased autonomy in areas such as budget, staffing and curriculum in exchange for being held accountable for the outcomes they produce. In a turnaround district, the stakes are high. Improvement efforts must be realized or schools face severe sanctions, including the possibility of school closure (Menefee-Libey, 2010).

Human capital. A second key turnaround component involves human capital, which is an important component of turnaround efforts and is also central to implementing ambitious instructional reform (Spillane & Thompson, 1997). Development or lack of human capital, especially the leadership, plays an important role in the turnaround context (Leithwood & Strauss, 2009; Murphy, 2008). Lowest-performing schools are provided with enormous flexibilities to manage and develop human capital in the federal and state regulations (Duke, 2012). Research calls for strong leadership, staff development, and capacity building in turnaround schools (Cosner & Jones, 2016; Leithwood, 2010; Mintrop & Trujillo, 2005; Murphy, 2008; Orr, Berg, Shore, & Meier, 2008). Strong principals are one of the most important elements of successful turnarounds. Research argues that turnaround principals need

to have a certain mindset and skills (Duke, 2015; Murphy, 2008). Therefore, it is important to understand the role of central office in recruiting, retaining and developing these leaders through assistance relationships.

Learning time. Learning time serves as the third turnaround component. Research shows that a resource of additional time enables schools to build in opportunities for core instruction, academic support, and teacher development and collaboration (Abdulkadiroglu et al., 2009). These resources are implemented within the master schedule through intervention blocks or through extended learning opportunities (i.e., summer school). Improving the efficiency of public education, with a focus on learning time, is of great importance. The idea that increased learning time leads to increased achievement is gaining support (Long, 2013). Policymakers have focused on the different uses of learning time and how to expand upon it, especially those schools and districts who have been chronically underperforming (Jez & Wassmer, 2015).

While researchers such as Long (2013) seek to show the correlation between learning time and student achievement, the scholarly evidence from empirical research on this subject is not extensive (Jez & Wassmer, 2015). For central office leaders and principals, it is important to understand the evidence on learning time and how it may fit best into a district in receivership.

Instructional expectations. The fourth component attends to instructional expectations. Honig (2012) argues it is critical that central office leaders and principals collaborate in the development of principals' instructional expectations within their schools and of their teachers. Principals must create a learning environment conducive to providing high-quality teaching and learning for all students (Gottfried, 2003; Cotton, 2003). Principals' instructional expectations greatly impact the quality of instruction teachers provide in the classroom (Cotton). Student achievement improves when principals purposefully create instructional expectations as they

relate to systems and structures, school culture, adherence to the curriculum and working conditions for teachers (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). Specifically, the assistance relationship between central office leaders and principals is a critical part of central office transformation to support principals' development and reinforcement of heightened instructional expectations (Honig, 2012). Therefore, central office's influence on the collaborative development of shared, high instructional expectations is a critical support for principal leadership. This will foster improvement in their leadership capacity and ultimately improve student achievement in turnaround districts.

Data use. The fifth and final component involves the use of data. Data is defined broadly as any information yielded from one's work to inform continued growth through the adjustment of leadership practice, shifts in instructional practice and use of technology to create efficiencies to achieve both in a data-wise school culture (Sun, Level, & Vaux, 2015). Subsequently, data use refers to a disciplined process of translating the data into action (Bernhardt, 2013).

Researchers (Sun et al., 2015; Sun, Johnson, & Przybylski, 2016) have begun to identify cultural traits within schools and districts that are representative of a data-wise culture. And, while their work holds much promise, they conclude in the most recent of these studies that sustaining an effective data-wise culture requires ongoing, focused professional development and consistent routines and protocols that inform how leaders treat data (Sun et al., 2016).

In most cases, leaders' responses to data are expected to yield improvements in teaching and learning. Central office leaders provide targeted supports to principals, which foster their shared capacity as instructional leaders. Likewise, this ongoing, dedicated attention to data use contributes to emerging practices that inform how all educators use data to respond to students' learning needs (Hubbard, Datnow, & Pruyn, 2014). Yet, the more educators are pressed by

national and state reform, the less time they have to intently focus on nurturing these practices. Like the interactions of educators--in and out of formal meetings--data system use is similarly variant. Therefore, translating data use into a social process is critical to transforming leadership practice (Wayman, Shaw, & Cho, 2017; Cho & Wayman, 2014).

Conclusion

Turnaround districts do not see significant improvement in teaching and learning without substantial engagement by central office leaders in building the capacity of the instructional leadership among principals (Honig et al., 2010). Central office's role in turnaround districts requires clear expectations of central office-to-school relationships (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2003; Honig, 2012). Our overarching study explored the work of central office leaders to foster assistance relationships with principals in a turnaround context. Each individual strand focused on one of the five turnaround components in the Lawrence Public Schools: autonomy and accountability, human capital, learning time, instructional expectations and the use of data (See Table 1.4).

Table 1.4

Individual Research Questions According to Turnaround Component

Autonomy and Accountability
1. In the context of a turnaround district, what ways do central office leaders grant autonomy to support school improvement?
2. What practices do central office leaders employ to support principals' autonomy as instructional leaders in the context of increased accountability in a turnaround district?
Human Capital
1. In the context of a turnaround district, what practices do central office leaders use to recruit, develop, and retain principals?
2. How do assistance relationships between the central office leaders and principals contribute to this process?
Learning Time
1. How does central office support principals in the selection of learning time opportunities?
2. How does central office support principals in the implementation of learning time opportunities?
Expectations
1. In the context of a turnaround district, what practices do central office leaders employ to strengthen principals' instructional expectations?
2. In the context of a turnaround district, how do "assistance relationships" between central office leaders and principals affect principals' instructional expectations?
Data Use
1. What is the nature of data use for central office leaders?
2. What is the nature of data use for principals?

CHAPTER TWO[2]

Research Design and Methodology

As our dissertation in practice team embarked on examining how central office leaders support principals as instructional leaders in a turnaround district, Lawrence Public Schools, all five members shared common practices and protocols for both gathering and analyzing data. Our team collectively contributed to the shared work of data collection but worked independently when analyzing data for individual studies. Data collection and/or analysis procedures that are unique to a member's particular strand are reported in chapter three. In this chapter, we present the design of the overarching study shared by team members with specific elements that include the study design, the criteria for site selection, and the procedures for both data collection and subsequent analysis.

Study Design

This overarching study explored how central office leaders interact with and support principals in their evolving practice of instructional leadership in the Lawrence Public Schools. We conducted a case study of a single site, which served as a bounded system. A bounded system is particularly relevant in this case as the instance of turnaround is a "specific, complex functioning thing" (Merriam, 2009, p. 28). In particular, a qualitative case study is appropriate for a research problem like ours, which is rife with unknown variables (Creswell, 2015; Yin, 2014). Specifically, we explored the complex interactions between central office leaders and building administrators. The unit of analysis of our case was a turnaround public school district. We aimed to conduct "an intensive, holistic description and analysis" (Creswell, 2015, p. 21) of central office leaders' interactions with and support of principals in this district.

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[2] This chapter was collaboratively written by the authors listed and reflects the team approach of this project. Authors include Julia James Carlson, Suzanne Charochak, Gregg T. Gilligan, Eylem B. Icin, and Sonia L. Tellier.

Guided by our conceptual framework of assistance relationships, our team focused on central office leaders' support of the development of principals' instructional leadership. Examination of a myriad of relationships and interactions lent insights and a fuller understanding of the practices in a turnaround district that requires some degree of central office transformation. By analyzing the turnaround work through the lens of assistance relationships, we aimed to develop a deeper understanding of central office's role in the improvement of teaching and learning.

Site selection. Our team applied two essential criteria to the selection of a Massachusetts public school district that would provide an accurate site. First, our research would be conducted in a turnaround context. Therefore, we looked to districts at Level 4 or Level 5 as designated by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. Second, to understand the influence of turnaround efforts on assistance relationships, the district had to be presently engaged in central office transformation. Consequently, restructuring efforts specific to a turnaround strategy provided the environment for such central office transformation.

As reviewed in the Literature Review, Massachusetts' five level classification system is a scale that denotes a school's and district's annual performance. Lawrence Public Schools was designated as an appropriate district. In the event that our team could not secure permission for this site, we were prepared to contact the other districts who met our criteria: either identified as a turnaround district (i.e., Level 4) or a low performing district (i.e., Level 3). Ultimately, the overarching study required a district that displayed evidence of active turnaround strategies as well as demonstrated progress (See Table 2.1). Our team anticipated that a district engaged in these strategies would display a parallel change in its leadership dynamic -- especially with regard to the interactions between central office leaders and principals.

Table 2.1

Accountability Level Improvements

School Accountability Level	2012	2016
Level 4	7	4
Level 3	13	8
Level 2	1	3
Level 1	2	10

Due to low number of districts identified for receivership, the team anticipated difficulty masking the identity of the selected district. Therefore, to enrich the data collected, the team pursued and was granted a non-confidentiality allowance, so the district could be named. However, to the extent possible, the team agreed to maintain the confidentiality of central office leaders and principals selected as participants .

Data Collection

In order to determine how central office leaders supported principals as instructional leaders in a turnaround district, we relied on three types of qualitative data: archival documentation, interviews and observations. Qualitative researchers operate under six assumptions (Merriam, 1988), and our team leveraged all six in advancement of our study. First, as qualitative researchers, we drew more from the process of discovery than we did from finite, quantifiable outcomes. Likewise, as stated in the second assumption (Merriam, 1988), we trusted that our efforts would inform meaning in the vital relationships shared between central office leaders and the principals they employ and support. How they received information and

made sense of their work was critical to their success as well as their growth.

Third, as qualitative researchers seeking to derive meaning of the work in which other leaders are engaged, we knew that we collectively served as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. As such, we were the mediators between the data and the newly forged understandings we share. Fourth, we engaged in interviews to enrich our understanding of the central office -- principal dynamic of instructional leadership. Therefore, in accordance with the fifth assumption, such fieldwork yielded data that is descriptive and supportive of the sensemaking in which we engaged to present our conclusion. Finally, our research is, as Merriam (1988) purports, the cumulative result of inductive reasoning, theories, abstractions and details melded into substantiated conclusions.

Document review. Our team first conducted a document review. The documents for the initial review process included public documents on file with the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) such as the initial and renewed district turnaround plan, the individual school improvement plans posted on the district website, and recent District and School report cards issued from DESE as well as any other documents identified through our interviews. We chose these documents to see what goals and strategies the district redesign committee identified as relevant to improving teaching and learning. Some participants provided additional documentation (e.g., data dashboards, professional development materials, staff memos and curriculum development procedures), which we added to the review (See Table 2.2) .

Table 2.2

Sample Document Collection

Plans
District Turnaround Plan (2012, 2015)
High School Improvement Plans (2014, 2015, 2016)
Middle School Improvement Plans (2014, 2015, 2016)
Elementary School Improvement Plans (2014, 2015, 2016)
Report Cards
State Department of Education District Report Cards (2015-2017)
State Department of Education School Report Cards (2015-2017)
Staff Memos
Our Way Forward

Interviews. Concurrent with the document review, our team conducted semi-structured interviews to further probe participants' perspectives. The interview process allowed our team to gain an understanding of each interviewee's perspective of the assistance relationships shared between central office and schools (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

As indicated in Table 2.3, the team initially interviewed central office leaders and principals focusing on the assistance relationships that supported principals' instructional leadership. Employing the snowball technique (Merriam, 2009) to extend our purposeful sample, our team interviewed 15 participants: six central office leaders and nine principals. Identified participants were recruited with support from the superintendent's office. However, given time constraints, we applied strict limiting criteria to determine our selection of interviewees. We sought to engage with a minimum number of principals who represented the differing accountability designations (i.e., Levels 1 through 4) and spanned all grade levels (K - 12).

Table 2.3

Interview Subjects

Participants
Central Office Leaders
Building Principals, K - 12
Other administration mentioned in plans targeting central office support of principals' instructional leadership

In preparation for our semi-structured interviews, the team prepared an interview protocol (see Appendix A) and previewed it through cognitive interviews to improve question validity and determine if the questions created probed the aspects of instructional leadership intended. This process involved asking the initial question, recording the response and probing the participant with a variety of questions (Conrad & Blair, 2009). We asked a participant a question from the protocol, "In what ways do you work with principals to set a vision and goals around instructional expectations?" The subject answered, and the interviewer probed "What do you think I meant by instructional expectations?" These responses were used to finalize our interview protocol (Beatty & Willis, 2007). Participants of the cognitive interview were similarly situated but selected from a district other than the Lawrence Public Schools. Interview responses recorded and transcribed.

Observations. Finally, our team entertained opportunities to engage in observations of central office leaders' and principals' interactions. Our team members planned to leverage the observations to gain valuable insight into the identified leaders' routine -- even *natural* -- practice (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). However, opportunities for observations were limited to public meetings. Compounding constraints limited access to observations as will be discussed later in the limitations section. For example, our team benefitted from the Superintendent's

presentation to the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, which was relevant and highly informative. In anticipation of observations, our team developed an observation protocol (Appendix A). Raw data was recorded in field journals, reviewed and typed into formal field notes, and shared among all team members to be analyzed in line with the team's coding strategy.

Data Analysis

Our team uploaded all data -- documents, interview transcripts and observation field notes – to an online qualitative research software, Dedoose, which facilitated the coding of all data (Merriam, 2009). The coding process was cyclical (Saldaña, 2009). The team used the first cycle of coding to "organize and group similarly coded data into families" (Saldaña, p. 9). These initial codes informed responses to the team's individual research questions, which aligned with five key turnaround focus areas: Autonomy and Accountability (AA), Human Capital (HC), Learning Time (LT), Instructional Expectations (E), and Data Use (DU). For a summary of these primary codes, please refer to the Interview Protocol (See Appendix A). Throughout the process, each researcher applied inductive reasoning to develop additional descriptive codes (Saldaña).

For the second cycle, the conceptual framework of assistance relationships guided the secondary codes that allowed our team to further analyze the data and inform our shared exploration of assistance relationships. These codes, as described in Table 1.2 and derived from Honig et al.'s (2010) explanation of assistance relationships, included Differentiated Supports (DS), Modeling (M), Use of Tools (UT), Brokering (BR) and Networks (N).

Following the first two cycles of coding, the team completed pair checks to review each other's coding cycles (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Working in these pairs, transcripts were first coded by one member and then verified by the second member. The pair who conducted the

interview also conducted this initial coding. Individual team members then reviewed each transcript to determine whether additional cycles were needed to address their individual research questions (see Table 1.4).

Alongside coding the documentation and interviews, our team utilized analytic memos to record decisions on the coding process and code choices, as well as field notes and reflections of the interview process. Each team member contributed to a shared process memo that captured the documentation and subsequent reflection of the decisions made by the team throughout this process. This collaborative work helped articulate how team members made sense of the data (Saldaña, 2009). All notes and documents were kept in both Dedoose and a secure folder within Google Drive.

CHAPTER THREE[3]

Central Office Leaders' Role in Supporting Principal Human Capital in a Turnaround District

Accountability pressures of the last two decades intensified the focus on turning around the lowest-performing schools (Childs & Russell, 2017; Cosner & Jones, 2016; Duke, 2012). Educational studies provided prescriptions to improve these schools based on the characteristics of success stories (Duke, 2012; Leithwood, 2010; Orr, Berg, Shore, & Meier, 2008; Stein, 2012; Trujillo, 2013). Federal guidelines were issued (Herman et al., 2008), various grant programs were established (Childs & Russell, 2017) and many state education agencies came up with turnaround programs with the help of turnaround specialists (Duke, 2006, 2012; Johnson, 2011). However, despite many reform initiatives over the years, we still don't have the improvement results at scale to close the achievement gap (Payne, 2008; Putnam, 2016).

Honig (2013) claims that the mismatch between the new accountability demands and district central office work and capacity is partly responsible for the increase in the number of schools not making adequate progress on accountability measures. Once seen only as a managerial and operational bureaucracy, the district central office today is considered to play a vital role in systemic educational reform (Rorrer, Skrla, & Scheurich, 2008). The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and the following reauthorization as Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) placed the district central office at the center of the reform initiatives. District central offices now find themselves assigned with the challenging task of supporting ambitious teaching and learning goals in schools. In this high expectations environment, districts central offices must transform into learning organizations to support teaching and learning system wide (Copland & Honig, 2010; Honig, 2009, 2013).

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[3] Chapter 3 was authored by Eylem B. Icin

As such, our overarching study explored the district central office transformation in a turnaround district (Lawrence Public Schools) through the assistance relationships developed between central office leaders and principals. Collectively, we addressed five components of the district turnaround: autonomy and accountability, human capital, learning time, instructional expectations, and data use. In my individual strand I explored the role central office leaders played in recruiting, developing and retaining principal human capital. The infusion of the disruptive forces through the takeover process provided an opportunity to transform the central office from managerial and operational bureaucracy to a learning organization that support teaching and learning. Honig et al.'s (2010) assistance relationships between central office leaders and school principals provided lenses to look at the efforts of the district leadership to address the principal human capital issues. Two research questions guided my inquiry:

1) In the context of a turnaround district, what practices do central office leaders use to recruit, develop and retain principals?
2) How do assistance relationships between the central office leaders and principals contribute to the recruitment, retention and development of principals?

While the human capital issues in a turnaround district go beyond the principals, I chose to focus on principals because they are one of the most important components of any turnaround effort (Duke, 2015; Leithwood, Harris, & Strauss, 2010), but are often not studied. As Campbell and Gross (2012) state: "Discussions about human capital and school improvement typically center on teachers, not administrators, and that's a mistake" (p. 1). Principals are key to the implementation of the turnaround strategies. They also play an important role in the development of teachers. In the next section I review the literature regarding the recruitment, development and retention of principals.

Literature Review

Since we discuss literature regarding turnaround and central office transformation in Chapter One, here I focus on the literature relevant to recruitment, development, and retention of principals. I start with a brief discussion of human capital, followed up with a review of principal recruitment and retention. I focus on leadership development in the next section. I end by briefly describing the conceptual framework that guides this individual strand, assistance relationships between central office leaders and school principals.

Human Capital and Leadership

Economists have long argued for the importance of investing in human capital. Schultz (1961), defining human capital as skills and knowledge people acquired through deliberate investment, claimed, "its growth may well be the most distinctive feature of the economic system" (p. 1). Similar to investment in physical capital, an investment in human capital can increase productivity and result in a higher rate of return (Langelett, 2002). Comparable arguments can be extended to the education field. Human capital is an important component of any instructional reform initiative (Spillane & Thompson, 1997; Spillane, Hallett, & Diamond, 2003). Development of human capital, especially the leadership, plays an important role in turnaround context. (Leithwood & Strauss, 2009; Murphy, 2008).

Educational research argues for the importance of leadership in the improvement of teaching and learning in general. Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004) claim that "leadership is second only to classroom instruction among all school-related factors that contribute to what students learn at school" (p. 5). In an extensive study of Chicago public schools, Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, and Easton (2010) posit leadership drives the change for school improvement. Similarly, in a large, six-year, nation-wide study Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, and Anderson (2010) argue for the strong indirect positive impact of school leadership on student outcomes. They claim that educators in leadership positions create

synergy across many school variables to produce large effects on student learning.

Likewise, turnaround studies consistently call for strong leadership, staff development, and capacity building (Cosner & Jones, 2016; Leithwood, 2010; Mintrop & Trujillo, 2005; Murphy 2008; Orr et al., 2008). The federal and state regulations give enormous flexibilities to manage and develop human capital in turning around the lowest-performing schools (Duke, 2012). In many cases, district administrators can replace the school staff or overwrite negotiated agreements. In Massachusetts, for example, An Act Relative to the Achievement Gap of 2010 gives Level 4 districts staffing autonomy that was not given to other districts (Lane, Unger, & Souvanna, 2014).

Moreover, turnaround literature identifies leadership as a crucial element of successful school turnaround. The context and challenge of the turnaround work necessitates leaders with specific character traits. Drawing on the larger literature of organizational recovery, Murphy (2008) points out that "leadership is often the essential element in the recovery algorithm" (p. 90). Further, Murphy cautions that "'leader proof' recovery efforts are about as likely to be effective as 'teacher proof' curriculum programs" (p. 90). Through his review of the literature Murphy (2008) calls attention to personality or character traits rather than leadership style for successful turnaround leadership. He points out leaders who are transformative, change agents, optimistic, enthusiastic, achievement oriented, courageous and persistent as some of the examples mentioned in the literature. Murphy also sees change of leadership an important component of the turnaround work.

Studying turnaround schools in Ontario, Leithwood and Strauss (2009) highlight the vital role school turnaround leadership plays in successful turnaround processes. While identifying four broad dimensions of successful leadership (direction setting, developing people, redesigning the organization and managing the instructional program), they mention a set of

core leadership practices found in most contexts. They conclude that during the initial stages of turnaround the leadership is highly focused on a small number of people, but it becomes shared and collaborative as improvement happens.

This body of literature recognizes that leadership can be collective and distributed across a range of personnel, including principals, other administrators, and teacher leaders. While acknowledging the importance of different forms of leadership in educational reform, I focus my individual strand on principals. Principals are crucial for a successful turnaround effort (Leithwood, Harris, & Strauss, 2010; Murphy & Meyers, 2008), and ineffective principals are often blamed for low-performing schools (Duke, 2015). Furthermore, principals' instructional leadership is an important component of improved educational outcomes (Honig, 2012). Therefore, central office leaders have to confront the challenge of finding and keeping principals to ensure a successful turnaround.

Principal Recruitment

In recent decades, trends of increased job responsibilities and accountability demands, accompanied by inadequate pay structure have led to a decline in attractiveness of the principalship and a shortage of qualified applicants to fill positions (Doyle & Locke, 2014; Kwan & Walker, 2009; Mascall & Leithwood, 2010; Normore, 2007; Tirozzi, 2001; Whitaker, 2003; Winter & Morgenthal, 2002). Winter and Morgenthal (2002) claim that the shortage is not due to lack of certified or qualified individuals but due to lack of interest in pursuing the position. This problem is multiplied in a low-performing school and where there is a substantial low-income population and/or students of color (Papa, 2007; Winter & Morgenthal, 2002). Loeb, Kalogrides, and Horng (2010), studying Miami-Dade County Public Schools, found:

> low-income students, students of color, and low-performing students are … more likely to attend a school that has a first-year principal, a principal with less average experience,

> a temporary or interim principal, a principal without a master's degree, and a principal that went to a less selective college. (p. 224)

Similarly, Gates et al. (2006), through a study of principal mobility and turnover in North Carolina and Illinois, found that schools with higher proportion of students of color have higher principal turnover. However, they also found that larger schools have lower principal turnover and principals who are the same race with the largest racial group in the school tend to not leave their position.

While there are deliberate recruitment and apprenticeship programs in the private industry, law, or medicine, most principal training happens through generic programs that lead to a certification that is supposed to be applicable across settings (Elmore and Burney, 2000). The challenge for central office leaders does not end with finding qualified principals to take over low-performing schools. Central office leaders also need to invest in principals' professional growth and subsequently increase principal retention, which I address next.

Leadership Development and Retention

Leadership development is an essential component of district reform (Dailey et al., 2005; Elmore & Burney, 2000). Leithwood (2010), in his review of 31 studies for the characteristics of high performing districts, identifies investment in instructional leadership as a crucial item especially in districts serving disadvantaged, low socio-economic status students or students of color. This can be accomplished by changing expectations of leadership, keeping principals accountable for the quality of instruction and providing opportunities for principals' development of instructional leadership skills (Leithwood). Elmore and Burney (2000) found that formal structures (e.g., monthly principal conferences, site visits, and study groups) helped principals understand and fulfill their roles, and that new principals benefited from support groups and mentors. Louis et al. (2010) report that districts with struggling schools are less

likely to provide leadership development opportunities, while higher-performing districts set clear expectations with aligned professional development and monitoring.

Principal development may also impact leaders' self-efficacy beliefs, which in turn may influence their behavior and success. Leithwood, Strauss, and Anderson (2007) found several practices to be positively associated with principals' self-efficacy feelings, including supporting their professional development, providing them individualized support to address challenges, holding them accountable for student and teacher achievement, and giving them responsibility to respond to student data. Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2007) found that principals valued the perceived interpersonal support from the superintendent and central office personnel.

Effective professional development develops knowledge and skills to achieve common purposes (Leithwood, Strauss, & Anderson, 2007). Bandura (2009) explains the development of self-efficacy through cognitive modeling where complex skills are broken down and guided skill perfection (with rehearsals and informative feedback) are provided. These sources of efficacy beliefs can be incorporated into principal preparation and induction programs (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2007).

Principal evaluation and assessment systems provide another avenue to foster leadership development (Portin, Feldman, & Knapp, 2006). Increased accountability demands has led districts to focus on student achievement and professional standards for school leaders in designing new systems for principal support and evaluation (Kearney, 2005). Sun and Youngs (2009) identify three purposes for the use of evaluation: guiding principal's professional development, encouraging school restructuring, and holding principals accountable for student outcomes. Porter et al. (2006) emphasize the nature and frequency of feedback as the crucial component of the leadership assessment that will lead to principal learning.

Leadership development does not happen in isolation. Principals interact and form

relationships with their peers and, as a result, learn together. Moreover, social dynamics of the local school system impact any reform effort. Social capital and human capital are interdependent and reinforce each other (Spillane and Thompson, 1997). Principal professional learning communities or networks can help principals develop as instructional leaders (Honig & Rainey, 2014). Similarly, social networks (Daly & Finnigan, 2011) and trust (Chhuon, Gilkey, Gonzalez, Daly and Chrispeels, 2008) can support or constraint reform efforts to develop leadership for improved teaching and learning. Moreover, these social dynamics can impact recruitment and retention of principals. School leaders may prefer to work in environments that are supportive and conducive to professional growth.

Above I reviewed literature that indicated the importance of recruiting, developing and retaining qualified candidates for a successful turnaround effort. Since turnaround schools by definition are low-performing and also have low-income and/or students or color students, the problem of recruiting and retaining principals becomes particularly challenging. In the next section I highlight the relevance of the assistance relationships (the conceptual framework of our overarching study) for principal human capital. Since I intend to study the role of the central office leaders in finding, developing and keeping the principals in a turnaround context, I use Honig et al. (2010)'s assistance relationships between central office leaders and school principals as the conceptual framework.

Assistance Relationships

As described in Chapter One, central office leaders invest in principals' capacity to exercise instructional leadership at their schools via "assistance relationships." The work of the central office leaders is based on the five high-quality assistance relationships practices (see Table 1.2).

First, the differentiated supports to principals contributes to their professional growth

and may also impact their decision to stay with the district. Second, the goal of explicit modeling is to "help learners deepen their sense of why they should engage in particular activities, essential to their ability to develop expertise in those areas" (Honig & Rainey, 2014, p. 8). Strong professional development through modeling can attract more candidates to the district and improve efficiency of the current leaders and contribute to retention. Third, use of tools can minimize frustration due to misunderstandings and in turn contribute to the efficacy of the district. As a result, retention may improve. Fourth, by brokering and buffering central office leaders may increase the attractiveness of a district for principals and prevent burnout that may occur in turnaround districts. Lastly, through networks, principal recruitment and retention may also improve in districts where principals see themselves as valuable members of high-quality professional learning communities and where trust is high. In contrast, when principals become isolated from each other and when there is lack of trust, the challenging work of turnaround may become unbearable and lead to principal burnout resulting in attrition.

Methodology

Since the goal of this individual strand was to understand a complex social phenomenon, principal human capital in a turnaround district context, I utilized case study methodology (Yin, 2014). The unit of analysis of this case study was the school district, as my research questions targeted central office practices.

Data Collection

My two sources of data were documents and interviews (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I analyzed the data collected to identify practices used by the central office leaders to recruit, develop and retain principals. The conceptual framework of assistance relationships in Table 3.1 provided the lenses to sort through the data.

Documents. I started reviewing the district turnaround plans, mission and vision

statements, and strategic plan documents, which were publicly available. As I gained access to the district I sought documents related to district policies and practices concerning principal human capital issues through the superintendent's office. I also sought out documents through resources outside of the district (e.g. Board of Elementary and Secondary Education meeting minutes, Department of Elementary and Secondary Education data and reports).

The documents helped me understand policies and practices district central office leaders used to recruit, develop and retain school principals. They provided initial insights that I pursued through interviews. Moreover, documents helped me identify coherence (or lack of) between district practices and strategic plans or initiatives for principal human capital.

Interviews. In collaboration with my Dissertation in Practice (DIP) team members, I conducted semi-structured interviews at the district central office and eight school sites to gain insight into strategies used by the central office leaders to address principal human capital issues and district factors impacting human capital at the school leadership level. Questions addressed the recruitment, development and retention of principals.

The DIP team developed an interview protocol that was used for all the interviews (see Appendix A). In collaboration, my DIP team interviewed six central office administrators and nine principals. I was present in three central office leader interviews and also in three school site interviews. As described in Chapter Two, interviews were recorded and transcribed.

Interview questions and follow-up probing helped illuminate the successes and challenges central office leaders had in recruiting principals. Similarly, interview data pointed not only to specific strategies that were used to increase retention but also the district work environment that contributed to this. Finally, I sought to identify the practices used to develop the principals and the presence (or absence) of collegial culture through the interview data from central office leaders and building principals.

Data Analysis

Data analysis involved multiple coding cycles to generate categories, themes, and concepts (Saldana, 2009). I first uploaded interviews to Dedoose (an online qualitative data analysis tool) to facilitate coding. I coded interview transcripts and documents for themes regarding principal human capital. The assistance relationships identified in Table 3.1 provided the conceptual framework to sort through the data. I kept analytic memos during this process. First, I recorded perceptions, reflections, and comments during and after interviews. I kept additional memos during the first read of the transcripts. Analytic memos were used during coding to record reflections, reactions, choices, emerging patterns and themes (Saldana, 2009). These analytic memos helped me document the process, provided context and facilitated the iterative coding process.

My first cycle codes addressed recruitment, development, retention, support and evaluation of principals. I used a second coding cycle to develop codes regarding assistance relationships practices of differentiated supports, modeling, use of tools, brokering and principal networks. After these two rounds of coding, new codes were identified and refined based on the themes observed in the interview data and insights from the literature review.

Findings

I now turn to describe the ways central office leaders went about recruiting, developing and retaining principals in a turnaround context. First, I describe the practices that central office leaders used to recruit, develop and retain principals (first research question). Then, I describe the way the assistance relationships between the central office leaders and principals contributed to the recruitment, development and retention of principals (second research question).

Principal Recruitment

Three general practices emerged from the data regarding principal recruitment. The first

was a focus on the characteristics of principals that will result in successful turnaround of their schools. The second practice was to focus on in-district recruitment and the development of the local talent. The third was to recruit from out-of-district. In the following sections I unpack these three practices.

Principal characteristics. The Lawrence Public Schools Turnaround Plan (Riley & Chester, 2012) focused on schools as the unit of change. The goal was to transform Lawrence Public Schools by building "a portfolio of highly autonomous, high performing neighborhood schools" (p 5). The focus on schools as the unit of change meant that principals played an important role in the turnaround effort. The Turnaround Plan provided significant autonomies to principals but also prioritized school accountability through "rewards and consequences for principals and partners who achieve, or fail to achieve, identified targets" (p. 18).

As a result, most[4] central office leaders expressed interest in recruiting principals with certain characteristics that they believed would be instrumental in turning around individual schools. One central office leader indicated that they looked for principals who showed "willingness to be innovative" and who could "quickly adapt to education in an urban community." Another central office leader mentioned seeking principals who "would do the work and not wait for somebody at central office to tell them what to do." Some central office leaders referred to "ownership" to describe the characteristics they wanted principals to show. One central office leader explained that the district was "looking for leaders who take personal ownership." Another central office leader elaborated that the district needed leaders who were "ready to take ownership of what is happening in the schools. Part of that is owning the data, is working with your teams, is bringing in your families and improving your community engagement."

[4] Responses are categorized as All; Almost all = more than 75% of the whole or one group; Most = more than half of the whole or half of one group; Some = more than one; One; None.

The autonomous nature of the district necessitated principals who would take advantage of the autonomy provided. As one central office leader explained:

> When the district was taken over by the state … most of the principals were let go. The reason for that is because in order for the full autonomy or the bounded autonomy to work, we needed people to hold themselves accountable.

Another central office leader agreed and indicated that principals who saw their jobs as "just to keep the status quo … and manage the children" were let go and replaced with "people who were gonna take it personally." This central office leader tied the success of the district to this approach and added "which is why we went from one Level 1 school to ten."

Documentation describing actions taken by the receiver, focusing on principal human capital, corroborated the interview data. During a presentation to the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, the Receiver appointed to govern the Lawrence Public Schools indicated that his initial review resulted in 3% teacher and 33% principal turnover (BESE Meeting Minutes, April 23, 2013). Moreover, the 2015 Renewed District Turnaround Plan (Riley & Chester, 2015, each plan was written for a period of three years) reported that over 50% of principals were replaced in total when additional principals were let go during the next two years.

In-district recruitment. A second practice followed by central office leaders to recruit principals was to hire within the district. All central office leaders referred to in-district recruitment and identified the benefits of hiring local talent for leadership positions as continuing the reforms after the district exits receivership. In the words of one central office leader, they "tried to spend as much energy, if not more so, on hiring from within." By relying on local talent, the goal was to have leaders who cared about the community. One central office leader explained this in the following way: "you certainly want to have people in places who

believe and are strong when you leave … it's definitely intentional and there is always an eye out for who's a rising star." As another central office leader explained, investing in local talent ensured "a sustainable model, and not just people that were coming in for the five-year Ed Reform whoop-de-do, and then checking out when things went back." The thinking was that these locally-recruited principals would be invested in the success of Lawrence and therefore stay for the long run.

Most principals also talked about in-district recruitment. One elementary school principal explained that "[superintendent] is now hiring from within. What he has seen is some of the administrators or teacher leaders that were excelling were given the opportunity to become administrators." Affirming the arguments made by central office leaders above about the benefit of hiring locally, another principal stated, "I don't have too many years left, but there'll be someone else in the pipeline that kinda gets what we're doing."

Reviewing the makeup of the principal cohort provided evidence that this practice was taking place. I compiled a list of the names of the current principals in the district from Department of Elementary and Secondary Education data. Then, I contacted the district central office to identify current principals who had previous experience in the district before being appointed as a principal, and also principals who were recruited from outside of the district. Based on this information, I determined that 71% of the current principals had previously worked for Lawrence Public Schools before being appointed as a principal. This number jumped to 85% when principals of the partnership schools, where the management structure is different and shared with an outside organization, were excluded.

In-district recruitment required a robust district pipeline of principal candidates. One initiative that helped the development of this pipeline was Lawrence Public Schools' master teacher initiative. I briefly explain this initiative in the next section.

Master teacher initiative. Central office leaders introduced structural changes that contributed to the development of the local talent. In the words of one central office leader, these changes allowed "people to take leadership roles within their school." The master teacher initiative was one such change. The Lawrence Public Schools' career ladder comprised five categories: novice, developing, career, advanced and master. The Lawrence Teachers' Contract identified advanced teachers as "outstanding educators" and master teachers as "exceptional educators," calling both "district-wide models of excellence." To be recognized as an advanced or master educator, a teacher must have at least five years of experience, have progressed to Career Level III, possessed a teaching license and rated proficient or exemplary for the past two years. The annual base salaries of advanced and master teachers were at $75,000 and $85,000 respectively.

The 2015 Renewed District Turnaround Plan (Riley & Chester, 2015) stated that this master teacher initiative provided leadership opportunities to aspiring Lawrence teachers. Two central office leaders and one middle school principal referred to the advanced and master teacher roles as an opportunity to groom future leaders. Principals nominated their star teachers for the master teacher category. Principals provided stipends to master teachers and developed proposals for them to perform leadership roles in their buildings. Principals created these teacher leadership roles to serve the unique needs of their buildings. The proposals then were sent to the central office for approval before they could be implemented. A central office leader described the key role this initiative played in grooming the next generation of leaders.

> The master teachers allows teachers to apply for specific leadership roles within their schools, and eventually allows them to demonstrate their leadership capacities. If they're ready and are able and they have the capacity to apply for a leadership within their school or any school in the district, we already know that this person's capable because

> they've been a leader in their school for so long already.

Therefore, the master teacher initiative contributed to the district's attempts to develop a robust pipeline of principal candidates.

Out-of-district recruitment. A third practice central office leaders used to recruit principals was to hire principals new to the district. The district tried to attract strong external candidates to the district that would take on the role of turning around struggling schools. Referring to strategies used to bring in principals to the district one central office leader mentioned that:

> It's everything from media blasts, to just kind of going out and every time I present in large places, we talk about looking for leaders of substance and looking for leaders who take personal ownership, and so some of that is word of mouth.

Another central office leader indicated that the district used a headhunter during the beginning stages of the turnaround. She further explained "this person's sole job was to look for leaders. It wasn't just a posting somewhere, this is what the person is really focused on."

However, throughout the interviews, most central office leaders referred to leveraging networks and receiver's relations as an effective strategy to bring in candidates. As one central office leader explained "our superintendent is great at recruiting people". Another central office leader, referring to the superintendent's attempts to bring in new principals, indicated that:

> There was certainly people that [superintendent] knew that were interested in this model, where they would have been frustrated in other school districts where they kept being told what they had to do all the time; really did good work but wanted to be left alone.

This provided an opportunity to recruit people that were non-traditional in some ways and would not be interested in principal positions in traditional school districts. Corroborating this, one principal (an out of district recruit) mentioned that when a receiver was appointed to lead

the Lawrence Public Schools, she knew him and she thought it would be "an interesting opportunity" to work for him.

In addition, most central office leaders referred to leveraging external networks to attract candidates that are ready to take on the challenge of turning around struggling schools. These central office leaders mentioned receiver's connections to Boston College's Lynch School or Boston Public Schools as pathways to attract candidates to the Lawrence Public Schools. One of these central office leaders also mentioned the Sontag prize as an opportunity to attract and hire new candidates to the district. The goal of this prize was to bring outstanding teachers to the Lawrence Public Schools to teach during the Acceleration Academy. Teachers all over the country could apply to Sontag prize. Recipients of the prize received a honorarium, two days of professional development at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, collaboration opportunities, and an invitation to the Awards Ceremony.

Until now, I focused on the recruitment part of the first research question. I now present findings about the practices central office leaders used to develop and retain principals.

Principal Development and Retention

Four main practices emerged from the data regarding principal development and retention in Lawrence Public Schools. The first one was a focus on in-district professional development through professional learning communities facilitated by central office leaders. Engaging external organizations was the second practice used to develop principals. Third was creating a conducive work environment appealing for principals. Lastly, the practice of hiring local talent for leadership positions contributed to principal retention. I unpack these four practices next.

In-district professional development. Central office leaders facilitated in-district professional development through various professional learning communities. These learning

communities developed organically based on the needs of the schools. One middle school principal explained that as principals became more autonomous, they also became more collaborative. As principals felt the pressure to produce results with the high level of autonomy they were given, they looked for solutions together. Central office leaders served as facilitators and brokers of resources.

Through the professional learning communities, principals formed networks with educators within the district and experts outside of the district. Almost all principals utilized these networks in making educational decisions and also for professional growth. In one elementary school principal's words, they provided "a chance to go and learn from other leaders about what might be working." The same principal indicated that she "probably made a lot of curriculum decisions from those professional development experiences."

Central office leaders did not mandate that principals participate in these professional development opportunities. While principals were encouraged and supported through this process, the decision to attend was solely theirs. As another elementary school principal stated "it's a matter of whether or not [principals] would like to participate." While central office leaders facilitated these learning communities, their development was ultimately driven by school needs and demands. For example, referring to one such learning community that was about to launch, one central office leader explained that "the school put this focus together, this is what they would like feedback about."

Four principals referred to these professional learning communities as "communities of practice". For instance, one elementary school principal explained:

> [A central office leader] has created communities of practice. The administrators and some of the coaches have the opportunity to attend these professional development/peer observations. Through these professional developments, it entails many, many different

> things related to curriculum implementation, analyzing data. I want to say strategies that are working at school that can be replicated, peer observations, going with teams of staff from your school to visit another school and observe standards based implementation, learning about how they run data analysis meetings. It's not just professional development where you go and sit. No, it's very, very interactive.

In these communities of practice, participants usually visited a school, debriefed together and looked for solutions to their problems. Central office leaders facilitated all these activities and through them developed principals. Moreover, almost all principals and most central office leaders referred to interactions with external experts, such as UnboundEd, National Center on Time and Learning (NCTL). For example, referring to these interactions, one central office leader explained:

> Small teams of leaders come together, facilitated by this very knowledgeable staff from UnboundEd who fly in to be with us. It's six full days, spread out through the year. We have it at a different host school each time. It includes learning walks for all participants in classrooms with some very facilitated debriefing that happens.

As one middle school principal and one elementary school principal stated, through these professional development opportunities, they have “become a much stronger leader,” developed as “an instructional leader” and “made a lot of curriculum decisions”. Worth noting, not everyone participated in all of these opportunities. Three principals mentioned lack of time or not wanting to leave the building as reasons to skip on these opportunities. However, additional support was provided to principals through mentors. Central office leaders brought in retired principals as mentors to develop individual principals. Moreover, central office leaders also served as mentors for school principals in their focus areas. One central office leader explained this in the following quote:

> All school leaders need a mentor. They need somebody that's going ... that they can call and be like, "Hey, I have no idea how to do this, can you help me." That's what we're here for at central office is that type of phone call.

External organizations. External organizations were also engaged to support principal development and retention. These would provide professional development opportunities to current or aspiring principals. All principals mentioned the support and encouragement they received from the central office in attending leadership development programs with external providers. For instance, almost all central office leaders reported sending various current and aspiring principals to the Lynch Leadership Academy for professional development. As one central office leader explained, they identified “future leaders” in the district and they “got them into the Lynch Leadership Program.” Another central office leader explained the support provided to principals to attend the Lynch Leadership Academy:

> [The superintendent] has a very good connection with the Lynch Leadership Academy, so he'll nominate people who are interested and these people obviously have to go through the process and if they get in, it's an opportunity. He'll be flexible, we'll make sure that there is coverage for them in their schools, that their schools covered at all times whenever they need to be.

Principals corroborated this support. The following quote from an elementary school principal is representative of principals’ comments on these professional development opportunities.

> I went through the Lynch Leadership Program at BC. [The superintendent] had encouraged us to apply and then they completely supported me with all the professional days and whatever cost incurred for that. And so, those experiences of being with other leaders and talking about what works for kids has absolutely had an impact on my ability to lead instructionally.

Principals acknowledged the accommodating nature of the central office leaders when they approached them about attending other professional development opportunities with external organizations. In a quote representative of many, one principal explained:

> We can go to the Standards Institute. We have opportunity to do that. We can attend NAATE. [The superintendent] has supported that. I think any PD that we would want to attend off site ... I think if there was anything I wanted to go to ... I was invited to go to present at a workshop in DC, a national council and it was about turnaround … I said to them, I'd like to go because there's workshops on urban schools and [superintendent] is like, sure, fine, you can go to it. So we can search it out ourselves and attend.

Almost all principals mentioned the National Academy of Advanced Teacher Education, UnboundEd or Standards Institute as examples of external professional development opportunities.

Having unpacked the development part of the first research question, I now move to present evidence regarding the two practices that contributed to principal retention: work environment and hiring local talent.

Work environment. Central office leaders leveraged the work environment as a practice to impact the principal human capital in the district. The work environment can play an important role in retaining principals in any district. The evidence showed that the district transformation that happened in Lawrence Public Schools changed the work environment principals operated in, and as a result impacted their decisions to continue to work in the district. Two components of the district transformation that impacted the work environment were building-based autonomy and a service-like approach when dealing with principals.

Building-based autonomy. The data showed that the autonomous nature of the Lawrence Public Schools was an important component that impacted principals' working

conditions. Central office leaders implemented an "open architecture" model, allowing "individual school teams to design their own school models with significant autonomy" (Riley & Chester, 2015, p. 3). The district approach, in one central office leader's words, was based on turning around schools by trusting that "people at the local level actually have the answers."

This approach impacted how principals felt about working in Lawrence Public Schools. All principals brought up the autonomous nature of the district during the interviews. Most principals indicated it as one of the reasons they chose to work or continued to work in Lawrence Public Schools. For instance, one elementary school principal mentioned:

> What's been really exciting is that we have been labeled chronically underperforming. We had somebody come in and actually say, I'm gonna actually give you more control of your school, not less… That has been really exciting. Just having this autonomy to just really create and build a school that makes sense for the kids in it and the adults in it. Not necessarily for the district at large, but for what's sort of been happening in the school.

Most principals valued the agency that came with autonomy. Two middle school principals remarked how their previous experiences with "restrictions" and "top-down" approaches frustrated them. This frustration, in one of these principals' words, led them "feel like as the principal, you really can't do anything." As the other principal explained, these restrictions made it "hard to make decision that are in the best interest of your kids in your building." Under the autonomous nature of the Lawrence Public Schools turnaround plan, principals repeatedly mentioned that they felt empowered. In a manner representative of many, one elementary principal explained: "That has been something that has been really fulfilling. To sort of have that ability to create turn around plans and really enact them. And have some legitimate control over budget and staffing and programming." Principals felt that they could

make changes that will work for their schools.

In the words of one elementary school principal and one middle school principal, they appreciated the "legitimate control" they had over their buildings as this gave principals "the ability to serve" the kids that needed it most. Most principals acknowledged the challenges Lawrence Public Schools students faced, and they wanted to see the impact of their efforts. They wanted to make a difference in the lives of their students. The following quote from a principal who spent a lot of years in the district is representative of feelings that many of the principals expressed:

> There's real work to be done in Lawrence. It's a needy community ... There's poverty. There's single parent households. It's an immigrant community. It's been this way, immigrant city, for years. It's a stepping stone to entrance into American society. We're the gatekeepers of an opportunity for students and their families to educate first generation immigrants and provide them with the skills, resources, and experiences to become successful and to become great citizens of the country. I feel like … to be able to impact that many kids and their families is a game changer. That's what keeps me in.

One central office leader called this approach a novel one as it allowed "principals to be able to operate in their schools and have full control of what happens in there."

Customer service approach. The second component of the district transformation was based on reorganizing the way the central office operated to support schools. District support or lack of it is an important aspect of principal job satisfaction and as such can impact principals' decisions to stay in a district. The data here showed that central office leaders adopted a new approach to help the district to improve working conditions for principals. A 2014 Lawrence Public Schools communication to Lawrence faculty, Our Way Forward, described the approach as follows: "At its core, central office becomes about *serving schools*, not the other way around.

This means first and foremost we have adopted a customer service culture in which central office is highly responsive to school needs and requests" (Riley, 2014, p. 7, emphasis in original).

The top-down mandate model that many districts take was replaced here with a bottom-up support model. Interviews indicated that under the receivership the central office staff was reduced by one third and the savings were passed along to schools. A review of documents supported this and showed that district pushed $1.6 million to schools as a result of this staff reduction (Riley & Chester, 2015). In dealing with schools, all central office leaders mentioned that principals were not told what to do. Instead, they asked principals, in the words of one central office leader, "What do you need?" Two central office leaders used the words "customer service" to describe the way the central office operated now. One of them explained it in the following way: "with a smaller central office we are leaner, so we have to be able to understand all the workings and make sure everybody gets what they want. I definitely view myself as a customer service person for schools." As the other central office leader further explained, the central office was no longer a "typical central office" but "more of a customer service central office." It no longer told schools "how it has to be done".

All principals corroborated the change in the way central office leaders operated. In a quote representative of many, one principal explained this change:

> [The superintendent] basically said one time, I think it was year two, year three, "We work for you." We were kinda like, "What does that mean?" Sometimes it felt like in the past we worked for central office. I think that role has changed in terms of "How can we support you? What do you need?"

Three principals used the words "service-oriented" to describe the central office leaders' approach during the interviews. All principals valued the relationship they had with the central

office leaders. They spoke highly of the continuous support they received from the central office leaders. For example, one middle school principal indicated that central office leaders will “drop everything to help them.” An elementary school principal explained that central office leaders will not “dictate” them what needs to be done. In the words of another principal, instead they “will work for them.” Lastly, as another middle school principal reported they are “amazing” and “just a phone call away.” All principals indicated that they felt supported by the central office. Regarding principal retention in the district, one principal argued, “the reason that people stay is, you know you get support.” Trust was built between the buildings and the central office leaders. As explained by one central office leader, principals felt “comfortable with being vulnerable” and called central office leaders anytime they needed help.

Hiring local talent. As explained in the recruitment section, central office leaders focused on local talent for many of the leadership positions. This approach also contributed to the principal retention. One central office leader explained that:

> If you look at who our administration is, most of them have been here, were pre-turn around. They weren't principals back then, but they have grown. They were Lawrence employees prior to the turnaround, and they've been given opportunities and have risen up in the ranks. I think honestly that's the bulk of our leadership right now.

By relying on local talent the district invested in people who cared about their community and kids in Lawrence. The following quote from another central office leader summarized this expectation well:

> The ones who are either at some point from Lawrence or live in Lawrence now... They would feel like they had betrayed their community to walk away. This is the work that they were meant to do, is to help their community. Right? You can see it, you can hear it, and then I think that there's a lot of joy at the end of the day in the accomplishments

that are being made, and it's a beautiful community.

This was corroborated by almost all principals who talked about Lawrence kids as part of the reason they continue to work in the district. The following quote from an elementary school principal was representative of how these principals felt:

> To see our kids perform at the levels that I would say, seven or eight years ago, nobody would have said that they were capable of is kind of what drives me now… It's just almost like proof to the world that just because you are in an urban poor minority based environment, [that] doesn't mean that these kids can't preform at the levels like most affluent, prvileged suburban kids can.

Assistance Relationships

My second research question focused on the contribution of the assistance relationships to the recruitment, development and retention of the principals. As mentioned previously, the district transformation at Lawrence Public Schools was based on building-based autonomy and a customer service approach adopted by central office leaders when dealing with principals. Honig et al.'s (2010) five high-quality practices of assistance relationships (differentiated supports, modeling, use of tools, brokering, and networks) provide us a conceptual tool to understand this customer service approach and its impact on principal human capital. Regarding the second research question of my individual strand, findings indicated that these high-quality practices impacted only principal development and retention, not recruitment. In what follows, I review the impact of the five practices on the development and retention of principals. I first start with modeling and use of tools as they mainly contributed to principal development. Then, I move to differentiated supports and networks as they contributed to both principal development and retention. I end with brokering as it mainly contributed to principal retention.

Modeling. Almost all central office leaders and most principals reported contributing to

the professional development of the principals through modeling. For instance, one central office leader summarized the relationship this way:

> I also do get a lot of reward out of working with principals, working with staff and seeing those light bulb moments when something you've been thinking about and you just present it in a way where it's starting to make sense to people. The state has a pretty convoluted accountability system and just being able to understand that and breaking down the components so schools understand it is probably one of my biggest accomplishments.

Most principals also described modeling from central office leaders, specifically regarding data analysis, accountability system, budget preparation, and scheduling. For example, referring to help she received from a central office leader regarding data analysis, one middle school principal mentioned that the central office leader would "work with our admin team to sort through the data, figure out what it's telling us, how to look at it differently". The customer service approach mentioned above was apparent in these modeling opportunities. Central office leaders visited the school buildings and set down with principals to go over issues principals were facing instead of, in the words of one middle school principal, asking principals to "get in the car and drive to central office".

Similarly, some principals reported that central office leaders modeled behaviors by inspiring principals to change the way they behave, in a transformative manner. Two middle school principals referred to this. For one of these principals, this transformative change was modeled through superintendent's approach to using autonomy when dealing with principals. This principal explained the opportunity to engage staff in creating a new schedule as an example:

> Four years ago after our first year, people wanted a change in the schedule. … I made a

> schedule.... Three years later, people are kind of still talking about the schedules they don't really like. … I think just seeing the way [the superintendent] leads has been really influential for me. Thinking about what is the autonomy people have. People want to make decisions that affect their practice. ... I had tried to resolve it in my head in the first time. So nobody was happy with it. Whereas now, teachers had to make that decision.

The impact of this reflective modeling had a strong impact on the instructional leadership style of this principal.

Use of tools. A second practice that was widely cited by almost all principals and contributed to principal development was the use of conceptual tools to support principals' understanding of district expectations and improve the focus on important instructional items. For instance, the superintendent provided biweekly communications that outlined an understanding of the high expectations the district had for teaching and learning. While most central office leaders referred to the superintendent's biweekly newsletter, one central office leader summarized its purpose well:

> The schools have a lot of autonomy, which is a great asset in many ways, but comes with a few challenges. You can just decide something and expect it to happen seamlessly through all 30 schools or for people to buy in necessarily in terms of how it fits into their vision, so it complicates things, but the primary communications, if we're talking major pillars, major policies, that often comes down through the superintendent who both does a biweekly newsletter communication to school leaders and department heads.

Another central office leader also referenced these newsletters: "Every two weeks [principals] are hearing from [the superintendent] directly about something that's impactful to the district or important to him."

The budget development process was an area where central office leaders mandated the use of a unified tool. Principals were provided with templates to develop their budgets. While budget templates provided a rough draft, the extended discussions with central office leaders enabled principals to reflect on their leadership decisions. One principal, referred to budget meetings with central office leaders, summarizing this process well:

> When we go to our budget meeting, we have to have in front of us … kind of like a rough draft, so we have BudgetFile.com. We download everything in there. … Then we have to come up [with], "What's your school priority? What are the action steps you're gonna take to get to that priority? What are you gonna use for assessment?" It's kind of broken down. There's the assessment piece. There's the instructional materials you're gonna purchase. In the end… how is that gonna affect your staff and students and achievement?

While the autonomous nature of the Lawrence Public Schools limited the development of district wide tools in many areas, some principals identified developing their own tools in collaboration with central office leaders.

Modeling and use of tools were the two assistance relationship practices that mainly contributed to the development of principals. The next practice I review, differentiated supports, impacted not only principal development but also contributed to principal retention.

Differentiated supports. The differentiated supports provided by the central office leaders contributed to the development and retention of the principals. Almost all central office leaders reported that central office leaders differentiated the supports they provided to principals based on the accountability levels of the schools and needs of principals. Almost all principals corroborated the differentiated supports principals received. Principals who were new or were struggling received a lot of support from the central office and were monitored closely.

Principals in schools that were doing well did not get as much support. Instead, central office leaders preferred to get out of their way. The following quote from a central office leader was representative of this approach:

> There are some principals that I spend very little time setting their instructional goals and expectations. If they're a high-flying principal, Level 1 school, maybe at the sixtieth percentile, you know, like flying high, I just tend to get out of their way … If you're somebody that's newer and just learning the ropes, or somebody that's struggling and could be, you know, possibly falling into Level 4, we're gonna be much more intensive with you. We're gonna be on the ground more, you're gonna see central office people a lot more.

Allmost all principals mentioned the same focus on accountability levels as the underlying measure to differentiate support to schools. Following quote from one middle school principal is representative of the way principals talked about differentiated support they received from the central office:

> When the superintendent came in, he pretty much looked at certain schools that had the title of Level 3, Level 4, you had your Level 1 schools that had pretty much autonomy, they could figure it out. Level 3, he would come in and he would have certain people suggest certain things.

There was also differentiated support based on the grade span or specific circumstance principals found themselves in. One central office leader stated, “People learn at different rates and they have different challenges in their buildings.” Through differentiated supports central office leaders addressed principal development based on individual school needs.

A review of documents also supported the centrality of the differentiated supports given to schools. The district communiqué, Our Way Forward, stated, “Open architecture is

fundamentally about differentiation. If differentiated instruction allows us to customize teaching to individual students' needs, open architecture allows us to customize supports to individual schools' needs" (Riley, 2014, p. 4). Similarly, the Renewed District Turnaround Plan described that "individual schools require a continuum of support: some operate with minimal district oversight while others require significant level of assistance" (Riley & Chester, 2015, p. 11).

The goal of differentiated supports was to channel resources where they were needed most, in one central office leaders words giving "more help to people that need more help." As more schools were "put into self-sufficient category", more resources were freed for schools that needed it most. As such, the timely access to central office resources could lower struggling principals' frustration. Therefore, central office leaders could impact principal retention through differentiated supports. For example, one such principal explained the additional support she received from the central office regarding data use:

> I think [central office leader] has probably done additional work with us because as a level four school, we are struggling more than most. And so, for instance, last year I met with her in January and then I met with her in February. Then I met with her ... I met with her about once a month to look at our student data and what supports we could put in place in order to move the kids forward.

For new principals, increased support at the beginning could expedite the learning curve and potentially lower the likelihood of failures. For example, regarding accountability goals, one central office leader explained the additional support she provided to newer principals:

> Constantly staying on top of [accountability goals] with each principal so they understand where they're at… You have an idea too on principals who needs what. You focus a lot on newer principals and making sure they're at where they need to be in their understanding.

As the level of assistance diminished and autonomy increased, principals had more agency. Conversely, one identified drawback of this differentiated supports approach was that principals of schools performing well did not get much feedback. One Level 1 principal explained this drawback in the following way:

> First year here, we were turning around the school… we were fighting those fires every single day. I think there were definitely more Central Office folks in the building that year… We were able to stabilize things. I think just since then, there's just been far fewer people looking around. As I said, I think the thing is it is pretty clear the district wants schools to get to stable. I think most of the support goes to that, which I completely understand from a resources allocation standpoint. To push us to the next level, I'd love to be observed more to get more feedback.

Networks. Principal engagement through networks contributed to principal development and principal retention as principals learned from each other and were provided a collaborative work environment. Almost all principals referred to principal networks facilitated through the work of central office leaders. One middle school principal explained that central office leaders "clumped some principals together," gave them the opportunity to work together and ask each other: "How did you do this? How did you determine enrichment? How did you figure out intervention?" This provided an opportunity for the principals to learn from each other. Moreover, as the middle school principal added, principals became much more collaborative with the autonomous structure of the receivership, where they were "going to get better and [they] were going to work together more." One elementary school principal indicated how the district was "so toxic with rumors and negativity" before the receivership. One central office leader supported this and expressed that changing this motivated her work at the central office:

> This is what you always said was wrong. That there's not anyone who's really joining these [principals] together, who's really giving them an opportunity, a network to support one another, and find some collaboration and collegiality in this work. I could do that. With the flexibility [the superintendent] is giving me.

Some central office leaders talked about the principal networks facilitated through central office leaders. For example, one central office leader referred to establishing cohorts and explained that they tried "to group [principals] and give as much support as [they] can to that cohort." Most central office leaders also provided opportunities for principals to network with external organizations. Central office leaders referred to external organizations, such as NCTL or UnboundEd while some principals mentioned networking with schools in Boston.

There have also been instances where the networking opportunity, despite the work of the central office leaders, did not materialize. The participation in these networking opportunities through professional learning communities was not mandated. The decision to join was left to principals. As one middle school principal explained, this led to failed network attempts in some cases:

> [A central office leader] was trying to start something up …. There were three or four of us who went around ... I hosted them here, and then the plan was for us to go to the next school. Things got so busy that it just never really became a working partnership. But, we were really excited about that. It comes down to in the moment, are you making a decision to put out the fire in your building or to step back. But, I do think it would be nice to be required to do something like that.

While the differentiated supports and networks contributed to both principal development and retention, the fifth and the last high-quality assistance relationships practice, brokering, impacted mainly the retention of principals. In the next section, I provide evidence

on brokering.

Brokering. Finally, all principals mentioned the benefits of having the central office leaders broker new resources for them. In the autonomous structure adopted, the Lawrence Public Schools left a lot of the decisions to principals. This had the potential to frustrate principals as it presented several logistical challenges. By taking over this logistical issue on, central office leaders helped principals and contributed to their retention. All principals mentioned curriculum resources, data analysis and assessment, scheduling and compliance (ELL, special education) as areas where central office leaders provided new resources or increased understanding. The following quote from one middle school principal was representative of how principals felt about central office leaders brokering new resources for principals.

> We had to vet out what curriculum we wanted, who we wanted to partner with. … I mean, as one human, or even my ILT team of 12, how in my mind I was- It was scary. Like, how am I going to do that? How am I going to go find the right curriculum as one person, you know? How am I going to determine what interim assessments are important, what diagnostics assessments, like all this stuff. … [A central office leader] did a really great job of finding curriculum and giving us- It really turned into what now looks like a menu and it comes out every spring and it's like curriculum options, testing options, enrichment options, what schools do it, how much it costs, so it's really nice to go through.

Similarly, all central office leaders referred to the brokering they have done for principals. They mentioned curriculum resources, data analysis and assessment, policy resources, additional grant funding, and enrichment resources as areas where they brokered new resources for principals. For example, one central office leader explained that, she attended

DESE workshops "with the intent of bringing all the knowledge [she] can steal out of that back to the district." Another central office leader called herself as "the chief negotiator" and added that central office leaders were instrumental in investigating new options and bringing in vendors since they could not "just have 25 or 30 schools negotiating with partners and curriculum vendors on their own, because they are not going to be able to get the best resources for the money."

In addition to brokering new resources, central office leaders also increased principals' understanding. For example, regarding data use, one central office explained the way she helped principals make sense of the results:

> That's part of my job is getting training on how to access those reports. What those reports mean. But you can also pull it all back out and give them a big picture piece so they can really look to see what's going on with each individual student.

One principal also referred to role of central office leaders in increasing understanding and stated that:

> We go to [the superintendent] and his team and ask him for things when we're kind of in a state where we don't know where else to go or we haven't figured it out or if we want to problem solve, we can kind of bounce things off of him.

Most principals referred to external experts central office leaders brought in to assist with curricular programs, assessment programs, extended learning time, and enrichment opportunities. For instance, one principal indicated that central office leaders "always brought presenters in to kind of walk [principals] through" curriculum resources. Another principal expressed her appreciation of all the brokering done by the central office leaders by stating "we were given a ton of opportunity to jump in and take advantage of amazing opportunities that I can't imagine too many school leaders have had that opportunity." Similarly, an elementary

school principal mentioned, “every single thing that [central office leaders] advised me to do has proven to be effective.”

Through central office brokering, principals had quick access to various vetted resources. They got better deals on the resources they needed through the work of the central office leaders. Moreover, central office leaders ran interference to protect principals. As one central office leader explained the district tried “to reduce the amount that [they’re] using up the principals’ time.” Another central office leader indicated that their approach to principals, in his words, “what can we do to make your life easier as the principal?” improved the principal retention in the district.

Through enactment of the five high-quality practices, assistance relationships were developed between central office leaders and principals. These practices contributed to the development and retention of principals. Through modeling central office leaders developed principals by focusing mainly on data analysis, budget preparation and scheduling as topics of interest. Moreover, central office leaders modeled behaviors that shaped the instructional leadership styles of principals. Use of conceptual tools was another practice that was instrumental in principal development. Tools and templates made expectations clear to principal and provided a starting point for reflective discussions. On the other hand, differentiated supports and networks, contributed to both development and retention of principals. Principals received help based on their needs and also when they needed it most. Central office leaders facilitated opportunities for principals to learn from each other through networks. The resulting collaborative environment contributed to principal retention. Lastly, central office leaders’ brokering and buffering contributed to principal retention as principals had access to new resources and increased their understanding of complex issues. I now move to discuss the findings of my strand and the implications of these findings.

Discussion

In this individual strand, I examined practices used by central office leaders to recruit, develop and retain principals, and how assistance relationships contributed to these practices. This strand extends the literature on district central office transformation for instructional leadership by focusing on a case where district takeover was initiated. By studying a district under state receivership, my hope is that the research presented here contributes to our understanding of district turnaround under extreme accountability pressures. This strand also seeks to contribute to practice. The increased accountability pressures and failure of reform initiatives to drastically improve lowest-performing schools may lead to more district takeovers in Massachusetts and nationwide. Since school leaders are a crucial component of the turnaround efforts, central office leaders can benefit from insights provided in this strand in recruiting, developing and retaining their principals. Moreover, increased focus on accountability has the potential to increase the popularity of district takeovers as a policy measure in the struggle to turnaround lowest-performing schools. Understanding the factors that impact the principals in these circumstances could assist policymakers to design better intervention strategies.

My discussion of the findings below starts with a review of the intrinsic and non-pecuniary factors that impact principal retention. Then I explain that the recruitment and retention decisions are the joint product of both district's (employer) and principals' (employee) preferences. Therefore, I call the second section a two-sided match. Third, I discuss the sustainability of strong turnaround principals. I end with discussing implications of findings for social capital and trust between central office leaders and principals.

Intrinsic and Non-Pecuniary Factors

The literature shows that recruiting and retaining principals, especially in low-

performing schools with a large portion of non-white or low-income students, is difficult (Papa, 2007; Stark-Price, Muñoz, Winter, & Petrosko, 2006; Winter & Morgenthal, 2002). While offering higher salaries has been proposed as a solution (Baker, Punswick, & Belt, 2010; Papa, 2007), findings in the strand presented here illustrate the importance of intrinsic and non-pecuniary factors in recruiting and retaining principals. All principals mentioned non-pecuniary reasons for their decisions to stay in Lawrence Public Schools. Therefore, a focus solely on monetary incentives might not be enough to recruit or retain turnaround principals.

As shown in the findings, principals mentioned "kids" and work conditions – specifically the autonomy and district support – as the two most important reasons that they come to work everyday. They acknowledged the challenges of working at Lawrence Public Schools. But they also indicated that they welcomed the challenge, as they were able to make a difference for their students. This is consistent with Farley-Ripple, Raffel, and Welch's (2012) argument that seeking a challenge plays an important role in administrators' career decisions. Lawrence central office leaders used this to their advantage and highlighted the transformative nature of the turnaround work in recruiting principals. Moreover, in Lawrence case, principals' intrinsic motivations aligned with the work environment they found themselves in. The autonomy and attached district support provided principals the agency to make decisions that mattered. Reinforcing a point Farley-Ripple make, efficacy and challenges pull principals to their positions.

Other research has shown that a work environment which relieves principals from bureaucratic mandates and trusts them as professionals can contribute to principal retention (Tekleselassie & Villarreal, III, 2011). In a similar way, my findings indicate that the guided autonomy model adopted by the Lawrence Public Schools served this purpose. However, central office leaders balanced the autonomy provided to schools with a simple description of

accountability and differentiated supports provided to schools based on accountability levels.

Two-Sided Match

Findings showed that the district focused on principals in their efforts to turn the district around. A higher percentage of principals, compared to teachers, were let go. In line with what the literature highlighted, change of leadership was seen as an essential element of recovery in almost half of the schools (Murphy, 2008). One important finding from my individual strand is that principal characteristics played an important role in central office leaders' decision to hire new principals. This is consistent with many of the ideas highlighted by Duke (2015) and Murphy (2008), that turnaround principals need to have certain characteristics due to challenges of turning around lowest performing schools. Central office leaders' focus on "ownership" provided an easy to understand concept for central office leaders when they recruited new principals to Lawrence Public Schools. It also helped principals understand what is expected of them. A common understanding around principal expectations, through the concept of ownership, pushed principals to seek solutions and assistance when needed. On the other hand, it signaled central office leaders that their job was to help principals, not to take over.

By focusing on viewpoints of both principals and central office leaders, this individual strand contributes to our understanding of the principal human capital issues through two-sided matching. While studies of principal career transitions often focus on principal decision-making (e.g., Stark-Price, Muñoz, Winter, & Petrosko, 2007; Winter & Morgenthal, 2002; Farley-Ripple, Raffel, & Welch, 2012; Tekleselassie & Villarreal, III, 2011), in my strand, by studying both sides, I show that the decision to recruit and retain is the joint product of central office leaders' and principals' preferences. A stable match happens when both central office leaders' and principals' preferences align (see Baker, Punswick, & Belt, 2010 for more on the concept of stable match). As mentioned in the previous section, one significant finding from my individual

strand is that the intrinsic and non-pecuniary factors played an important role in the decision making process. As such, Figure 3.1 provides a simple illustration of the principals' and central office leaders' preferences in the recruitment and retention decisions.

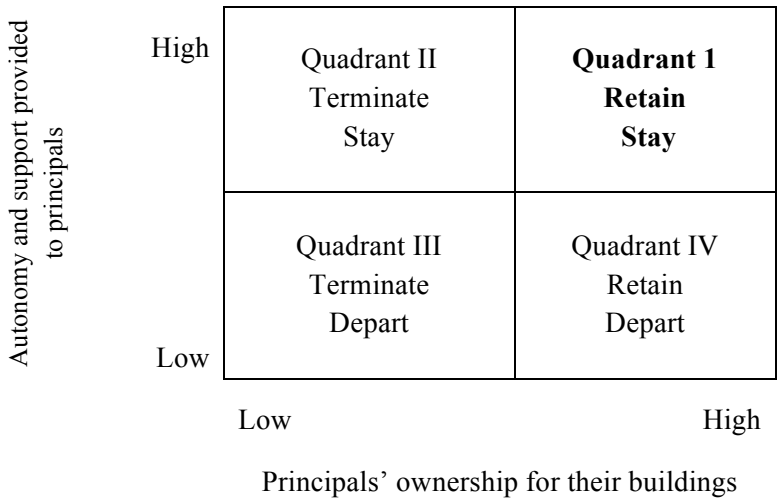

Figure 3.1. Two-sided decision making. This figure illustrates how the relationship between principal characteristics (e.g. ownership for building) and non-pecuniary factors (autonomy and support provided by central office leaders to principals) impact principal retention.

The horizontal axis in Figure 3.1 depicts the superintendent's decision to hire or retain a principal based on certain characteristics that are important for the turnaround context. Showing ownership summarizes the principal characteristics that central office leaders pay attention to when hiring and retaining principals. As the findings for my first research question indicate, central office leaders prefer to hire and retain principals on the second column, where principals show high level of ownership for their buildings. The vertical axis in Figure 3.1 depicts the non-pecuniary factors, such as the work conditions, that impact principals' decision to work in a district. Findings showed that building-based autonomy and customer service based district support were the two important work conditions appealed to principals. Having autonomy over their buildings and being supported by the central office are important for principals. Therefore, principals prefer to work in districts where they have more autonomy and district support.

Quadrant 1 represents the equilibrium where district and principal preferences match. The goal for the district would be to move to this quadrant, despite high terminations or departures rates at the beginning of the process, where there would be a stable principal core.

Sustainability

Another important finding of my individual strand is the preference for in-district recruitment over out-of-district recruitment to ensure a sustainable model. Data presented in principal recruitment section show that central office leaders recruited heavily within the district. Findings indicate that central office leaders invested in the local talent for leadership positions to ensure the sustainability of reform efforts. The reliance in Lawrence Public Schools on in-district candidates runs counter to Winter & Morgenthal's (2002) argument that internal candidates do not show interest in principalship at low-achieving schools.

The extant literature emphasizes the importance of having a strong principal pipeline of turnaround principals. Fink and Brayman (2006) argue the importance of succession and sustainability for school improvement processes. As shown in my findings, central office leaders engaged external agencies and also provided in-district professional development to develop a strong in-district principal pipeline. Moreover, by adopting a systematic way to provide teacher leadership opportunities, like the master teacher initiative, central office leaders might have also found a way to address the gender or race bias principals show when tapping teachers for leadership opportunities (see Myung, Loeb, & Horng 2011 on this bias). While I did not present any evidence on the composition of master teachers selected, I believe by requiring principals to write a proposal and seek central office approval, central office leaders could encourage a selection based more on merits rather than ancillary reasons.

Social Capital and Trust

The extant literature highlights the importance of networks for district reform initiatives

(Daly & Finnigan, 2011). In a similar way, my findings show that central office leaders utilized various professional learning communities to engage principals with each other. Through voluntary participation of principals, these networks grew organically. Principals collaborated through communities of practice to find solutions to their common problems. Central office leaders lowered the transaction costs by facilitating the process. Moreover, by not mandating participation in these professional development opportunities, central office leaders signaled principals that they trusted them with their decisions as professionals. Consequently, trust developed between principals and central office leaders. The district transformation around the concepts of building-based autonomy and customer service approach not only made principals' jobs easier but also signaled them that they are trusted as professionals who know what is best for their buildings.

Building trust, especially under high accountability pressures, is not easy. The Lawrence Public Schools' district transformation provides an example where building-based autonomy and attached district support could be instrumental in building trust. Lastly, the nature of the district support through the enactment of high-quality assistance relationships practices played a major role in building trust and improving principal retention.

District support through assistance relationships. In conclusion, central office leaders supported principals through a customer service approach where they assisted schools in the implementation of decisions they made. Honig et al.'s (2010) assistance relationships provided a way to understand the supportive relationship developed between principals and central office leaders. Moreover, a focus on five high-quality practices of assistance relationships and principal human capital enabled us to understand their contribution to district work environment and non-pecuniary conditions that could improve principal development and retention.

A differentiated support system, reinforced with modeling, reallocated district resources

so that principals who needed most help were provided with timely assistance and intervention. On the other hand, this kept high-performing principals free of unnecessary interference. Use of conceptual tools helped the district develop a common vision and an understanding of district wide expectations. Finally, through brokering and networks central office leaders made principals' jobs easier and facilitated district wide principal collaboration and engagement. The assistance relationships, when combined with the guided autonomy adopted in Lawrence, have the potential to provide a trusting work environment that is appealing to principals despite the challenging work of turning around struggling schools. Together they serve as equilibrium forces that can improve retention (Farley-Ripple, Raffel, and Welch, 2012).

CHAPTER FOUR[5]

Discussion, Limitations, and Recommendations

This overarching study explored central office transformation as a key strategy in the turnaround process in an underperforming urban district. Our dissertation in practice team examined the key practices necessary for the establishment of assistance relationships as outlined by Honig et al. (2010) and documented across five strands highlighted in the Lawrence Public Schools' Renewed Turnaround Plan (Riley & Chester, 2015). Previous research examined other aspects of this phenomena. Similarly, our team did as well: Charochak (2018) focused on the role of assistance relationships and the intersection of autonomy and accountability for principals as instructional leaders. Icin (2018) focused on the contribution of assistance relationships in the recruitment, development and retention of principals. Carlson (2018) focused on the assistance relationships developed among central office leaders and principals in the selection and implementation of learning time opportunities. Gilligan (2018) focused on central office leaders' role in the development of assistance relationships to employ and strengthen principals' instructional expectations. Tellier (2018) focused on the nature of data use for central office leaders and principals.

Lawrence Public Schools was the first district in Massachusetts designated for receivership as a result of chronic underperformance and the first to demonstrate measurable gains in student achievement (Wulfson, 2017). Lawrence students' MCAS performance improved 18 percentage points in mathematics and 24 percentage points in English language arts between 2011 and 2016. The District's graduation rate rose 19 percentage points, and the annual dropout rate fell by more than half. Subsequently, the number of level one schools

[5] This chapter was collaboratively written by the authors listed and reflects the team approach of this project. Authors include Julia James Carlson, Suzanne Charochak, Gregg T. Gilligan, Eylem B. Icin, and Sonia L. Tellier.

increased from two to ten during this same period. Moreover, the District substantially increased arts and enrichment opportunities for all students.

The overarching study contributes to the extant literature through the exploration of those high-quality practices identified by central office leaders and principals. Each strand presented individual findings in the five areas of autonomy and accountability, human capital, learning time, instructional expectations, and use of data. In this final chapter, we discuss these findings vis-a-vis their implications for practice, policy and research. First, we discuss the transformation of central office and the essential shifts made by the Lawrence Public Schools in the enactment of the high-quality practices. Second, we discuss the cross-cutting connections of assistance relationships across the five strands. Third, we provide recommendations that we believe may guide state and district leaders in addressing chronically underperforming districts and schools in urban areas.

Synthesis of Shared Findings

Two common findings surfaced as the team synthesized the individual strands in the overarching study. First, consistent with the research by Honig et al. (2010), we found that in transforming central office, leaders leveraged the stated high-quality practices to develop assistance relationships with principals. These assistance relationships are best highlighted through the examination of two important features: autonomy and accountability and the hiring and retention of principals in the turnaround process. Second, we found that these practices contributed to the development of principals as instructional leaders through the use of the five high-quality practices. Of particular focus is the development of leadership skills that deepen principals' understanding of the importance of high instructional expectations, optimizing learning time and the use of data. In the following sections, we discuss each of these findings.

Transformation of Central Office

Our overarching study suggested that the transformation of central office and the development of assistance relationships played an important part in the preliminary success of turnaround under receivership. Consistent with our conceptual framework, findings indicated common efforts to implement the five high-quality practices (Honig et al., 2010) in the Lawrence Public Schools' turnaround effort. Goals confirmed in the District's Renewed Turnaround Plan (Riley & Chester, 2015) were further substantiated in the Superintendent's call for action in *Our Way Forward* (Riley, 2014). Through each individual strand of the overarching study, data pointed to the purposeful restructuring of central office as "customer service" and the enactment of the high-quality practices of assistance relationships (see Table 4.1).

Table 4.1

Cross-cutting Impact of Assistance Relationships' Practices on Turnaround Components

Assistance Relationship Practices	**Examples of Practices that Cross Strands of the Overarching Study**
Differentiated Supports	• Level of autonomy granted to principals balanced with accountability, performance level • Resources for and responses to focused, school-level managerial decisions vary by school • Support tailored to increase principals' instructional leadership • Data use provided objective responses to individual principal requests • Provision of opportunities to grow principal capacity based on their unique needs
Modeling	• Modeling paired with reflective strategies informed principals' leadership styles • Principals mirrored own leadership practices on the successes of central office leaders' experiences as principals • Focus areas tied to cycles of inquiry and supported with data • Accompaniment to the introduction of new tools
Use of Tools	• Development and utilization of templates, shared resources, webinars and available technologies • Protocols and conceptual tools for instructional rounds, educator evaluation • Promotion of critical thinking, innovation, changed action and ongoing reflection • Creation of opportunities for personalized professional learning
Brokering	• Central office leaders' provision of previewed resources • Safeguards for principals to protect from extraneous external pressures • Minimized impact of compliance tasks on schools, classrooms • Buffered principals from bureaucratic policies and non-essential work • Contribution to common understanding of planned actions and expected outcomes
Networking	• Central office leaders connect with principals with external organizations to evaluate both practice and progress • Provision of opportunities for cross-district and interagency collaboration • Stimulation of high-quality learning environments that promote collaboration and open sharing of best practices

As Table 4.1 shows, central office leaders in the Lawrence Public Schools enacted high-quality practices throughout the turnaround process. The five high-quality practices of

assistance relationships (column 1, Table 4.1) catalogue multiple examples of how practices are evidenced across the five strands of the overarching study (column 2, Table 4.1). Each of our five strands (i.e., autonomy and accountability, human capital, learning time, instructional expectations, and use of data) examined specific components of the turnaround plan of the Lawrence Public Schools. While explicit reference to Honig et al.'s (2010) research was not a feature of the central office leaders' intentional plan, there was clear and consistent enactment of these practices by central office leaders across all strands in the development of assistance relationships with principals. Examples of the broad enactment of high-quality practices were seen in both the manner in which central office leaders modeled leadership in their interactions with principals and the use of conceptual tools to support these efforts. The intersection of these practices, when paired with reflective strategies, have contributed to the Lawrence's positive results. This suggests that central office transformation is elemental to turnaround success.

Common Themes

Several common themes emerged in the findings across strands. First, evidence showed that autonomy was a primary impetus behind change in Lawrence. We observed that the level of autonomy for principals existed on a continuum that is linked to accountability targets and can be substantiated through data use. Second, it was clear throughout our overarching study that despite the autonomy to implement programs at the school level, there remained a common vision of high-quality teaching and learning that was designed at the central office level. Finally, principals valued supports and accepted them as a tool for improvement, not of evaluation, in line with the customer service model employed by central office leaders. Principals accepted supports, whether they were provided directly from central office leaders, or leveraged from local resources. Principals reported that these supports made a difference in student learning and achievement.

The creation of assistance relationships is targeted and increasingly personalized in nature. This assistance is predicated on both the autonomy and accountability as well as the recruitment and retention of principals. These are two means by which central office leaders determine the nature of the assistance that principals require.

Autonomy and accountability. Consistent with the findings of Honig & Rainey (2012), the Lawrence Public Schools enacted the turnaround strategy of granting autonomy to school leaders in managerial decision-making to foster school improvement. The provision of this autonomy in the areas of budget, staffing, curriculum and instruction, and school schedule enabled principals to make decisions that addressed the unique needs of their individual school communities. In addition to increased autonomy, central office leaders engaged in assistance relationships with principals as a means to build instructional leadership capacity. This strategy was defined in the purposeful design structure of the turnaround plan as "Open Architecture" and highlighted by a differentiated, guided autonomy in which principals are charged with designing a school program unique to the needs of their students. Specifically, central office leaders offered autonomy to principals, providing supports and guidance, while monitoring school leaders' improvement efforts. These supports differ in frequency and intensity in balance with the performance level of principals' instructional leadership.

Recruitment and retention of principals. Principals play an important role in turning around the lowest performing districts. Lawrence's central office leaders focused on recruiting principals who showed ownership of their buildings. As such, these principals would make the best of the autonomy provided to them. The significant autonomy provided to principals was paired with substantial central office support that manifested itself in the enactment of the five high-quality assistance relationship practices. Principals valued the agency they had through the autonomy they were given. Through differentiated supports, central office leaders reallocated

resources to provide principals with timely interventions when they struggled. By brokering new resources or buffering principals from external demands, central office leaders made principals' jobs more manageable. Moreover, through facilitated networks, central office leaders encouraged district wide collaboration. Consequently, the assistance relationships developed between central office leaders and principals provided an appealing work environment for principals and contributed to their retention. We now turn to the second common finding of the overarching study, the enactment of the five high-quality practices in the development of instructional leaders.

Development of Instructional Leaders

Just as the Lawrence Public Schools enacted purposeful strategies to transform central office in the development of assistance relationships, central office leaders also communicated the expected outcomes of such assistance in the development of instructional leaders. This was done with intentional emphasis on instructional leadership, which demands heightened expectations, structured learning time, and routine use of data. The Lawrence Public Schools, through the use of assistance relationships, provided support for principals that contributed to the positive growth identified for students (Schueler, Goodman, & Deming, 2016).

High instructional expectations. The evidence we found of central office leaders' efforts to strengthen principals' instructional expectations is consistent with emerging research about the critical role central office leaders play in supporting principals' development as instructional leaders (e.g., shared vision, working collaboratively) (Honig, 2012). For example, when raising expectations, Lawrence Public Schools' central office leaders created instructional leadership institutes, developed networks and tools, and modeled key practices for principals. In all schools, central office leaders asked principals what they needed to raise expectations, and together they took on a "partnership approach" in response. Accordingly, when creating a

culture of raised expectations, central office leaders provided principals ongoing opportunities to collaborate by maintaining the use of professional networks and structured times for common planning and data review. Many principals also used collaboration time to keep the focus on high expectations by modeling their own interactions with central office leaders with their building-based leadership teams.

Optimizing learning time. Expanded learning time aimed to improve student achievement in some of the most chronically underperforming schools. The findings supported that all schools selected and implemented learning time opportunities, which resulted in increased achievement (Schueler, Goodman, & Deming, 2016). Principals had flexibility in how they implemented learning time; they received training and benefitted from the modeling of different options regarding how to set up their master schedule and extend learning opportunities through enrichment.

The literature presented on learning time opportunities as a turnaround practice in urban districts suggests that the selection and implementation of said practices helps schools create the conditions for improvement (Darling-Hammond, 2004). Moreover, the impact of learning time opportunities on school improvement were shown to be more influential when coupled with central office leaders' support of principals (Hanushek & Raymond, 2004). Consistent with this research, improvements in the Lawrence Public Schools were realized with the implementation of learning time opportunities that included not only core curriculum but enrichment as well. When schools began to get results, their success was shared with others to model best practice. Schools began to emulate each other, as evidenced in the findings, and the District as a whole improved. A review of selected school schedules revealed that all implemented expanded learning time. As stated on the Lawrence homepage, "The Lawrence Public School district has made a significant investment in TIME as a resource to advance the achievement of learning."

Data use. Collectively, leaders' share a constant sense of urgency, and data use informs responses to that urgent need for perpetual action, which grounds both central office leaders' and principals' shared practice of data use. Having data and being able to meaningfully use that data remains a critical component of Lawrence Public Schools' narrative of success. Decision-making appears centered on what is best for students. Knowing how to use data is essential to the District's imperative for leadership: Principals must be able to hold themselves accountable while central office leaders lessen the impact of external pressure.

Ultimately, data use is the nexus of central office leaders' and principals' shared practice of instructional leadership. The stories of success, as documented in assessment scores, sponsored increased autonomy for school-level leaders who reap the benefits of a transformed central office. Principals whose formative and summative assessment data revealed the greatest gains or sustained high performance received full autonomy to make decisions about their curricular design and the corresponding instruction and assessment.

Limitations and Recommendations

In light of our findings and current research on underperforming urban districts, the following section provides recommendations that may guide state and district leaders in future efforts in the turnaround of chronically underperforming schools and districts. In this section, we first discuss the limitations of our study. We then present the recommendations from each independent strand as well as those from the overarching study as they relate to three key audiences: practice, policy, and research.

Limitations

Conducting a qualitative, single-case study in an urban Massachusetts school district highlighted how central office transformation efforts led to Lawrence leaders' creation of assistance relationships. The study -- both in its totality and through its five individual strands --

contributed to a growing body of research. However, despite the contributions, there are several limitations.

The first limitation that the team considered is that the unique authority granted to the superintendent/receiver in turnaround context is not available in other public school districts. The superintendent/receiver, who is appointed by the Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education, does not have to answer to an elected, multi-member school committee. Therefore, the structure of central office leadership in the Lawrence Public Schools may inhibit the generalizability of our findings in a broad range of contexts without adjusting for consideration of this variable.

Second, our team is aware that our study presents a snapshot of Lawrence Public Schools' leadership as we aimed to examine the role of central office in providing principals with supports to develop their instructional leadership. Through this study, we documented use of high-quality practices that contributed to the strengthening instructional leadership and improvement of teaching and learning. While we drew data from documents that capture the District's turnaround experience, our overarching study does not chronicle long-term, longitudinal trends in student performance. As previously cited, this is a take off point for future contributions to the growing body of research documenting Lawrence's turnaround journey.

Among the limitations are the restrictions presented by the tight bounds of receivership. One such limitation is a possibility that participants may be hesitant to answer questions about central office leaders, the support they provide and their relationships with principals due to pressures of the receivership. In the end, our team's probing into the systems and structures of change did not appear to cause discomfort for participants.

Finally, our study's data relied on self-reported interviews gathered from central office leaders and principals. Document review and observations, while limited, provided additional

context and confirmed findings from interviews. However, the bulk of evidence relied upon self reported interviews which limits generalizability of the study. Future researchers may find that with additional site time and more opportunities for observations, they may overcome these limitations.

Recommendations

Enactment of the key strategies utilizing Honig et al.'s (2010) framework of assistance relationships and the development of principals as instructional leaders to guide turnaround reform efforts have led to demonstrated improvements in the Lawrence Public Schools. Drawing from the five strands as well as the overarching study, we present the following recommendations that implicate three audiences: practitioners, policy makers, and researchers. To better understand the scope of our recommendations, we offer a summary of the recommendations that identified each with one of three categorizations:

1. *Broadly Transferrable*. A recommendation that fits into this category is drawn from our research in the turnaround context in support of assistance relationships but is not limited to such a context. These recommendations suggest practices that would benefit improved trust among educators and improved teaching and learning for students as a result of shifts in the execution of leadership.
2. *Legal Despite Anticipated Challenges*. A recommendation in this category is likewise sourced from our research in the turnaround context. While it would be legal to transfer the related practice to nearly any educational context, there are anticipated challenges (e.g., changed working conditions, need for impact bargaining) with doing so that could deter use outside of the turnaround context.

3. *Restricted to Turnaround Context*. A recommendation in this category is, as the name states, restricted to the governance and structure of a school or district engaged in the turnaround process.

While the recommendations span five independent strands as well as the overarching study, Table 4.2 presents the full complement of recommendations from our team.

Table 4.2.

Summary of Recommendations

Recommendation	Broadly Transferrable	Legal Despite Anticipated Challenges	Restricted to Turnaround Context
Overarching Study: Practice			
Turnaround efforts must address the complex challenges facing districts.		X	
Turnaround starts with transformation of Central Office: Practitioners should re-examine the structure of central office identifying ways to transform relationships with principals to provide "customer service."		X	
Supports from Central Office must address individual needs of the building and its principal.	X		
Increase principal retention central office leaders should focus on non-pecuniary factors such as work environment and district support.	X		
Leverage local resources to improve teaching and learning to sustain turnaround gains (e.g., human capital, community organizations).	X		
Overarching Study: Policy			
Receivership offered a "Legal way to Reimagine Education:" there needs to be a way for all districts to be able to make changes like Lawrence without the strict provisions of receivership.		X	
Enable districts to employ flexibility with district responses to persistent challenges (e.g., portfolio model, changes to compensation).		X	
Incentivize university and district partnerships to improvement development of leadership pipeline.	X		

Recommendation	Broadly Transferrable	Legal Despite Anticipated Challenges	Restricted to Turnaround Context
Overarching Study: Policy *continued*			
Prioritize principal autonomy and the establishment of assistance relationships between central office leaders and principals.	X		
Focus on district transformation prior to the failure of districts; policies should give district leadership flexibility to implement a variety of initiatives.	X		
Emphasize sustainability of turnaround reform in any new policy initiative.	X		
Overarching Study: Research			
Conduct a complementary study that explores teachers' experiences with receivership.			X
Conduct longitudinal, follow up study of Lawrence's progress to assess long-term gains.			X
Create university and district partnerships to improvement development of leadership pipeline.	X		

We intentionally present our recommendations in the following order: practice is the daily action of leaders; policy is the next tier and provides a framework for practice, and research studies both practice and policy and offers insight into both their efficacy and need for change.

Practice

Turning around chronically underperforming schools is a challenging task for central office leaders. Central office leaders in these districts face complex challenges. For example, upon arriving in Lawrence, before the turnaround team was able to begin implementing the turnaround plan, they first needed to address the physical challenges of the infrastructure. The first three months were spent fixing toilets, putting up stalls, repairing broken windows and

ensuring there was heat in every classroom. In addition, they had to overcome the low morale that was pervasive in the district. The reputation of Lawrence was not positive, with a local news magazine dubbing it "The City of the Damned" (Boston Magazine, 2012). Teachers had not been evaluated, principals faced an uncertain future, and the district had endured unstable leadership. Findings of this overarching study provide some insight into effective practices that can be utilized by central office leaders charged with this difficult task. Despite these factors, there were a core of existing educators and administrators that held to the belief that positive outcomes could be realized. Below are the recommendations of our team in what we believe are *Lesson Learned from the Lawrence Public Schools*.

Turnaround starts with transformation of central office. The Lawrence Public Schools began the process of turnaround by first examining the structure and practices of the central office. A reduction of central office staff (30%) meant that there was more money available for the schools. The funding for these positions was diverted to the individual school buildings and used to improve teaching and learning. As a result of these findings, our first recommendation for practitioners to central office leaders is to prioritize the limited resources according to their contribution to teaching and learning and allocate them accordingly. The closer the funds are to the building level, the more impactful they may be in supporting student outcomes.

The transformation of central office leaders included a commitment to both autonomy and a "customer service approach." To start with, principals need the autonomy to design their schools in the way they believe will work for their students. Lawrence Public Schools' theory of action was that people on the ground knew best, and they needed to be trusted with high stakes decisions. Therefore, central office leaders should grant autonomy to building principals and their staff to utilize structures and tools that best meet the unique needs of their individual

school community. Next, central office leaders should provide principals with timely and effective support. Autonomy works best when balanced with accountability and ongoing monitoring of efficacy. The five high-quality practices, identified by Honig et al. (2010) and corroborated by this overarching study, provide a template to structure district support for principals. While central office leaders empower principals with autonomy to make a wide variety of managerial decisions in their buildings, they should also provide principals with supports tailored to their unique needs.

Supports from central office must address individual needs of the schools and principals. Each building and the needs of its students are unique and require programs and structures that supports the needs of the school community. Therefore, principals in the schools need the flexibility to make decisions about the work they do everyday. The approach in Lawrence avoided a *One Size Fits All* fix and instead utilized a strength-based model to guide the creation of the turnaround plan. Despite the overall performance of the district, central office leaders evaluated what was working (some high performing schools and some high performing teachers and leaders) and made adjustments based on their evaluations.

Additionally, Duke (2015) argues that a successful school turnaround cannot happen without a capable principal at the helm. Central office leaders should focus on recruiting principals with certain characteristics as the challenge of turning around schools is not an easy one. By hiring principals who demonstrate ownership of their schools' results, central office leaders can maximize the effectiveness of autonomy as an improvement strategy. Findings illustrated the impact of non-pecuniary factors in retaining principals. Therefore, central office leaders should not just rely on compensation as an incentive to recruit and retain strong principals for the turnaround work. Improving work conditions should be targeted by central office leaders to increase principal retention. Providing autonomy and district support through

assistance relationships will go a long way in improving working conditions in low-performing schools.

Policy

This overarching study highlighted the importance of central office transformation for a model district in the context of a turnaround. It is important to note that the gains realized by the Lawrence Public Schools were achieved through the process of a receivership. This receivership offered what the superintendent described as a "Legal Way to Reimagine Education" (The Boston Foundation, 2013). First, as part of the receivership, the receiver has the substantial authority to make changes as they operate with both the authority of the School Committee and the Superintendent and report directly to the Commissioner of Education and not the Mayor or school board. Second, the receiver is relieved from the constraints of collective bargaining; they are provided the authority to limit or suspend rights if they are deemed an impediment to rapid improvement. Third, the Lawrence Public Schools had the opportunity to rethink teacher compensation and as such, constructed a career ladder for teachers. Finally, the receivership afforded principals an opportunity and the tools to make changes to both staffing and school design.

Within the ESSA framework, state-level policy makers have more latitude to address their lowest performing schools (Sargrad, Batel, Miles, & Baroody, 2016). Policy makers should enable districts to employ flexibility with district responses to persistent challenges (e.g., portfolio model, changes to compensation). While state takeover remains an option for remediating chronically underperforming districts, policy makers should design regulations that focus on district transformation. The policies should give district leadership flexibility to implement a variety of initiatives. Local resources (e.g., human capital, local community organizations) should be prioritized in designing new programs. Policy makers and state

education leaders would be wise to come up with guidelines that promote greater flexibility to district leaders to focus on school autonomy and meaningful district support.

Research

While the literature provides direction for school leaders on how to turn around schools, the focus on central office transformation is limited. Our overarching study sought to call out central office leaders' role in turnaround. We concluded that these leaders value their changed role from directing principals' action to providing *customer service* in response to principals' requests. Transformation of central office served as the backdrop for common findings. In transforming central office, leaders leveraged the high-quality practices to develop assistance relationships with principals.

Future researchers may continue to contribute to the growing body of literature by examining our team's findings and offering a longitudinal view of this practice. Even more, this research would be complemented by a comparative analysis of the initial superintendent/receiver's influence on the District's success and the influence of the incoming leader. Another implication for future research calls for a study that explores teachers' experiences with receivership. As previously called out, the current turnaround effort spotlights leaders' professional practice; however, their changed practice affects teachers' practice. A study that captures teachers' perceptions and experiences would offer a more holistic view of turnaround.

Finally, researchers should focus on creating partnerships with underperforming districts to develop leadership programs not only to address leadership gaps, but also to study the impact of assistance relationships on principal development. Through these partnerships, researchers and practitioners can identify effective strategies to develop capacity and sustain turnaround gains.

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Appendix A
Interview Protocol

Question alignment key

DS = Differentiated Supports	**LT** = Learning Time
M = Modeling	**AA** = Autonomy & Accountability
UT = Use of Tools	**DU** = Data Use
BR = Brokering	**E** = Expectations
N = Networks	**HC** = Human Capital

Questions for Central Office Leaders

- How do central office leaders support principals in the selection of learning time opportunities (e.g., master schedules, block schedules)?
- How do central office leaders support principals in the implementation of learning time opportunities?
  - Follow up: Is there specific training on creation of a master schedule?
- Are there certain areas where schools have more or less autonomy? Please share an example.
  - Follow up: On what data do you rely to make decisions?
- How much control do you have over the management structures and the policies implemented in schools? Over what decisions do you not have control? Are these important to your job?
- Your schools all have different performance levels, capacity, communities, and demographics. What indicators are used to measure progress at both the district and school levels?
  - Follow up: How do you assess outcomes in light of these varying school needs?
  - Follow up: What are the advantages and disadvantages to this approach?
- What qualities do you look for in principals? What strategies/procedures are used in the district to recruit principals?
- What is done in the district to increase principal retention? What are the main drivers of principal retention?
- In what ways do you work with principals to set a vision and goals around instructional expectations?
  - Follow up: If instructional expectations and/or accountability goals are not fulfilled, what happens?
- What systems and structures do you have in place to support principals' development within their schools and of their teachers? Please talk specifically

about instructional expectations and/or professional growth opportunities.

Questions for Principals

- How do you create your master schedule?
  - Follow up: What things do you need to consider when creating?
  - Follow up: How do you decide on block or regular schedules?
- How do you decide to offer extended learning opportunities (e.g., Summer School, after school, etc.)?
- How much control do you have over your school's budget? What can you control?
  - Follow up: What role does central office play in your school's budget?
  - Follow up: What aspects of the budget do you not have control over? Is it important to your job?
- How much control do you have over staffing (typical year)?
  - Follow up: What role does central office play in your school's staffing?
  - Follow up: What aspects of the staffing do you not have control over? Is it important to your job?
- How much control do you have over curriculum and instruction (typical year)?
  - Follow up: What role does central office play in your curriculum decisions?
  - Follow up: What aspects of the curriculum do you not have control over? Is it important to your job?
- Why did you choose to work in the district? What motivates you to keep working here?
- Do you feel supported by the central office, and, if so, in what ways? Do you think there are enough professional growth opportunities for you at LPS? Why?
- What professional development opportunities are provided for principals? Please describe how they improve your instructional leadership skills.
- In what ways do you work with central office leaders to set a vision and goals around instructional expectations?
  - Follow up: On what data do you rely to make decisions?
- What structures or practices are in place support to your development of instructional expectations within your schools and of your teachers?
- How are expectations for high-quality instruction communicated and understood by most staff?
- What indicators are used to measure progress at the school level?

Appendix B
Adult Participant Consent Form
Adapted from Boston College Sample Form

Boston College | School of Education | Department of Educational Leadership and Higher Education
Informed Consent to be in study titled *Central Office Support of Principals through Assistance Relationships in a Turnaround District*
Researchers: Julia Carlson, Suzanne Charochak, Gregg T. Gilligan, Eylem B. Icin, and Sonia L. Tellier

Introduction
· *You are being asked to be in a research study of that is exploring the nature of the relationship shared between central office leaders and principals. Our team is specifically seeking to understanding how these two groups interaction with each other to advance turnaround reform.*
· *You were selected to be in the study because you are either a central office leader (i.e., superintendent, assistant superintendent or deputy superintendent), a principal, or another influential educator who was reference in three or more of the interview with participants in the first two identified groups.*
· *Please read this form. Ask any questions that you may have before you agree to be in the study.*

Purpose of Study:
· *The purpose of this study is to understand the role of central office leaders support principals' growth as instructional leaders. We want to know about the nature of their relationships, especially as a result of working in a district engaged in receivership.*
· *People in this study are from your same school district. The total number of people in this study is expected to be approximately eighteen to twenty-four fellow educators.*

What will happen in the study:
If you agree to be in this study, we would ask you to do respond to a series of questions that will inquire about your role as an administrator. We will also ask about the relationship(s) you share with other administrators in your district. We anticipate that our interview will take approximately forty-five to sixty minutes. This will be the only opportunity that we will specifically seek you out to ask questions. However, if you think of an additional experience or idea you want to share, you can email it to your primary interviewer within seven (7) days of the interview.

Risks and Discomforts of Being in the Study:
There are no expected risks. This study may include risks that are unknown at this time.

Benefits of Being in the Study:
· *The purpose of the study is to examine the assistance relationships shared between central office administrators and principals to inform their instructional leadership.*
· *The benefits of being in this study are the contributions to a growing body of research that seeks to understand the nature of leadership in a turnaround district. While you may not experience a direct, personal benefit, please know that you are helping inform leadership practice at large.*

Payments:
You will not receive any payment for being in the study.

Costs:
There is no cost to you to be in this research study.

Confidentiality:
· *The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report we may publish, we will not*

include any information that will make it possible to identify you. Research records will be kept in a locked file.

· *All electronic information will be coded and secured using a password-protected file. Since we will be recording the interview, we want to inform you that members of the Dissertation in Practice team, our Chairperson and instructional staff supporting our efforts to articulate our findings. Access is solely for the support of articulating and substantiating our findings in our Dissertation in Practice, which will be a published document. These reasons, therefore, are explicitly educational purposes. Our recordings will be erased and our interview transcripts will be destroyed upon publication of the final dissertation.*

· *Mainly just the researchers will have access to information; however, please note that a few other key people may also have access. These might include government agencies. Also, the Institutional Review Board at Boston College and internal Boston College auditors may review the research records.*

Choosing to be in the study and choosing to quit the study:

· *Choosing to be in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to be in this study, it will not affect your current or future relations with the University.*

· *You are free to quit at any time, for whatever reason.*

· *There is no penalty or loss of benefits for not taking part or for quitting.*

· *During the research process, you will be notified of any new findings from the research that may make you decide that you want to stop being in the study.*

Getting dismissed from the study:

· *The researcher may dismiss you from the study at any time for the following reasons: (1) it is in your best interests (e.g., side effects or distress have resulted), (2) you have failed to comply with the study rules, or (3) the study sponsor decides to end the study.*

Contacts and Questions:

· *The researchers conducting this study are Julia Carlson, Suzanne Charochak, Gregg T. Gilligan, Eylem B. Icin, and Sonia L. Tellier. For questions or more information concerning this research you may contact them at [telephone number or other way to contact person].*

· *If you have any questions about your rights as a person in this research study, you may contact: Director, Office for Research Protections, Boston College at (617) 552-4778, or irb@bc.edu.*

Copy of Consent Form:

You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records and future reference.

Statement of Consent:

I have read (or have had read to me) the contents of this consent form. I have been encouraged to ask questions. I have received answers to my questions. I give my consent to be in this study. I have received a copy of this form.

Signatures/Dates

Study Participant (Print Name) : *Date* _____

Participant or Legal Representative Signature : *Date* _____