Central Office Leaders' Role in Supporting Principals' Instructional Expectations in a Turnaround District

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CENTRAL OFFICE LEADERS' ROLE IN SUPPORTING PRINCIPALS' INSTRUCTIONAL EXPECTATIONS IN A TURNAROUND DISTRICT

Dissertation in Practice

by

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Abstract

This qualitative case study explored the role of central office leaders as they supported principals' development of high instructional expectations in the 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 were 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 employed high quality practices that strengthened principals' instructional leadership capacity and raised instructional expectations within schools and of teachers. Principals reported that having central office support through systems and structures, curriculum, culture and working conditions created heightened instructional expectations and contributed to their growth as instructional leaders. The central office leaders and principals reported the strong culture of assistance relationships contributed to increased expectations and improved student outcomes. Recommendations include continual examination of assistance relationships among central office leaders in support of principals in the context of a turnaround district. 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 can serve as a guide for the practice of central office leaders who

are working with principals to raise and create heightened instructional expectations required for improving achievement and equity system-wide in habitually underperforming schools and districts across our country.

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CHAPTER ONE[1]

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 preparation) of these accountability reforms hinder improvement efforts (Berliner, 2011; Hong

[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.

& 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, Plecki, 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.

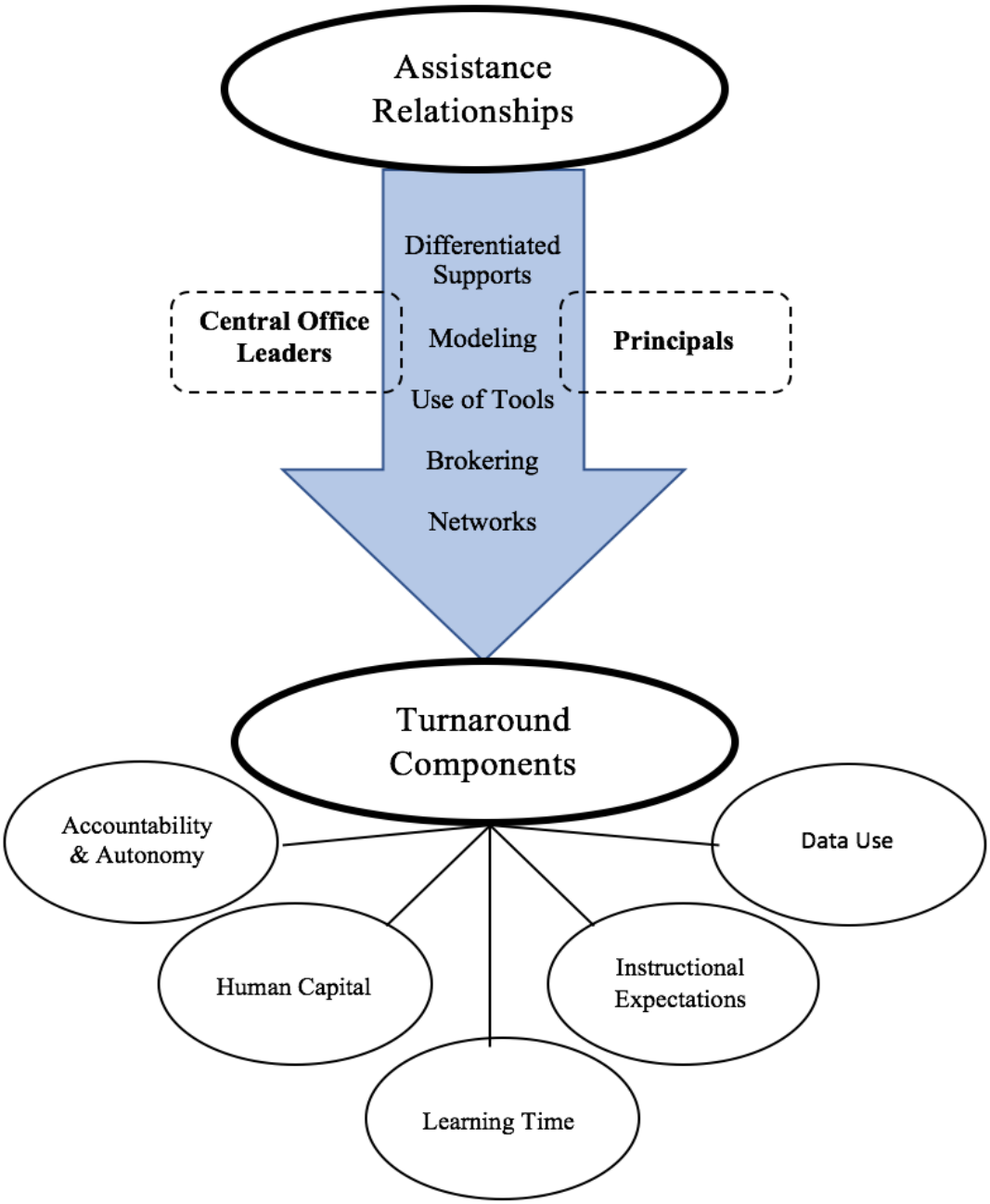

Figure 1.1. Connecting Assistance Relationships and Turnaround Components.

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 Thomas 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

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 (2014)

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 PRINCIPALS' INSTRUCTIONAL EXPECTATIONS IN A TURNAROUND DISTRICT

Improving learning outcomes in our country's chronically underperforming schools is identified as a top priority in federal, state and local reform initiatives. In the state of Massachusetts, chronically underperforming districts are referred to as "turnaround districts.[4]" Federal (Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), 2015) and state (Office of District and State Turnaround (ODST), 2017) accountability policies have issued mandates specific to turnaround districts with the goal of improving schools and student achievement outcomes. Central office leaders and principals in turnaround districts are, thus, under increased pressure to raise instructional expectations and improve achievement outcomes (Johnson & Chrispeels, 2010). Despite leadership efforts and a continual focus on the lowest performing schools (Office of District and School Turnaround, 2017), many researchers argue that state and district leaders have done little to produce significant change (Fullan, 2014; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008).

Historically, school improvement research highlighted the importance of the principal in school reform efforts (Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, & Easton, 2010; Skrla, McKenzie, Scheurich & Dickerson, 2011). A growing body of literature, however, emphasizes the importance of the relationship between central office leaders (e.g. Superintendents, Deputy and Assistant Superintendents, Chief Operating Officer) and principals in the context of turnaround school reform (Honig, 2012; 2010). For example, Honig (2008) found that turnaround initiatives are more likely to achieve scale when central office leaders focus their

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[3] Chapter 3 was authored by Gregg T. Gilligan

[4] Referred to as turnaround districts, the lowest performing districts in Massachusetts (Level 4 and 5) are required to create, develop and implement a turnaround plan that ensures that the district can support effective instruction and student achievement through raised expectations (Office of District and School Turnaround, 2017).

energy on building the instructional leadership capacity of principals. At the same time, Katterfield (2013) suggested that the influence of high instructional school-level expectations established by principals is an important factor in raising student achievement. Honig, Copeland, Rainey, Lorton and Newton (2010) in their study, *Learning Focused Partnerships*, found that the "assistance relationships" formed between central office leaders and principals can positively impact school improvement outcomes by supporting principals' working in turnaround districts in building their instructional leadership capacity.

However, in their effort to create assistance relationships and support instructional leadership, central office must undergo its own transformation. Specifically, Honig et al., (2010) identified five high-quality practices as part of these assistance relationships that central office leaders can employ to assist principals in establishing high instructional expectations in their schools. These practices include: (1) differentiating supports, (2) modeling ways of acting and thinking, (3) developing and using tools, (4) brokering, and (5) engaging principals in networks. These practices play a key role in organizational learning and the advancement of instructional leadership capacity. Therefore, the exploration of these practices will contribute to a growing understanding of how central office leaders best support principals' development of high instructional expectations. (Honig et al.; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2003).

Using the conceptual framework of assistance relationships, (Honig, et al., 2010), the overarching Dissertation in Practice (DIP) further explored the role of these "assistance relationships" in accordance with the five components of school reform identified by Schueler, Goodman, and Deming (2016). According to Schueler, et al. these components include: (1) instructional expectations, (2) accountability and autonomy, (3) human capital, (4) learning time, and (5) data use. The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) considers these five components vital to successful reform (ODST, 2017). In order to gain a

deeper understanding of their importance, we organized the individual studies that composed our DIP according to Schueler's et al. (2016) five components of school reform.

My individual strand of this DIP explored the role of central office leaders in a turnaround district as they supported principals' development of high instructional expectations (within in their schools and of their teachers). To examine this element of turnaround, I looked at instructional expectations in a chronically underperforming district working under a receivership[5]. Assistance relationships provided a lens for examining district leaders' efforts to address instructional expectations. Specifically, my strand sought to answer two research questions:

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?

A key component of school turnaround is high instructional expectations for teaching and learning. Assistance relationships between central office leaders and principals are a critical part of central office transformation to support principals' instructional expectations (Honig, 2012). Collectively, our DIP investigated the role of central office in supporting principals' instructional leadership capacity in a turnaround district. My individual strand aimed to understand how central office supports principals' development of instructional expectations. Overall, our DIP seeks to provide districts, schools, educational leaders and researchers keen insight on quality and successful practices to advance principals' instructional capacity in turnaround districts through assistance relationships.

[5] According to M.G.L. c. 69, § 1K - When a district is designated to be in receivership, the receiver is given the powers of the superintendent and school committee and full managerial and operational control over the district.

Literature Review

In order to set the context for my research focus, I briefly review literature relating to central office leaders' efforts to support principals' instructional expectations within their schools in a turnaround district through assistance relationships. First, I discuss practices that central office leaders employ to support high expectations in a school environment. Second, I describe the importance of central office transformation and the development of assistance relationships in support of principals' instructional expectations. Lastly, I discuss turnaround districts and why central office leaders play a key role in their support of principals instructional leadership capacity and how both work to raise expectations and improve student achievement in chronically low performing districts.

Practices to Support High Instructional Expectations

Today's principal is tasked with creating a learning environment conducive to providing high quality curriculum and instruction for all students and establishing instructional expectations to support teaching and learning (Gottfried, 2003; Cotton, 2003; Katterfield, 2013). Effective central office and principal leadership serves to promote a shared academic vision and goals, develop a school-wide culture, encourage the use of specific instructional strategies, and create orderly and supporting working conditions (Robinson, Lloyd & Rowe, 2008; Leithwood et al., 2010). Principals' instructional expectations impact the quality of instruction teachers provide in the classroom as well as student achievement (Cotton; Bryk et al., 2010). When principals actively and transparently create instructional expectations relating to systems and structures, school culture, adherence to the curriculum, and working conditions for teachers, student achievement improves (Leithwood et al., 2010). The role of the principal in instructional leadership is necessary for school reform (Leithwood et al.,). In a meta-analysis of both quantitative and qualitative studies that measured principal impact on student achievement,

Waters, Marzano and McNulty (2004) found a significant correlation between principal leadership and student achievement. Similarly, in a later meta-analysis, Leithwood (2010) found that principal leadership is the second most influential factor to student learning. From this literature emerge four high-quality practices that influence instructional expectations in a school environment to improve teaching and learning.

Systems and structures. The use of systems and structures is one way leaders set direction and establish high expectations for learning in underperforming schools (Leithwood, et al., 2010; Rorrer et al., 2008; Katterfield, 2013; Thompson, Henry, and Preston, 2016). In a narrative synthesis of past research, Rorrer et al. found that systems and structures play a key role in district-wide reform and posit that district leaders must consider their role supporting principals to reorient expectations. The role of the district leaders in school reform and support of principals is critical to improving student achievement (Rorrer et al.).

Leithwood et al., (2010) further identified the use of the systems in creating a shared sense of direction through the development of a strong vision outlining high expectations for teaching and learning. Additionally, articulating and defining where the school needs to be in the future is a key strategy in school turnaround. It is through this common understanding and a well-developed vision that teachers perceive high school-level expectations for classroom instructional practice (Katterfield, 2013). Accordingly, Thompson, et al., (2016) found strategically organized and managed structures and supports for instruction to be instrumental in turnaround reform. Specifically, successful principals reoriented low expectations for behavior and student achievement to reflect high expectations for student learning.

School culture. Principals are key players in creating a positive school culture with high expectations (Chenoweth, 2007; Thompson et al., 2016). A positive school culture set by the principal emphasizes clear expectations for achievement. Weiner and Higgins (2016) identified

building principals as key actors in creating school culture. Additionally, Tichnor-Wagner, Harrison, and Cohen-Vogel (2016) found that schools with stronger cultures had distinct practices leading to shared goals and high expectations. The creation of a psychologically safe working environment in a positive culture supports the development of skills and knowledge that are essential to improve instructional practice (Leithwood, 2010).

A culture of data use also contributes to increasing learning expectations in a school building (Honig & Venkateswaran, 2012). High-quality teaching is critical to school turnaround along with the regular use of data to inform instruction (Lachat & Smith, 2005). Moreover, analysis of data clearly establishes instructional expectations (Rorrer et al., 2008). Reflection about instruction informed by data creates a shared understanding of defined learning outcomes, which can, in turn, positively influence school culture through a common vision. (Duke 2015).

Adherence to the curriculum. A third way principals ensure high expectations is through consistency of curriculum (Katterfield, 2013; Leithwood et al., 2010; Robinson et al., 2008). Leaders in high-performing schools are actively involved in the planning and coordinating of curriculum (Robinson et al.). Curriculum that is challenging, with high learning expectations for all students, promotes academic growth and "demonstrates what is valued in the learning environment" (Little, 2012, p. 703). Leithwood et al., (2010) posit that principals must restructure their schools to address adherence to curriculum through collaboration.

In a turnaround district, central office must support the work of principals as they create structures for collaboration within their buildings (DuFour & Eaker, 2010). Central office leaders may grant the autonomy to building principals to create or modify curriculum that meet the unique needs of their individual school community (Demas & Arcia, 2016). Additionally, resources may be allocated to support embedded professional development such as coaches and

content specialists to strengthen pedagogy, which can in turn, raise expectation for learning (Bottoms & Fry, 2009).

Similarly, mentoring can play a key role in principals' own growth as instructional leaders (Daresh, 2007). Mentors play an important role in the development of principals as instructional leaders responsible for setting school-wide expectations. Additionally, districts must have a relentless focus on improving instruction and raising academic expectations by supporting building principals as the leaders of learning (Bottoms & Fry, 2009). Professional development specifically targeted for principals through assistance relationships supports this articulation of high expectations and performance standards (Honig, 2012).

Working conditions. Working conditions play a critical role in teacher buy-in of high expectations. Management of human capital, buffering staff from distractions and providing opportunities for professional development and networking are examples of practices that can positively affect working conditions (Leithwood, 2010). In a school turnaround study, Cucchiara, Rooney, and Robertson-Kraft, (2015) found that consistently improving schools received messages from central office and principals about the importance of rigorous instruction and engaging learning with high expectations for all students. As a result, Cucchiara et al. identified these types of working conditions as crucial elements in establishing high expectations as an institutional reality.

Similarly, Hallinger, Heck, and Murphy (2014) identified supervision and evaluation as a key component to raising instructional expectations in schools. Their review of teacher evaluations and their relationship to school improvement found that evaluations play a key role in instructional expectations as they "contribute to development of a results-oriented school culture ... designed to foster quality in teaching and learning" (Hallinger et al., p. 8). Moreover, modeling best evaluation practices in central office leaders' supervision of principals may

increase principals own instructional leadership capacity (Honig et. al, 2010). While work to improve expectations in turnaround districts is challenging, the work of central office leaders and principals is far more effective when done in collaboration. Central office leaders need to work with principals through assistance relationships if they are to raise expectations.

In sum, Leithwood et al., (2010) identified the following four high-quality practices that influence instructional expectations in a school environment to improve teaching and learning: the use of system and structures, developing school culture, adherence to curriculum, and working conditions. The next section discusses the importance of central office leaders developing assistance relationship to support principals' instructional expectations in turnaround districts (Honig, 2012).

Central Office Transformation

Historically, central office leaders have not participated or partnered with building-level leaders to improve teaching and learning (Honig et al., 2010). Furthermore, past research on educational leadership focused mostly on the principal (DuFour & Marzano, 2011). However, Honig et al., (2010) posit that in order for turnaround schools to improve, central office must work closely with principals and provide support for principals' growth as instructional leaders.

The conceptual framework that guided this study and our overall group Dissertation in Practice is the work of Honig et al. (2010) on central office transformation to support principals' instructional leadership through assistance relationships. Increased pressure and accountability in turnaround districts have resulted in the role of central office shifting from one of management to one of instructional leadership (Honig, 2013). Through this shift, central office support of principals' instructional leadership has resulted in the creation of assistance relationships to improve teaching and learning (Honig, 2008; Honig et al.; Honig, 2012).

Honig's study of Central Office Transformation for District-Wide Teaching and

Learning Improvement (2010) outlined five key practices that serve as the conceptual framework to explore instructional expectations. Therefore, the work of central office to advance district leaders' ability to support principals' instructional expectations is based on the following five practices of assistance relationships: the use of differentiated supports, modeling ways of acting and thinking, developing and using tools, brokering resources, and engaging principal in networks. These five practices provided a lens through which I examined the support central office leaders provided principals in raising instructional expectations.

First, Honig et al., (2010) found central office leaders needed to provide differentiated supports based on principals' individual needs and circumstances within the schools they lead. When central office leaders effectively supported principals based on their respective needs, student achievement increased (Duke, 2015; Leithwood et al., 2010). Therefore, in order to raise instructional expectations and leadership capacity, principal-specific supports such as coaching and mentoring serve as effective tools (Daresh, 2007; Rorrer et al., 2008).

Second, the practice by central office leaders of modeling ways of acting and thinking about instructional expectations serves as an exemplar for principals to develop their own understanding of instructional expectations (Honig et al., 2010). Thus, central office modeling of high-quality practices such as providing evaluative feedback strengthens principals' ability to raise instructional expectations. As a result, principals develop skills necessary to raise and set high instructional expectations.

Third, Honig et al. (2010) cited the use of tools as an avenue to grow principals' practices. Using tools such as protocols to establish performance standards and expectations in Professional Learning Communities illustrates one example of how central office and principals can work in partnership to use common tools and language (DuFour & Eaker, 2010). Subsequently, this collaborative work may assist both central office leaders and principals with

consistent messaging of instructional expectations.

Fourth, through the brokering of external mandates associated with turnaround plans and policy, central office leaders solidified principals' understanding and assisted in the prioritization of strategies and initiatives to improve student learning. Alleviating the pressures that accompany sanctions associated with turnaround allowed principals to focus their attention on the important task of addressing student learning (Berliner, 2011; Duke, 2012).

Last, engaging principals in professional networks led to increased student achievement (Honig & Rainey, 2012). Through these networks, central office supported principals' ability to articulate, communicate, and raise instructional expectations in a collaborative setting. These included administrative professional learning communities and/or memberships in state or national organizations, as well as other less formalized opportunities. As a result, principals gained different perspectives that allow for their own professional growth and capacity to effectively raise instructional expectations.

Therefore, focusing on how district leaders support principals' instructional expectations will contribute to a growing understanding of the link between instructional expectations and assistance relationships (Honig et al., 2010; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2003). This study seeks to contribute to increased understanding of assistance relationships with central office leaders and principals. In the third and final body of literature, the next section will address the unique needs of these relationships in a turnaround district.

Turnaround Schools

Leithwood et al., (2010) identified turnaround strategies for school leaders to employ in low-achieving schools and posit that these strategies are only successful if central office leaders and principals are engaged in collaborative reform efforts. Research on turnaround schools, identified low expectations as an important cause of failing schools (Duke, 2015). Changes in

academic performance were directly related to educational expectations (Mistry, White, Benner, & Huynh, 2008; Jacobson & Rosenthal, 1968). In general, principals cannot successfully lead school reform without effective central office involvement (Duke, 2015; Thompson et al., 2016). Central office leaders are particularly important partners for principals in turnaround districts to improve teaching and learning. Recent research identified the critical need for central office leaders to partner with principals in turnaround districts to improve teaching and learning (Honig et al., 2010; Honig, 2012). Finnigan and Daly (2012) pointed out that increased emphasis on district responsibility and accountability created the need for an environment where schools feel supported and are protected from the accountability demands of sanctions. As a result, school turnaround was less likely in the absence of a central office and principal assistance relationship (Finnigan & Daly).

In sum, turnaround districts did not see significant improvement in teaching and learning without substantial engagement by central office leaders in building the instructional leadership capacity of principals (Honig et al., 2010). Central office leaders' role in turnaround districts required clear expectations of central office-to-school relationships (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2003; Honig, 2012).

Methods

The purpose of this strand was to understand principals' instructional expectations in the context of a turnaround district. The research questions explored central office leaders' role in supporting principals' instructional expectations through the use of high-quality practices while engaging in assistance relationships. Honig's assistance relationships served as the conceptual framework for this study.

Context

As described in Chapter Two, the overarching study of the Dissertation in Practice (DIP)

employed a qualitative-design methodology chosen to capture information and explore the ways central office leaders interacted with principals in the development and implementation of instructional expectations in their schools through high-quality practices. In order to address my research questions, I utilized a case-study approach. This case study allowed me to explore the complex development of instructional expectations in a turnaround district and the nature of assistance relationships between central office leaders and principals (Yin 2014).

Data Collection

In order to answer my research questions, I drew upon two types of data: documentation and semi-structured interviews. This strand and the data collected focused on ways central office leaders provided principals with support in creating instructional expectations within their schools. Data was gathered between July 1, 2017 and December 1, 2017.

Document review. A document review (See Table 3.1 below) took place to construct the interview protocol in preparation for a series of semi-structured interviews with identified central office leaders and principals (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). A document review focused on instructional leadership practices including all school improvement plans, district improvement plans, and report cards on the schools and district from DESE. These documents were chosen by our dissertation team to provide information on the current state of school reform in the Lawrence Public Schools. Additional documents were added to this review upon recommendation of interviewees.

Table 3.1

Document Collection

Initial Documents
Plans

District Turnaround Plan (2012, 2015)
School Improvement Plans (2014, 2015, 2016)
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 Card (2014-2017)
State Department of Education School Report Cards (2014-2017)

Additional Documents

Our Way Forward, August 2014
Lawrence Level 5 District Turnaround Plan - Renewed Plan

Interviews. The interview protocol (see appendix A) afforded me the opportunity to gain insight of each participant's perspective on instructional expectations and to respond with additional questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The DIP team worked in pairs to conduct interviews in eight school buildings as well as the central office. Participants included a purposeful sample of central office leaders and principals (see table 2.2). The DIP team conducted 15 interviews. Additionally, I worked with the district superintendent to recruit central office leaders and principals to participate. Interviews ranged from 36-66 minutes and interview responses were recorded and transcribed.

Data Analysis

I transcribed and coded documents and interview responses and examined the codes for themes concerning principal instructional expectations. The coding process was cyclical (Saldana, 2009). In my first cycle of coding, I explored the data to gain a deeper understanding of assistance relationships. I organized and grouped like coded data into families using the following categories: Differentiated Supports (DS), Modeling (M), Use of Tools (UT),

Brokering (BR) and Networks (N). This cycle generated categories, themes and concepts to match our conceptual framework.

Secondary codes allowed me to organize and group like-coded data into the following categories: Systems and Structures (SS), School Culture (SC), Adherence to Curriculum (AC) and Working Conditions (WC). Leithwood (2010) identified these four practices as instrumental in improving instructional leadership (see table 3.2). Coded data informed responses to our team's research questions that aligned to my individual strand of the overarching study, as well as provided insight on my individual research questions. In each future cycle, DIP team members examined the data and inductively generated codes that supported our individual coding efforts (Saldana, 2009).

Second Cycle (Secondary Codes)

Table 3.2

Practices for Improving Principals' Instructional Expectations

Code	**Description**
Systems & Structures (SS)	Creating a shared sense of direction (high expectations); strategically planning; reorient low expectations
School Culture (SC)	A culture of data use to inform instruction; reflection about instruction
Adherence to Curriculum (AC)	Principal is involved in planning and coordinating curriculum; willing to restructure to address adherence curriculum; professional development to set instructional expectations
Working Conditions (WC)	Messages from Central Office on what is rigorous instruction; teacher supervision & evaluation

In addition, I compiled an analytic memo to record documentation and reflection of the coding process and code choices that assisted in the articulation of making sense of the data (Saldana, 2009). I contributed to the team process memo to capture the documentation and

subsequent reflection of the decisions made by the group throughout this process. All notes and documents were kept in a secure DIP team file to record all reflections about the participants and iterative process of thinking throughout the case study.

Findings

To present my findings, I begin by addressing my first research question. I describe the ways central office leaders attempted to strengthen instructional expectations in the context of a turnaround district. Then, addressing my second research question, I describe how the assistance relationship between central office leaders attempted to support the efforts to raise instructional expectations in the context of a turnaround district.

Attempts to Strengthen Instructional Expectations

The four categories of high quality practices (Leithwood et al., 2010) provide useful categories for considering how central office leaders strive to strengthen principals' instructional expectations. In the Lawrence Public Schools, all[3] principals are provided a myriad of supports to strengthen principals' instructional expectations through (a) systems and structures, (b) school culture, (c) adherence to curriculum, and (d) working conditions.

Systems and Structures. The use of systems and structures is one way leaders can set direction and establish high expectations for learning in underperforming schools. In the interviews, all[6] central leaders and all building principals reported that systems and structures were in place across schools to strengthen instructional expectations as part of the district's turnaround plan. For instance, one structure that research participants referenced was the Instructional Leadership Institute (ILI), an annual district-wide conference for all administrators with a focus on instructional expectations, instructional standards and their impact on student

[6] 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

learning. One central office leader explained, “The Instructional Leadership Institute sets the instructional goals at the beginning of the school year and provides the framework for building principals to set individual school instructional expectations. We set the academic focus for the year.” Another central office leader emphasized that the ILI provided a platform to employ strategies that raised instructional expectations. In reviewing an ILI agenda, I confirmed that the content of the Institute focused on assisting principals in setting instructional expectations and goals based on the need of their individual schools. One central office leader attributed the impact of the ILI growing principals’ capacity to make sure students are provided with “rigorous academic work or instruction.”

A second area of systems and structures developed by central office that almost all principals reported as beneficial was the structure of a Professional Learning Community (PLC) model for all schools. A professional learning community, or PLC, is a group of Lawrence educators that meets regularly, shares expertise, and works collaboratively to improve teaching skills and the academic performance of students. In Lawrence, PLCs are held for three hours each week and facilitate a collaborative process to examine instructional expectations and practices across the district. One principal described that the PLC structure allowed time to meet in her building and stated:

> You know we have professional learning days built in, within my school we basically have three hours of professional learning per teacher per week. So we use that as professional learning time... to set goals, plan lessons and review data to improve instruction.

Another principal reported that this professional learning structured time was used to bring in experts to “make sure we are doing things the right way, and that we are and that we have really

high expectations." This principal cited the support of ANet coaches as an example of an outside curriculum expert working during this time.

A third example of a system and structure was the system set up by the superintendent in which he met principals through annual meetings to set yearly goals. All central office leaders and all principals reported that goal meetings had a major emphasis on high instructional expectations. For example, one central office leader explained that in pursuit of "providing students with rigorous academic expectations. Every principal at the beginning of every school year sits with the superintendent, and they go over all of those goals." Through the implementation of structured goal meetings all principals reported working with central office leaders to create a shared sense of direction. One principal noted that goal setting was a collaborative process through "a shared conversation with the superintendent" or other members of the central office leadership team.

School Culture. Principals serve as key players in creating a positive school culture with high expectations. Data use is one way in which principals can set instructional expectations within their schools and of their teachers. Almost all principals and all central office leaders reported that data use with support from central office leaders created a shared understanding of raised instructional expectations. In a response representative of many, one principal reported that as a result of data support from the central office, teachers developed a stronger sense of data literacy and increased their expectation for student outcomes: "I think the expectations have just continued to increase, and 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."

Similarly, one central office leader reported that the use of data provided principals a clear target line: "[We] can really see where the students are and make sure we're giving them what they need, what every other student across the commonwealth is getting at that grade

level. We're getting them closer to it." When describing how data helped create a culture of instructional expectations, almost all principals reported receiving support from central office leaders on data use as instrumental in helping them meet the instructional needs of students in their building. For instance, one principal reported that " we do all kinds of assessments" to inform instruction. Many of these are tracked by central office leaders on the *Big Data Sheet* or within independent formative assessment programs. The *Big Data Sheet* is a document provided to principals with longitudinal data on individual student performance (1.e. MCAS, ACCESS, Disability Status etc.).

Adherence to Curriculum. A third way principals ensure high expectations is through consistency of curriculum. Almost all principals and most central office leaders reported attending or participating in the Standards Institute through UnboundEd as professional development that aided in the selection, implementation and assessment of curriculum for their individual buildings. UnboundEd's Standards Institute is an intensive five-day professional development experience that encouraged greater understanding of the research behind the standards, instructional expectations and delivered practical, day-to-day strategies that can improve instructional practice and leadership in schools. Although this is one recent professional learning opportunity, it is representative of the ongoing efforts within the District.

One principal described participating in the Standards Institute as a way in which expectations are set and reported that participation in the institute fostered the development of the following shared expectations: "Rigorous instruction, high standards, a good enrichment program and professional learning communities." Almost all central office leaders described this training as a way in which principals could plan and coordinate curriculum to set instructional expectations. One central office leader reported that the programs made available to principals "actually talk about quality instruction, and what are the standards, and what does

deep instruction look like, beyond the word 'rigor,' but what actually qualifies as that." Similarly, one principal characterized how data from interim assessments informed deep instruction: "e have grade level teams looking at how we are implementing curriculum."

Working Conditions. Consistent messages from central office leaders, including supervision and evaluation, are key components to raising expectations in schools as part of working conditions. Through the evaluation process and memorandums, central office leaders are regularly sending messages with themes of high instructional expectations focused on rigorous, standards-based instruction. Almost all principals reported that central office leaders evaluate the way in which instructional expectations are set. According to one principal: "There's no excuses here. You have high expectations for everyone." Similarly, communications from central office reinforced the district commitment to this message. One central office leader reported that the superintendent sends out bi-monthly memos that contain "a message on the front cover... hearing from him directly about something that's impactful to the district or important."

Most central office leaders and most principals reported that messages in the bi-monthly memos were taken from a district document that served as the blueprint for improvement titled *Our Way Forward* (Riley, 2014). Similar to messages identified in the memos, *Our Way Forward* emphasized heightened instructional expectations as part of a purposeful plan for the Lawrence Public Schools to create a culture shift in schools where staff believed all students were capable of high student achievement. In this memo, the superintendent (2014) asserted: "Our children were not always presented with challenging work or high expectations"(p.8). The superintendent explained the cornerstone of his vision in the document entitled *Our Way Forward* that "really set the direction for us." The superintendent reported that raised instructional expectations were critical to improved student outcomes and that the "ultimate

goal is for each school to give Lawrence students a high-quality education that mirrors the experience of kids in the suburbs" (p. 8). In Lawrence, almost all central office leaders, using a customer service approach, implemented a turnaround plan supporting all principals and re-orienting expectations by calling "out the need to empower those at the school level while providing schools with the support necessary to succeed" (Riley, 2014, p.4).

In sum, the evidence I analyzed pointed toward many practices central office leaders employ to strengthen principals' instructional expectations. All central office leaders and all principals reported that the four supports for instructional expectations (i.e., systems and structures, school culture, adherence to curriculum, and working conditions) led to increased instructional expectations across the district.

Assistance Relationships

My second research question examined how "assistance relationships" between central office leaders and principals affected the principals' instructional expectations of their teachers and within their schools. As described above, the five dimensions of assistance relationships are 1) differentiating supports, 2) modeling, 3) use of tools, 4) brokering, and 5) networking. While most participants identified all five practices, I found evidence on networking and the role networks play in the development of instructional leadership of principals as the foundation. I next present modeling and the use of tools in a combined section as the intersectionality of these two practices are intertwined throughout the evidence. Finally, I examine the evidence of differentiated supports and brokering to highlight how leaders sustain their work.

Networking. The evidence showed that all central office leaders work to stimulate high-quality learning environments through the facilitation of principal engagement in professional networks. One central office leader described networks in this way: "Things like UnboundEd and outside networks have really raised instructional expectations." All principals

reported that networks were available for them to join. Participation in these networks, as for all professional development opportunities, is voluntary. One principal described it this way: "Invitations are sent out to participate in outside learning opportunities. We do a little research and say yes or no thank you." While almost all principals reported taking advantage of these opportunities, some principals reported, "that although this was available, they did not participate."

Additionally, all principals described a myriad of opportunities to engage in instructional growth. One principal reported, "We've done a lot of work around that, and we've done a lot of work outside of our district, so we've kind of worked with different programmings. We've done a lot of work with this UnboundEd." Almost all principals described opportunities to visit schools in other districts. For example, one principal reported, "When A-Net was new to us, we used to go see Boston schools" to learn the program. Furthermore, one principal described networking with other districts in the pursuit of growing instructional leadership and to better understand:

> What does collaborative time look like? What do good enrichment programs look like? What does teacher-planning look like? What does using the data look like? It was great because none of us had ever done this before, and then we did visits. We visited Orchard Gardens in Boston who has been doing it for years and we visited a school in Worcester.

Almost all central office leaders reported that principals had the opportunity to attend and or join networks specifically tailored to meet their unique needs and goals. Examples evidenced in interviews and document review included participation in the following networks: Expeditionary Learning, the National Academy of Advanced Teacher Education, the National Center on Time and Learning and the Boston College Lynch Leadership Academy. In addition to these formal networks, all principals reported the opportunity to participate in informal

networks. For instance, one principal identified “Communities of Practice, PLCs, and Mini Standards Institutes” as examples of informal networking.

Modeling and Use of Tools. Both modeling and use of tools are considered together as these qualities share characteristics, which became evident in participants’ responses. For example, all principals reported receiving support in the form of modeling by central office leaders and use of tools particularly regarding supervision and evaluation. Most central office leaders and some principals reported that Instructional Rounds explicitly highlighted what heightened instructional expectations should look like. One central office leader described instructional rounds with principals as, “instructional leaders conducting learning walks and classroom visits, assessing how curriculum is aligned to standards.” Similarly, one principal described participation in the rounds as beneficial to her “instructional leadership growth” and had “success” with a tool for Instructional Rounds provided by central office. Further, the document review confirmed central office leaders’ commitment to increased evaluator feedback. For example, experienced principal evaluators modeled and coached less experienced principal evaluators “regularly to focus on how to conduct high quality observations….and to calibrate and improve feedback’ to teachers to improve instruction (MA DESE, Lawrence Artifact Brief, 2015,p. 3).

All central office leaders utilize conceptual tools to promote and model good instructional leadership practices. In a response representative of many, one principal reported, “ the data analysis template that central office provides and assists me with... helps me understand where we are as a school and where we have to get to.” All principals described the use of assessment tools and data analysis as a support in setting instructional expectations. Central office leaders’ support principals’ data use, which all principals identified as a driving force in their efforts to raise instructional expectations. One central office leader who supported

a principal's use of data stated, "You have to make sure [principals are] aware of everything. For what I do, I'm like a little guardian angel. I just hover around them, around their data, and make sure it's where they need to be." When describing data tools central office provided, one principal responded:

> We have a central office leader that supports assessment and accountability… They do a really good job for us of collecting it and putting it in a place that we can have it all. And this central office leader will, again it's up to us, but can come and work with our teachers, or work with our admin team to sort through the data, figure out what it's telling us.

Differentiated Supports. Almost all study participants reported that central office leaders differentiated their support of principals' instructional expectations. When describing differentiated supports, one central office leader explained, "Support varies by principal, so 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." Conversely, this central office leader reported, "On the other hand, if somebody's really struggling, I'm more intensive in my support. I'll be there more often, I'll be working with them, I won't be just green-lighting all of their decisions." Similarly, one principal of a high performing (Level 1) school reported that central office leaders provided differentiated levels of support based on principal performance. This principal reported they enjoyed a great level of autonomy and stated, " Yeah, it would be nice if central office could be around more, but they are busy people. I think they know what we do here, and I think if they were concerned, quite honestly, they would be here more often." One principal confirmed different levels of support and explained that as a Level 3 school the superintendent was a lot more visible and present. "He came and has done learning walks. He's

walked through. He has a rubric. He visits classrooms. He'll give us feedback on what he saw, what he thought was good, what maybe we need to work on."

Brokering. Almost all central office leaders provided new resources, increased understanding, and buffered principals from external demands. Similarly, almost all central office leaders and almost all principals reported that the central office was restructured to support principals and schools. Central office leaders explained that their goal was to support principals with the resources they needed to run their building while cutting down and making sense of "red tape". One central office leader put it this way, " I definitely view myself as a customer-service person for schools." Therefore, when principals make a request, central office leaders respond with support and resources in response. Another central office leader described it this way:

> Our goal is to take non-essential work off of schools' plates so principals and teachers can focus on what is most important—improving teaching and learning. This means clearing out bureaucratic policies, minimizing requests we make of schools, and taking care of operations and compliance tasks.

In Lawrence, almost all central office leaders utilized assistance relationships to support principals' instructional expectations. All central office leaders and all principals reported that although all five practices were enacted, some were more frequently identified in responses from both central office leaders and principals. In support of instructional expectations, networking and the combination of modeling and use of tools were the most frequently cited in interviews and the review of documents. Almost all principals identified these supports as crucial to increased instructional expectations across the district. In the final section I discuss these findings' implications for practice in light of current scholarship.

Discussion

This study describes the ways in which central office leaders in the Lawrence Public Schools have gone about supporting principals' instructional expectations for improving achievement for all students. Analysis of the data found that principals' instructional expectations within their schools and of their teachers were supported in several areas of school leadership as part of a turnaround strategy. Central office leaders strengthened principals' instructional expectations by employing supports through systems and structures, school culture, adherence to curriculum, and working conditions (Leithwood 2010). Additionally, the data showed that central office leaders and principals engaged in assistance relationships through the use of five important practices: differentiated supports, modeling, use of tools, brokering, and networking (Honig et al., 2010). Central office leaders employed these practices in an effort to support principals' instructional leadership capacity and development. At the same time, Lawrence Public Schools demonstrated significant gains in student academic achievement, attendance and improved graduation rates. While working to support raised instructional expectations through a shared vision of heightened expectations, central office leaders served principals through a customer-service approach to develop their instructional leadership capacity. These findings have implications for districts enacting turnaround practices.

High Instructional Expectations

Research on principals' instructional expectations suggest that principals help schools improve by creating a learning environment conducive to providing high-quality curriculum and instruction for all students and establishing instructional expectations to support teaching and learning (Gottfried, 2003; Cotton, 2003; Katterfield, 2013). Instructional expectations help schools create the conditions for improvement (Honig & Rainey, 2012). Further, effective central office and principal instructional leadership serve to promote a shared academic vision

and goals, develop a school-wide culture, encourage the use of specific instructional strategies, and create supportive working conditions which improve outcomes for student achievement (Robinson, Lloyd & Rowe, 2008; Leithwood et al., 2010). Consistent with this research, improvements in the Lawrence Public Schools were realized with central office support of principals through the implementation of key practices that created a culture of high instructional expectations throughout the district as a critical part of the district turnaround plan.

Central office leaders in the Lawrence Public Schools demonstrated that their work supporting principals' development and implementation of high instructional expectations resulted in a significant culture shift where student achievement improved. First, principals created a shared sense of direction (with high expectations) and strategically planned and re-orientated expectations that led to improved achievement through training (systems and structures) and participation in the *Standards Based Institute* and *Instructional Leadership Institute*. Second, a commitment was made to strengthen principals' instructional expectations through school culture. Creation of communities of practice, with support from central office leaders, led to a culture of data use to inform instruction and set ambitious goals. Third, adherence to a rigorous curriculum led to high standards, and differentiated supports were put in place and provided principals with meaningful professional development (e.g. Standards Institute, National Academy of Advanced Teacher Education School, & UnboundEd). These supports were differentiated for each principal based on the need of the principal and school, which led to school improvement. Finally, the decision to develop working conditions in schools that set explicit goals though supervision and evaluation, along with messages from central office, led to clear and raised expectations. The strategic turnaround plan and purposeful manner in which central office leaders supported principals raised instructional expectations and ultimately student achievement.

Crucial to the gains of the Lawrence Public Schools was the purposeful plan to raise expectations and create a culture shift in schools where staff believed all students were capable of high student achievement. These goals were outlined in Our Way Forward (Riley, 2014). The Superintendent described that raised instructional expectations were critical to improved student outcomes. The commitment to establishing high instructional expectations is similar to turnaround efforts in other urban districts. However, in Lawrence, central office leaders (using a customer service approach) implemented a turnaround plan supporting principals and re-orienting expectations by calling out the need to empower those at the school level while providing schools with the support necessary to succeed. Consistent with the research by Honig (2010), this approach shifts away from a "top-down" leadership approach, and instead central office leaders serve principals in their efforts to raise expectations. The Lawrence Public Schools Turnaround Plan created a new concept of how the district organized support for principals on behalf of their schools.

Assistance Relationships

In accordance with research on assistance relationships, central office transformation and school turnaround, the Lawrence Public Schools transformed central office by reducing 40% of staff and redistributed those staff resources to schools to support and strengthen principals' instructional leadership capacity. This bold transformation of central office clearly illustrated the existence of assistance relationships (Honig , 2012) developed by the Superintendent through the use of differentiated supports, modeling, use of tools, brokering, and networks. According to the Superintendent "at its core, central office becomes about serving schools, not the other way around". The transformed central office and the support central office leaders provided principals were reported by all study participants interviewed. All participants

in this study noted that as principals' instructional leadership skills expanded, student achievement improved.

Central office leaders implemented key impactful practices in a myriad of ways to support principals' instructional expectations within their schools and of their teachers. The key practices of transformation (Honig et al., 2010) most frequently identified in the area of expectations included differentiated supports in the networks provided to principals on standards- based, rigorous curriculum and modeling in the area of instructional rounds. For example, principals participated in National Academy of Advanced Teacher Education cohorts to strengthen principals curriculum and instructional knowledge. Similarly, modeling of instructional rounds served as an important support for principals in the area of what rigorous instruction looked like, and these opportunities provided principals with clearly defined instructional expectations

Our country faces a well-documented achievement gap in most of our urban school districts (Putnam, 2015). Educational leaders and policymakers should take pause to look at the work that has taken place in the Lawrence, Massachusetts Public Schools district. Central office transformation and the role of assistance relationships were key components to improved expectations and student outcomes. Certain aspects of the partnership, shared vision, and key practices that strengthened principals instructional expectations in the Lawrence Public Schools should serve as a guide for other urban districts that have not realized heightened expectations and improved student outcomes.

Conclusion

In sum, Paul Reville, a professor at Harvard University's Graduate School of Education, described the turn around best and stated:

> When you look at the annals of state intervention in local school districts across the country… there's virtually no track record, nor extant examples of states effectively turning around academic performance in local school districts until Lawrence arrived on the scene (Christian Science Monitor, 2017).

This individual strand explored the ways in which central office leaders in one public school district that was making significant gains at closing the achievement gap, went about strengthening principals' instructional leadership through the use of key practices and the development of assistance relationships. This individual strand concluded that central office leaders employed high quality practices that strengthened principals' instructional leadership capacity and raised expectations within their schools and their teachers through efforts attempted in their turnaround plan that led to improved student outcomes. This strand's findings can serve as a guide for the practice of central office leaders who are working with principals to raise and create heightened instructional expectations required for improving achievement and equity system-wide in habitually underperforming schools and districts across our country.

CHAPTER FOUR[7]

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

[7] 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 Thomas 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 sse. 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 Thomas Gilligan, Eylem B. Icin, and Sonia 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 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* _____