Central Office Leaders' Role in Supporting Principal Autonomy and Accountability in a Turnaround District

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CENTRAL OFFICE LEADERS' ROLE IN SUPPORTING PRINCIPAL
AUTONOMY AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN A TURNAROUND DISTRICT

Dissertation in Practice

by

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with Julia James Carlson, Gregg T. Gilligan, Eylem B. Icin, and Sonia L. Tellier

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Central Office Leaders' Role in Supporting Principal Autonomy and Accountability in

a Turnaround District

by

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Abstract

This qualitative case study explored the role of central office leaders in supporting

autonomy and accountability 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 was gathered from interviews with and

observations of central office leaders and principals as well as a document review. The results

of the study found that principals were granted broad autonomy in several areas of school

leadership that resulted in improved student outcomes. Findings further noted that central office

leaders engaged in assistance relationships and employed the key practices in their efforts to

support principals. Principals reported that central office leaders employed these practices in

each of the four decision-making areas of building leadership; budget, staffing, curriculum and

assessment, and scheduling. While enacting autonomy for principals in building decision-

making, central office leaders executed a "customer-service culture" of

support. Recommendations include continual examination of assistance relationships among

central office leaders in support of principals' autonomy 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 strands' findings may begin to provide insights into strategies that will add to school improvement efforts for chronically underperforming schools and districts.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

CHAPTER ONE[1]

Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

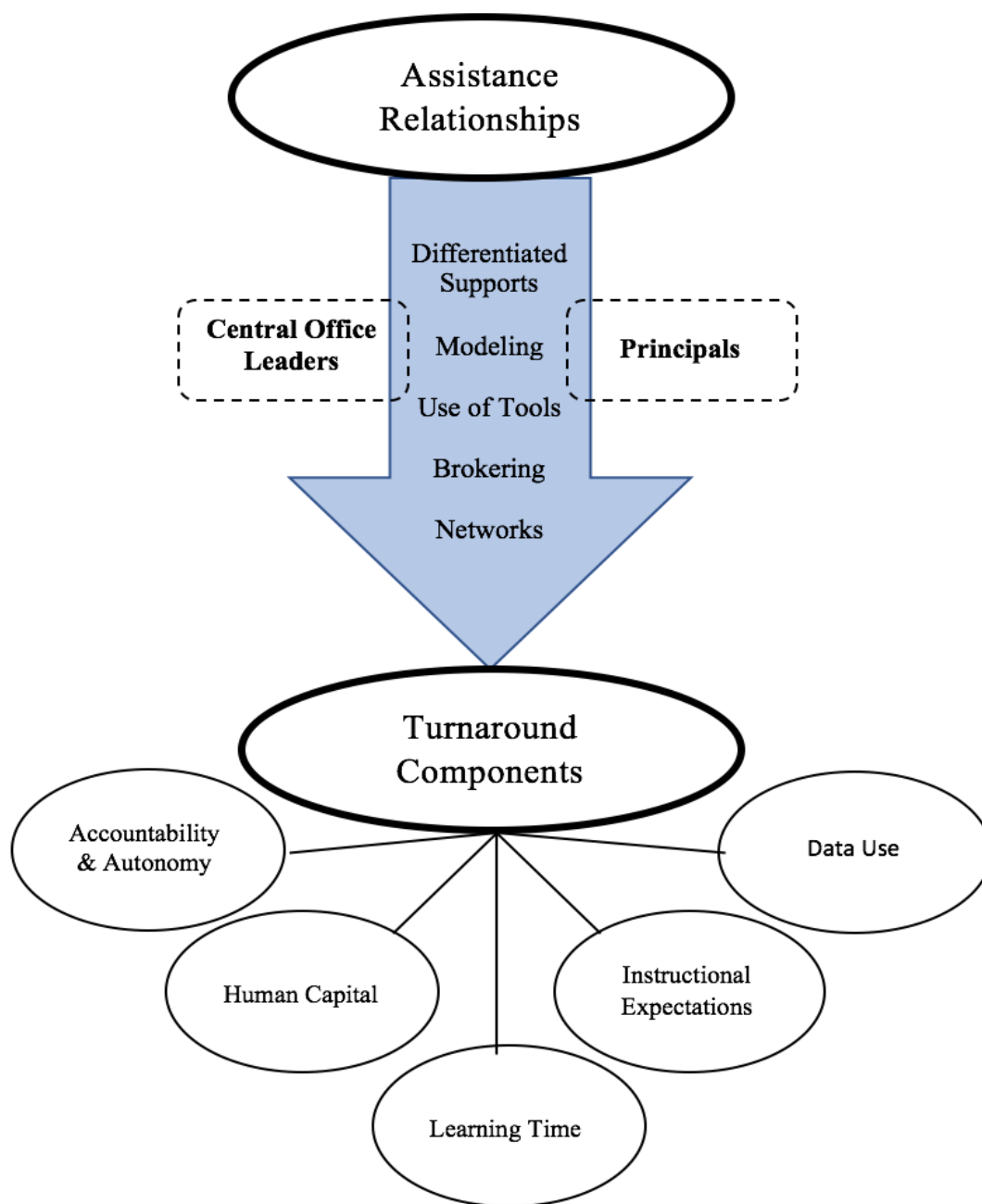*Figure 1.1. Connecting Assistance Relationships and Turnaround Components.*

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

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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 M. Charochak, Gregg T. Gilligan, Eylem B. Icin, and Sonia L. Tellier.

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

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

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

Table 2.1

Accountability Level Improvements

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

Due to low number of districts identified for receivership, the team anticipated difficulty

masking the identity of the selected district. Therefore, to enrich the data collected, the team

pursued and was granted a non-confidentiality allowance, so the district could be named.

However, to the extent possible, the team agreed to maintain the confidentiality of central office

leaders and principals selected as participants.

Data Collection

In order to determine how central office leaders supported principals as instructional

leaders in a turnaround district, we relied on three types of qualitative data: archival

documentation, interviews and observations. Qualitative researchers operate under six

assumptions (Merriam, 1988), and our team leveraged all six in advancement of our study. First,

as qualitative researchers, we drew more from the process of discovery than we did from finite,

quantifiable outcomes. Likewise, as stated in the second assumption (Merriam, 1988), we

trusted that our efforts would inform meaning in the vital relationships shared between central

office leaders and the principals they employ and support. How they received information and

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

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

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

Table 2.2

Document Collection

Plans
        District Turnaround Plan (2012, 2015)
        High School Improvement Plans (2014, 2015, 2016)
        Middle School Improvement Plans (2014, 2015, 2016)
        Elementary School Improvement Plans (2014, 2015, 2016)

Report Cards
        State Department of Education District Report Cards (2015-2017)
        State Department of Education School Report Cards (2015-2017)

Staff Memos
        Our Way Forward

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

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

Table 2.3

Interview Subjects

Participants
    Central Office Leaders

    Building Principals, K - 12

    Other administration mentioned in plans targeting central office support of principals' instructional leadership

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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]

Autonomy and Accountability in a Turnaround District

Central office leaders face the challenge of ensuring high-quality teaching and learning of students across the district. Despite decades of intervention to improve chronically low-performing urban schools, results are mixed at best (Childs & Russell, 2017). In a turnaround district, the sense of urgency to improve student outcomes is even greater (Honig, 2012).   To date, research on the school improvement process underscores the principal's role as instructional leader (e.g., Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, & Easton, 2010; LeFloch et al., 2014; Keller & Slayton, 2016; Louis et al., 2010). However, the role of central office in supporting the development of principals' instructional leadership capacity is less well documented (Honig, Copland, Rainey, Lorton & Newton, 2010). As a result, leaders in turnaround districts face navigating the turnaround process and implementing reform efforts that require a transformation of central office without the proven guidance of research (Honig, 2012).

The role of central office in a turnaround district requires clear expectations of central office-school relationships (Honig, 2008; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2003). Turnaround districts do not typically see significant improvement in teaching and learning without significant engagement of central office to build the capacity of the instructional leadership among principals. Honig et al. (2010) refer to these relationships as "assistance relationships" and emphasizes their importance in her analysis of the practices of central office staff in three urban districts (Honig et al.). Honig et al. outlined five high-quality practices that advanced district leaders' ability to support principals' instructional leadership capacity: the use of differentiated supports, modeling, tools, brokering and networks.

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[3] Chapter 3 was authored by Suzanne M. Charochak

Effective implementation by central office leaders of high-quality practices to promote principals' instructional leadership correlates with increased student achievement (Waters & Marzano, 2006). To impact student outcomes, central office leaders must shift the focus of their work from regulatory functions to agents of change (Honig et al., 2010). Utilizing the conceptual framework of assistance relationships developed by Honig et al., the overarching study in this Dissertation in Practice explored the extent to which central office leaders applied high-quality leadership practices in accordance with the five components of school turnaround reform: autonomy and accountability, human capital, learning time, instructional expectations, and use of data (Schueler, Goodman, & Deming, 2016). The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Schools (DESE) identified these specific strategies as those that districts must attend to for successful reform in their guide to Turnaround Practices (Office of District and School Turnaround (ODST), 2017). We examined these practices in a Massachusetts turnaround district that demonstrated positive growth and had identified engaging in central office transformation as a key aspect of their turnaround plan.

In my individual strand, I explored the intersection of autonomy and accountability in this turnaround district. Building upon Honig et al.'s (2010) research, I examined the role of central office in the areas of autonomy and accountability by answering the following research questions:

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 the increased accountability in a turnaround district?

Essential to the success of turnaround is the balance of autonomy and accountability in which feedback informs outcomes. The shift to assistance relationships between central office leaders and principals will impact the implementation of this autonomy and other strategies in school improvement efforts in a turnaround district.

Literature Review

The intersection of autonomy and accountability is critical in reform efforts and considered a key element of central office transformation (Demas & Arcia, 2015). To contextualize my examination of this intersection, I review three literature strands. I first consider the transformation of autonomy as a reform strategy in school improvement efforts over time. Next, I explore the role of accountability policies in education reform, their use in school improvement efforts and the emergence of district responses to accountability in turnaround efforts. Last, I examine the ways in which principals exercise autonomy in their instructional leadership.

Autonomy

Reform strategies that promise autonomy for building leaders aim to foster school improvement by changing schools' decision making authority (Honig & Rainey, 2012). Principals, as part of the policy design, are afforded increased discretion over a myriad of decisions ranging from curriculum and instruction, budgets, human resources, and the school calendar. One aspect of these policies is an increase in school autonomy in exchange for greater responsibility for accountability (NCLB, 2002).

Initiatives aimed at providing principals autonomy in school-based decisions are not new. Education reform in the 1960's and 1970's focused on school decentralization in order to increase efficiency and offset state authority (David, 1989). The school-based management movement that emerged as a reform strategy in the 1980's held a different focus. These

initiatives shifted the authority for school-related decisions from the district to individual schools in the hopes of empowering schools to replace regulations with responsibility and encouraging schools to develop innovative practices that better met the needs of students (Honig & Rainey, 2012).

Despite the intentions, research on these initiatives yielded "little evidence that school-based management improves student achievement" (Honig & Rainey, 2012, p. 468). These efforts failed for three main reasons. First, school-based governance councils consumed a great deal of time and effort from both staff and leadership (Leithwood & Menzies, 1998). The focus of their work concentrated on unrelated activities that did not improve student learning outcomes. Second, schools were not prepared to assume the responsibilities associated with this autonomy (Malen, Ogawa, & Krantz, 1990). The policies did not account for the necessary time or resources to use this authority in ways that would improve student achievement. Third, the school-based management initiatives of the 1990's emanated from state policy, and district offices did not support the idea of decentralized, site-based management (Honig & Rainey). Because of this, district leaders continued with the top-down implementation of policy and did not transfer authority to the schools.

These earlier, site-based reform efforts focused on autonomy and accountability as a positive correlation; high performing schools operate with increased autonomy (Honig & Rainey, 2012). Honig (2012) posits an alternate correlation, proposing that in turnaround efforts, schools with the lowest performance may need the greatest amount of autonomy to address the varying conditions within their building. This alternative model suggests that autonomy and accountability have an inverse or conditional relationship (Bloom, Lemos, Sadun, & Van Reenen, 2014). Several studies suggest that this closed loop of autonomy, accountability, and assessment is found in schools that demonstrate significant improvement

(e.g. Bloom et al., 2014; Fryer, 2014; Patrinos et al., 2015). Patrinos et al. conclude that if one or more of the components is low, the effectiveness of the system is compromised and school and student performance does not improve.

Autonomy initiatives. Contemporary autonomy initiatives identified their purpose as focusing on teaching and learning (Honig, Lorton, & Copland, 2009). Some of these initiatives developed a quality review process that held schools accountable for student improvement as a requirement of autonomy. Unlike previous initiatives that reward schools with freedom as a result of demonstrated levels of performance, the new autonomy initiatives help schools create the conditions for improvement within the traditional public schools as a starting strategy of turnaround (Honig & Rainey, 2012). The newer initiatives anticipated the need for school teams to build capacity, recognized the need for central office and schools to develop assistance partnerships, and recognized this relationship as a shared responsibility.

School autonomy refers to the principal's authority to make school based management decisions on budget planning and the staffing of their building, as well as pedagogical decisions on curriculum and assessment and learning time (Bruns, Filmer & Patrinos, 2011; Demas & Arcia, 2015). The central emphasis on teaching and learning, the investment in building capacity for school leaders, and the involvement of central office as the key supporter of the school autonomy are key components of success for school improvement (Honig & Rainey, 2012). The impact of autonomy on school improvement is nuanced by the level of instructional leadership the principal provides (Patrinos et al., 2015). However, autonomy alone does not provide the answer for low performing schools and districts. Questions remain regarding whether performance is linked with the autonomy afforded and how that autonomy is exercised (Bloom et al., 2014). An examination of the use of autonomy in turnaround efforts must also

include discussion regarding the tensions created through accountability efforts in our lowest performing schools.

Accountability

Current federal policy on school improvement focuses heavily on accountability. As described in Chapter One, the evolution of federal reform efforts culminated in the passage of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in 2001. These reforms, linking achievement to a single, mandated standardized assessment attempted to address student achievement through sanctions tied to federal funding. Critics of NCLB argued that this reform limited school-based decision-making and led to greater centralization than any previous reform effort (Forte, 2010). Additionally, research suggests that these accountability contexts lessened the likelihood that high-quality leadership practices were enacted (Finnigan & Daly, 2012). It is yet to be seen how Every Student Succeeds Act of 2016 (ESSA), the newest reauthorization, will impact chronically underperforming schools and districts.

In the effort to turnaround a school or district, three distinct responses to accountability sanctions have emerged (Bruns, Filmer and Patrinos 2011; Bulkley, Henig & Levin, 2010). The first, standards-based reform, with its roots in IASA (1994) and NCLB (2001), sets its aim at district and state leadership and relies exclusively on state-mandated, test-based performance to measure accountability. A school's accountability level, in turn, impacts how much autonomy central office affords the principal. Research indicates a weak but positive link between the use of these large-scale assessments and accountability measures for student learning outcomes (Clarke, 2010).

The second approach to accountability sanctions aims to create a more competitive market for education through the use of vouchers or public-private partnerships. This market-based accountability reform relies on school choice to drive school improvement and assumes

that low-performing schools will find ways to improve or face closure due to under-enrollment (Bulkley et al, 2010). One example of this is the emergence of privately funded charter schools. In addition to enrollment factors, private charter schools create and renew individual accountability plans every five years in which they identify the metrics they will employ to ensure objectives are being met (MA DESE, 2017).

The third approach, differentiation of schools, shifts away from the premise of a common school, instead acknowledging that schools are distinct in some way (Bulkley et al., 2010). Examples of this are evident in the push toward magnet schools, small schools and public charter schools. The result is a range of schools within a system of choice serving the varying needs and interests of students and broadening the opportunity for innovation. Bulkley cites New York, Chicago, and Boston as examples of turnaround districts that have increased these small, autonomous schools.

A well-defined autonomy and accountability system achieves closure when it "enforces enough autonomy to evaluate its results and use those results to hold relevant actors accountable" (Patrinos, Arcia & Macdonald, 2015, p. 432). The closed-loop of autonomy, accountability and assessment is an integral part of instructional leadership (Patrinos, et al., 2015). Effective central office leaders grant principals the authority they need while maintaining a consistent balance with accountability for continuous improvement (Waters & Marzano, 2006). Thus, the following section examines the attention and support central office leaders provide principals regarding student learning outcomes through assistance relationships.

The Exercise of Autonomy in Instructional Leadership

Reform efforts often ignore the role of central office in school improvement efforts (Zavadsky, 2016). NCLB mandated that districts help schools improve their performance, thus supporting the notion that central office leaders play an important role in the outcome of school

improvement efforts (Honig et al., 2010). Much research has been done in the past decade on leadership for learning that has examined both the practical role of principals as well as the organizational view of educational systems (Breidenstein, A., Fahey, K., Glickman, C., & Hensley, F., 2012; DuFour & Marzano, 2011). Yet there is a lack of research on what this looks like in practice and, in particular, how assistance relationships between central office leadership and principals impact student learning (Knapp et al., 2014). Studies that do focus on the role of central office in teaching and learning improvement often highlight what not to do (Togneri & Anderson, 2003; Honig et al., 2009).

Previous research on the role of central office may have been hindered in part by methodological limitations (Honig, 2012). One such limitation is the small number of central office administrators, the lack of access to district leaders and the available data on their daily practices. There are some studies that have concluded that central office administrators should provide support for principal learning but most draw their findings from cases in which central office has not provided support (Hubbard, Mehan & Stein, 2006). Others have found a correlation between central office support and principal engagement in instructional leadership, but does not specify what central office staff did to make a difference (Honig).

Honig et al. (2010) posit that in an effort to transform central office and improve teaching and learning outcomes, central office leaders must make substantial investments building assistance relationships with principals to exercise instructional leadership. The creation of an assistance relationship involves engaging central office leaders and principals in joint work practices, building the capacity for them to become more able instructional leaders (Honig, 2008). In light of the autonomy afforded to principals in a turnaround district, the establishment of assistance relationships is critical. This strand examined the level of autonomy

and the support that central office leaders provided in key areas of school-based decisions; staffing, budget, curriculum and scheduling.

Principals in turnaround schools may have sole discretion for fiduciary control of their building (Demas & Arcia, 2015). In some turnaround districts, rather than receiving most of their budget through staffing allocation formulas set by the district, turnaround schools receives a lump sum per pupil amount equal to other schools that the principal is able to allocate as they see fit (Honig, 2009). In addition, they can decide whether or not to purchase discretionary services from Central Office. Additionally, they may also be afforded the opportunity to make staffing decisions based on the best interest of students in their schools, and have the authority to select the best staff from both internal and external candidates without regard to seniority. In some cases, compensation structures may be developed to support the hiring and retention of effective staff.

Pedagogical decisions are also required at the building level and in some turnaround districts, principals are not required to follow district mandated curriculum or assessments. In their analysis of schools in Oakland, Honig et al. (2009) found that those that engaged in autonomous initiatives often create or modify curriculum "focusing on rich and rigorous school designs" (p. 482). Further, in schools where principals have developed systems to create curriculum, staff engagement increased with their increased decision-making capabilities. Additionally, principals may have the ability to vary the length and schedule of instructional periods, allowing staff the flexibility that offers improved focus on teaching and learning (Patrinos et. al., 2015). Extended learning time is another option that principals may elect to allow staff opportunity for collaboration and time to plan interdisciplinary curriculum. Turnaround schools are able to modify the school schedule and calendar. Finally, principals are

afforded flexibility in start and end times that may reflect the particular conditions of their school community.

This individual strand aimed to examine the exercise of autonomy in four areas: budget, staffing, curriculum and assessment, and scheduling. Understanding the level of autonomy administrators have in school based decisions, and the ways in which the central office leaders support these decisions through assistance relationships as part of the development of instructional leadership were examined in this qualitative case study in a turnaround district.

Methods

To explore this interplay of autonomy and accountability, I utilized a qualitative research methodology (Merriam, 2009) to study a single turnaround district. This offered the opportunity to examine assistance relationships across a complex interchange of central office leaders and building principals. As described in Chapter Two, the overarching study employed a case study approach (Yin, 2014). This strand aimed to explore the relationship between central office administrators and principals in a turnaround district and the high-quality practices of instructional leadership employed within the district in respect to autonomy and accountability. The five practices of assistance relationships (differentiating supports, modeling, developing and using tools, brokering, and networking) served as the conceptual framework for the strand (See Table 3.1).

Table 3.1

High-Quality Practices of Assistance Relationships

Code	Description
Differentiated Supports (DS)	Central Office leaders working with principals in ways that fit the individual needs and strengths related to instructional leadership, levels of empowerment of autonomy
Modeling (M)	demonstrating instructional leadership to support autonomous decision making
Use of Tools (UT)	engaging/modeling discussions about school walkthrough and classroom observation protocols, cycle-of-inquiry protocols, and data based protocols to focus principals' instructional leadership practices on outcomes;
Brokering (BR)	central office leaders supporting principals by connecting them to resources outside of their immediate circles; options of partnering with agencies;
Networks (N)	examples of social engagement with a focus on increasing individual and collective knowledge; autonomous schools' leadership groups

In particular, four policy goals identified as a turnaround practice for autonomy were examined in an effort to describe how these practices were applied in the Lawrence Public Schools. These policy goals for autonomy (See table 3.2) in a turnaround reform included school budget, staffing, curriculum and assessment, and scheduling (Demas & Arcia, 2015).

Table 3.2

Goals of Autonomy in a Turnaround Reform

Code	Description
Budget (BG)	sole discretion for fiduciary control of their building
Staffing (HC)	select the best staff despite seniority; compensation structures
Curriculum (E)	create and modify curriculum and assessments
Scheduling (LT)	modify school schedule and calendar

Data Collection

The case study included a document review, observations and interviews conducted from July to December, 2017. I have drawn on these three sources of data to identify ways in which central office leaders granted autonomy and the extent to which they employed high-quality practices to support principals in their school improvement efforts.

Document review. I conducted a document review in preparation for a series of semi-structured interviews (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) with identified leaders at central office and in schools. The documents were used to triangulate interview responses for information regarding the ways in which central office supports building administrators by granting autonomy and monitoring accountability. Data was drawn from a purposeful sample of official records (Merriam, 2009). The review of documents identified turnaround practices related to autonomy, patterns or trends of gains in student achievement associated with these practices, and specific goals or strategies of central office support for principals related to these practices.

These documents were selected as they provided pertinent information about goals and strategies identified by the redesign committee as relevant to school improvement (See Table 3.3).

Table 3.3

Document Collection

Initial Documents

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 Card (2015-2017)
State Department of Education School Report Cards (2015-2017)

Additional Documents

Our Way Forward, August 2014
Lawrence Level 5 District Turnaround Plan - Renewed Plan - 2015

Observations

Jeff Riley and the Emerging Lawrence Schools Experience - 11/13/13
State of the School's address to DESE Board - 11/15/17
Interview with Board of Education - 1/26/18

Semi-structured interviews. Our team engaged in interviews at eight different building sites in addition to the district offices and participants included a purposeful sample of six central office leaders and nine building principals (See Table 2.2). Each participant was interviewed individually and transcripts of these interviews were sorted using codes relevant first to our conceptual framework of assistance relationship (See Table 3.1) and then in

accordance with the four policy goals of autonomy and accountability (as described below in Table 3.2).

The interview protocol examined central office and building administrators experiences in the turnaround process, central office support of instructional leadership and the level of autonomy afforded principals in the four areas of management: budget, staffing, curriculum and assessment and scheduling. Based on the conceptual framework of assistance relationships, the protocol focused on ways in which central office leaders supported the development of instructional leadership through five high-quality practices: differentiated supports, modeling, use of tools, brokering, and networking (See Appendix A).

Data Analysis

Interviews, observations and documents were recorded, transcribed and entered into Dedoose software, which was used to facilitate the coding of all data and to identify broad practices in place in the district. The process of data analysis involved cycles of coding (Saldana, 2009). In the first cycle (Table 3.1), I filtered the data from documents to generate categories, themes, and concepts to match the conceptual framework of our overarching study. The second cycle was used to "organize and group similarly coded data into families" (Saldana, p. 9) in accordance with the four policy goals of autonomy and accountability (Table 3.2). All further cycles generated codes determined inductively. Transcripts and field notes were coded in the same categories (differentiating supports, modeling, developing and using tools, brokering, and networking). Additional descriptive codes compiled further identified areas of autonomous decision making at the building level or references to accountability.

I documented reflections on the coding processes and code choices in an analytic memo to articulate how I made sense of the data (Saldana, 2009). I included specific examples of school-based decision-making, examples of central office leaders holding others accountable,

and references of expectations set by district leadership. Additionally, the Dissertation in Practice team maintained a process memo to record our work.

Findings

In what follows, I describe the ways central office leaders utilize assistance relationships to support instructional leadership in a turnaround district. First, I describe ways in which central office leaders grant autonomy to support school improvement. Second, I describe how central office leaders employ assistance relationships to support principal's autonomy as instructional leaders in the context of the increased accountability in a turnaround district.

Autonomy, Accountability and School Improvement

My first research question inquired into the ways in which central office leaders grant autonomy to principals and school leaders in their efforts to support school improvement. In the Lawrence Public Schools, the evidence suggested that all[4] principals are afforded increased discretion over a myriad of decisions ranging from budgets, staffing, curriculum and assessment, and the school schedule.

The primary way in which autonomy was granted can be best illustrated in the Lawrence Public Schools in the purposeful turnaround design identified as "Open Architecture". This new paradigm, first described by the Superintendent (Riley & Chester, 2015) highlighted a differentiated, guided autonomy in which school are afforded broad autonomy to run their school as they see fit. The superintendent described Open Architecture as the ability "to customize supports to individual schools' needs" (Riley, 2014, p. 4). At the core of Open Architecture is the flexibility for school teams to design a program that will accelerate achievement based upon the unique needs of the students in their buildings. As the

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

superintendent explains, "Open Architecture is fundamentally about differentiation" (Riley, p. 4). It is not a one-size fits all model.

Evidence from interviews revealed that this concept of Open Architecture was embraced by central office leaders and principals through the district. All respondents talked about it directly. For instance, one central office leader described it in this way:

> We're expecting that you're going to be running this and we are here to support you and we will provide the best customer service we can provide, but you need to be innovative and you need to be resourceful and you need to go out there and make sure you find what's right for your school.

At the heart of the plan is the built-in autonomy for principals to make decisions regarding the operation of their school. The four areas of school operations (Demas & Arcia, 2015) identified as necessary conditions for managerial autonomy include (a) budgets, (b) staffing, (c) curriculum and assessment, and (d) schedule.

Budgets. The purposeful design of Open Architecture afforded schools the autonomy to create their own budget and allocate resources within their school. All central office leaders and all building principals reported autonomy over the manner in which they allocated resources through the use of building funds. For instance, one central office leader explained, "[Principals] have a budget. Obviously, everybody has to work within a budget, but how they want to allocate [is an individual decision made by the building principal]". While there is no autonomy over the amount of money each school is allocated, all principals described the ability to move money around within their budget to address the needs of their individual buildings as well as the need to develop a repertoire of skills that combined many aspects of leadership. By way of example, one principal explained that there is a great amount of "freedom within your budget in terms of moving money, purchasing and hiring staff." This autonomy was described

by a central office leader to be particularly important in terms of school turnaround in that "principals are your core component in a successful district. [Schools need] someone who can actually create a budget, and somebody who can run the school without relying on anybody."

One area of budget identified in which some principals reported limited autonomy are areas regulated by compliance. One principal reported:

As far as where there's little room for autonomy, it's over things that are compliance-driven, such as special education, what has to happen for English Language Learner support. But even within those kinds of compliance pieces, the superintendent is always trying to think outside of the box.

Principals described great latitude in allocating resources as long as they remained in compliance with federal regulations. For example, one principal reported that she made a budgetary decision to "not rehire a counselor so I could add a special education position" to provide appropriate student support and be in compliance with special education law. She continued, "I didn't have to have this conversation with anyone outside of my school," explaining that within the school these decisions are made as a team. The principal explained that the autonomy to make the decision lay at the school level: "[I thought], alright, well I have this person, she is leaving, so I'm creating a new position within special education to meet student need… And nobody has ever said to me, "No."

In addition, while autonomy is granted in allocation of funding, a process is in place to ensure alignment to the identified goals in the School Improvement Plan. Both central office leaders and principals describe this process as including a meeting with central office leaders at which they present the budget. For example, one central office leader explained, "Someone's really looking at the plan. Principals have to come up with realistic priorities, they have to have a plan that makes good sense, it has to align with their budget needs and what they're

doing." Almost all principals identified the use of the district budget planning template and webinars as useful in the preparation for these meetings. Overall, all central office leaders and all principals reported this process as a key safeguard in the way in which central office grants autonomy in the area of budget.

Staffing. All central office leaders and all principals reported that building leaders are granted autonomy in almost all decisions regarding staffing within their schools.   Within the area of staffing, principals have full autonomy to hire staff, create positions and change staffing patterns within the building. One area they do not have autonomy over is the ability to set salary. They do, however, recommend teachers within their building as Advanced Teacher, Master Teacher and for the Teacher Leadership Cabinet, all of which impact compensation. The career ladder program in Lawrence operates as a performance based compensation system that rewards teachers for their effectiveness. While final designations of Advanced and Master teachers are made by a central committee, principals have input. One central office leader described it this way, "Because of school autonomy, your school has a different need from the other school, [the principal] can determine how your Advanced educator is going to be used."

When asked how staffing decisions were made at the building level, all central office leaders reported that principals have this autonomy. For example, one central office leader reported, "Principals have created new positions that never existed before, and that's school by school." Similarly, all principals reported the ability to establish a staffing pattern, identifying necessary roles within the building. According to one principal: "When I go to my budget meeting, I just tell them, 'I'm going to move this position to here and do this.'" Another principal explained, "I am able to decide if a position for a building-based educator can be changed completely into another position and use that money for that other position." The

central office affords principals this flexibility to enable the design of programs tailored to the specific needs of their individual buildings.

Curriculum and assessment. Accordingly, almost all principals and all central office leaders reported autonomy in the selection, implementation and assessment of curriculum in their individual buildings. When asked about areas over which principals have a great deal of autonomy, all central office leaders identified the superintendent's commitment to decision-making in the area of curriculum. One central office leader reported that in some cases, more autonomy is afforded than they like:

> I even went to the Superintendent and said I need some leverage with this, and his answer back was 'principal decision'. So, you know, even in that instance where it's a level three school, I wasn't able to override or overrule what the principal was requesting in that particular instance.

Almost all principals reported autonomy in the selection of curriculum materials and reported that they appreciate the opportunity to do so. Similar to the goal of autonomy cited in the Lawrence Public Schools Renewed Turnaround Plan, one principal described it in this way:

> We piloted some curriculum units and then had to really make a strategic decision about; Do we want to purchase this? Do we want to use this? Does this make sense for our kids? I don't know that that happens in other places, that you get to pick and choose what you think really makes sense and it's varied from school to school in terms of what people have chosen, but I think [this independence] is a good thing.

While afforded the autonomy to decide on curriculum and assessments, almost all principals reported receiving support and guidance from central office. For example, one principal reported working closely with the assistant deputy superintendent of curriculum to help determine which assessments, which goals, what curricula. "We're collaborating around

these secured contracts with three or four different reading intervention programs. [The assistant deputy superintendent of curriculum] is working with us to find the right curriculum that meets the needs of our students." Another principal noted, "[The central office leader] sends a note in the bulletin about all the curriculum resources that she is compiling. If we have a principal meeting, she'll do demos of things. For example, she has a bunch of science curriculum."

Scheduling. Finally, the data suggested all principals were granted autonomy in scheduling learning time within the school day. One central office leader reported, "It would be difficult for me to tell you exactly what a school day looks like because it's not the same for everybody. Every school uses time differently, and that's okay." Similarly, one principal reported, "This is an area in which schools create their own school day. There's no dictated time of day when things are supposed to happen." A document review of building schedules confirmed this variance. For example, one principal reported that in the creation of her extended day, the team worked together to make sense of the enrichment block. In doing so, "our kids learned how to swim at the YMCA in the middle of the day". Without constraints to the structure of the schedule, this principal was able to creatively design time for enrichment without compromising the core academic learning time.

When asked about an area in which principals had limited autonomy, some respondents identified the start time of the school day. One principal explained that when a request was made to start the day a little bit later, "ultimately, the district overruled us on that. We need to open the doors at 7:00." When probed, a central office leader explained the insistence on start times was part or the larger effort to increase family engagement. The commitment to serve the families in Lawrence included a change mindset around working with families as part of the larger equation.

To recap, all central office leaders and all principals confirmed high levels of autonomy in each of the four areas examined; budget, staffing, curriculum and assessment and scheduling. As stated in the Renewed Turnaround Plan of 2015 (Riley & Chester, 2015), Lawrence Public Schools embraced the model of Open Architecture, shifting decision making authority to the schools, enabling principals to design programs to meet the unique needs of their students. Each school team proposes its own curriculum, calendar, and professional development, while school leaders have budget and hiring autonomy.

Assistance Relationships

My second research question examined the ways in which central office leaders support principals' autonomy as instructional leaders in the context of the increased accountability in a turnaround district. The evidence suggest that the Lawrence Public Schools central office leaders supported the instructional leadership of principals, employing assistance relationships in the context of the increased accountability in a turnaround district. As discussed in Chapter One, assistance relationships involve central office leaders engaging with principals in key practices including differentiating supports, modeling, use of tools, brokering and networking. I begin with the examination of the use of differentiated supports which was consistently identified by all participants. Second, I examine modeling and use of tools in a combined section as these two practices are intertwined and were consistently cited by all central office leaders and principals. Lastly, I examine the evidence of brokering and networks which although cited were less frequently identified by all participants.

Differentiated supports. The high-quality practice most frequently identified by all participants was that of differentiated supports. All respondents reported that central office leaders tailored their approach to principals. This evidence aligns with the design of Open Architecture highlighted in the Renewed Turnaround Plan (2015). Central office leaders

differentiated the time that was spent with principals, the conversations in which they engaged

and the tasks in which they supported them based upon the attainment of School Improvement

Goals as well as level of accountability on mandated assessments. As one central office leader

explained, "There's always room for improvement and we're here to make sure that when

principals are saying they need to change certain things... that we provide them that support and

whatever resources they need to get it done." Further, one principal described supports from

central office as always available to schools:

> I guess I just feel like whenever I need anything, I can just call people. I feel like, if
>
> something happens... I just call her up and I'm like can you move this? I don't ever feel
>
> like I can't call someone and ask them for help.

> When asked about accountability if schools not meeting their goals, one central office

leader responded: "That's definitely a conversation. We go back to it's not full autonomy

anymore… we need to sit down and have a conversation". Specifically, the differentiation

varied from more frequent and directive supports to less frequent and self-directed guidance,

depending on how the school was performing. Another central office leader confirmed that as

long as a school is not "underperforming", they enjoy full autonomy:

> If you're a level one school, have fun, build your curriculum. Have your team create a
>
> curriculum that's going to work for your kids as long as they're meeting the standards. If
>
> you're not a top performing school, you can still have your team and you work on your
>
> curriculum, but we're going to keep an eye on that.

> While all principals reported receiving supports, some principals of high performing

schools reported feeling somewhat isolated, citing a desire for more feedback from central

office leaders. For instance, one principal reported, "I would love to get more feedback and be

observed more." Similarly, in reference to the evaluation process, one principal reported, "So

we had to kind of give our own feedback, what we thought, and our own grade, what we thought we did well at, where we think we need to grow, and then what supports do we need." Conversely, another principal described the process as: "very, very thorough", stating that the central office leader provided "excellent feedback" that described "what he sees and what he wants us to improve." This example of variance supports the differentiated model of support frequently noted by respondents.

Modeling and use of tools. All respondents reported receiving support in the form of modeling and use of tools by central office leaders. The most frequently identified practices involved budget development. All central office leaders reported that in the beginning of the turnaround, they felt they needed to model the budget process for principals. One central office leader described it this way:

> I sat down with a few principals the first time that they were supposed to create their budget and it was interesting, because I didn't realize how many school leaders had no idea how to put a budget together for the schools. I feel like that's good for them now.

All principals noted the importance of these tools in support of the budget process. For example, one principal explained: "Some of these leaders were put in the position of thinking about things that they never had to deal with before. Thinking about budgets in a new way."

Additionally, the evidence suggests that this modeling paired with reflective strategies has informed the leadership styles of leaders at the building level. For example, some principals reported granting autonomy to their instructional leadership teams within their building in a manner similar to the autonomy they had been granted. One principal reported, "I think just seeing the way the superintendent leads has been really influential for me. Thinking about what is the autonomy people have. People want to make decisions that affect their practice." Another principal described the influence of modeling in this way:

He's like - think about the level of skill that your people have, and about the level of control that you want to have, right? People who are in this top level of skill, they need to have autonomy over their work. People who are brand new and don't know what they're doing or people who are underperforming, you need to manage now or you need to improve their skills so they can handle the autonomy. And the same for your best teachers, you need to set them up to do their best work. I think that was pretty transformative for me.

In addition to other supports for assistance relationships, almost all principals describe the use of conceptual tools to support principals in decision making. For instance, in a response representative of many, one principal reported that "Over the last few years there has been an effort to create templates and some shared drives, webinars and tutorials that everybody can access." For example, all central office leaders reported they have utilized tools to support principals in establishing high instructional expectations and in the use of data. One principal described participation in the rounds as beneficial to their "instructional leadership growth" and had "success" with a tool for Instructional Rounds provided by central office.

Brokering. Almost all central office leaders and almost all principals reported that central office leaders engaged in brokering by providing new resources and safeguarding principals from external demands. My review of documents revealed that the superintendent often refers to the system of Open Architecture that has adopted a "customer service culture" in which central office is highly responsive to school needs and requests. A primary goal of the Open Architecture 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." (Riley, 2014, p.3)

In the interview process, almost all central office leaders and most principals confirmed this safeguarding. By way of example, one principal explained,

It's a great thing, because I feel like we're so used to hearing from principals that they feel crippled by central office and that they can't do the work because central office keeps dictating what systems to implement and how to do things that, when principals sit down with their team and they go over what they're lacking and what they need in their schools, that's really where the work needs to happen."

Further, a central office leader explained:

We're not there every day. We don't see your kids every day. We don't see the struggles every day. What do you think you need at your school to make sure these kids are getting rigorous academic instruction? How do we support you and how do we make sure that your staff is being supported?

This approach by central office leaders of buffering principals supports the unique needs of each building and is representative of the brokering provided.

Networking. Most central office leaders reported supporting principal engagement through principal networks. In support of the improvement of professional practice, all principals reported receiving the "invitation" to participate in instructional rounds. One principal described it this way: "The curriculum director connected me with another principal who was having some success with this instructional rounds tool. And so, we modified that to meet our needs." The tool described was developed by a group of principals working in partnership to look at instructional expectations in classrooms.

Additionally, some principals described a variety of opportunities to engage in networking to strengthen instructional practices. Some described opportunities to visit high-performing schools in neighboring districts while all identified the opportunity to bring staff to

the Standard's Based Institutes. Attendance at the Standard's Based Institute, one of many professional development opportunities offered to all principals, was also cited by almost all central office leaders as a professional growth opportunity that was instrumental to successful student outcomes.

All central office leaders supported principals as instructional leaders in the context of increased accountability. A careful review of documents and analysis of interviews and observations provided evidence of the enactment of each of the five practices of assistance relationships. Differentiated supports and the combination of modeling and use of tools were most frequently cited by both central office leaders and principals as common features of the Lawrence Public Schools. Brokering and networks were also prevalent practices that were discernible in the analysis of the data. In the section that follows, I discuss the findings and their implications as they relate to the current literature.

Discussion

This individual strand describes the development of assistance relationships and the transformation of central office in the Lawrence Public Schools, an urban district placed in receivership as a result of accountability sanctions. In response to my first research question, analysis of data found that principals were granted broad autonomy in several areas of school leadership as a turnaround strategy. In response to my second research question, findings further noted that central office leaders engaged in assistance relationships (Honig et al., 2010) and employed the key practices (differentiated supports, modeling, use of tools, brokering and networking) in their efforts to support principals' development of instructional leadership. Leaders employed these practices in each of the four decision-making areas (Bruns, Filmer & Patrinos, 2011; Demas & Arcia, 2015) of building leadership (budget, staffing, curriculum and assessment, and scheduling). At the same time, Lawrence Public Schools

demonstrated gains in student achievement and identified outcomes including attendance, graduation rate and family engagement. While enacting autonomy for principals in building decision-making, central office leaders executed a "customer-service culture" of support. The following sections discuss the potential implications these findings may have for future districts enacting turnaround practices in an urban district.

Autonomy and Accountability

Research on autonomy as a turnaround practice in urban districts suggest that autonomy initiatives help schools create the conditions for improvement (Honig & Rainey, 2012). Further, when the impact of autonomy on school improvement is nuanced by the level of instructional leadership the principal provides (Patrinos et al., 2015) and the focus includes the investment in building capacity for school leaders (Honig & Rainey, 2012), outcomes for student achievement is improved. Consistent with this research, improvements in the Lawrence Public Schools were realized with the implementation of a strategy that granted autonomy to building principals while balancing accountability as an integral part of the district turnaround plan.

Central office leaders in Lawrence avoided the pitfalls highlighted in previous studies (Leithwood & Menzies, 1998; Malen, et al., 1990; Honig, 2014) that detailed the difficulty faced by some districts when school-based management strategies were employed. First, principals were granted autonomy in four crucial areas directly related to student learning outcomes. Creation of budgets and allocation of resources for staff, selection of curriculum specific to the needs of the students in their buildings, and development of schedules to address learning time aligned with the vision and goals for the school led to improved achievement. Second, a commitment was made to preparing principals for this autonomy through explicit attention to the development of instructional and operational leadership skills. These supports were differentiated for each principal based on the need of the school and the

level of accountability. Finally, the decision to grant this autonomy was driven by central office in a purposeful manner and defined as a primary goal of turnaround. Policy mandates were buffered, but schools were left with the authority for implementation with compliance as the only edict. The work to decentralize authority and to provide support to the principals demonstrates the level of commitment to a true transformation of central office and shift in role from management to instructional leadership.

Primary to the success of the Lawrence Public Schools is the "Open Architecture" design outlined in the strategic turnaround plan (Riley & Chester, 2015). Given the importance of autonomy to empower principals, understanding what is meant by Open Architecture is crucial. The superintendent describes the core of Open Architecture in a summer memo, to staff as a process of teacher leadership teams working with principals to develop "the program and plan that will accelerate achievement for their students, based on the unique factors at their school" (Riley, 2014, p. 4). The commitment to establishing in-district, unionized, neighborhood schools runs contrary to turnaround efforts in other urban districts. Consistent with the research by Bulkley et al., (2010), this approach shifts away from the "common school approach" and instead acknowledges that schools are distinct. The difference in Lawrence is the resistance to handing the responsibility for management to charter schools, instead choosing, when needed, to partner with outside providers but retaining the status of true public schools. This flexible design allows central office to differentiate supports for schools based on their need and monitor their progress through accountability measures while allowing principals to maintain autonomy in crucial decision-making areas.

Assistance Relationships

Consistent with research regarding assistance relationships and the transformation of central office as a key strategy of turnaround, Lawrence Public Schools, led by the

superintendent, implemented a transformation of central office designed to strengthen principals' instructional leadership and highlighted the creation of assistance relationships (Honig et al., 2010) developed through the use of differentiated supports, modeling, use of tools, brokering and networks. Significant changes implemented included trimming the staff by 30 % and identifying the primary goal of central office leaders to provide support to principals (Riley & Chester, 2015). These supports were articulated by all participants interviewed and resulted in increasing the capacity of instructional leadership of principals and improved outcomes for the students of the Lawrence Public Schools.

Central office leaders implemented these practices in different ways and in a variety of situations. The key practices of transformation (Honig et al., 2010) most frequently identified in the area of autonomy include differentiated supports in the selection, implementation and assessment of curriculum and modeling in the area of budgeting. For example, curriculum decisions are made in each building by the building principal. Supports for the decision-making process are provided by the central office leaders responsible for curriculum development. Similarly, modeling served as an important support for principals in that area of budget. Central office leaders created opportunities for principals to meet throughout the budget process to discuss and respond to questions principals may have in the creation of a building budget. Resources were developed including webinars and tutorials that supported the professional growth of principals in this area.

Many principals also described the influence of modeling by central office leaders in developing their decision-making and reflective practices. Throughout the interview process, principals referred to specific instances in which the superintendent or other central office leaders influenced their own leadership style. For example, one principal cited the "high will/high skill" standard described by the superintendent in his summer memo (Riley, 2014) and

applied it to their own work with staff. Central office leaders model a shared vision for principals in the same manner. In a school or district where teachers are believed to be the primary force in driving student achievement, central office leaders believe the principal is the driving force for school and district growth.

Given the gap in achievement in many urban districts in our country, the work of the Lawrence Public Schools, leaders and policy makers can take note of many important aspects of successful urban turnaround. Central to the turnaround efforts in Lawrence are the transformation of central office (Honig et al., 2010) and the creation of autonomy for building leaders who possess the greatest knowledge of the individual needs of their school. District leaders and policy makers should therefore craft models of leadership "designed to empower principals, teachers and families to create school programs tailored to the needs of their students" (Riley & Chester, 2015, p. 2).

Moving forward, it will be important for central office leaders and principals to develop their understanding of both instructional leadership and decision-making skills. Current leadership programs for principals do not adequately prepare future building leaders is the development of budget and other operational aspects that impact school improvement. Likewise, current leadership programs for future district leaders do not emphasize the importance of key practices such as developing networks for their leadership team and the need to model practices while avoiding top-down decision-making in crucial areas of management. Development of policy and legislation that supports increased teacher voice in the selection of curriculum and assessment and flexibility for districts in establishing parameters for learning time will also lead to improved student outcomes and will be imperative in the work of urban turnaround. The work of Honig et al., (2010) and Honig and Rainey, (2012), provide powerful insights into the needed transformations in public education policy and

practice. Inherent in the success of the Lawrence Public Schools will be the ability to maintain this approach in the absence of the current superintendent, who is stepping down at the end of the current school year. As the district transitions from receivership over the coming years, and redesign monies from the state are no longer available, the theoretical guidance provided by these works will become even more valuable.

Conclusion

This individual strand explored how central office leaders in the Lawrence Public Schools granted autonomy in four decision-making areas of school leadership and provided support for principals through the development of assistance relationships. Through this strand, I identified a pattern of high-quality practices that were employed in the effort to grant autonomy as a purposeful turnaround strategy that contributed to the strengthening of instructional leadership and consequently, school improvement. The work of turnaround in urban school districts is complex and will require a great deal more research to fully identify a formula for success. Just as each school is distinct, each district faces its' own challenges, and therefore, may require different strategies at various levels. However, Lawrence Public Schools was the first urban district in Massachusetts to enter receivership, and the lessons learned in their continual progress is encouraging. This study's findings may begin to provide insights into strategies that will add to school improvement efforts for chronically underperforming schools and districts.

CHAPTER FOUR[5]

Discussion, Limitations and Recommendations

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

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

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

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

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

Synthesis of Shared Findings

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

Transformation of Central Office

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

Table 4.1

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

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

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

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

Common Themes

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

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

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

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

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

Development of Instructional Leaders

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Limitations and Recommendations

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

Limitations

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Recommendations

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

1. *Broadly Transferrable*. A recommendation that fits into this category is drawn from our research in the turnaround context in support of assistance relationships but is not limited to such a context. These recommendations suggest practices that would benefit improved trust among educators and improved teaching and learning for students as a result of shifts in the execution of leadership.

2. *Legal Despite Anticipated Challenges*. A recommendation in this category is likewise sourced from our research in the turnaround context. While it would be legal to transfer the related practice to nearly any educational context, there are anticipated challenges (e.g., changed working conditions, need for impact bargaining) with doing so that could deter use outside of the turnaround context.

3. *Restricted to Turnaround Context.* A recommendation in this category is, as the name

states, restricted to the governance and structure of a school or district engaged in the

turnaround process.

While the recommendations span five independent strands as well as the overarching study,

Table 4.2 presents the full complement of recommendations from our team.

Table 4.2.

Summary of Recommendations

Recommendation	Broadly Transferrable	Legal Despite Anticipated Challenges	Restricted to Turnaround Context
Overarching Study: Practice			
Turnaround efforts must address the complex challenges facing districts.		X	
Turnaround starts with transformation of Central Office: Practitioners should re-examine the structure of central office identifying ways to transform relationships with principals to provide "customer service."		X	
Supports from Central Office must address individual needs of the building and its principal.	X		
Increase principal retention central office leaders should focus on non-pecuniary factors such as work environment and district support.	X		
Leverage local resources to improve teaching and learning to sustain turnaround gains (e.g., human capital, community organizations).	X		

Recommendation	Broadly Transferrable	Legal Despite Anticipated Challenges	Restricted to Turnaround Context
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		
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 every day. 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 L. Tellier. For questions or more information concerning this research you may contact them at [telephone number or other way to contact person].*

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

Copy of Consent Form:

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

Statement of Consent:

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

Signatures/Dates

Study Participant (Print Name) :   *Date _____*

Participant or Legal Representative Signature: *Date _____*