A Descriptive Case Study of Rural Turnaround Superintendents:
What matters most in sustaining turnaround?

by

Bonnie Sullivan

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
Auburn University
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Auburn, Alabama
December 16, 2017

Key words: turnaround, superintendent, rural schools, turnaround principles, school
improvement, turnaround models

Approved by

Ellen Reames, Chair, Associate Professor of Educational Foundations, Leadership and Technology
Frances Kochan, Professor Emerita of Educational Foundations, Leadership and Technology
Jason Bryant, Assistant Clinical Professor of Educational Foundations, Leadership and Technology
Jane Teel, Assistant Clinical Professor of Educational Foundations, Leadership and Technology

Abstract

This descriptive qualitative case study examined how rural superintendents implement the eight

turnaround principles to foster and sustain improvement in the school district organization. The

eight turnaround principles are as follows: school leadership, school climate and culture,

effective instruction, curriculum, assessment and intervention systems, effective staffing

practices, enabling the effective use of data, effective use of time, and family and community

engagement. The primary participants selected for this study are eight superintendents located in

rural school systems in a southern state. The eight rural superintendents were chosen from school

systems that have an agreement with the PACT grant partnership with three universities in the

southern state. The voices from the eleven rural superintendents in Alabama gave insight to how

the eight turnaround principles were applied in facilitating and hindering factors of school

system turnaround. This study examined specific internal and external learning partnerships that

support turnaround in a school system. Data were obtained through in-depth face-to-face

interviews, reviewing the "End of Year" Status reports, and asking follow up interview questions

Acknowledgements

This has been an exciting journey that I have enjoyed from the beginning to the end and could not have made it without the support of my committee, family, husband, and friends. I have thoroughly been intrigued with learning more than I thought possible about rural superintendents implementing turnaround in their school system. I am grateful for my committee providing guidance and encouragement in leading me to having a successful research study. From this experience, I have learned lot from working with dissertation committee members as well as getting to know a talented group of superintendents. This study has helped me grow professionally and made me a stronger instructional leader which will help me achieve my future careers goals.

To Dr. Ellen Reames, thank you for all your time, commitment, encouragement, and patience with working with me. I cannot thank you enough for all your support and guidance you have provided me through this journey and over the last couple of years. You have always known exactly which direction to lead me in and how to keep me motivated throughout the program. I am so grateful for you providing experiences that have contributed to me becoming a better leader but also allowing me to see the reality in how leadership works. In my future endeavors, you will always play an important role because I have learned from you, which I consider the best! To Dr. Fran Kochan Dr. Jason Bryant, and Dr. Jane Teel, thank you for your continued support and guidance to help me achieve my goal of earning my Ph.D.! All of you are incredible leaders and I consider myself lucky to have you on my committee. Dr. Kochan, you are a remarkable woman and instructional leader who knew exactly how to help me finish this project successfully and as a stronger leader. Dr. Bryant, thank you for all your support and

encouragement throughout this journey. You are a talented instructional leader and professor which students are going to learn how to become extraordinary leaders because of you. Dr. Teel, thank you for your time and support in serving on my dissertation committee. I truly appreciate all your guidance and encouragement to help me reach my goal of finishing my dissertation.

To Dr. Gilbert Duenas and Dr. Shelly Bowden, thank you for encouraging me to pursue the doctoral program. I cannot thank you enough for your continuous support in encouraging and always telling me we cannot wait until you get your doctorate. I have learned a lot from both of you and know that I am a better leader because of you both!

Auburn Friends and Family, thank you for your support and always maintaining a strong friendship while completing our graduate work. We have embraced a long journey that has better prepared us for accomplishing great things in education. To my closest friends and colleagues, thank you for always encouraging me to keep going and giving me positive feedback! You all are great friends and I cannot thank you enough! It's always said to surround yourself with good people; well to me you all are great people I choose to surround myself with!

Elmore County Friends and Family, thank you for always encouraging and supporting me to finish my Ph.D. I cannot thank you all enough for your encouragement and support to me for accomplishing this goal! I am thankful for your guidance, which has helped me grow as a leader and always leading me in the right direction. I have learned more than you can imagine from each of you and hopefully taught you something too!

To my family, thank you for all your support you have given me throughout the years. I really appreciate the encouragement from each of you when I told you I was going to get my Ph.D.! Your positive comments and support kept me going year after year and I cannot thank you enough for always being there for me!

Most importantly, thank you Mr. Gary Sullivan, for supporting me through all the degrees and completing the Ph.D.! I could not have done this without your love, encouragement, and motivation that you have shown me. You have sacrificed a lot and I appreciate your commitment to me and love you!

Table of Contents

List of Figures

Chapter I: Introduction

Turnaround is hard work. It's not for the tired, weak, or weary.
- Alan Ingram

Congress introduced provisions to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, 1988 (ESEA) to hold schools accountable for improving the performance of their students but it was not until 2001 that U.S. legislators introduced the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) which required adequate yearly progress (AYP) and the identification of low-performing schools. The NCLB Act of 2001 brought accountability standards and corrective actions for all schools to make AYP on standardized assessments. From 2001 to 2008, schools that did not meet AYP under NCLB were labeled as "failing and were required to implement the same one-size-fits-all interventions that did not result in significant improvement" (Rosenburg, 2011, p. 2) Characteristics of these failing schools included poor achievement, lack of safety and high levels of disruptive student behavior, little focus on learning, high personnel turnover rates and parents who were not satisfied with their child's education. In the eight years of NCLB, public school districts never uniformly reached the AYP goals.

In 2009, the Obama administration changed federal policy concerning improving public schools across the nation by reauthorizing the ESEA and adding the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009. The combined funding of these two legislative acts increased assistance to 12,599 schools which had been identified as needing improvement, corrective action or restructuring (Taylor, Stecher, O'Day, Naftel, & Le Floch, 2010).

This chapter provided an overview of those policy changes which occurred with the reauthorization of the ESEA, the ARRA, and the *Project Alabama Consortium for Rural Turnaround (PACT)* grant used for the setting of this case study. Chapter one also includes a background of rural turnaround, the turnaround conceptual framework, the role of district

1

leadership provided by rural turnaround superintendents, and the purpose, significance and research questions for the study.

Background of the study: The Call for Turnaround

In 2009, the USDOE shifted its focus of turning around the nation's lowest-performing schools by overhauling the Title 1 School Improvement Grant (SIG) Program, reauthorizing the ESEA and adding the ARRA (Rosenburg, 2011). Used in conjunction, Title 1 SIG grants, ESEA and ARRA funding intensely increased the financial support for struggling schools by 6.5 times more than the previous federal backing. The U.S. Congress and President Obama increased SIG grants from $491 million in 2008 to $3.456 billion in 2009. In each year after 2009, the SIG funding exceeded $535 million (Brown & Green, 2014; Rosenburg, 2011, USDOE, 2015;). Instead of the AYP goals that were never reached under NCLB from 2001-2009, President Obama outlined a new goal: every student should graduate from high school ready for college or career opportunities (Executive Office of the President, 2015; Rosenburg, 2011; Wallin & Newton, 2014).

For schools to be eligible for SIG funding they had to be identified as the lowest achieving schools within a state and they had to agree to take immediate action to correct their performance (Hurlburt, Therriault, & Le Floch, 2008). By increasing the level of funding, better targeting these funds to the persistently lowest-achieving schools, and requiring that schools adopt specific intervention models, the revamped SIG program aimed to be more aggressive in turning around school and student performance (LeFloch et al., 2014; Marrapodi & Beard, 2013). To correct these, the school district where the failing school resided was required to follow one of the four turnaround models. The four models available to choose from were closure, restart, turnaround and transformation (Herman et al, 2008; LeFloch et al, 2014;

Rosenburg, Christianson, Angus, & Rosenthal, 2014).

The transformation model focused on academic performance through changes in school culture, professional development for best instructional practices and rewarding the faculty who do make improvements. The principal is removed and staff that do not perform after corrective action are replaced. The Closure Model caused multiple issues with staffing and finances because the school was shut down and students were transferred to neighboring schools with records of higher academic performance. The Restart Model closed the existing school and reopened it under a public or private charter organization with stringent requirements and monitoring. The Turnaround Model involves removal of the principal and rehiring no more than fifty percent of the staff. Only about twenty percent of schools have chosen this route because of its similar harsh nature to the closure model (Brown & Green, 2014; Copeland, 2013; Herman et. al., 2008; Le Floch et. al, 2014).

Turnaround and rural context. As of 2012, there were approximately 5,000 chronically low-performing schools with half located in urban areas, a third in rural areas, and the rest in suburbs and medium-sized towns (USDOE, 2012). A representative sample of the first cohort of schools to use the increased funding provided by SIG grants, ESEA and ARRA were examined for a three-year period from 2010-2013 by the National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance (NCEE) through the Study of School Turnaround (SST). In the NCEE case study project a core sample of 25 schools was selected. Sixteen of the schools were urban, five were rural fringe and four were rural (LeFloch et al, 2014).

Research questions for the case study were developed from examining contexts inside and outside the school system which might influence: 1) adoption and implementation of improvement, 2) the role of school leadership, 3) strategies used to improve capacity of teachers,

3

administrators, instruction and learning and 4) identifying variables that might improve outcomes over time. Of note, were the indicators of improvement which included safe and orderly schools, collaborative environments for change, clear goals, a shared vision, a culture of continuous improvement lead by data informed decision making and student, teacher and family engagement (LeFloch et al, 2014).

Findings from the rural school subsample included three characteristics related to rural context that distinguished them from non-rural settings. These included: distance to an urban area, the large geographic spreads with low population density and small community size. Distance to metropolitan areas meant fewer teacher applicants and more difficulty retaining high quality professionals. Distance to urban areas signified fewer opportunities to garner professional development from outside sources such as universities. Distance also denoted fewer opportunities for employment after graduation. Distance from urban areas meant fewer opportunities for entertainment and enrichment and less housing opportunities for school system employees. Geographic spread correlated to low local tax bases, which in turn affected salaries and retention rates of employees. It also suggested fewer opportunities for parents and students to participate in school activities and after school programs. Transportation was a problem for many parents and families and thus impeded the ability to interact with teachers, administrators and other students. Small community size equated to teachers in rural secondary schools having to teach multiple content areas and thus having limited opportunities to collaborate with others. Many rural teachers were often the only instructional unit for certain subjects and thus there were no others available to partner (Rosenburg, Christianson, Angus, & Rosenthal, 2014).

Similarities of failing urban and rural schools. Jacob (2007) reported failing urban

schools faced problems related to staffing, teacher shortages, students coming from disadvantaged neighborhoods, and lack of parental involvement. An example for recruiting teachers to urban schools was explained by the following statement, "the Chicago public schools, for example, regularly receive roughly ten applicants for each teaching position. But many applicants are interested in specific schools, and district officials struggle to find candidates for highly impoverished schools" (Jacob, 2007, p. 129). Rubin, Hayes, and Benson (2009) found that students from urban settings typically have school and community experiences associated with poverty, violence, and injustice.

Failing rural schools also struggled with recruiting and retaining teachers and administrators and poverty. Low performing rural school systems will typically take the "grow your own" leader or teacher approach just to have qualified personnel in the schools. This is definitely a strategy but it can produce the same results with the same type of people and ultimately cause continued failure. Baser and Karaman (2015) found two areas of concern with parents from failing rural and urban schools. First, involved teacher turnover. Teachers took the job to get a start but when an opening in a better district became available they left. Failing rural and urban systems had larger percentages of new teachers in comparison to schools that were adequately performing. Secondly, many teachers did not live in the rural or urban areas in which they taught. Instead, they lived in areas that provided better resources and only commuted for their job. When the day was over, they left and returned to the community where they lived. There was no connection from faculty for the rural school organization.

Rosenburg (2011) found that rural schools have lower levels of student achievement and higher dropout rates. Students are transported long distances from home to school. Lack of family proximity to the school makes it challenging for the family and child to participate in

school activities. An additional major challenge for rural schools is that they have small enrollments, which contributes to lack of funding, transportation costs, and a limited curriculum.

Teachers and administrators reported that it would be beneficial to include internship experiences with rural schools and urban schools because they felt inadequately prepared to deal with challenges in these settings (Bell & Pirtle, 2012; Fusarelli & Militello, 2012; Skolits, Lasjley, & King, 2003). Regardless of the urban on rural nature, preparing future teachers and school leaders for the work in schools needing improvement was deemed an important area for consideration (Barley & Brigham, 2008; Copeland, 2013; Fuasrelli & Militello, 2012; Ravitch, 2010).

The rural superintendent and the turnaround principles as the conceptual framework. To be a successful rural turnaround superintendent, one must have understanding of being an effective school leader and know how to put the Turnaround Principles into action. The eight Turnaround Principles are as follows: school leadership, school climate and culture, effective instruction, curriculum, assessment and intervention systems, effective staffing practices, enabling the effective use of data, effective use of time, and family and community engagement.

Figure 1. Original Conceptual Framework. Indiana Department of Education, 2016. Retrieved from http://www.doe.in.gov/outreach/turnaround-principles

The Turnaround Principles can be found in numerous pieces of research as well as being identified by the USDOE. Research (e.g. Autti & Hyry-Beihammer, 2014; Bell & Pirtle, 2012; Canales, Tegeda-Delgado, & Slate, 2008; Copeland 2013; Forner, Bierlein-Palmer & Reeves, 2012; Gorman. 2012; Harrington-Lueker, 2008; Maxwell, Locke, & Scheurich, 2013) suggested the eight turnaround principles as best practices for failing schools. Furthermore, their research points to leadership as a key component for turnaround implementation and sustainability.

From the superintendent perspective, district level school leadership should include: a school improvement plan, school mission/vision, climate surveys, evaluation systems, handbooks, scheduling, and setting high expectations for teachers, students, and other stakeholders. School leadership for superintendents, is how you plan to organize and run your school system. School climate and culture is important because superintendents need to understand how to maintain a positive culture and climate. In this research, the rural

superintendents will discuss how he or she transformed or maintained the culture and climate of the school system. Effective instruction focuses primarily on increasing student achievement. This is done through a variety of ways such as school observations, setting high expectations from central office for curriculum assessments, and being an active participant in the learning that is taking place as much as possible (Copeland, 2013; Duke, 2006; Gorman, 2012; Harrington-Lueker, 2008).

Curriculum, assessment, and intervention systems are important in school systems because they monitor student achievement. This principle includes Response to Instruction or the Problem-Solving Team that schools use to monitor student achievement. An effective staffing practice includes personnel procedures such as hiring effective teachers. An important piece to examine in rural education, is what plan has been developed to recruit and keep principals, teachers, and additional staff in the school system. A rural setting is quite different from an urban because there is more teacher and administrator turnover (Autti & Hyry-Beihammer's, 2014; Gorman, 2012; Le Floch et al., 2014).

The effective use of data is described as what specific types of data are we looking at and how we use it to increase student achievement. It is also equally important to examine the four types of data, which are the following: demographic, perception, student achievement, and survey data. The effective use of time principle is examined in this study to show how superintendents manage their time in running their school system (Bell & Pirtle, 2012; Herman et al, 2008; Marrapodi & Beard, 2013).

The last principle focused on family and community engagement, which is how are all families and community members involved with the school system. This is one of the most important principles because it has shown when families are involved and engaged then the more

8

student achievement increases. The school systems that spend extra money on family involvement tend to be able to sustain student achievement (Jenkins, 2007; Maxwell et al., 2013).

The conceptual framework consists of closely reviewing what each of the eight turnaround principles entailed. These eight principles have either appeared separately or all together in several pieces of scholarly-based research. The turnaround principles were used to guide the study and examine the rural district superintendents as they performed their duties and guided their school systems in improvement and sustainability (Bell & Pirtle, 2012; Copeland, 2013; Harrington-Lueker, 2008; Herman et. al., 2008; Jenkins, 2007).

Project Alabama Consortium for Rural Turnaround (PACT). In 2014, the Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE) revealed that Alabama has seventy-six failing public schools out of 1,496 total schools (The Alabama Media Group, 2015; Duke, 2006; Ravitch, 2010). Further pressure on public education in Alabama occurred with the passing of the Alabama Accountability Act of 2014 which allowed students to have the option to transfer to another school in the same system, transfer to another school system, or use $3,500 state tax credit to use toward attending private school (The Alabama Media Group, 2015).

During this same time period, the USDOE awarded a rural turnaround grant to the University of Alabama, Auburn University, Samford University, and the Alabama State Department of Education. The USDOE acknowledged the partnership between the state department and the higher education institutions as a positive alliance and unlike any other applications received. As a result, the three university programs implemented a school leadership turnaround program which immediately addressed Alabama's rural, low performing school districts needs for highly qualified school administrators.

9

PACT was aligned with the State Superintendent Dr. Thomas R. Bice's Plan *2020* agenda to dramatically improve student achievement and graduation rates and ensured every student would advance from high school ready for college and/or career. The PACT grant leadership certification was master's level or entry level certification for aspiring school administrators. The aspiring leaders who completed the PACT program at one of the three respective higher education institutions would receive an endorsement on his or her certificate as a specialist in "Rural School Turnaround Leadership". Most of these graduates were expected to enter the school leadership profession as newly appointed assistant principals or principals.

The University of Alabama, Auburn University and Samford University were allowed to develop their own unique turnaround master's leadership program. PACT conceptual frameworks were different and tailored to each university. Student recruiting and admissions, curriculum and instruction, student and program evaluation as well as each university's mentoring program were distinguished by university context.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive case study is to examine how rural superintendents implement the eight turnaround principles to foster and sustain improvement in the school district organization. The primary participants selected for this study are eight superintendents located in rural school systems in a southern state. The eight rural superintendents were chosen from school systems that have an agreement with the PACT grant partnership with three universities in the southern state. The study is designed to identify what specifically district leaders do to implement turnaround in their school system. This study is important because it will add to the research about how rural superintendents implement

turnaround in their school system. Data were obtained through in-depth face-to-face interviews, reviewing the "End of Year" Status reports, and asking follow-up interview questions.

Rural superintendents are faced with new challenges each day as they engage in school turnaround. It is a complex picture because there are many internal and external factors which influence the success or failure of turnaround (Canales et al., 2008; Copeland, 2013; Forner et al., 2012; Harrington-Lueker, 2008). Results from the current study shed light on the facilitating and hindering factors of the turnaround process, the outcomes of the turnaround and the role of the superintendent in the process.

Significance of the Study

Much of what we know in regard to turnaround in schools has occurred from 2006 to the present and most of this work has concentrated on urban school settings. Failing rural schools and how to turn these around has only begun to be explored since 2010. Only a few reports been filed with the USDOE (Herman et al., 2008; Rosenburg, 2011; USDOE, 2012). Data concerning the outcomes of turnaround is limited and researchers need a longer period of time in order to make any conclusive decisions about school improvement. While the superintendency has been widely studied, less is known in regard to rural superintendents and rural turnaround. This study will add to the body of literature for the rural turnaround superintendent.

Research Questions

The superintendents were interviewed to determine the answers to the following research questions:

(a) What was the role of the superintendent in implementing the eight turnaround principles, as perceived by the superintendents serving in the PACT grant?

(b) What were the factors that facilitated implementation of turnaround in rural systems as perceived by the superintendents?

(c) What were the factors that hindered implementation of turnaround in rural systems as perceived by the superintendents?

(d) From the superintendent perspective, what were the highlights and challenges of leading a rural turnaround school district?

Method

This study was a descriptive case study that focused on conducting in-depth face-to-face interviews, reviewing the "End of Year" Status Report, and follow up questions with rural turnaround superintendents. Case study research allows the researcher to observe different phenomenon within real world settings. In essence, the researcher is an observer with little control over the events that unfolded (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In the present study, the researcher wanted to describe turnaround leadership using the lens of the 11 rural superintendents from the SIG districts. The researcher was interested in a thick rich description of the turnaround principles as used by the superintendents of the SIG school districts. The case study was that of the rural turnaround process in Alabama as perceived by superintendents from the 11 school districts. The eight Turnaround Principles served as the conceptual framework for this study. These Turnaround Principles served as a priori codes and themes emerged from the coded data. Memoing was used throughout the research process. These were maintained in a researcher journal. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. Other data sources were also reviewed, coded and included in the data matrix.

Limitations

Since the design of the PACT grant and the rural turnaround preparation programs at the

respective universities, some of the rural superintendents have taken new positions while some have just been promoted to the position within their district. Additionally, the subjectivity or the bias of the researcher was taken into account because they are a doctoral student at one of the university leadership programs which took part in the PACT grant. Also, because the superintendents only represent PACT school districts it would be difficult to generalize to other rural settings within this state or rural settings in other states.

Assumptions

The following major assumptions made about the study:

- All of the information provided by the participants was a truthful and accurate depiction of their perceptions relative to rural turnaround superintendent leadership.

- Participants were not pressured nor coerced in any way to provide any sensitive information relative to the PACT, the school district or the implementation of the turnaround principles.

- All school personnel interviewed are or were a part of the PACT turnaround districts.

Definition of Terms

- Case Study – Creswell (2007) defined case study research as the study of an issue explored within a bounded system i.e. a setting, a program, and a context.

- Turnaround School Leaders Program – The Alabama State Department of Education, University of Alabama, Auburn University, and Samford University developed a principal leadership development model that will addressed rural Alabama school districts' in critical need for highly qualified SIG school administrators.

- Project Alabama Consortium for Turnaround grant - provided school leaders to grow and develop through two components: principal and current licensed principal. The

two components provide professional development for school leaders or aspiring school leaders who are or want to serve in low-performing rural schools.

- Rural Schools – Rural schools are those that serve communities of 2,500 or fewer populations. (Locale codes 41-Rural Fringe, 42-Rural Distant, and 43-Rural Remote).

- Locale codes from the National Center for Educational Statics:

  o 41 – Rural, Fringe: Census-defined rural territory that is less than or equal to 5 miles from an urbanized area, as well as rural territory that is less than or equal to 2.5 miles from an urban cluster.

  o 42 – Rural, Distant: Census-defined rural territory that is more than 5 miles but less than or equal to 25 miles from an urbanized area, as well as rural territory that is more than 2.5 miles but less than or equal to 10 miles from an urban cluster.

  o 43 – Rural, Remote: Census-defined rural territory that is more than 25 miles from an urbanized area and is more than 10 miles from an urban cluster.

- School Leadership – Term used to describe leadership by school administrators, including principals, assistant principals, superintendents, and assistant superintendents.

- Sustained School Improvement – School improvement that lasts for over a time period of two to three years.

- Turnaround Principles – Eight principles created to describe school improvement areas.

Summary

Today, school superintendents in rural turnaround districts are engaged in how to successfully implement and sustain turnaround. This study examined how rural superintendents have used the eight turnaround principles to help improve and sustain turnaround efforts in their K-12 school system. A thorough review of literature suggested little attention has been focused on how superintendents use the eight turnaround principles as best practices, how these practices were facilitated or hindered and what outcomes were positive or negative outcomes. The rural turnaround superintendent is a unique role in district leadership and more needs to be learned about this leadership role. Little has been reported in regard to the head rural district learner and research is lacking in regards to the nuances of this distinct context. This dissertation examined how rural school system superintendents used the turnaround principles to improve and sustain their district's performance.

Chapter II: Literature Review

"It takes a team to turn around a school, but it all begins with the leadership."
- Rosemary Papa and Fenwick English

Turnaround has happened across the United States. Turnaround questions have many variables but the research suggested that attention has drawn towards the role of school district administration when schools are failing. One might believe that if the right leader is put in an educational setting, then achievement should occur. But is that always the case? Is it the case in rural school settings? With these given thoughts, the review of literature found that leaders must know how to implement turnaround principles to promote and sustain success in schools. This implementation must begin at the top, with the superintendent's leadership. The review of the literature will discuss the following: (a) eight turnaround principles (b) rural superintendents (c) Alabama superintendents (d) Instructional Leadership Standards (e) female superintendents (f) rural education (g) turnaround models (h) leader's role in sustaining change and (i) PACT grant

Published scholarly studies were examined in this review of literature. Literature selected for this study was located by (a) search for information on school turnaround in peer reviewed journal articles located in the following electronic databases – ERIC, EBSCO, ProQuest, and Google Scholar (c) school turnaround books and (d) exploration of the U.S. Department of Education website. Database searches included the following search terms: turnaround schools, low achieving schools, education reform, data implementation, rural schools, school failure, (SIG), turnaround strategies, and rural turnaround superintendents.

The Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework used in the present study were the eight turnaround principles that school superintendents and other school leaders utilize in promoting school system success. The eight principles are used to guide a school leader's ability to meet school and system goals.

16

The principles provide an instructional road map of where to begin for improvement as well as what is expected in a school system. The eight turnaround principles are as follows: school leadership, school climate and culture, effective instruction, curriculum, assessment and intervention systems, effective staffing practices, enabling the effective use of data, effective use of time, and family and community engagement (Duke, 2006; LeFloch et al., 2014; Maxwell, Huggins, & Scheurich, 2010; Rosenburg et al., 2014; Wallin & Newton, 2014). These eight principles are known as focus areas that school leaders can examine closely when determining factors that can facilitate or hinder school improvement. The following sections will describe how the eight principles can be implemented in a school system.

Principle 1: School leadership. Scholarly research suggests that school leaders should utilize the eight turnaround principles in implementing turnaround efforts in school systems. The school leadership principle is defined as implementing the following: school improvement plan, school mission and vision statements, climate surveys, focus groups, data protocols, observation forms, evaluation system, faculty, parent, and student handbooks, master schedule, behavior system, curriculum guides, lesson plan format, staffing protocols, and professional development plan (Indiana Department of Education, 2016).

Rural schools and their leaders face a unique set of challenges, mostly due to their geographic isolation. Many rural schools can overcome these challenges, but some still may struggle (Arnold, Newman, Gaddy, & Dean, 2005). Failing schools are faced with challenges such as poor attendance, discipline problems, high teacher and instructional leader turnover, inadequate facilities, and lack of parental involvement (Rosenburg et al., 2014). Research showed that when school leaders have an improvement plan in place then there should be an increase in school efforts to sustain turnaround achievement in schools (Rosenburg et al, 2014;

Maxwell et al., 2010). By implementing a school improvement plan focused on student achievement, perception data, demographic data, and community involvement data the leader and faculty can clearly see the possibilities that can increase school improvement.

School leaders should examine school achievement patterns through an on going review of school improvement plans. When reviewing and recreating the plans, the school leader and team can focus on making the best decisions for students. School leaders can influence others by showing that he or she cares about the school improvement plan as well as make decisions that are focused on what is best for the students (Wallin & Newton, 2014). If something is not working in the plan, then school leaders shall take the initiative to change it to implement turnaround (LeFloch et al., 2014).

Principle 2: School culture and climate. The second turnaround principle focuses on school culture and climate, which have a significant impact on school success. Steve Gruenert and Todd Whitaker defined this turnaround principle in a quote, "School culture is the personality of the group, which is influenced by the leadership, the community, the school's history, and the unwritten rules people abide by. Climate is the general attitude of people in the school relative to specific situations." School leaders who have focused on school culture and climate tend to have more sustained efforts in turning around low performing schools (Duke, 2006).

There are factors that have hindered the improvement of school culture and climate for schools. These factors have built barriers to keep schools from achieving school improvement goals. These factors include poor attendance, inadequate facilities, few instructional materials, recruiting faculty, and having negative media reports. These factors are often pointed out verbally to school leaders, faculty, and stakeholders which make it difficult to believe that there

18

is any hope for change in increasing school success (Brown & Green, 2014; Murphy & Meyers, 2008). With this challenge, school leaders in low performing schools struggle with the pressure of figuring out new solutions to overcome these barriers.

School culture and climate is highly impacted for the worse by leaders who do not follow the eight turnaround principles consistently. These leaders are described as ones who typically coast by and are not implementing and monitoring improvement plans in the school setting (Murphy & Meyers, 2008). Research showed that effective leaders are thought to be intelligent, dependable, self-motivated, ones who can lead the school through a variety of obstacles. These leaders are ones who can pick up problems, fix them, and move on to the next problem. When schools have ineffective leaders, the school culture and climate is greatly impacted by people perceptions and then confirmed with not having much school success. In efforts to improve the culture and climate, leadership replacement continues to be a popular choice in the executive toolkit (Howell, Bowen, Dorfman, Kerr, & Podsakoff, 1990; Murphy & Meyers, 2008).

The school environment plays an important role in increasing student achievement. Students need to feel safe at school. When school leaders learn about the students' interest and desires to be included in the school environment, then student achievement should increase (Stump, 2015). The environment needs to be created that supports and motivates strong student performance that it becomes one of the main priorities of everyone in the school (The Wallace Foundation, 2012).

One of the factors that has had a significant impact on school culture and climate it the leaders ability to recruit and retain teachers. Rural schools have great difficulty in recruiting and retaining teachers due to the geographic location and adapting to the school setting. It has been found that rural high schools face more difficult challenges like recruiting teachers and school

leaders (Brown & Green, 2014; Murphy & Meyers, 2008). These high schools usually have geographic isolation and require teachers and school leaders to teach multiple subjects in different grades (Rosenburg, 2011). Rural schools face the issue of not having enough technology resources due to geographic location or not enough funds to purchase equipment. There is not a one-size fits all approach for rural student achievement. School leaders must be flexible and wear multiple hats in implementing school turnaround. Rural districts should seek partnerships with other districts, organizations, and colleges to help with tutoring, apprenticeships, and learn through educational programs (Bell & Pirtle, 2012; Brown & Green, 2014; Rosenburg, 2011). Typically, rural systems will take in the "grow your own" leader or teacher approach just to have qualified personnel in the school system (Bell & Pirtle, 2012).

Principle 3: Effective instruction. Effective instruction is a powerful turnaround principle that has impacted student achievement for obtaining school improvement goals (Brown & Green, 2014; Forner et al., 2012; Harrington-Lueker, 2008). The effective instruction principle is defined as implementing the following: administrative walkthrough data, informal and formal teacher observations, lesson plans, posted lesson objectives, examples of student work, student surveys and interviews, teacher certifications, school climate survey and data, common assessments and rubrics, discipline reports, faculty and student handbooks, and school focus group data (Indiana Department of Education, 2016).

One way that effective instruction is takes place in the classroom is through school leaders and teachers monitoring student achievement. Monitoring student achievement can be done the many ways that were mentioned above. Most importantly, research has pointed out that when students are not learning, the teacher should reteach and collaborate with colleagues about figuring out a solution. One way schools can do this is through an intervention process known as

the problem solving team (PST). This team consists of a variety of professional educators within the school that can help find research-based strategies to help support struggling students (Iverson, Thomas & Grimes, 2002; Tilly, 2008).

School leaders should hire effective staff that can put this leadership principle into practice (Forner et al., 2012). The need to attract and retain highly qualified teachers as a priority in rural school districts. The link between teacher quality and student achievement is highly valued and is a challenge for rural school districts to find plenty of highly qualified teachers (Arnold et al., 2005). One of the most common ways is for rural school districts is to maintain a partnership with universities to help recruit teachers. Higher education programs have encouraged students to visit rural districts, posting job openings, sell the positive aspects, and invite rural educators to be guest lectures and provided rural teaching internships (Harmon, 2001).

Another area of effective instruction is for staff to receive and actively participate in professional development to enhance their abilities to improve student achievement. School leaders who take time to listen to their staff can easily identify professional development opportunities. Professional development should not be viewed as a way to fix teachers but it is providing continuous learning to increase student achievement (Marrapodi & Beard, 2013). Professional development takes many forms such as facilitated group learning, book studies, coaching, and independent professional studies (Forner et al., 2012).

In effort to meet the challenges in statewide student performance standards, it is important for teachers to receive professional development. This is critical to teachers to learn how to make the most effective instructional use of new technologies to meet the needs of a diverse student population (Gittisriboongul, 2013; Lawless & Pellegrino, 2007; Synyard, 2010).

Technology professional development should include discussions and training on how to incorporate technology tools into daily classroom routines such as use of computer programs, SMART Board, internet searches, appropriate use of technology tools, and educational apps or programs to enhance and assess learning (Epper & Bates, 2001; Lawless & Pellegrino, 2007). Rural school leaders and staff should participate in professional learning communities to collaborate and share what they learn about increasing student achievement (Howley & Howley, 2005; Lawless & Pellegrino, 2007). Cultural meetings in schools with school leaders and staff have helped shaped and developed staff due to the meetings providing information about teaching in a rural school. This can also help retain teachers as they learn about rural education, the community, and how students learn (Howley & Howley, 2005).

Principle 4: Curriculum, Assessment, and Intervention Systems. Scholarly research has pointed out that the curriculum, assessment, and intervention systems principle is defined as implementing the following: district curriculum guides, lesson plans, walkthrough observations, administrative walkthrough data, informal and formal teacher observations/evaluations, common assessments, professional learning communities meeting agendas and minutes, grade level meeting agendas and minutes, professional development plan/goals, inventory of instructional materials and resources, school-based budget, master schedule, and school improvement plan (Brendle, 2015; Indiana Department of Education, 2016; Stump, 2015). There are a lot of other factors that come into play with this particular principle which are the school environment, student demographics, student attendance, and family and community support.

School leaders, who have professional conversations about data and student motivation, tend to close student achievement gaps (Marrapodi & Beard, 2013). Effective teachers have increased student achievement in all types of schools. Even in the lowest-performing schools,

effective teachers have increased student achievement by consistently reviewing data and re-teaching skills until mastery (Fusarelli & Militello, 2012).

The intervention systems component of this principle pertains internal and external factors that impact student achievement. Internal interventions are known as the implementation of Response to Instruction (RtI) and the Problem Solving Team. External factors can hinder or facilitate student achievement such as transportation, attendance, and family expectations for learning. Students in rural schools often have attendance issues due to a variety of reasons such as traveling to school, motivation to learn, and ability to see what is out in the real world after graduating (Brown & Green, 2015). Student attendance is a commonality reported in rural education however, it is reported in a study that it has the least effect on school improvement (Stump, 2015). Research suggested that school leaders should focus on students' interests and desires to be included in the school environment, which will decrease the focus on student attendance (Brown & Green, 2015; Stump, 2015).

Another external factor is how community engagement plays a vital role in the success of students. The purpose of community engagement is to ensure that school improvement is done with the community, not to the community. Two primary predictors for student achievement are income and educational characteristics of families (Reform Support Network, 2014). School systems that have spent funds on family and community engagement have been more successful in sustaining student achievement (Stump, 2015).

Principle 5: Staffing practice. Staffing practice is the ability of the school leader to recruit and retain highly qualified teachers to provide effective instruction to meet the needs of the school (Marrapodi & Beard, 2013). The staffing practice principle is defined as implementation of the following: human resources procedures and policies, staffing protocols

23

and guidelines, teacher evaluations and walkthroughs, professional development plan linked to needs from data, climate surveys, staffing assignments, and master schedule (Indiana Department of Education, 2016). There are a lot of other factors that come into play with this particular principle which are the recruitment and retaining of highly qualified teachers, partnerships with universities and businesses, and family and community support.

Rural schools face the challenge of recruiting and retaining highly qualified teachers and school leaders (Mintrop & Trujillo, 2005). Failing schools employ the least qualified teachers even though these schools are in the most need for highly qualified teachers. Teachers do not have adequate training for working in low-achieving or failing schools (Mintrop & Trujillo, 2005; Ravitch, 2010). The problem in low-achieving schools do not have enough effective teachers from grade level to grade level and the student achievement fades over time. There is also a lot of teacher turnover in low-performing schools (Fusarelli & Militello, 2012). School leaders have closed this gap, by making highly qualified teachers feel satisfied, appreciated, and want to remain at the education setting. Schools where dissatisfaction rates are high typically have high areas of poor teacher morale, high turnover rate, and low student achievement (Mann, 2014).

It is important for rural schools to create partnerships with universities and community business to help recruit and retain highly qualified staff. Research showed there are only a few colleges and universities that prepare teachers for teaching in low-performing schools. It can be worrisome to know that new teachers will more than likely be assigned to these types of schools with little training (Fusarelli & Militello, 2012). One program, Teach for America (TFA) sends new teachers to high poverty and low performing schools. These teachers come and go, which leaves student achievement goals harder to sustain. Research studies have pointed out that the

rural teacher turnover rate is connected to the demographics of students and achievement level. Teachers often leave low achieving schools in essence of employment in high-paying, high achieving schools (Maranto & Shuls, 2012).

Principle 6: Use of data. The use of data principle is one that drives the instruction and school leadership team to form goals. For many reasons, people would rather keep doing things the same way, even if it is not working, rather change (Bauer & Brazer, 2012). When failing schools started becoming a priority in the early 1990s, the reason for this was because of the development of data and how all stakeholders perceived it (Duke, 2006). The use of data principle can be applied in a variety of ways such as examining student data, principals actively engaged in data, and creating plans to help increase student achievement.

When examining data in a school, it is best to look at four steps in the continuous improvement process: root-cause analysis, solution development and action planning, reflective practice and evaluation, and collaboration problem diagnose (Bauer & Brazer, 2012). Rural schools must figure out what is the root cause of student achievement through analyzing data. Two common predictors for student achievement data are income and educational characteristics of families (Stump, 2015). Finding a solution to how to get families more involved would be the root cause and the school leadership team would develop a solution to put in place (Bauer & Brazer, 2012; Stump, 2015).

School leaders who are actively involved in their school data typically see more turnaround efforts faster. One way of doing this is through being involved in the RtI process, which allows for a team within the school to monitor student achievement closely (Brendle, 2015). School leaders felt that the more he or she was involved in the RtI process, then the easier it was to understand the school's academic performance. School leaders who create a sense of

urgency and dive into the data allow themselves to develop a plan with a timeline and manageable goals (Brendle, 2015; Dodman, 2014).

Principle 7: Use of Time. Research on the use of time can be categorized in many ways such as time spent on tasks, leading, or the framework of being a leader who can get things done in a timely manner (Kowalski & Oates 1993). The time spent on tasks varies from being a teacher, principal, and superintendent. There is no wrong or right way to manage time to complete tasks. Studies showed that the three roles have different perspectives on what is important and that everyone must prioritize tasks to meet deadlines (Grissom & Loeb, 2009; Kowalski & Oates, 1993).

Superintendents typically spend their time doing the following: gathering documents for board members to make policy changes, dismissal of personnel, preparing the school budget, and developing and evaluating curriculum programs (Kowalski & Oates, 1993). Another study found that superintendent obligations include the following: building relationships between the school district and community, informing the public of educational needs, bringing people together to create visions and goals, interpreting educational goals to the public, and building support for school initiatives (Kowalski, 2005).

Research by Jones (2004) described how strategic leaders use time effectively. Strategic leaders have great sense of timing and patience to wait to make a decision or intervention. These leaders invest their time in developing staff to make the school a better place for learning. Principals who are strategic leaders typically have more alert schools as well as ready to seize opportunities (Jones, 2004). Likewise, a study by Grissom and Loeb (2009) found the following information about how principals felt time was spent on a variety of tasks:

On average, principals felt the most effective at developing relationships with students, communicating with parents, attending school activities, developing safe school environments, dealing with concerns from staffs, managing school schedules and using data to inform instruction. Principals felt least effective at fundraising, planning professional development for prospective principals, releasing or counseling out teachers, utilizing district office communications to enhance their goals, and working with local community members and organizations (Grissom & Loeb, 2009, p. 13).

Teacher time usage typically includes the following: lesson plans, learning the curriculum, student behavior, classroom environment, grading papers, and so forth. Research has shown that teachers prioritize their responsibilities just as the principal and superintendent do (Grissom & Loeb, 2009; Kowalski, 2005). It is important for teachers to learn how to manage his or her time to prevent burnout from occurring. Burnout comes when teachers are distrusting their classroom management abilities, avoids management tasks, continuously over doing activities and cannot stay on routine (Brouwers & Tomic, 2000).

Principle 8: Family and Community Engagement. Schools that invest the time and financial resources on the family and community engagement principle are able to sustain student achievement longer. The idea is that one person cannot increase student achievement alone therefore by creating partnerships within and outside the community helps greatly (Browne-Ferrigno & Maynard, 2005; Fusarelli & Militello, 2012; Stelmach, 2011). The family and community engagement principle is defined as implementing the following: school climate survey, school focus groups, student and parent handbooks, family/community engagement activities, community group partnerships, job description of family/community engagement staff, parent resource room, school guidance plan (Indiana Department of Education, 2016). It is

27

important for rural schools to work in partnership with leaders and residents in the community, and then there is a more positive impact on community viability (Miller, 1995). Partnerships can be formed between school systems with inside community resources and outside the community through university programs.

Partnerships outside of the school district included forming programs for rural schools to grow such with universities and training programs. These partnerships offer opportunities to the school by preparing staff in training to work in rural schools (Browne-Ferrigno & Maynard, 2005; Fusarelli & Militello, 2012; Skolits et al., 2003). North Carolina State University developed a school turnaround program for leaders in rural, high poverty schools funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation for this program. It is focused on the following goals in preparing school leaders: rigorous selection, individualized leader development plans, daytime learning experiences, embedded practicum, turnaround principles, community internship, specialized training, stipends, and a full-time internship (Fusarelli & Militello, 2012). Likewise, the University of Kentucky developed the Principals Excellence Program (PEP) to help train teachers from a high needs rural system. This school system has a population with the annual family income under $15,000. Majority of high school graduates do not seek a post-secondary degree. The goals of the PEP were essentially to better prepare or retrain school leaders in the following areas: promoting success for all, seeking principal mentors, addressing high-stakes accountability issues, and delivering effective leadership preparation (Browne-Ferrigno & Maynard, 2005).

Another example of a multiple university partnership is known as the Appalachian Rural Systemic Initiative (ARSI) office. This partnership included a five-year grant of $2.3 million dollars with multiple universities and community resources. The goals were to improve the

following: academic performance, classroom teacher effectiveness, educational expectations, student knowledge about post-secondary education, parent knowledge of post-secondary education, graduation rate, college enrollment rates, and promote community involvement. The grant initiative met these goals by doing the following: providing hands-on instruction, teacher professional development, supplying instructional equipment, student awareness of college opportunities, student exposure to cultural experiences, and meaningful careers (Skolits et al., 2003).

Turnaround Models

In efforts to improve and provide support to low achieving and high needs schools, the United States Department of Education developed four turnaround models for schools. The four-turnaround models are as follows: turnaround, transformation, restart, and closure. The turnaround model is when the principal is replaced and no more than fifty percent of the faculty is rehired. In this model, there are implementation strategies for recruitment and professional development for the new principal and faculty. A research based instructional program that aligns with state standards and discussion of data of school achievement is implemented. The transformation model is replacing the principal and still keeping the faculty and staff. Faculty and principal evaluations are put in place to monitor teacher and student achievement. Strategies for recruitment, professional development, and discussion of data are put into place as well as continuing the promotion of family and community engagement. The third model is known as restart in which the school is reopened under a charter school operator. The fourth model is the closure model in which the school is closed and students may choose to enroll in other higher achieving schools in the district. Along with the four turnaround models, there are SIGs that provide financial resources for these schools.

In the five years since the SIG was redesigned, states, districts, and schools have taken a wide variety of approaches to implement one of the four SIG intervention models. Through its technical assistance efforts, the U.S. Department of Education has worked to increase peer-to-peer sharing of some of these approaches and strategies, particularly in the area of capacity building. Schools that have used the SIG funds over a five-year period, have reported the top three improvement strategies as follows: increasing professional development strategies, replacing the principal, and increasing learning time. The other strategies included the following: using instructional coaches, replacing teachers, changing core curriculum/instruction, using student data, providing student supports, using technology, implementing new behavior programs/policies, and providing parent activities (Le Floch et al., 2014).

To further these efforts, American Institutes of Research (AIR), under contract with the Department, have developed profiles of State-, district-, and school-level strategies to build capacity for turning around the lowest-performing schools. Covered in each profile are topics such the strategy used, the strategy development process and implementation, barriers overcome in the process of implementing the specific strategy, signs of promising implementation, and lessons learned from development and implementation of the strategy.

Research has shown the turnaround model to be effective in a variety of ways. One example took place in rural high school, which the principal was replaced and fifty percent of the faculty was terminated. The SIG funds allowed for an external consultant to consultant was hired who helped implement the professional learning community with the Accelerated Schools Project (ASP) model. There were many misunderstandings between the school and community, which led the consultant helping the school form PLC research teams (Maxwell et al., 2010). In another turnaround model example, a high school replaced its principal with one of the top

principals in the state. The Teach for America program came in to replace staff. The school improved on academic records and school safety. The turnaround strategies used were as follows: discipline was a priority, enforced the dress code, encouraged students to arrive on time, classroom teachers focused on remediation skills, coalition of parents and alumni reached out to the community for support. Within two years, student scores increased, and the high school received a C grade as well as the graduation rate went from thirty four percent to sixty three percent (Gorman, 2012).

The transformation model was applied to a school that had frequent leadership turnover, low staff morale, student violence, attendance problems, irrelevant professional development, and very low student achievement. The school system decided to use funds for establishing a partnership with Teachscape. The principal, faculty, and Teachscape professionals created a data-informed instructional improvement process to support, model, and sustain rigorous standards-based teaching in every classroom. The school has been removed from the state's failure list due to these efforts (Marrapodi & Beard, 2013).

The closure and restart models are similar in efforts of turning around a school. In a study with elementary schools, the restart model was applied, which the school buildings are reopened under a charter school operator or an educational management organization. Student enrollment in the new school required an application and each year a grade level was added. The findings showed that these schools made significant improvements in test scores but large improvements did not occur immediately (De la Torre et al., 2013). A school that chose the closure model found that it was difficult to locate new schools for students to attend. The results of this study suggest that turning around a school is a process, rather than something that happens over a small amount of time (Autti & Hyry-Beihammer, 2014; De la Torre et al., 2013). Findings from

another study showed how two districts chose the restart model. The two districts reopened ten struggling schools as public charter schools. Findings were one district said it was effective whereas the other did not find it as effective. Strategies that helped increase turnaround efforts from this study were as follows: provide sixty extra minutes of tutoring, incentives for principals and teachers, implement advanced education programs, provide extended school day, direct appointment of principals rather than the traditional hiring process, spilt schools into single gender approach, use community support for students, and examining data to continuously drive instruction (Lachlan-Haché, Naik & Casserly, 2012).

Superintendents in Rural Settings

Rural superintendents play an important role in the development of success in their school system. These leaders are very dynamic and have to be willing to think outside the box when overcoming obstacles because of limited resources so often found in rural contexts (Maxwell et al., 2013). Research has pointed out that being a rural superintendent requires skills such as building relationships, listening and interacting with the community, maintain good relations with media, understand community values, recruit and retain qualified teachers, transportation costs, and lead the central office (Canales et al., 2008; Copeland, 2013; Maxwell et al., 2013). The rural superintendent can find him or herself to be the only administrator, chief executive in the community, and often the target of public criticism. These superintendents are responsible for managing what is the largest employer in the community and are primarily responsible for both success and failure within the school system (Copeland, 2013; Lamkin, 2006).

Building relationships and visibility are two important priorities for the rural superintendent (Copeland, 2013; Harrington-Lucker, 2008; Jenkins, 2007; Winard & Edlefson,

2008). One way for superintendents build relationships is through development and understanding of community values that align with school board expectations (Glenn & Hickey, 2009; Jenkins, 2007). Rural superintendents should create strategic plans with input from the community such as board members, parents, business leaders, and teachers (Winand & Edlefson, 2008). The rural community expects the superintendent to be visible at everything ranging from everyday activities at school to community events. It is very important for the superintendent to maintain positive relations with media about the school system. The media could damage a rural school system because the rural community is always in the news (Jenkins, 2007; Maxwell et al., 2013).

Rural superintendents are connected to the community by being visible, being available to talk anytime, and to promote the school district (Copeland, 2013; Jenkins, 2007). The rural community's perception about education is impacted due to most rural areas are in economic distress, which contributes to many problems that affect rural schools (Budge, 2006). The community typically has six habits of practiced ways of living, which are as follows: connectedness, development of identity and culture, interdependence with the land, spirituality, ideology and politics, and activism and civic engagement (Budge, 2006). With these six habits, the rural superintendent must understand and value them in order to continue to build and sustain relationships with community.

Superintendents are faced with numerous situations each day, some might be financial and enrollment stability, budget, economy, school finances, and recruiting principals (Forner et al., 2012). In order to manage his or her time effectively, the superintendent must be able prioritize daily tasks along with the additional tasks that come up each day. Katz (2009) identified three skills for a superintendent that is technical, human, and conceptual. Technical

means having specialized knowledge and analytical ability to perform particular tasks. Human skills are to be able to work effectively individually or with a group while building a cooperative effort within the team he or she leads. Human skills include knowing how an individual perceives what is being done as well as realizing the perceptions of others. Cognitive skills refer to being able to deeply understand a problem before making a decision (Katz, 2009)

Alabama School Superintendents

Alabama has an estimated population of 4,858,979 in 2015 and constitutes more than 1.5% of the U.S. population; Alabama has about 94 persons living per square mile. Twenty-one percent of state residents live in a rural area and more than 80% of the state's residents live in a metropolitan area, which is defined in the United States Census Bureau (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). The majority of the population is Caucasian (66%), with African-Americans making up one fourth (26.3%) of the population. State spending is allocated via two separate budgets, "the general fund" for all non-education related expenditures and the Education Trust Fund (ETF) for all education-related expenditures (Key, 2010). Each school system is allotted 10 mills of property tax and local revenue exceeds state revenue in the more affluent school districts (ALSDE, 2008). The requirements for local school systems to receive funds include the following: 187-day school year, teacher salary schedule, and local taxation that raises the value of 10 mills of property tax (Key, 2010).

There are a total of one hundred thirty nine school system superintendents in Alabama. These school leaders are either appointed or elected in the state (Landry, 2009). In the United States, 98% of school superintendents are appointed rather than elected and typically most states say their school systems attract higher-caliber candidates with the appointed model (Alabama

34

Media Group, 2016). There are a total of seventy-one city school systems, sixty-seven county school systems, and one fine arts system in Alabama (ALSDE, 2016).

City school systems already appoint their superintendent whereas Alabama has thirty-seven elected superintendents in the following counties: Autauga, Blount, Chambers, Cherokee, Clarke, Cleburne, Colbert, Conecuh, Coosa, Dale, DeKalb, Elmore, Franklin, Geneva, Henry, Houston, Jackson, Lamar, Lauderdale, Lawrence, Marion, Pickens, Randolph, Tallapoosa, Washington, and Winston (Alabama Media Group, 2016). Under Alabama law, any candidate running for superintendent must have the following qualifications: degree from a recognized four-year college, at least three years of recent "successful educational experience" as a teacher, principal, supervisor, superintendent, educational administrator or instructor in school administration, at least five years of public school work experience, and an Alabama certificate in administration and supervision (Alabama Media Group, 2016).

Superintendents are valued based on their beliefs and behavior in relationship to solving problems and making their school system succeed (Lewis, Rice, & Rice, 2011). Through a thorough review of literature, it was discussed in studies that school superintendents play an important role in setting priorities, dealing with being under pressure by being an appointed or elected superintendent, and leading a central office staff with school leaders in their school system (Alsbury, 2008; Brouillette, 2009; Fairbanks-Schutz, 2010; Landry, 2009; Lewis et al., 2011). Research also provided information about how female superintendents tend to serve as appointed superintendents, have personal barriers in the position, and their process for career development (Brouillette, 2009; Promisee-Bynum, 2010). Alabama appointed the first female superintendent in 1916. In the past, males dominated the superintendency job until the 1980s (Landry, 2009). The percentage of Alabama female superintendents fluctuated from 12% to 16%

during the 1980s and 1990s and reached a high of 19% in 2010 (Connell, Cobia, & Hodge, 2015). Today, Alabama has 102 male superintendents, 67 female superintendents, 22 females have earned a doctorate, 18 females are superintendents in a city school system, 18 females are superintendents in a county school system, 48 males have earned a doctorate, 53 males are superintendents in a city school system, and 49 males are superintendents in a county school system (ALSDE, 2016). With this data, it is evident that universities seek out females who want to actively become a superintendent (Brouillette, 2009; Promisee-Bynum, 2010). Through research of superintendents it was found that he or she must abide by the instructional leadership standards, face the challenge of being an appointed or elected superintendent, and females face challenges such as gender discrimination and barriers serving in a higher position (Alsbury, 2008; Boring, 2003; Brouillette, 2009; Buchanan, 2013; Edwards, 2006; Hoff & Mitchell, 2008; Kowalski, McCord, Peterson, Young, & Ellerson, 2010; Landry, 2009; Lewis et al., 2011; McGriff, Bishop, & Rice, 1997; Miller-Whitehead, 2003; Wallin & Newton, 2014; Odum, 2010; Promisee-Bynum, 2010; Wilson, 2011).

Instructional leadership standards for superintendents. Superintendents are held accountable in the United States by following and utilizing the eight instructional leadership standards (Buchanan, 2013; Lewis et al., 2011). The eight instructional leadership standards are as follows: planning for continuous improvement, teaching and learning, human resources development, diversity, community and stakeholder relationships, technology, management of the learning organization, and ethics (Lewis et al., 2011). These eight standards align with the eight turnaround principles by being similar in descriptions and actions taken by school superintendents. The eight standards were developed by the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB), local instructional leadership evaluation and standards from the Southern Association of

Colleges and Schools (SACS), the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC), and standards from 22 other states (Lewis et al., 2011). In addition, all Alabama school employees are held accountable to follow the Alabama Code of Ethics which include: professional conduct, trustworthiness, unlawful acts, alcohol, drug and tobacco use or possession, public funds and property, remunerative conduct, maintenance of confidentiality, and abandonment of contract (ALSDE, 2016).

The development of the instructional leadership standards, code of ethics, and the eight turnaround principles came about through the history of school superintendents. Over time, the school superintendent has had many different roles, many roles and responsibilities that overlap (Edwards, 2006; Wilson, 2011). The first role emerged as a school headmaster such as a teacher and clerk with a school committee that would make decisions on important matters (Edwards, 2006). From the 1800s to 1900s, superintendents spent much of their energy on maintaining schoolhouses, supervising teachers, and implementing curriculum. In the 1960s and 1970s, superintendency changed into meeting the demands of the public and educational groups, the superintendent became politically aware of what was expected in the school system and community (Buchanan, 2013; Edwards, 2006; Wilson, 2011). Today, Alabama superintendents, school leaders, professional educators, and other stakeholders are held accountable for abiding by the instructional leadership standards and the Alabama Code of Ethics (ALSDE, 2016).

Research pointed out that school superintendents are responsible for management and implementation of these standards. In an Alabama study of fifty-five superintendents, it discussed how superintendents ranked the importance of instructional leadership standards (Lewis et al., 2011). These are ranked in order from most important to least important from 55 Alabama superintendents: Standard 2, teaching and learning; Standard 1, planning for continuous

improvement; Standard 8, ethics; Standard 7, management of the learning organization; Standard 3, human resource development; Standard 5, community and stakeholder relationships; Standard 6, technology; and Standard 4, diversity (Lewis et al., 2011). This study showed that Alabama school superintendents identified teaching and learning as the most important standard. A similar study that took place with superintendents in Alabama, Florida, and Mississippi investigated the leadership orientation frames are structural, human resource, political, and symbolic. This study particularly looked at which frame was the most common among superintendents in these three states, which was the human resources frame (Landry, 2009).

Research has shown that superintendent leadership can influence student achievement by closing the achievement gap developing an understanding of how they do it (Fairbanks-Schutz, 2010). Spillane, Halverson, and Diamond (2001) suggested having a more complete understanding of educational leadership we need to learn not only what leaders do but also how they do it. School systems typically look for a transformational leader that can move the district forward in the 21st century (Wilson, 2011). Superintendents are held accountable in making ethical decisions. The school leader is viewed as a community leader who is respected by all and whose decisions are made on ethical and moral values (Buchanan, 2013). Alsbury (2008) pointed out when school superintendents and school leaders are not respected within the school system or community then there is a decrease in student achievement. This is known as the dissatisfaction theory that predicts that a politically motivated board and superintendent turnover may influence student performance. Results included when student test scores declined in rural districts, where there was no superintendent change over the course of eight years (Alsbury, 2008).

Standard 1: Planning for Continuous Improvement. The school superintendent can plan for continuous improvement by engagement of the school community in developing a shared

vision, use critical thinking and problem-solving techniques, collect and analyze data, allocate resources, and evaluate results for the purpose of continuous school improvement (Lewis et al., 2011). Bottoms & O'Neill (2001) reported that superintendents should have a targeted mission to improve student achievement. It was reported that superintendents should work with principals in having a shared vision for the system and school that makes a difference in preparing students for the present and future world. Specifically, middle school leaders believe their primary mission is to get students ready for challenging high school courses and high school leaders see their mission as preparing students to transition to post-secondary studies and work (Bottoms & O'Neill, 2001). Superintendents see planning for continuous school improvement as a way to develop and create a continuous improvement plan (CIP) that is focused at the district level and school level (Bottoms & O'Neill, 2001; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2003). The CIP can provide the architecture to support district-wide and school support for organizational learning (Kruse, 2001).

  Standard 2: Teaching and Learning. The teaching and learning standard is enhanced by the superintendent leading change in the learning environment by collaboration with a variety of stakeholders about aligning the curriculum and assessments, using a variety of benchmarks, setting high learning expectations, and providing feedback to ensure accountability (Lewis et al., 2011). One major responsibility of superintendents is the development of having a strong central office staff. Research by McLaughlin & Talbert (2003), found evidence that having a weak central office limits school system improvement whereas a strong district central office promotes strategic distribution of responsibilities which makes stronger gains in school system achievement goals (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2003). In a similar study, the central finding in improving teaching and learning starts at the district level with the superintendent by making

efforts to align instruction with assessments, provide a detailed analysis of student responses from the assessments, and provide immediate feedback and appropriate instruction for individual students (Cawelti & Protheroe, 2001).

   Standard 3: Human Resources Development. The superintendent practices the human resources standard by recruiting, organizing, and mentoring faculty and staff to accomplish school and system goals maintain the human resources development standard. He or she works collaboratively with the school system faculty and staff to plan effective professional development that is based upon student needs and organization growth (Lewis et al., 2011). Superintendents review human resources plans for hiring teachers to reduce the teacher turnover rate. The estimated cost of replacing just one teacher ranges from $4,366 to $17,872, which includes recruitment and advertising, incentives (signing bonuses), administrative processing, and training for new hires (Brooks-Young, 2007).

   Standard 4: Diversity. The superintendent meets the needs of diversity by being responsive and a positive influence on the larger personal, political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context in the classroom, school, and the local community while addressing diverse student needs to ensure the success of all students (Lewis et al., 2011). School systems educate a diverse group of students that superintendents must take an active role in improving learning for all students. The focus on educational accountability has revealed diversity contributes to having a larger performance gap between African American, Latino, Caucasian, and economically disadvantaged students from middle and upper income families (Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005). Superintendents must possess high quality instructional skills to be able to support the learning of all students as well as be able to provide leadership to improve school system improvement (Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005; Lewis et al., 2011).

40

Standard 5: Community and Stakeholder Relationships. The school superintendent promotes and builds relationships with the community and stakeholders by identifying the unique characteristics of the community and developing ways to sustain supportive family-school-community relations (Lewis et al., 2011). The most successful superintendents develop community and stakeholder relationships by having an entry plan for the superintendent position and use multiple methods of communication to establish trust. Superintendents who are strategic in their use of leadership strategies are able to develop a stronger relationship with their board as well as rely on self-reflection to evaluate their success (Huang, 2012; Synyard, 2010). Today, the school board and superintendent relationship is becoming more complex and must be maintained in meeting the mandates for high student achievement (Huang, 2012; Porch & Protheroe, 2003). The three factors with improving relationships superintendents face with their board and community are discussions about school improvement plans, the effects of state and federal accountability requirements, and the increase focus on student achievement (Porch & Protheroe, 2003).

Standard 6: Technology. The superintendent promotes the technology standard by planning, implementing, and evaluating the effective integration of current technology tools in teaching, management, research, and communication (Lewis et al., 2011). In the attempt to bring rigor and relevance into today's classroom, superintendents are infusing 21st century skills into district curriculum to provide students with the opportunities to meet these challenges (Synyard, 2010). Superintendents are continuously looking for grants that can supply technology tools for students to be able to meet the needs of becoming a 21st century school system (Gittisriboongul, 2013; Synyard, 2010).

Standard 7: Management of the Learning Organization. The management of the learning organization standard is carried out by the superintendent managing the organization, facilities, and financial resources, implementing operational plans, and promoting collaboration to create a safe and effective learning environment (Lewis et al., 2011). Research by Hatch & Roegman (2012), found that bringing together a small group of superintendents one day each month to discuss and address problems in their district was very beneficial in meeting school system goals. The monthly meetings included focusing on personal interactions with other superintendents to discuss resources and routines and practices. One way superintendents stay connected with the learning environment is by participating in instructional rounds. These rounds allow superintendents to observe classroom instruction and the connections tied to student learning (Hatch & Roegman, 2012).

Standard 8: Ethics. The superintendent practices the ethics standard by demonstration of honesty, integrity, and fairness to guide school policies and practices that are consistent with current legal and ethical standards for professional educators (Lewis et al., 2011). Buchanan (2013) examined the ethical decisions of superintendents into four categories that were: ethic of justice, ethic of critique, ethic of care, and ethic of profession. Superintendents felt that students are the first priority when making decisions and they should hold all stakeholders accountable for following rules and regulations (Buchanan, 2013). The Alabama Code of Ethics (2016) suggests for superintendents to uphold the ethical standard by maximizing the positive use of school funds and model for students and colleagues the responsible use of public property (Alabama Code of Ethics, 2016).

Elected and Appointed School Superintendents. Alabama counties that have appointed superintendents have a larger pool of applicants to interview (McGriff et al., 1997). Schuh and

Herington (1990) found the elected superintendent as one that maintains public control of schools, is more responsive to citizens, and decreases the high turnover and abuses of power. The ones in favor of having an appointed superintendent find efficiency in the decision-making process and the creation of a professional rather than a political process (McGriff et al., 1997). Majority of smaller rural districts have an appointed superintendent who serve from three to ten years. Majority of these superintendents hold advanced degrees (McGriff et al., 1997).

Landry (2009) investigated the leadership orientation frames of school superintendents in Alabama, Florida, and Mississippi. These are the only three states in the United States with both elected and appointed school superintendents (Landry, 2009). The four frames were developed from Bolman and Deal's (1997) four frame typology. The four frames investigated are the following: structural, human resource, political, and symbolic. The study found that elected superintendents had a statistically significant mean score for human resources. These leaders were effective school managers (Landry, 2009).

Alabama appointed superintendents rather than elected demonstrated more of the following work-related behaviors: reviews of reports on student achievement, increase in attendance and graduation, engaged in assessment and putting students' needs first, and articulated high expectations for student learning and teaching quality (McGriff et al., 1997). Elected superintendents initiated specific improvement actions from the public more often than did appointed superintendents (McGriff et al., 1997). In addition, superintendents should demonstrate the ability to provide leadership with a board in working collaboratively to carry out board policies, directives, assist the board in long range planning and to support accountability for both the administration and the board itself (Boring, 2003). There are high risks for a superintendent and at some point he or she will have to deal with an issue that they will have

43

little control over. When this occurs, the superintendent must operate from principles of integrity, as anything else would be a violation of the office (Edwards, 2006).

Boring (2003) reported the number of applicants for superintendency has diminished overtime. Twenty years ago, in a district of about 12,000 students, the superintendent pool would be about 50 applicants. Today, it is half that amount of applicants (Boring, 2003). School systems can conduct a superintendent search process by two ways: hiring an outside consultant agency or appoint someone local to conduct the search (Boring, 2003). Suggested categories for selection of superintendent are as follows: educational experience, communication and community relations, leadership skills, decision making skills, and district level administration (Boring, 2003).

Female School Superintendents. Through multiple research searches regarding the superintendency, literature pointed out that females make up the majority of school system employees, but today there are still an inadequate number of female superintendents (Brouillette, 2009; Kowalski et al., 2010; Miller-Whitehead, 2003; Wallin & Newton, 2014; Promisee-Bynum, 2010). During the 2006-2007 school year, there were only twenty-seven females who served as school superintendents (Brouillette, 2009). According to the Digest of Educational Statistics (2001), 79% of all public-school teachers nationally were female. Today, 80% of Alabama's teachers are female (Alabama Education Quick Facts, 2008). The most recent outcomes found that from a survey of approximately 2,000 superintendents in the United States, 24% were females, an increase from 14% in 2000 (Kowalski et al., 2010).

Female superintendents typically earned a doctorate degree and were employed in a rural school system (Promisee-Bynum, 2010). She was usually hired from within her school system and served as a superintendent for three years earning between $100,000-$149,000. (Brouillette,

44

2009). Gender was a significant predictor as well as being an appointed superintendent for females in Alabama (Miller-Whitehead, 2003). Research identified that universities should recruit females to become school superintendents (Brouillette, 2009; Promisee-Bynum, 2010).

In multiple studies, it is pointed out that more females than men had completed the requirements for administration certification, earned advanced degrees, and waited for their children to be attending school before applying for their first leadership role (Brouillette, 2009; Hoff & Mitchell, 2008; Kowalski et al., 2010; Miller-Whitehead, 2003; Promisee-Bynum, 2010). Females on average had taught for thirteen years whereas men taught for eight years before moving into an administrative role. Females would wait for someone to encourage them to apply, needing confirmation before proceeding into administrative roles (Hoff & Mitchell, 2008). Females are more than likely to apply for positions that emphasize instructional leadership activities that lead them to being hired as superintendents because of their expertise in instructional leadership (Wallin & Newton, 2014).

The personal barriers that female superintendents reported were the following: conflict between career and family, lack of ability to relocate, and constantly having to prove oneself. The professional barriers they felt in the position were the nature of superintendent work, little room for error, gender discrimination, and lack of job security (Brouillette, 2009; Odum, 2010; Promisee-Bynum, 2010). Personal strategies that supported them in their position were having a supporting family, having well-polished communication skills, and having obtained a doctorate (Hoff & Mitchell, 2008; Wallin & Newton, 2014). The professional strategies that helped them in their career were having management and leadership experiences, knowledge of school finance, and knowledge of curriculum and instruction and networking (Brouillette, 2009; Odum, 2010).

Rural Education

Rural schools are quite different from urban or suburban schools in a variety of ways. Rural schools face challenges that are more difficult to overcome simply because of geographic isolation and recruitment of teachers (Bell & Pirtle, 2012; Rosenberg et al., 2014). There is a very high turnover rate with school leaders and teachers which make it difficult to increase and sustain student achievement efforts. In this section, three main parts will be discussed which are school leader obstacles, parent support, funding and recruitment of staff, and student achievement in rural schools.

Research has shown that since 2012, there were approximately 5,000 chronically low-performing schools with half located in urban areas, a third in rural areas, and the rest in suburbs and medium-sized towns (USDOE, 2012). When researching turnaround schools, it is evident that there are many challenges faced in low achieving schools. From multiple pieces of research, the common challenges faced in low achieving rural schools include the following: large class size and/or case load, lack of safety in or around the school, inadequate or substandard facilities, inadequate supports for the lowest achieving students, few textbooks and other instructional materials, textbooks and instructional materials that are not aligned with state standards, poor student discipline, insufficient parent involvement, large number of student transfers into this school or your class at various points during the year, low student motivation, low staff morale, low teacher expectations for student achievement, low and/or erratic student attendance, and insufficient access to technology (Bell & Pirtle, 2012; Johnson, Strange, & Madden, 2010; Rosenberg et al., 2014). With these challenges, it is important to know that turnaround does not happen quickly and one-size fits all approach does not work for each school (Bell & Pirtle,

2012).

School leaders must be flexible and work well with faculty and staff to help change the schools. Transportation can be an issue in rural communities by having long commutes for students in these school districts (Bell & Pirtle, 2012). On a daily basis, principals are overcoming obstacles and finding solutions such as creating sense of urgency, surround themselves with like-minded people, and staying focused on the data (Dodman, 2014). A common obstacle that school leaders face is the recruitment of staff. Teachers in rural schools often leave positions due to the following: social isolation, low salaries, multiple teaching assignments, and lack of familiarity with rural schools. The multiple preps are required because the teacher is responsible for multiple grade levels and subjects can be overwhelming (Barley & Brigham, 2008). One-way research has shown to increase recruitment of teachers is to promote the positives like having a smaller class size and having parent support. Research findings support rural school in developing partnerships with universities that can offer courses and placement options for pre-service teachers to learn about rural schools (Barley & Brigham, 2008; Bell & Pirtle, 2012; Versland, 2013). In another study, it was reported that teachers would find it beneficial to include experiences interacting with rural schools in their teacher preparation program (Baser & Karaman, 2015).

Parental support in rural schools can vary from family to family but for the most part research has shown that rural families have expectations for their child (Baser & Karaman, 2015; Bell & Pirtle, 2012; Rosenberg et al., 2014; Johnson et al., 2010). Findings from one research study showed that students from rural settings are expected to maintain serious responsibilities over academics when getting home from school such as preparing dinner and helping parents with chores. Rural parents reported that they love the school and respect the school, but have no

idea how to do the work. Two main complaints from parents: teacher turnover (there was always a new teacher) and teachers left school early in the afternoon (Versland, 2013).

Rural low achieving or high needs schools typically face funding issues due to not having a high enrollment rate. "Because rural districts typically enroll fewer students, they may not benefit from the "number weighting" formula as larger, urban districts do" (Bell & Pirtle, 2012, p. 3). Financial assistance can be provided by the Rural and Low Income School (RLIS) Program to rural schools that are low performing by offering School Improvement Grants. The SIG incentive allows for low achieving schools to receive assistance in meeting adequately yearly progress, teacher recruitment and retention, teacher professional development, and parent involvement activities. To be eligible for receiving SIG incentives a school or system must have a history of low student achievement, and be at the bottom five percent performance in the state for a period of time. Once a school system receives acceptance for a SIG, then one of the four-turnaround models is implemented (Rosenberg et al., 2014).

Due to the geographic isolation and low academic achievement, recruitment of teachers and school leaders can present a tough barrier for schools. Rural schools deserve the chance to succeed just like any other school (Bell & Pirtle, 2012; Johnson et al., 2010; Rosenberg et al., 2014). One way to help is for universities to start providing educational experiences for all pre-service teachers (Bell & Pirtle, 2012; Rosenberg et al., 2014; Van Tuyle & Reeves, 2014). Research has pointed out that due to the lack of university partnerships, rural communities often rely on "growing your own" to have an increase in teachers and leaders. Teachers from the area will sometimes move away and return back home to their community (Bell & Pirtle, 2012; Versland, 2013). Research findings also show that the principals hired from the "grow your own" did not have any leadership experiences and lacked in the big picture of how to lead and manage

a school. These schools tend to continue operating the same way (Versland, 2013).

School leaders and teachers who continuously review data and implement action plans are likely to increase student achievement (Fusarelli & Militello, 2012). Some schools, like rural schools, find it more of a challenge to increase student achievement. Seventy-seven percent of the eight hundred rural districts that have the highest student poverty rate are located in the southern and southwestern states: Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, New Mexico, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Texas, and West Virginia. These states have the highest poverty rate including rural school districts that can contribute to rural school problems and issues (Johnson et al., 2010). Additional research findings supported this by identifying two main primary predictors for student achievement, which were income and educational characteristics of families. Students from rural settings would struggle due to not having enough resources available. Rural high schools also have the highest high school dropout rates (Johnson et al., 2010; Stump, 2015).

One interesting component of turning around a rural school system is the need for innovative school models. An innovative school model is when a school is transformed to add magnet component or career tech that will provide new curriculum to for students to achieve their goals (Bell & Pirtle, 2012). In addition, rural school districts should build partnerships with businesses to be able to provide innovative learning tools for students (Johnson et al., 2010).

PACT Grant

The PACT Grant was granted to three universities to implement a school turnaround leadership program that would have a positive impact on rural schools. The three higher education institutions, the University of Alabama, Auburn University, and Samford University redesigned their master's instructional leadership program to include the eight turnaround

principles. This program allowed for school leadership students the opportunity to complete field experiences in rural schools. The PACT grant was aligned with State Superintendent Dr. Thomas R. Bice's agenda to dramatically improve student achievement and graduation rates and ensure every student graduates from high school and would be successful in college and/or career through a strategic plan entitled *Plan 2020*. In an effort to support PLAN 2020, Alabama has initiated several processes to specifically address the need for principals, assistant principals, and central office personnel to become instructional leaders. PLAN 2020 renewed focus on instructional leadership.

Throughout this literature review, it can be understood that applying the turnaround principles are important to increase and sustain school success. School leaders are to utilize the turnaround principles daily to help sustain improvement over time. The rural superintendent is one who wears multiple hats and is expected to be visible in the school system district. One of the main challenges of rural schools is the geographic isolation and recruitment of teachers. School leaders should seek out partnerships that will help achieve school system goals. The four turnaround models have been implemented across the United States along with SIG funds that can help turnaround low achieving schools. The PACT grant has been a valuable program in forming a partnership with rural schools and training school leaders. This review also provided research on Alabama superintendents, how superintendents apply instructional leadership standards, and the need for universities to seek out female superintendents.

Chapter III: Methods

As of 2012, there were approximately 5,000 chronically low-performing schools with half located in urban areas, a third in rural areas, and the rest in suburbs and medium-sized towns (USDOE, 2012). More specifically in Alabama, approximately forty-two percent of all school students are attending a school designated as rural (Johnson, Showalter, Kein, & Lester, 2014). Schools can be labeled as high performing, low achieving, or failing depending on student achievement standardized assessments (Marrapodi & Beard, 2013). Rural schools can fall into the failing school category due to reasons such as high teacher/principal turnover rate, classes being too large, multiple grade levels in one class, and not having curriculum materials that are aligned with state assessments (Forner et al., 2012; Rosenburg, 2011).

The conceptual framework for this case study was connected to rural superintendents' utilization of the eight turnaround principles. The eight turnaround principles used in this research were: school leadership, school climate and culture, effective instruction, curriculum, assessment and intervention systems, effective staffing practices, enabling the effective use of data, effective use of time, and family and community engagement. The eight turnaround principles were supported in numerous pieces of research as ways to help school leaders guide turnaround. The researcher sought to explore the perceptions of rural turnaround superintendents as they applied the eight turnaround principles in their K-12 school districts (Bell & Pirtle, 2012; Copeland, 2013; Gorman, 2012; Harrington-Locker, 2008; Jenkins, 2007; Marrapodi & Beard, 2013; Maxwell et al., 2013).

This chapter contains the purpose, significance, research design, research questions, data collection methods and data analysis. This chapter will discuss the method used to explain how rural superintendents applied the eight turnaround principles to implement and sustain

51

turnaround in their school system. For this study, a qualitative descriptive case study was chosen as the most appropriate approach.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive case study is to examine how rural superintendents implement the eight turnaround principles to foster and sustain improvement in the school district organization. The primary participants selected for this study are eight superintendents located in rural school systems in a southern state. The eight rural superintendents were chosen from school systems that have an agreement with the PACT grant partnership with three universities in the southern state. The study is designed to identify what specifically district leaders do to implement turnaround in their school system. School district leaders emphasize that themselves and their staff wear multiple hats and are limited in resources to provide for their school system, which impacts turnaround efforts. This study is important because it will add to the research about how rural superintendents implement turnaround in their school system. Data were obtained through in-depth face-to-face interviews, reviewing the "End of Year" Status reports, and asking follow-up interview questions.

Rural superintendents are faced with new challenges each day as they engage in school turnaround. It is a complex picture because there are many internal and external factors which influence the success or failure of turnaround (Canales et al., 2008; Copeland, 2013; Forner et al., 2012; Harrington-Lueker, 2008). Results from the current study shed light on the facilitating and hindering factors of the turnaround process, the highlights and challenges of implementing turnaround and the role of the superintendent in the process. The superintendents were interviewed to determine the answers to the following research questions:

(a) What was the role of the superintendent in implementing the eight turnaround

principles, as perceived by the superintendents serving in the PACT grant?

(b) What were the factors that facilitated implementation of turnaround in rural systems

as perceived by the superintendents?

(c) What were the factors that hindered implementation of turnaround in rural systems as

perceived by the superintendents?

(d) From the superintendent perspective, what were the highlights and challenges of

leading a rural turnaround school district?

Significance of the Study

Turning around failing schools came into focus during the Obama Administration's

reauthorization of ESEA in 2009 and adding the ARRA of 2009. Much of the research on

turning around failing schools was centered in urban areas (Herman et al., 2008; Rosenburg,

2011; USDOE, 2012). Out of this research, it was estimated that it took anywhere from three to

five years to reverse and improve a failing school (Harrington-Locker, 2008; Jenkins, 2007).

Superintendency has been widely studied, but there has been less established about rural

superintendents and there is little evidence of rural turnaround superintendent's influence in

implementing change using the turnaround principles. This study was significant because it

added to the body of literature on how rural superintendents lead turnaround in their school

systems. This study will have an impact in people's lives by the research contributing to rural

education and superintendency.

Research Design

The goal of this research was to develop a better understanding of how rural

superintendents applied the eight turnaround principles to foster and sustain improvement in the

school district organization. This study used a qualitative descriptive case study approach in examining the issue because it appeared to be the most appropriate. The study used a case study design as it was believed that it would enable the researcher to develop insight and understanding as to how rural superintendents applied the eight turnaround principles to foster and sustain improvement in the school district organization.

A case study is a detailed examination of a particular setting. The general design of a case study can be best represented as a funnel. It starts wide and becomes narrower as research continues (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). A case study methodology allows a large amount of data to be collected and analyzed during the investigation. This method enabled the researcher to collect a wide range of data allowing for in-depth lived experiences of the key stakeholders (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2014) and enabled the researcher to examine the uniqueness and similarities of the superintendents leading turnaround in their school districts. The use of a case study methodology supports a more detailed study, which provides more in-depth data collection and analysis. (Creswell, 2007; Rowley, 2002). Merriam and Tisell (2016) stated, "we believe that research focused on discovery, insight, and understanding the perspectives of those being studied offers the greatest promise of making a difference in people's lives" (p.1).

Creswell (2013) explained a case study as a researcher(s) who collected stories from individuals about their perceptions on a particular topic. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) discussed case research studies as a way of characterizing the phenomena of human experiences. The case study investigates real situations and seeks out the experiences from others. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) point out that the researcher listens first to the story and the researcher reports what comes about from listening to the experiences.

The eight individual cases that made up this descriptive case study included rural school systems that have one or more low-achieving schools. Each of the school systems is from rural southern state area with significant poverty in the community. The descriptive case study approach enabled the researcher to study the individual cases to determine rural superintendent's perceptions in applying the eight turnaround principles in their school system. A case study was the most appropriate because it allowed the investigation of how the eight turnaround principles were implemented from the perspective of the rural superintendent.

Research Questions

The superintendents were interviewed to determine the answers to the following research questions:

(a) What was the role of the superintendent in implementing the eight turnaround principles, as perceived by the superintendents serving in the PACT grant?

(b) What were the factors that facilitated implementation of turnaround in rural systems as perceived by the superintendents?

(c) What were the factors that hindered implementation of turnaround in rural systems as perceived by the superintendents?

(d) From the superintendent perspective, what were the highlights and challenges of leading a rural turnaround school district?

Data Collection

The data collection for this study included the following: in-depth face-to-face interviews, reviewing the "End of Year" Status reports, and asking follow up interview questions. For this research study, the interview data collection method included eight semi-structured informational interviews with the eight rural turnaround superintendents. After interviewing, the

data was recorded and transcribed for specific codes and themes. Each interview lasted for one hour.

Data Analysis

The data collection for this study included the following: in-depth face-to-face interviews, reviewing the "End of Year" Status reports, and asking follow up interview questions. The data collected needed to be reduced by transforming it into codes to make it more specific to the study. Developing a list of coding categories after the data have been collected was a crucial step in the data analysis step (Bogdan and Biklen, 2007).

The collection and analysis of data can be challenging and interesting for a case study. The process of data analysis involved several steps suggested in Creswell (2013), which were as follows: organized the data, read-through the data multiple times, coding and organizing themes, representing the data. Creswell (2013) pointed out that the process of data collection and analysis are "interrelated and often go on simultaneously in a research project" (p.182). Reflection is the best way to get a better understanding of what the data is representing.

Once the researcher completed the analysis of the data and the themes that emerged, the researcher started to triangulate the data. Triangulation is the process intended to ensure the validity and integrity of the findings. Triangulation is critical to ensure that the findings are based in the data and not in some pre-conceived ideas of what is believed to be true based on experiences and interpretation of the research (Berg & Lune, 2012; Bernard & Ryan, 2010; Creswell, 2013; Merrian, 1998; Stake, 1995; Stake, 2004; Stake, 2006; Yin, 2014).

Coding Process

The coding process is a method that researchers use when gathering data during a research study. During the interviews, the researcher would write notes while recording the conversation taking place (Bernard & Ryan, 2010). The coding process helps researchers attach meaning to the data that is collected. When beginning the coding process, the first step after collecting the data, is to read over the data not to code the data. The researcher needs to have time to refresh his or her memory about the data (Creswell, 2013). After the researcher is familiar with the data, then he or she will need to make a list of themes or ideas that are common and unique.

The next step is to develop a codebook. This was an evolving document that was constantly modified as the researcher developed a better understanding of the data and how it was connected to the theoretical framework of the study (DeCuir-Gunby, Marshall, & McCulloch, 2011). This codebook was developed to ensure that the codes and its definition were specific enough to be meaningful. Creswell (2013) recommends no more than between 25 and 30 codes be included in the codebook, while Bernard and Ryan (2003) recommends no more than between 50 and 80 codes in the codebook. Creswell (2013) recommends that the codes in the codebook be held to as few as possible due to the need to reduce these codes into five or six themes necessary for publication. Keeping these guidelines in mind the researcher developed a codebook for this study that contained nineteen codes that were broken down into themes for each of the four research questions. The National Center for Educational Statics has developed a three tier definition of rural. Using the locale codes of 41-rural fringe (an area within five miles of an urban area), 42-rural distant (more than five but less than 25 miles from an urban area), and 43-rural remote (more than 25 miles from an urban area).

Assumptions

The following major assumptions made about the study:

- All of the information provided by the participants was a truthful and accurate depiction of their perceptions relative to partnership development.

- Participants were not pressured nor coerced in any way to provide any sensitive information relative to partnership development and their university.

- All school personnel interviewed are or were a part of the redesign process of the educational leadership program.

Participants, Background and Setting

Alpha Chi Omega County

Superintendent: Appointed
Central Office Hierarchy: Superintendent, Finance Director, Elementary Supervisor/Federal Programs, Secondary Supervisor, SPE Director, Maintenance, Transportation, Child Nutrition, Technology
County Population: 59,660
County Demographics: Rural Distant
53.7% were White, 41.8% Black or African American, 0.4% Asian, 0.4% Native American, 0.2% Pacific Islander, 1.3% of some other race and 2.1% of two or more races. 3.7% were Hispanic or Latino (of any race).
Median Household Income: $36,066
Amount of Failing Schools: 1 High School
School System Demographics: African American–35%, Hispanic– 4%, Caucasian- 55%, Other – 6%

Alpha Delta Chi County

Superintendent: Elected
Central Office Hierarchy: Superintendent, Finance Director, Curriculum Supervisor/Federal Programs, SPE Director, Transportation, Child Nutrition, Technology
County Population: 10,724
County Demographics: Rural Remote
63.94% White, 34.19% Black or African American, 0.32% Native American, 0.04% Asian, 0.01% Pacific Islander, 0.62% from other races, and 0.88% from two or more races. 1.29% of the population were Hispanic or Latino of any race.
Median Household Income: $32,340
Amount of Failing Schools: 1 Middle School
School System Demographics: African American– 45%, Hispanic– 2%, Caucasian- 50%, Other – 3%

Alpha Epsilon Phi County

Superintendent: Appointed
Central Office Hierarchy: Superintendent, Finance Director, Curriculum and Instruction, Federal Programs/SPE Director, Maintenance, Transportation, Child Nutrition, Technology
County Population: 10,458
County Demographics: Rural Remote
73.5% identified as Black or African American, 25.3% White, 0.2% Native American, 0.1% Asian, 0.3% of some other race and 0.5% of two or more races. 0.8% were Hispanic or Latino (of any race).
Median Household Income: $25,678
Amount of Failing Schools: 1 High School, 2 Middle Schools, 1 Elementary School
School System Demographics: African American–100%, Hispanic– 0%, Caucasian- 0%, Other – 0%

Alpha Gamma Delta County

Superintendent: Elected
Central Office Hierarchy: Superintendent, Finance Director, Curriculum Supervisor/Federal Programs, SPE Director, Maintenance, Transportation, Child Nutrition, Technology
County Population: 16,804
County Demographics: Rural Remote
64.98% White (non-Hispanic), 26.89% Black or African American, 7.12% Native American, 0.06% Asian, 0.03% Pacific Islander, 0.05% from other races, and 0.87% from two or more races. 1.1% of the population were Hispanic or Latino of any race.
Median Household Income: $44,731
Amount of Failing Schools: 1 High School
School System Demographics: African American– 27%, Hispanic– 0%, Caucasian- 62%, Other – 11%

Alpha Kappa Alpha County

Superintendent: Appointed
Central Office Hierarchy: Superintendent, Finance Director , Elementary Supervisor/Federal Programs, Secondary Supervisor, SPE Director, Maintenance, Transportation, Child Nutrition, Technology
County Population: 41,131
County Demographics: Rural Fringe
63.26% Black or African American, 35.58% White, 0.11% Native American, 0.35% Asian, 0.01% Pacific Islander, 0.14% from other races, and 0.55% from two or more races. 0.63% of the population were Hispanic or Latino of any race.
Median Household Income: $26,494
Amount of Failing Schools: 1 Middle School, 1 High School, 1 Elementary School
School System Demographics: African American–76%, Hispanic– 0%, Caucasian- 23%, Other – 0%

Alpha Kappa Phi Agonian County

Superintendent: Appointed
Central Office Hierarchy: Superintendent, Finance Director, Curriculum and Instruction, Federal Programs, SPE/Student Services Director, Maintenance, Transportation, Child Nutrition,

Technology
County Population: 20,028
County Demographics: Rural Remote
51.7% were Black or African American, 46.4% White, 0.3% Asian, 0.2% Native American, 0.1% Pacific Islander, 0.7% of some other race and 0.8% of two or more races. 1.7% were Hispanic or Latino (of any race).
Median Household Income: $33,714
Amount of Failing Schools: 1 High School
School System Demographics: African American–69%, Hispanic– 0%, Caucasian- 31%, Other – 0%

Alpha Omega Epsilon County

Superintendent: Elected
Central Office Hierarchy: Superintendent, Finance Director, Curriculum and Instruction, Federal Programs, SPE/Student Services Director, Maintenance, Transportation, Child Nutrition, Technology
County Population: 54,354
County Demographics: Rural Distant
78.52% White or European American (non-Hispanic), 16.62% Black or African American, 0.37% Native American, 0.24% Asian, 0.02% Pacific Islander, 0.34% from other races, and 0.89% from two or more races. 1.12% of the population were Hispanic or Latino of any race.
Median Household Income: $39,914
Amount of Failing Schools: 1 High School
School System Demographics: African American–12%, Hispanic– 3%, Caucasian- 84%, Other – 1%

Alpha Omicron Pi County

Superintendent: Elected
Central Office Hierarchy: Superintendent, Finance Director, Curriculum and Instruction, Federal Programs, SPE/Student Services Director, Maintenance, Transportation, Child Nutrition, Technology
County Population: 94,725
County Demographics: Rural Distant
93.38% White, 1.47% Black or African American, 0.53% Native American, 0.24% Asian, 0.04% Pacific Islander, 3.24% from other races, and 1.09% from two or more races. 5.66% of the population were Hispanic or Latino of any race.
Median Household Income: $39,473
Amount of Failing Schools: 1 High School
School System Demographics: African American–1%, Hispanic– 18%, Caucasian- 80%, Other – 1%

Credibility

The credibility of this research was established in an agreement to report valid information from participants. The qualitative researcher is responsible for reporting the truth and value in a study. This study used the following approaches to achieve credibility: purposeful sampling, reviewing the data multiple times, triangulation of data sources, and checking the data to make sure it matched the participants.

Ethical Conditions

The researcher entered a contract which explains the purpose of the research and received approval from Auburn University and its Institutional Review Board (IRB) on April 13, 2017, see Appendix A. An informed consent document was signed by all participants informing them of the right to withdraw from participation without consequence which was explained to all participants is found in Appendix B.

Role of the Researcher. The researcher is a doctoral student pursuing a Ph.D. in Elementary and Secondary Supervision. At the time of the study, the investigator was serving as a principal in a county that was not associated with the grant. No interviews were conducted in the researcher's school system where she worked. The primary role of the researcher was to conduct interviews with the rural superintendents that would provide data on how he or she utilizes and sustains turnaround with implementing the eight turnaround principles.

Limitations

Since the design of the PACT grant and the rural turnaround preparation programs at the respective universities, some of the rural superintendents have taken new positions while some have just been promoted to the position within their district. Additionally, the subjectivity or the bias of the researcher was taken into account because they are a doctoral student at one of the university leadership programs which took part in the PACT grant. Also, because the

superintendents only represent PACT school districts it would be difficult to generalize to other rural settings within this state or rural settings in other states.

Summary

According to the USDOE (2012), we know there are 5,000 chronically low-performing schools in the United States. From research, it shows how rural schools can fall into the failing school category due to reasons such as high teacher/principal turnover rate, classes being too large multiple grade levels in one class, and not having curriculum materials that are aligned with state assessments (Forner, Bierlein-Palmer and Reeves, 2012; Rosenburg, 2011). Alabama has approximately forty-two percent of all school students are attending a school designated as rural (Johnson et al., 2014). The goal of this research was to develop a better understanding of how rural superintendents applied the eight turnaround principles to foster and sustain improvement in the school district organization. This study used a qualitative descriptive case study approach in examining the issue because it appeared to be the most appropriate. The data collection for this study included in-depth face-to-face interviews, reviewing the "End of Year" Status reports, and asking follow-up interview questions. This study was significant because it added to the body of literature on how rural superintendents lead turnaround in their school systems. This study will have an impact in people's lives by the research contributing to rural education and superintendency.

Chapter IV: Results

This chapter will report the findings from the present study regarding rural turnaround superintendents' utilization and implementation of the eight turnaround principles in their school systems. The participants interviewed were able to share their experiences on how turnaround occurs in rural school system settings. Throughout the study, the researcher was able to describe and identify themes that were important to the implementation and sustainability of the eight turnaround principles.

The history of turnaround began in the United States when school leaders began to examine data to determine how students were performing. Congress introduced provisions to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, 1988 to hold schools accountable for improving the performance of their students, but it was not until 2001 that U.S. legislators introduced NCLB, which required AYP and the identification of low-performing schools. The No Child Left Behind Act, brought accountability standards and corrective actions for all schools to make annual yearly progress on standardized assessments. From 2001 to 2008, schools that did not meet AYP under NCLB were labeled as "failing and were required to implement the same one-size-fits-all interventions that did not result in significant improvement" (Rosenburg, 2011, p. 1). All of the eight school systems were considered failing school systems because they had at least one school on the state's priority list.

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive case study is to examine how rural superintendents implement the eight turnaround principles to foster and sustain improvement in the school district organization. There were eight superintendents selected from rural school systems to participate in the study. This study examined the factors that facilitated and hindered the efforts of leading turnaround in the school system. The participants identified positive and

negative outcomes of leading a rural school system.

Data Collection Procedures

The data collection procedures included interpreting and analyzing three data sources in the study. The three main data sources were the following: in-depth face-to-face interviews, reviewing the "End of Year" Status reports, and asking follow-up interview questions. All pieces of data showed how rural turnaround superintendents used the eight turnaround principles to foster and sustain improvement in their respective school organizations. Interviews were considered an essential source of case study evidence (Yin, 2014). An interview script was created based on a list of predetermined questions that each participant would be asked. The questions were developed by the researcher to gain insight about each superintendent experience and were grouped by the established research questions guiding the study. The four categories were: role of the superintendent implementing the turnaround principles, factors that facilitated turnaround efforts, factors that hindered turnaround efforts, and the positive and negative outcomes of leading a rural turnaround school district. The questions were designed and asked in a way that would allow participants to respond openly and freely without threat of negative connotations. The researcher wanted the rural superintendents to be able to share their unique experiences as they engaged in school improvement through turnaround.

Throughout the data collection process, interviews were transcribed, shared for member checking, reviewed with common themes. Interview data also provided the researcher with the verbatim questions from the participants so that the principal investigator's descriptions and interpretations would more closely reflect the lived experiences of the participants (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The data collected in this research was very detailed and provided a variety of codes and themes. The researcher also reviewed the "End of Year" status reports for the school

system and also created a survey designed to capture a more detailed description of certain elements which unfolded during the primary interviews. The follow-up survey was sent to superintendents for them to review and complete. This was followed by a short telephone call from the researcher to clarify any responses and to determine if what was contained in the survey needed further explanation.

Research Questions

The present study was designed to answer the following questions:

(a) Question 1: What was the role of the superintendent in implementing the eight turnaround principles, as perceived by the superintendents serving in the PACT grant?

(b) Question 2: What were the factors that facilitated implementation of turnaround in rural systems as perceived by the superintendents?

(c) Question 3: What were the factors that hindered implementation of turnaround in rural systems as perceived by the superintendents?

(d) Question 4: From the superintendent perspective, what were the highlights and challenges of leading a rural turnaround school district?

Setting

This study occurred in a southern state with a population of 4.863 million people. The interviews were conducted with eight superintendents in rural turnaround school systems. The superintendents were selected because of their involvement in the *PACT Grant.* The PACT grant was a partnership with three universities and these rural districts to prepare aspiring school leaders to work in high needs/high poverty rural school systems that were undergoing turnaround. The description of each rural school system is listed below.

Participants, Background and Setting

Alpha Chi Omega County

Superintendent: Appointed
Central Office Hierarchy: Superintendent, Finance Director, Elementary Supervisor/Federal Programs, Secondary Supervisor, SPE Director, Maintenance, Transportation, Child Nutrition, Technology
County Population: 59,660
County Demographics: Rural Distant
53.7% were White, 41.8% Black or African American, 0.4% Asian, 0.4% Native American, 0.2% Pacific Islander, 1.3% of some other race and 2.1% of two or more races. 3.7% were Hispanic or Latino (of any race).
Median Household Income: $36,066
Amount of Failing Schools: 1 High School
School System Demographics: African American–35%, Hispanic– 4%, Caucasian- 55%, Other – 6%

Alpha Delta Chi County

Superintendent: Elected
Central Office Hierarchy: Superintendent, Finance Director, Curriculum Supervisor/Federal Programs, SPE Director, Transportation, Child Nutrition, Technology
County Population: 10,724
County Demographics: Rural Remote
63.94% White, 34.19% Black or African American, 0.32% Native American, 0.04% Asian, 0.01% Pacific Islander, 0.62% from other races, and 0.88% from two or more races. 1.29% of the population were Hispanic or Latino of any race.
Median Household Income: $32,340
Amount of Failing Schools: 1 Middle School
School System Demographics: African American– 45%, Hispanic– 2%, Caucasian- 50%, Other – 3%

Alpha Epsilon Phi County

Superintendent: Appointed
Central Office Hierarchy: Superintendent, Finance Director, Curriculum and Instruction, Federal Programs/SPE Director, Maintenance, Transportation, Child Nutrition, Technology
County Population: 10,458
County Demographics: Rural Remote
73.5% identified as Black or African American, 25.3% White, 0.2% Native American, 0.1% Asian, 0.3% of some other race and 0.5% of two or more races. 0.8% were Hispanic or Latino (of any race).
Median Household Income: $25,678
Amount of Failing Schools: 1 High School, 2 Midle Schools, 1 Elementary School
School System Demographics: African American–100%, Hispanic– 0%, Caucasian- 0%, Other – 0%

Alpha Gamma Delta County

Superintendent: Elected
Central Office Hierarchy: Superintendent, Finance Director, Curriculum Supervisor/Federal Programs, SPE Director, Maintenance, Transportation, Child Nutrition, Technology
County Population: 16,804
County Demographics: Rural Remote
64.98% White (non-Hispanic), 26.89% Black or African American, 7.12% Native American, 0.06% Asian, 0.03% Pacific Islander, 0.05% from other races, and 0.87% from two or more races. 1.1% of the population were Hispanic or Latino of any race.
Median Household Income: $44,731
Amount of Failing Schools: 1 High School
School System Demographics: African American– 27%, Hispanic– 0%, Caucasian- 62%, Other – 11%

Alpha Kappa Alpha County

Superintendent: Appointed
Central Office Hierarchy: Superintendent, Finance Director , Elementary Supervisor/Federal Programs, Secondary Supervisor, SPE Director, Maintenance, Transportation, Child Nutrition, Technology
County Population: 41,131
County Demographics: Rural Fringe
63.26% Black or African American, 35.58% White, 0.11% Native American, 0.35% Asian, 0.01% Pacific Islander, 0.14% from other races, and 0.55% from two or more races. 0.63% of the population were Hispanic or Latino of any race.
Median Household Income: $26,494
Amount of Failing Schools: 1 Middle School, 1 High School, 1 Elementary School
School System Demographics: African American–76%, Hispanic– 0%, Caucasian- 23%, Other – 0%

Alpha Kappa Phi Agonian County

Superintendent: Appointed
Central Office Hierarchy: Superintendent, Finance Director, Curriculum and Instruction, Federal Programs, SPE/Student Services Director, Maintenance, Transportation, Child Nutrition, Technology
County Population: 20,028
County Demographics: Rural Remote
51.7% were Black or African American, 46.4% White, 0.3% Asian, 0.2% Native American, 0.1% Pacific Islander, 0.7% of some other race and 0.8% of two or more races. 1.7% were Hispanic or Latino (of any race).
Median Household Income: $33,714
Amount of Failing Schools: 1 High School
School System Demographics: African American–69%, Hispanic– 0%, Caucasian- 31%, Other – 0%

Alpha Omega Epsilon County

Superintendent: Elected
Central Office Hierarchy: Superintendent, Finance Director, Curriculum and Instruction, Federal Programs, SPE/Student Services Director, Maintenance, Transportation, Child Nutrition, Technology
County Population: 54,354
County Demographics: Rural Distant
78.52% White or European American (non-Hispanic), 16.62% Black or African American, 0.37% Native American, 0.24% Asian, 0.02% Pacific Islander, 0.34% from other races, and 0.89% from two or more races. 1.12% of the population were Hispanic or Latino of any race.
Median Household Income: $39,914
Amount of Failing Schools: 1 High School
School System Demographics: African American–12%, Hispanic– 3%, Caucasian- 84%, Other – 1%

Alpha Omicron Pi County

Superintendent: Elected
Central Office Hierarchy: Superintendent, Finance Director, Curriculum and Instruction, Federal Programs, SPE/Student Services Director, Maintenance, Transportation, Child Nutrition, Technology
County Population: 94,725
County Demographics: Rural Distant
93.38% White, 1.47% Black or African American, 0.53% Native American, 0.24% Asian, 0.04% Pacific Islander, 3.24% from other races, and 1.09% from two or more races. 5.66% of the population were Hispanic or Latino of any race.
Median Household Income: $39,473
Amount of Failing Schools: 1 High School
School System Demographics: African American–1%, Hispanic– 18%, Caucasian- 80%, Other – 1%

Participants

A total of eight rural superintendents were chosen from the *PACT Grant.* Their accounts were documented through individual in-depth face-to-face interviews. The participants were superintendents who had led turnaround in their rural school system. While scheduling interviews, some superintendents were no longer the superintendent due to loss of an election, changing positions, or retirement from the position. The original superintendents who led turnaround were interviewed. There were eight total superintendents interviewed. Five were males and three were females. Two females and one male had earned doctoral degrees.

The stories of the eight participants were told using their own words. The transcripts were analyzed to identify themes for each research question. In addition to the data collected from the participants, additional documents were used to verify and add to the depth of the study which were reviewing the "End of Year" Status reports and asking follow up interview questions. The "End of Year" Status report included a scale that the superintendents rated all principals based on the eight turnaround principles. The third piece of data collected included asking participants to answer follow up questions to clarify and gain insight to topics in the research questions. After analyzing all data, common themes were used to consolidate their stories and determine how rural superintendents implemented turnaround efforts in their school system. These findings are organized into the following sections: the role of the superintendent in implementing the eight turnaround principles, the factors that facilitated implementation of turnaround in rural systems, the factors that hindered implementation of turnaround in rural systems, and the highlights and challenges of leading a rural turnaround school district.

The Role of the Superintendent in Implementing the Eight Turnaround Principles

The first question focused on the role of the superintendent in implementing the eight turnaround principles in the school system. The participant responses were able to shed light on what actions were needed in leading turnaround in rural school system. The researcher found that rural superintendents provided detailed explanations to each question, and this led to the following themes. The themes which were developed for research question one were as follows: relationships, perceptions, data driven instruction, and leading by example.

Superintendent Relationships

Out of the eight participants, all agreed that relationships were important and should be a priority in implementing the eight turnaround principles. In serving as a leader, it was vital that

relationships were formed first. Before change occurred and implementation could take place, all superintendents felt that these strong relationships with building level administrators, teacher leaders, and community stakeholders had to take place.

Respondent R1 shared how important it was to have relationships with as many stakeholders as possible:

Relationships are major. You have to have relationships with the commissioners and educate the community the best you can… And be very transparent with the finances and all. [Lines 795-797]

Respondent R3 commented on relationships by explaining how it helps superintendents gain trust within the community from being a people person. Respondent R3 shared:

I like to think of myself as a people person that can relate to people, and I think most of the county knew who I was. I was a classroom teacher for 20 years and a former coach. [Lines 103-105]

While forming relationships, it is also important for leaders to surround themselves with good people to help lead turnaround in the school system. Respondent R6 gave a description of how a leader should surround themselves with good people:

I surround myself with good people. You've got to be around good people. I'll give you some advice. Be around people that are a little bit smarter than you. Be around people that you can like practically record with your brain as you're around them. You may be able to learn some things from all people but you can learn more from wiser people who are real intelligent. Whether it's about data. A person that can read data and just explain to you. I think it'll make you a better leader. [Lines 223-230]

Respondent R2 shared how relationships with all stakeholders are important:

My leadership style is the same, basically, what I used as a principal worked well for me. It's more of a facilitator. I incorporate stakeholders, student, staff, and parents in the community. I try to be engaged with them as much as possible. [Lines 23-25]

Respondent R4 shared one way to build relationships and trust with principals which is as follows:

To choose the person that's going to be best fit for the way we're headed. I think that's important. Principals interview for positions at the central office. The final decision is up to the principals who they want to hire. [Lines 715-717]

When asking the participants about their specific type of leadership style, they all provided different responses and not one participant had the same word to describe their leadership style. The findings are listed in the following statements. R4 commented that she had

a shared leadership style – believe in allowing both persons involved to have a voice.

R6, who has been a superintendent for twelve years, said

he started off as a micromanager and is now an innovator. And a good leader is a very motivational person. In addition, if you hire the best fit then it adds to your level of trust internally and externally with the school system.

R1 said he was a group leader and making decisions should be a collaborative effort with the people involved at the table that is described in the following statement:

I would say my leadership style is definitely a group leader. I've made sure that I position people around the table with me that were experts from different areas. I don't believe in being just a one person knows it all type guy. Not that we would always agree, and when the final decision came down to it, I would make one, but it was very few times that we

didn't discuss things with my federal programs, special ed, had experts in those areas.

[Lines 23-28]

R8 said she was a social butterfly and a people person with a clear description in the following response:

Without someone wanting to talk about school or, hey, let me tell you this, or let me ask you about this. Of course, I'm a people person. Of course, I give a lot of my time. It's hard for me to just shut people off because I'm just a very social, very people oriented. I'm a social butterfly. I talk. I'm all over the place. My husband is like, we can't even go out to dinner. Now, I find myself going out of town. [Lines 52-57]

R4 commented that she was a people person and it is important to be open to the community. If the community has a question, she will write it down and get back to them such as in the following:

For them to know that you have my support. If you need me, call me. I try to be open to the community even when I see them at Walmart. If they have a question, I'll write it down. I keep a notepad in my purse. If they ask me something I don't forget to get back to them. I think that's important to parents, that if I contact you, you at least respond to me. Even if you're not in to calling back. [Lines 225-229]

The participants felt that relationships play an important part in how the superintendent leads his or her school system. It appeared that rural superintendents build relationships through solving problems collaboratively as well as being a servant leader in the school system and community. All participants reported that the family style atmosphere helps attract and retain teachers in the school system. Once teachers are hired, they typically find out how much the

school system employees value and care about their communities and students. This contributes to being a part of something important and teaching is highly valued.

Stakeholder Perceptions

The superintendents reported that perceptions were an important piece to their rural school system being successful. Superintendents' felt that if parents, teachers, students, and other stakeholders could have a voice then this would create a more positive perception for their rural school system.

R4 shared the impact of how she visits classrooms to see how teachers are teaching and talk to students about their learning. She shared the following perception gained from her experience in doing this:

> *Some of the parents are like, my baby talks about you all the time. How often do you ... I said, When I'm there. I'm going to stop. I'm going to talk to them. I'm going to ask them questions. I'm going to talk to them about what do they like about their school. If there was anything they could change about their school what would it be?* [Lines 1119-1124]

In another response, it appears that parents, students, and other stakeholders can have a perception of the school system that sometimes might be similar or different from the superintendent. This creates a sense of urgency in regards to superintendents being aware of the voices from the school system and community. The superintendents agreed that perception is everything and is strengthened by hiring the right people, being visible in the community as well as listening and talking with stakeholders. R2 believes that perception is important with how you respond, listen to concerns and absorb everything.

> *Because perception is very important. I do a lot of listening and then form, different kind of meetings.* [Lines 25-27]

73

Another example, R6 made it clear that he does not want to hear anything on the street.

More recently I've tried to be more of an innovator. Think about things that would really help our rural school system and present it to people, and thus work on projects together. Because I do feel like as a manager I do have good people in place. I let them have the job. All I ask for them is to let me know what I need to know. I don't want to hear anything on the street. You know? If you need some help pick up that phone and call me. [Lines 34-39]

R2 has an open-door policy and responded with the following:

Most of the time if people stop by, if it's a parent or a community member and they don't have an appointment, I just tell them to wait outside and when I get through with one, I'll let them come in. Because if they've taken the time to drive here out of their busy day then it's important for me to listen to them or handle whatever situation that they're needing me to handle. [Lines 72-76]

Another example of how superintendents (R1, R2, R3, R4, R6, R9) felt that perception could be maintained is by understanding the culture and reacting professionally to situations. Superintendents are seen as political figures with many people always watching how he or she responds to any situation. Their actions play a vital role in shaping the school system culture and climate.

R6 responded with the following about making a mistake with hiring which can lead to having a negative result from others. R6 says you must hire the best person for the job no matter who they are or who they are associated with:

You have got to hire the best. You got to hire the best person. I made a mistake years, and years, and years ago. Many years ago. I hired someone's niece. I did it reluctantly. But I

did it because I was a new administrator and I thought, you know, not knowing any

better. It was a disaster. [Lines 68-71]

R4 responded with following about reacting professionally to situations:

They tell me I never get angry, but I do. If I have to repeat things over and over. It makes

me angry. They just don't know. I make sure it doesn't show on my face. I make sure it

doesn't show in my voice. I'm always very even tempered, even spoken. Sometimes if you

speak in anger, things come out that you don't want to come out, and later on you're

sorry. I try to make sure that I think before I speak. That I consider their feelings, and

their thoughts, and their values, and what's important to them as well. [Lines 32-37]

R1 explained how being visible and active in the community strengthens the

understanding of the culture and climate and impacts the perception of how the superintendent is

performing. It allows the parents and community stakeholders to see the superintendent cares

about the community and students. R1 responded with the following about being visible:

Being visible ... It's very important to be visible as many events as you can be, because

that shows the parents that you do care about their children, and that's the main thing.

They want to know that you care and love their kids. I would go back to that question we

talked about earlier, learn to pace yourself. Plan for success, because if you don't have

some sort of a plan, you would burn out a lot quicker. Be understanding of the culture. I

mean, you can do so much to try to change the culture, but sometimes you just have to

accept the culture and make small changes within how people really come to you, cause

you're not going to change how they are in their communities. [Lines 797-806]

R2 and R4 explained, that perception could be changed just as opinions can with

obtaining new information regarding a particular issue. Rural communities can get the reputation

that anyone can get a job there because of the geographic locations, isolation, and limited places to live. It was mentioned that a lot of beginning teachers would take a job in a rural community and then leave within two to three years to go to another school system next door (R2, R8, R3, R7). This can be frustrating for rural school systems especially after investing time and professional development training in teachers who do not stay with the school system.

R2 shared the following about teachers leaving the school system:

They realize that it's a great place to work. Even some of the people that have left and went to city systems are not as happy as they thought they would be because it's not always greener on the other side. [Lines 659-662]

R3 provided a description of how perception can impact the hiring process with a school system. This implies that sometimes teachers think the grass is greener on the other side. R3 responded with the following:

A lot of the teachers that we hired were teaching somewhere else, but they were from here and wanted to come back here. For example, in another County, a lot of our teachers started out in this County, my wife being one of them, and I did not hire her in the county by the way. She was hired by a previous superintendent. People that were teaching in this County wanted to get out of this County and come up here. This County's got their own problems down there too, and it seemed to be more prevalent problems than what we were having. That's one thing, we're community schools, and that's where they wanted to come back to, where they were raised and went to school. [Lines 475-484]

R8 explained the way perception impacts the recruitment of teachers in the school system. R8 commented that one big barrier that has impacted perception is,

we've had a negative image in our School District. Racial barriers. We've had, because of low performance, being able to compete with surrounding districts and being a county school, rural district, of course. [Lines 197-200]

In addition, with recruiting teachers, the superintendent R8 reported:

City versus county. You've got a city school system next door. Teacher retention. We're competing with a high performing school system. We're competing with the city school systems surrounding us. As a young candidate, graduate, of course they want a job. They're excited. They'll take a job with us. [Lines 201-205]

R6 provided a response about having a similar teacher pay scale to reduce loosing teachers to a neighbor city school system with the following response:

We'll lose some to the city system. But we don't lose teachers very often to systems close by, unless it's that city school system. If we lose them it's because like I had a teacher called it. He's getting married. He and his wife are moving to Maryland. We lost one down because of money. You know? They're going to pay this guy $10,000 more dollars than what we pay. But that's really about it. We don't lose many. [Lines 552-558]

It can be seen that perception plays a key role in the success of rural school systems. The participants reported that it is important to pay attention to the voices and input from school system employees and community stakeholders. Decisions made by superintendents should be carefully considered about the possible impacts on the school system. Last, superintendents should pay careful attention to hiring and finding ways to retain teachers in rural school systems.

Data Drives Instruction

Throughout interviewing the eight superintendents, another important theme regarding data driven instruction emerged. Failing schools are required to discuss and submit reports to the

77

superintendent's district leadership team each month. Reports came in the form of power point presentations, charts, spreadsheets, Quality Performance Index (QPI) or other documents that would show student achievement. The majority of the superintendents reported that they have a group principal meeting once per month and the principal data meetings with the superintendent's team bimonthly. The bimonthly meetings include the principal, superintendent, curriculum supervisors, and teachers to review data, create action plans, and visit classrooms. These meetings can last all day if the school is a failing school.

R1's school system received a turnaround grant and shared how it provided more resources and brought in turnaround specialists that had a positive impact to get their middle school off the failing list. R1 shared how proud he was in the following statement:

I'm proud that our middle school came off school improvement. I think it was seven straight years that we were on the school improvement list, and when we wrote the school improvement grant and were awarded that, the new process that we still implement to this day, we were able to come off and remain off school improvement. [Lines 32-36]

R1 shared the process of what turnaround looks like in the following statement:

The process was basically you would use formative and summative assessments, and we would use data to drive instruction, and we still use that to this day. A lot of PD went into the faculty. If you go to the school, you will see that we have a very technology-rich school system. Our entire K-12 system has a Smart Board in every teacher's classroom, but the middle school with that grant, we were able to get all new computer labs, new science labs and all that. That's not the key to it. The key was our teachers learning to do some purposeful planning and taking that more serious and direct approach to what the kids were really lacking. It was impressive that our students would even learn to look at

their own data and be able to tell the teacher, "You know, I didn't pass that standard. I

need to redo that standard." So, the kids were even educated. [Lines 38-48]

Several of the superintendents (R1, R2, R8, R7) reported that implementing turnaround it is important that students become their own advocate to know how to interpret and explain their data. Students have their own data notebooks, which they could explain how they were performing in school.

R1 explained how students used data notebooks in a middle school:

Well, actually the children had data books, and we kept up with all their data. We kept it

as private as we could. We did have data all the ways that was classroom-based, that

they saw overall how their class was doing, but the students as individuals had their own

Data Books that kept up all their information, and the teachers would have conferences

with them and pretty much taught them to be self-advocates. [Lines 51-56]

R8 discussed how teachers are trained to become a master teacher through receiving professional development on building a Master Classroom. R8 described the Master Classroom program as follows:

We have this wonderful, awesome program called Master Classroom where our

curriculum director who's really, really awesome, and she's a former school

improvement specialist from the state department, she does an awesome job of training

our teachers. They go through this year training, periodically through the year, called

Master Classroom. We will master classrooms. She introduce them and expose them to

all kinds of strategies. They get to observe really great teachers and awesome training.

We have a team that go in and observe the teachers. At the end of the school year, they

have to go through this very intense training. They have to actually present a lesson

where they have to master all those skills to become a master classroom teacher. [Lines 223-232]

R8 also shared how the school system is data driven and in principal meetings they discuss a variety of data. R8 stated the following:

We have a district school improvement plan, and then we individual school improvement plans. Then, we look at our data. We are data-driven. You hear that a lot, but you have to look at your data. Not just your state assessments, but we look at attendance and discipline. All that. We really look at our surveys. [Lines 696-700]

R2 emphasized the importance of stakeholders to understand the growth of data since they are one of the top five most poverty counties. R2 shared the following:

That's just one thing I've tried to do is help our people understand where we are with our poverty and the challenges we have with our students. We own our own data. You just kind of have to make sure that your people realize where we are and then what we need to do about it. [Lines 268-271]

In addition, R2 said that outside partnerships with companies did not help increase student achievement much so they have developed a new action plan.

We have actually changed how we're doing our data. We used to outsource a lot of that with companies like that where they could come in and have certain days where they would work with our people and that sort of thing. We just didn't get the results we wanted. We're kind of going back to our own school, which is digging deep and not using the wrong data. They can better identify what to look at now because they are doing it themselves instead of waiting for a company to tell them what to do. That's made a big difference this last year. Of course, it's put a lot more on the reading coaches. The

literacy coaches, they're doing ... they've done a great job of just getting with the

teachers. I don't think the teachers even knew enough about their own data. That was a

huge concern. [Lines 272-280]

It was also referenced that the school board needs to understand data and how the school system is performing. One superintendent responded with the following about how she gained the school board's attention about schools on the failing school list. R4 responded with the following:

My board is very, very supportive of us as we move forward. They want to see something

different in our county. They are learning to listen when I share data. They used to just sit

and doodle. I kind of said to them in a meeting, "Well, I can bring this back another time.

I know we're crunched for time." No, ma'am. No, ma'am. No, ma'am. We're listening.

That was the first time that they heard me say we had two schools on the failing list.

[Lines 307-312]

R3 made the statement how a board member did not understand providing transportation for students transferring from a failing school in the county.

We've got a school in school improvement right now that is considered a failing school in

the county because of course, those students are allowed to transfer, and the board

member still, he didn't understand that the law says that they can and we have to provide

transportation for them. [Lines 228-232]

R3 commented that when a school was listed on the failing school list the reputation suffers. R3 shared the following about a school in the county with low student achievement:

It's got a name, and people don't want to go there. If they got an opportunity at this

school or some other school, they're going to go to the other school. It's gotten to that

point, and there have been some excellent teachers down there. In the past, it's been a

mess, and as soon as they got an opportunity, they would transfer out of there. [Lines

279-283]

R7 commented on how his school system manages failing schools through having

meetings to review the Quality Performance Index (QPI) with the principals. All data meetings

like this must be consistent to determine if achievement is taking place. R7 stated the following:

What we have is called QPIs, quality performance index. At the end of each nine weeks,

we go into the schools. And we look at the data and we have presentations made by the

principals. We do it at each school. However, if the school is a failing school we spend a

whole day instead of a half-a-day at that school. The whole day requires the team to

actually go into the classroom. So it's a team of about six people. And I go to each one of

those things there. We have them three times a year. But it's at the end of each nine

weeks. So a lot of the information that will go into this meeting comes from the global

scholar assessment. At the beginning of the first semester we have a pre-test. And then we

have a very similar test, same types of questions, and it's related to the same contents.

And it's called a post-test. So we have a pre and a post. So we do a comparative analysis

between the two. During the QPI meeting, the principals share lots of information,

including information from the pre and post assessment of the global scholar. [Lines 178-

190]

In another county, the superintendent R6 commented on how they are able to stay off the

failing school list with the following statement:

Rewards. Rewards. People in faculty meetings or at principal's meetings point out school

has done well. The school has done well with ACT. I'm real proud of what ... I'd like to

see more of our school's do this. I'm proud of all of you that you're not on a failing list,

you know? We've got schools all around. The school system right across here have all

three of their schools are on the failing list. We don't have any. Our kids are no different

then theirs. Even when you interview. We've got high expectations. I mean, this is a job.

This is not a babysitting service. This is a job. You're creating the future. You're trying to

mold kids into being someone that can have a positive effect on our society one day.

[Lines 282-291]

Lead by Example

The Turnaround superintendents had different responses in regards to their leadership

style but a commonality was that leading by example was important to all. Listed below are

examples of how the participants felt they modeled appropriate leadership.

R8 commented:

I try to lead by example, because a lot of times aspiring administrators get caught up

with the title, the name. I believe in the bible, when it says that where much is given,

much is required. I try to make sure that I model that for all the administrators in that I'm

the hardest working administrator in the district. I lead by example. Servant leadership,

no job is beneath me, no matter what it is. [Lines 150-155]

R2 responded how being interactive and working hard is important in the following

statement:

I try to do that on most things, as far as my leadership style. It's also important for people

to see me working as hard as I expect them to. Being interactive, especially with the staff,

they respect me for that and I'm just able to get more cooperation from them. We just

work off each other's energy and do that. [Lines 33-36]

83

R1 shared the idea of pacing yourself as a leader in the following:

So, you have to really be disciplined to go home to continue having a life. Of course me being a local guy, I would hear about school stuff at church. I would hear about it at Walmart, you know, wherever I saw people. So, as far as me dealing with it, I had to learn that. I had to learn to pace myself, and I would come in an hour early, but I wouldn't stay much more than an hour late, because I really learned that I would never get it all done. So, I would leave and come back and start the next day. [Lines 470-476]

R5 commented how having experience in a variety of jobs has helped with his role of being superintendent.

I literally have done a little bit of every job within the school system with the exception of drive a bus. The only reason why I haven't driven a bus is because I don't have a license. [Lines 558-560]

You have to make decisions. Sometimes, when I see, I am a go get it kind of person. I don't mind delegating, you know, I want people to develop and become teacher leaders also. [Lines 46-48]

R1 commented how to learn to become a flexible leader when plans do not work out.

I'm a person that can function in plan B. There's people that can't function past Plan A, and so I don't get freaked out. [Lines 592-593]

R7 shared how leading by example is about making decisions in the best interest of the students.

In other words, you have to look at historical deficit areas or even look at the disaggregated test scores, and see where that teacher or the students are. The end results are the students. [Lines 129-132]

84

R4 shared her experience with getting everyone on the same page so that others could have trust in their superintendent. The trust would build relationships with others that will allow the superintendent to be able to lead by example.

> *My Central Office staff is the support for instruction, we make sure that everybody understands they're not here to evaluate you. They're here to give you support. They're here to help you find resources. To help you find professional development if necessary. If you see them, and you need something, let them know.* [Lines 301-305]

R6 discussed how to have patience and staying calm in working out problems:

> *My disposition: I'm an easygoing guy. I really am. It takes a lot to upset me and I have found out this job can weigh on your health. You got to maintain some patience and you've got to just not let things worry you. Like they always say the things that you feel like that you're worried about most never come into play. Sometimes things just take care of themselves. You worried about something that really didn't have any reason to be worried about. My disposition now over the years is I've tried to pace myself, be open minded, and try to tell my principals the same thing. Don't get so upset with the parent or the child or a coach or teacher. I say, you know, just sit with them and talk with them, and work through a problem.* [Line 44-52]

R3 shared that you have to be willing to have hard conversations with people on your staff. By having difficult conversations then you are able to lead by example by getting everyone on board. R3 shared the following statement:

> *You still had some old school personnel in there that did not want to get onboard with stuff. You had that battle that end of it at times. I did have to go sit down with some of*

them and say, look, this is what we're going to do and this is what we're trying to do, and

we want you onboard. [Lines 77-80]

R5 responded to leading by example by staying consistent and open-minded with decisions:

Try to do the right thing by being consistent with your decisions, be open-minded, listen

and listen some more, be involved, allow your personnel to do their jobs, work with your

school board, appreciate good work, do not forget the support people, engage with the

students by being visible, and always remember that things are never as bad as they

might appear and also, never as good as they might appear. [Lines 23-33]

R1's response provided details about being a good listener and communicator:

First, be a good listener and communicator. Know that there are many slices that make

up the whole pie. You must realize that football, band, choir, etc. ARE just important as

our academics. You must be accessible to the community. You must be active and show

your support to all events. I would say that as with any educator, you must be a caring

person and help the students achieve their goals. [Lines 22-26]

R7's response shared how shared leadership and collaboration contribute to being a successful

superintendent:

A successful rural superintendent leads through a shared leadership process built on

collaboration that helps to define the mission of the school system. In order for a

superintendent to be successful, he must focus on making improvements. In order to make

improvements, changes must occur. For changes to occur, the superintendent must be

the catalyst that enhances student learning by working with teachers, administrators,

community leaders and Board members. Because the superintendent is only one person,

none of this is possible without a shared leadership process. [Lines 27-33]

Factors that Facilitated Implementation of Turnaround

The eight interviews conducted led to the conclusion that every rural school system is unique in implementing turnaround. Every school system has their own way of doing things to make it successful. The common factors that facilitated the implementation of turnaround were the following: collaboration, adherence to a continuous improvement plan, professional development, student engagement, stakeholder relations, and partnerships.

Collaboration. One theme that facilitated the implementation of turnaround is collaboration with central office and school level leaders. The participants reported that working together to solve problems was the best way to lead their school system. It is best to listen and solve problems as a group versus the superintendent or other administrators just making a quick decision. In addition, online surveys for employees have been very helpful for the superintendents in regards to collaborating with their leadership team and identifying what needs could be met in the school system.

R2 has been the superintendent for two years; she feels that collaborating with employees helped contribute to the culture of the school system becoming more positive. She reported her perception of collaboration with the following statement:

> *I incorporate stakeholders, student, staff, and parents in the community. I try to be engaged with them as much as possible. I listen to their concerns and try to absorb just where we are. I do a lot of listening and then form my take on the matters at hand. Sometimes I call several different kinds of meetings to gain a complete understanding of the issues.* [Lines 24-27]

In addition, R2 reflected on how the school system was before she became superintendent in the following statement:

I think that morale with our teachers was at an all-time low, not just state-wide issues

that has impacted our educators and their benefits and that sort of thing, but on a local

level. The former leader was more of a dictator, kind of do it because I said so and if you

don't, I'm coming after you kind of, rather than being engaged and trying to help people

along, which is what we're really supposed to do is that's why we're here is to support the

local schools and protect that instructional time for students. [Lines 193-198]

Another way R2 collaborated with her school system is through surveys. She explained

how valuable input could be used to strengthen the school system culture:

We have been able to help the culture and climate by doing a lot of things like input. We

use the Google Surveys a lot. We use Survey Monkey on some of the little things, doesn't

matter how little it seems to us, it's a big deal to teachers. So if you can send those out

and just get opinions from people and give them opportunities to vote or give input, that's

going to be a big difference. We've even changed our professional development as a

result of those surveys. [Lines 201-207]

That's how we've come up with that in some of our suggestions on our strategic plan was

done on goodwill surveys. Of course, I sent those out digitally so everybody could

complete that. Sent paper copies so they could send paper copies in if they wanted to, if

they felt like they wouldn't have an anonymous survey. That sort of thing. Just tried to

move all those barriers. Just trying to listen to people and get their input and just treat

them with respect. That's helped our culture a lot. [Lines 231-236]

Participants (R2, R1, R5) reported how the master schedule should have each teaching

team on the same planning time. If this is not possible then teachers will need to meet after

school. Professional development days are very useful in teachers collaborating with each other.

R3 commented on how he collaborated with his central office staff and principals in the following statement:

> *They help me as far as setting the expectations. Again, it was a team effort, and the team would set the expectations. For example, we pulled principals in along with counselors, and tell them what we were trying to do, and we let them set the expectations so they could deliver them back to their individual schools.* [Lines 65-68]

R8 believes in keeping staff and principals focused on the vision in the following statement:

> *I believe in trying to make sure that we stay focused on the vision. Why are we really here? It's about the children. That's what I tell people. Of course I believe in creating a positive culture through collaboration. I believe in teaching them well. I believe in stroking your administrators, celebrating them, letting them know when they do good, but I also believe in correcting them. We collaborate by starting being real with ourselves about fixing a problem. Not just telling them that, but guiding them through that process. Let's work on this. Let's discuss this. What are some things that we can do differently? How can I help you? How can I support you?* [Lines 348-355]

R7 explained the following about how collaboration takes place with principals:

> *We have principals meeting every other month. And we have meetings, administrator council meetings that occur every other month. So every month I'm meeting with the principal. During the odd months, it's just me and the principals. And during the even months it's the principals, me, and all the administrators across the district. So at that particular time is where we share concerns. And we also provide professional*

development, where one of the concerns we have in our district is relevancy and rigor.

[Lines 103-109]

Continuous Improvement Plan. The continuous improvement plan for rural school systems starts with aligning the state standards with the school system's curriculum. Five of the rural superintendents (R1, R2, R7, R8, R3) reported that the teaching and curriculum did not align with the state standards. Therefore, pacing guides and curriculum maps were created as well as providing professional development for teachers.

R3 provides a specific example of how the curriculum was not aligned with the state standards below:

The first problem that we had was when the College and Career Ready standards came down. Our curriculum was not aligned with that, and we tried to ... so focused on opening the textbook to page one and teaching to page 350, and the textbooks were not necessarily aligned with the College and Career Ready standards. What we had to do was we developed curriculum guides and pacing guides to make sure that all of the objectives were taught prior to testing. [Lines 194-200]

We used research strategies, research-based strategies, and we tried to get our instruction aligned with the College and Career Ready standards. We also implemented the tier-two and tier-three instruction to help students that weren't where they were supposed to be, try to get them caught up. [Lines 202-205]

R1 responded with how a failing school developed and implemented post-assessments to hold teachers and students accountable for student achievement. R1 provided the following description:

The only thing that I was a little bit worried about in the beginning of our process was
that we had our post-test count for 25% of the student's grade, and I thought that was a
bit high, but we didn't change it. We stuck to it, but it was kind of shocking that a student
made 75%, may have had a B going into that post-test, and they failed it or did poorly on
it, and it dropped their grade. It was kind of hard to explain to parents, because they
were getting used to this new process too. [Lines 86-92]

R1 also reported that student data books play a vital role in the increase of student

achievement with the following:

It was very important, the student Data Books, because it kept everything organized, and
it kept the conversation going. [Lines 254-255]

We built our school improvement plan around the data and our new way of teaching.

[Lines 604-605]

R7 monitors the action plan for the continuous improvement plan by thoroughly

reviewing instruction in the classrooms and meeting with the principals. R7 explained this in the

following response:

So we look grade by grade, teacher by teacher, and we see which teacher is making a
difference. And which one needs some improvement. So we can actually focus our
questions based on that particular data. So let's just say, Ms. Smith teaches math, and
there's a problem with that. My team and I can ask questions. Well how is it that Ms.
Smith is having problem with fractions. Does she not cover this? Does she know the
difference between a numerator and a denominator? Does she know that a denominator
is the same as a divisor, and the numerator is a dividend? A quotient is a decimal

equivalent value, which is converting a fraction to a decimal. We could have those type of

poignant conversations. [Lines 191-197]

R4 reported that it is important to collaborate with people in understanding how to interpret and analyze data.

The thing that I need to work on with my staff is ensuring that I know and understand the

data. They've been told by them that I need to share my knowledge. When I'm gone, that

knowledge will go with me, and that's true. I just assumed that everybody here

understood the data. Now I know they don't. [Lines 70-73]

As for my data meetings and things of that nature, I start those early in the year. When

the data comes in, I spend my time digging in it. It's very important to me to start the year

out with that information, and my administrator's hands. The one thing that I'm going to

do differently this year with the data is I will meet just the principals and I to talk about

what did your data look like? Where there any surprises to discuss? How they think they

worked for them. What changes they plan to make. [Lines 531-536]

We look at as much research as possible for the issues that we're dealing with. We

determine which commonalities our kids have when we start looking at that research.

How poverty affects. How it affects me to be a child growing up in a single home. We try

to address what we can do to help those student skills supported. How we can advocate

for them within that building, and use those things to be our step strategies for moving it

forward. Once we set our goal and our objective, then we set out those action steps.

[Lines 656-662]

Professional Development. R1 shared that professional development was extremely important but needed to be used in conjunction with teacher planning and purposeful and meaningful lessons.

> *A lot of PD went into the faculty. If you go to the school, you will see that we have a very technology-rich school system. Every teacher has a Smart Board and all this, but the middle school with that grant, we were able to get all new computer labs, new science labs and all that. That's not the key to it. The key was our teachers learning to do some purposeful planning and taking that more serious and direct approach to what the kids were really lacking. Then they suggested the PD that was needed to support their instruction. This was critical input from the teachers. It was also impressive that our students would even learn to look at their own data and be able to tell the teacher, "You know, I didn't pass that standard. I need to redo that standard." So, the kids were even educated.* [Lines 40-48]

R7 also reported that professional development is important but teachers need to follow through with implementing it in their classroom. R7 reported:

> *The facilitator is good professional development. I cannot stress the importance of professional development. But not only should it be good but it should be prescriptive in nature. In other words, you have to look at historical deficit areas or even look at the segregated test scores, and see where that teacher or the students, and this even more ... The end results are the students. That's the dependent variable. That's the outcome variable. So if you know what the outcome is, then you can actually formulate working backwards. Put some plans in place whether it's prescriptive professional development or some new lesson plan, some lesson plan ideas, that can really help bridge the gap of*

where the students aren't actually learning the content that they should learn. [Lines 127-136]

R7 found that professional development was the most beneficial when focused on developing higher order thinking questions for instruction. R7 shares the following:

Professional development that dealt with asking higher order type questions was critical for us to begin Professional development dealing with differentiated instruction. Professional development using professional learning communities. All those things are really, really important information to our principals and to our teachers. And stressing the fact that there should be a correlation between their GPA and the ACT score. [Lines 115-119]

We do know that in our case we do have an issue with rigor. That being said, typically you have a strong correlation between your GPA and the ACT scores. Well our GPA, in some cases, is relatively high but our ACT score is not so high compared to the state average. So we know we have a problem with rigor. So we discuss those issues with the principals, and we have professional development for our teachers. [Lines 110-114]

R4 reported that she feels teachers are not as familiar with the curriculum as she thought they were. R4 provided the following description:

What I also want them to understand is the depth of the curriculum that we're asked to teach according to the course of study. I don't think we're teaching at that depth. I think we're still kind of skimming off the top. I don't think it's that they don't want to. I think it's they don't understand how to get those concepts into the classroom and make it more real world for those children. [Lines 79-83]

94

I give them the opportunity to decide if this is a training I'm interested in. I don't say, this is what we're going to do. I don't like that authoritarian way of offering PD, because I think the person knows best what I need assistance with. I try to make sure that they have that option. Even with our district wide professional development, they get to choose which sessions they participate in. [Lines 287-292]

One example R4 monitors instruction and student learning through the following:

I basically do walkthroughs through the buildings. I get a lot of miles because of it. I get to see, am I seeing what I'm looking for. We talk about what we could have done differently. We reflect on the lesson that I saw, and how did the teacher think it went first. Was there anything she would have changed about it? We talk about question levels. Whether I saw that level three question, whether I saw a level four activity. If I didn't, then we talk about how a question could have been changed. We put them through some training. [Lines 239-245]

R2 created a professional development for school system employees called Edcamp:

Our teachers loved it. That's so much more- they look forward to doing that rather than going and just sitting to a speaker. A team of presenters provide professional development that teachers are able to use in their classroom. Teachers look forward to learning in a small group setting versus sitting in a large group listening to a speaker. [Lines 230-231]

We're kind of going back to our own school, and digging deep. That's made a big difference this last year. [Lines 276-280]

Student Engagement. Student engagement is a piece that can influence achievement according to the superintendents. Students who feel that they are cared about and have a sense of belonging at school have a better chance at being successful (R2, R5, R8, R4).

R5 provided an example of how he shows he cares about his students:

I listen to my kids. I listen to my teachers talk to my kids. I'm not afraid to tell my kids that I love them that I care about them. You know, even when they're in trouble, look, I don't like the choice you made. You know, that you're in trouble here, that doesn't mean I don't care about you because I do. I care about the choices you make. You get the kids that you hear their mama say, I wish I had an abortion instead of have you. These kids have you know, if they get to a point where they kind of trust you. [Lines 397-403]

R2 increased student engagement by inviting parents to come here their child discuss their data at school.

Did I mention the data and doughnuts and that's been a very good thing getting parents in. They'll usually come for the younger things. We've not had a lot of success at the high school level of getting parents in. I think the parents just don't see it like as important as it was when they were younger. [Lines 775-778]

We do social media. Parents read social media. [Line 783]

What we have found is that students really want to get there for breakfast, even the ones who have breakfast at home because they won't have breakfast with their classmates. It's helped our tardiness because some of the kids were like- [Lines 362-364]

R8 increased student engagement with making her school system become visibly important on the news and to the community.

I'm on the television. People see me all the time. I'm going places. It's not about me, but

it's about branding. Branding is big, branding our ... I think we've done a great job the

last two years of branding not just our district, but our schools. We highlight what's

going on. We do newsletters that we send out, though. I have a running list. Send this to

the judge. Send this to the Chamber of Commerce. We give them copies of our

newsletters. [Lines 449-454]

R4 provided an example of how students are engaged in the classroom.

The real story is the children. When the children say, I never liked math before, but I like

it now because Miss so and so assists me when I struggle. If she's busy, she gives me a

peer helper. [Lines 259-261]

Stakeholder Relations. R2 builds relationships with stakeholders by having them

contribute bags filled with food for the school to distribute to students.

We have Blessings In a Backpack at our local churches. Actually, Gospel was the one

that started that. Now, this year we've been told that they're not going to serve the whole

county anymore. [Lines 337-339]

R5 reported that stakeholder relations are strong with the church and community. The

school system encouraged them to be involved in the school in many ways.

Number one, the school and the church are the two main hubs of this community. There is

a lot of parental involvement. When I say there's a lot of parental involvement, literally

all I have to do is pick up the telephone and say we're gonna have a special day. It's a

special day for the kids and I need a little help watching classes, so forth like that. I could

get a half dozen parents kind of help out with that as we do like, class rotations and

things and stuff like that. [Lines 441-447]

97

R4 shared how stakeholders have started a community tutoring program for students:

The community has been very supportive in getting them whatever they needed as far as tools and technology is concerned. They come to every board meeting to say, this is what we want for our children that's new for us. [Lines 141-143]

Where all the grade levels meet at one school. That way mom can get with a friend, bring the friend with them. Sometimes we would get there, and we had no place to park. I thought that was a blessing, because they were there. They wanted to know what could they do to help their children. [Lines 155-158]

R8 shared how the school works with parents to make it more convenient for them to come to school meetings. The more parents are involved then student achievement should increase by becoming more important to the family:

The community center or something as a site because of the transportation issue. It's things like that, making sure we tell them the needs of the district based on the needs of the parents and the community, making sure that we provide a parent resource room. A lot of parents don't have computers or laptops or whatever. Where, if they want to, if they're going back to school, they can come use our ... That's going to help us, the more educated they are. [Lines 1144-1149]

Partnerships with Higher Education. Throughout this study, it is evident that partnerships played an important role in helping rural systems become successful. By forming partnerships with regional colleges and universities, the rural system would have support through student teachers working in the school. Other college students performed volunteer work or service learning projects with the school system. The superintendents commented that rural systems typically do not attract many candidates for teaching positions (R1, R8, R9, R2, R3, R5).

98

Therefore, by forming partnerships with colleges helps to bridge the gap and is a win-win for student teachers and for newly certified teachers to get the experience they needed while the and rural school systems got professional support that was so needed.

R8 explains how difficult it is to attract teachers to her school system because it is surrounded with higher performing school systems:

Of course, in being a rural school district, what is it that will attract young teachers to move in our district. We just don't have anything that's going to attract them. If they're here for three or four years, get their experience, then as soon as something comes open next door, whether it's this city school system, whether it's this school, city, or bigger cities, they leave us. We have been really brainstorming, trying to come up with incentives and strategies to retain our teachers. [Lines 208-214]

R4 reported on the partnership with a nearby community college:

The partnership we have with this college. This college has an elementary education program that we hire through, so we built a partnership with them where we service their lab. Their teachers get to come in, work with our students. For example, they can do DIBELS progress monitoring. They get to sit in on data meetings to see how things are going to change for the children, share what they did with them, what they learned. I think it's going to be effective for us. That's what I'm most proud of. [Lines 64-69]

R1 explained how a partnership with a nearby university allowed for his county to hire leaders who went through turnaround training as principals. R1 reported:

As a matter of fact, the four teachers, well three of them are still here that went to a program, known as the turnaround principals. One of them has already became an assistant principal and two others have actually interviewed in the last two weeks for the

assistant principal job at the high school. Now, that's the first in-house principals that

we've had in years. They are instructional leaders. [Lines 302-307]

R3 shared that his county had partnerships with colleges as well but did not provide much

detail. R3 response:

yes, we did partner with this college on some stuff, and I'd have to go back and figure

out what all that was. We did have some partnerships with two other colleges. [Lines

561-563]

R5 also referenced how a college partnership helps high school students in rural school

systems:

I think we do a good job as far as retaining our students, but at the same time you know,

all three of *our high schools are smaller high schools. We have an agreement with a*

community college for our students to take a dual enrollment, dual credit classes,

especially on the industrial side of things. Matter of fact, there are 10 programs of 30

that offer almost a 100% tuition-free education. Say for example if you want to get a

certification in industrial maintenance, you still take your English, math, science, and

social studies with us, and as long as you can afford your own transportation over to the

community college, you can take those electives over there with them. [Lines 764-773]

Factors that Hindered Implementation of Turnaround

Lack of Knowledge. The lack of knowledge is from multiple pieces reported in

interviews such as not having the curriculum aligned, understanding the College and Career

Ready Standards (CCRS), closing achievement gaps, and teachers not understanding how to

interpret the data. Five superintendents (R1, R3, R4, R5, R7) explained that once the curriculum

was aligned and pacing guides were created, then there was an increase in student achievement.

100

R3 reported specifically that the CCRS was not aligned in his school system:

> *The first problem that we had was when the College and Career Ready standards came*
> *down. Our curriculum was not aligned with that, and we tried to ... so focused on*
> *opening the textbook to page one and teaching to page 350, and the textbooks were not*
> *necessarily aligned with the College and Career Ready standards. What we had to do*
> *was we developed curriculum guides and pacing guides to make sure that all of the*
> *objectives were taught prior to testing.* [Lines 194-200]

R4 explained how important it is to understand the curriculum:

> *What I also want them to understand is the depth of the curriculum that we're asked to*
> *teach according to the course of study. I don't think we're teaching at that depth. I think*
> *we're still kind of skimming off the top. I don't think it's that they don't want to. I think it's*
> *they don't understand how to get those concepts into the classroom and make it more real*
> *world for those children.* [Lines 79-83]

R1 reported how the school improvement grant impacted student achievement in the
school:

> *The principal that we hired at the beginning of the grant was on board, because he was*
> *in there with the new process and all the PD and all this. Now, it's been, like I said, going*
> *on the fourth year now of a new principal after the grant. So, really they had to be*
> *convinced about the process of the pre-test and the post-test and all the things that we're*
> *working and are working to keep that process going. I guess the data shows that it's the*
> *right way to go, because we haven't been back on school improvement since then.* [Lines
> 139-149]

R1 also reported that parents do not understand the CCRS:

It's very frustrating, because ... Even the generation of the parents that are the now

parents, I mean, I taught the children's parents I've been here so long, but they weren't

even taught those standards. So, even the younger parents get frustrated. I see sometimes

they get very frustrated in wanting to help their children. They would help if they knew

how. So, it's easy to not be happy with the common core. [Lines 423-428]

Well, I think that the media had a lot to do with the resistance to CCRS because it turned

out to be political stuff. You know, they would say the Democrats and the Republicans

were talking about this. We're going to get rid of it, and they wouldn't say anything that

was specifically bad about it, but it was just a talking point. So, people hear it on the

news, and so ... [Lines 456-460]

R4 shared how the parent perception of CCRS and assessments changed after having a

meeting:

For my parents, we've had several parent meetings. That we shared with them where our

students were. We explained to them that the standards have changed. There were some

were concerned that their student's grades dropped over the last couple of years. We

gave them the opportunity to look at English assignments, language arts assignments that

related to those course of study standards. Math problems that related. Some of them say,

okay, I'm going to have to talk to my child. He's going to have to study. There's no way he

can get this just coming to the school, and then coming home and doing nothing. [Lines

130-137]

R5 shared how there were a variety of problems but the main one was the staff was not

teaching effectively:

It was really a variety of problems, one being attendance, truancy, one being the staff

really just wasn't at par. They were teaching, but the depth and breadth of what they were

teaching just wasn't up to getting these kids what they need in order to succeed. [Lines

85-88]

R7 gave an explanation of how the implementation of CCRS requires teachers to be

provided with a lot of professional development.

Well common career ready standards, the standards are at a higher rigor. And the new

standards, they're fewer in numbers but they're longer. In other words, in the past with

the traditional standards you may of had 25 standards. And now those 25 standards have

turned into 18 standards but they're much longer there. With the new college ready

standards a lot of the focus more so is on actually doing instead of just learning. John

Dewey said it best in 1899, "The experience is the mother of all learning and we learn by

doing." Well that's the approach that CCRS takes. Instead of just learning science, you're

actually doing science. [Lines 287-294]

We want to be lifelong learns, and we want to apply what we learn. It sounds really good

but saying it and having somebody do it is totally different. It takes a lot of professional

development for teachers to be able to do that. [Lines 308-310]

Resources. Rural school systems face many barriers such as not having enough of

resources for their teachers and students. Resources are scarce in rural counties because of the

lack of businesses to help support schools as well as many are in poverty areas. Food is an issue

so many school systems had to find resources to meet the basic needs of students. Parents often

work different hours that can prevent them from attending school events and sometimes

transportation can be an issue. Rural school systems spend a lot of money on school transportation because students live long distances from the schools.

R4 provided an example of how many possible parents might show up to a parent teacher report day when held at times during the parents working hours:

At a parent report day, we typically have problems with getting parents to come. The two reasons the parents might not come are due to transportation and the event being held during work hours. For example, I've got a school that has 500 kids in it. You may get 10 parents. [Lines 170-171]

The other thing that we're looking at this year is alternating when we're having meetings as a school. We've met about that, that the schools need to be more flexible with the meetings. All of them don't have to be at five o'-clock at night, or six o'-clock at night. Some parents work from three to eleven, and they can't ever make it. [Lines 185-188]

R2 also referenced that parents cannot come to school events due to transportation:

Parent meetings and that sort of thing that I've offered for just communication purposes on what we're doing in some of our curriculum in schools…parents just are not able to come because they don't have the transportation. About 57% of our students ride a bus out of our 5500 students. We have summer programs... [Lines 375-380]

A lot of times, parents will send them because we also do the free feeding program with that as well. They have free food and free daycare for parents. They will send those students. The summer program we run buses because they would not get there otherwise. [Lines 425-430]

R2 reported that majority of her students come to school hungry:

They're coming to school hungry and then they're going home on the weekends and they

don't have food. They don't have food in the summer. We do everything we can to make

sure their basic needs are met, because if they're not, they're not going to be learning.

[Lines 332-335]

R4 and R2 commented that they search for technology grants whereas other school

systems have funds to purchase technology items. R4 reported the following:

The barriers to that have been, I think their desire to include technology and to integrate

it effectively. That's our next goal. Is to first be able to purchase the technology, so we're

looking for grants to get that done. We're asking each principal, when we do our

principals training this year to provide training on technology integration. How I can use

that technology to teach that concept as opposed to just letting the children use the

technology. How to use the technology to teach a concept. I think it is going to be

important that our teachers know that the technology is going to help with the activities

that I'll use to ensure my students master that concept. [Lines 401-408]

All participants reported how funds are needed for various reasons such obtaining 21st

century computer labs. Another resource would be to provide a way to identify at-risk students

so that more professional development and interventions could be put into place early. This

would help contribute to having a higher high school graduation rate.

R2 explained how she was able to find technology just by being in the right place at the

right time:

I went to State Surplus and stumbled upon a gold mine. We were able to get 500 laptops,

brand new laptops, for $30 apiece. [Lines 397-298]

R1 made the comment that the middle school was very technology rich due to receiving the school improvement grant:

If you go to the school, you will see that we have a very technology-rich school system. Even our K-12 now every teacher has a Smart Board and all this, but the middle school with that grant, we were able to get all new computer labs, new science labs and all that. That's not the key to it. The key was our teachers learning to do some purposeful planning and taking that more serious and direct approach to what the kids were really lacking. [Lines 40-46]

R7 reported teachers would sometimes use the excuse that students cannot succeed due to poverty and lack of resources. R7 shared:

Well probably the biggest barrier is the fact that a lot of times our teachers use an excuse that because our students come from a high poverty area that they can't learn or that can't do that. And that's not true whatsoever. I'll say that if you come from a high-impoverished area there are more obstacles to keep you from possibly being effective but it still can be done. [Lines 272-276]

R6 discussed barriers with resources such as mandates from the state department and not having enough resources to fulfill those mandates:

Barriers are, for me, are some of the requirements that are passed on to us from the state department. Like unfunded mandates. They expect us to have a gifted program, but don't give us money for a gifted teacher. They expect us to be able to provide school nurses at all of our schools, but only have limited funds for our actual school nurse. That biggest barrier that I see us having is not our kids being rural and poor. Because I know if I were to put my kids in a hundred-yard race against the kids from Mountain Brook and they ran

106

the kindergarten. The kids in Mountain Brooke would already be on by the 30-yard line. I

don't know if we can ever catch them. Because they've got that big of an advantage.

[Lines 154-162]

Stakeholders. The stories of the eight participants included how stakeholders can

sometimes become a barrier for leading turnaround in the school system. Stakeholders identified

by the superintendents included school boards, media and parents. These superintendents noted

that these stakeholders impacted turnaround and decisions made by the superintendent. The

following quotes provided insight.

R2 provided a description of how superintendents need more support in learning how to

deal with school boards and media:

Probably something that the superintendents are not prepared for when they become a

superintendent is how to deal with board members and how to deal with the media.

Because there's media that'll come and dig and dig and they'll keep asking questions.

There's just a fine line of you communicating with the public and acting. You don't need

to appear like you're trying to hide something or you're closing yourself off. [Lines 747-

751]

When I first started, I tried to meet with them like every two weeks I would meet with the

board president and vice president. I would bring like one day we would talk about data,

strictly data and try to go with that. The next day it might be personnel. The more I tried

to educate them, though, it seems like the more they tried to be the superintendent.

[Lines112-117]

R4 explained how her school board has a changed mindset once failing schools got their

attention:

My board is very, very supportive of us as we move forward. They want to see something

different in our county. They are learning to listen when I share data. They used to just sit

and doodle. I kind of said to them in a meeting, "Well, I can bring this back another time.

I know we're crunched for time." No, ma'am. No, ma'am. No, ma'am. We're listening.

That was the first time that they heard me say we had two schools on the failing list.

[Lines 307-312]

R4 referenced to how she promotes the school system with stakeholders in the

community:

During the school year, everybody wants you to come to their meetings to speak. To

share what's going on in the district. Of course, because I'm trying to get the community

to become more a part of our county. That's one of my goals for the year…to make the

community more involved as well as the parents. If they call me to speak, I'm going to

speak. You've been at four meetings this week. I said, "But I need to be that face that they

see, and I need to hear ... them to hear the positive message coming from me." I don't

need someone else saying, they're not doing anything at our county. [Lines 560-569]

R8 works with school board members, community members, and politicians by doing the

following:

Community functions are so important. But we do have lots of partners in education. I

have my career tech person who is also kind of like our PR person. We do, at the end of

the year recognize all our partners in education. We publicly thank them and give them a

little something to express our appreciation. We have sponsors. We use an excellence

award to recognize many of our community partners. We had lots of sponsors financially,

like the local business owners. I'm the kind of person that I write letters to our

108

congressmen, our state legislative representative, to say, hey, we're doing this. Will you

support us? I actually go in, and speak with them, and tell them, hey, I want you to

support this. Will you think about this? Consider this? Build relationships. I'm very

visible all over the place. [Lines 945-954]

R1 explained that stakeholders change, especially when a large industry goes out of

business:

One thing about our county, and like I said, I'm from here, but poverty ... that study on

poverty students and how they're extra loud and all that ... That's what I see a lot here.

Our students ... and it's gotten ... it's really changed since the closure of a corporation

where the jobs left and all. The people have changed, and even my friends in nearby

towns, a lot of your more well-behaved students seemed to move away. But they are good

kids here, but it's a culture that you have to get used to. [Lines 312-318]

R3 explained that families would move from school to school making it difficult to keep

track of student progress and interventions. In addition, board members did not understand

providing transportation to students who could transfer from a failing school to a non-failing

school in the county. R3 described this situation below:

Our families move around, and there were students jumping from school to school where

they would be in one spot at one school, and they'd transfer to another school, and they

would be either way behind or way ahead. We were trying to get everybody on the same

page for that reason. [Lines 222-226] *We've got a school in school improvement right*

now that is considered a failing school in the county because of course, those students

are allowed to transfer, and the board member still, he didn't understand that the law

says that they can and we have to provide transportation for them. Anyway, that was part

109

of the problem those district lines, they could come and go across districts. If they live in

the south end of the county, and they want to go to the school in the north end, they could

go. [Lines 228-235]

The following chart provides a summary of the facilitators and hindrances of

implementing turnaround in rural school systems (see Figure 2).

Facilitators	Hindrances
Collaboration Continuous Improvement Plan Professional Development Partnerships Stakeholder Relations Student Engagement	Lack of Knowledge Resources Stakeholders (School Board and Media)

Figure 2. Facilitators and Hindrances of Implementing Turnaround in a Rural School System

Highlights and Challenges of Leading Turnaround

The eight stories presented several highlights of leading turnaround in a rural school

system. One is that rural systems are typically small ranging from five hundred to about five

thousand students in a system. Rural systems considered themselves to have a family style

atmosphere with teachers, parents, and students (R6, R1, R7, R8). Rural systems are able to own

the data but often have to go through a lot of professional development to learn about how to do

so. Partnerships with regional colleges and universities played an important role because they

provided student teachers and additional support for rural systems.

Family Atmosphere. R7 made the comment that the school system treats teachers like

family:

So that's sort of like our claim to fame that in our county, the school system is like family.

We take care of you. And lot of times we're able to attract people based on that particular

generalization that's made about us. [Lines 989-991]

R8 referenced to celebrating success and making teachers and principals feel valued:

110

One thing, just creating a positive culture. Morale building, I love to appreciate people.

I'm really big on celebrations. Sometimes we focus on the negativity or reprimanding. We

tend to focus too much on what we're not doing. I think that's important because you've

got to have a plan. That's why all schools have improvement plans. We also have to focus

on the celebrations. We have to focus on the professional and make them feel like they

are an important part of our community and our school system. It all works together.

[Lines 181-185]

R6 showed how principals appreciated and rewarded faculty members for being present at school:

That could be with your faculty as far as attendance. What we're trying to do here is

we're trying to get our faculty to have 95% or more attendance rate. How many teachers

can be here 95% of the time? Let's find out the ones that do. [Lines 249-251]

Then it's a reward at the end of the year. I like to recognize the teachers that were here

95% of the time. Because we do this, our attendance has significantly stabilized at close

to 95%. That is an extremely important outcome for us. [Lines 256-257]

Data, curriculum, and professional development. R3 realized that the curriculum was not aligned to the state standards:

Our curriculum was not aligned with that, and we tried to ... so focused on opening the

textbook to page one and teaching to page 350, and the textbooks were not necessarily

aligned with the College and Career Ready standards. [Lines 195-198]

R4 felt that teachers did not fully understand the curriculum and needed professional development:

What I also want them to understand is the depth of the curriculum that we're asked to teach according to the course of study. I don't think we're teaching at that depth. [Lines 79-80]

Partnerships. R4 shared their experience with a community college that has had a positive impact in the school system:

The partnership we have with this College. It has an elementary education program that we hire through, so we built a partnership with them where we service their lab. Their teachers get to come in, work with our students. Do Dibels progress monitoring. They get to sit in on data meetings to see how things are going to change for the children. Share what they did with them, what they learned. I think it's going to be effective for us. That's what I'm most proud of. [Lines 64-69]

R4 started a partnership with the media:

We've got this little slogan that we're destined for excellence. I like to make sure that what we're doing, then, is excellent. I tell administrators that we're always being watched by the community, the media is always watching, our students, our parents. We just have a standard of excellence. We've done a lot of renovations, first of all, because that's the first thing, your image. I could just go down the list of things that I think we've addressed to first of all change the image. [Lines 190-196]

We do newsletters that we send out, though. I have a running list. Send this to the judge. Send this to the Chamber of Commerce. We give them copies of our newsletters. [Lines 452-454]

This is superintendent excellence awards. This guy right here works for the TV station. It's really nice. You can see, we had the carpet with the stars right there. [Lines 479-481]

Challenges of Leading Turnaround

The challenges of leading turnaround in a rural school system can vary because every rural area is unique. The common challenges that were identified by the rural turnaround superintendents included meeting basic student needs, not being flexible with parents, school boards and media who were not informed either because school districts had not done so or because of a lack of interest on their part, geographic location, and technology needs.

Meeting Basic Student Needs. R2 reported that food is a major concern for students because they cannot learn at school when they are hungry.

Definitely, the food is a huge issue with us because we're sending backpacks home with kids on Fridays just so they have food for the weekend. [Lines 414-415]

R7 reported that teachers use poverty as an excuse for why they cannot learn:

Well probably the biggest barrier is the fact that a lot of times our teachers use an excuse that because our students come from a high poverty area that they can't learn or that can't do that. And that's not true whatsoever. I'll say that if you come from a high-impoverished area there are more obstacles to keep you from possibly being effective but it still can be done. [Lines 272-276]

R3 commented about poverty being in the school system:

We got the poverty down here too, and our main problem was, in one area of the southern part of the county, one school, and it was where the school was. That's probably where the most poverty is. [Lines 491-493]

Being flexible with parents. R4 created a plan to help get parents to school for parent report day:

113

A lot of our parents don't have transportation. In those two communities it was great.

They were usually the communities where parents didn't come to meetings. In order to

meet them, we started doing zone meetings. Where all the grade levels meet at one

school. That way mom can get with a friend, bring the friend with them. [Lines 152-156]

R1 referenced that parents get upset sometime in elementary school with the CCRS:

I don't know what the magic time is that they start losing confidence in themselves, but

it's somewhere in the elementary level that the parents really get frustrated about helping

their children with homework and all. [Lines 404-407]

School boards and media. R5 shared how the school board should participate in daily
operations of the school system:

It's an elected board also. The board members feel like they represent certain

communities. A board member does not represent a certain community on a board of

education. They represent the county school system as a whole. They are the governing

body. They vote on policy, they vote on the budget, so they don't have anything to do with

day-to-day operations. [Lines 662-668]

R2 reported that it could be a challenge to work board members at times:

When you have five members with five different agendas, sometimes it gets interesting

and I spend a lot of time trying to communicate or explain things about what's going on

in our world that they really don't understand. [Lines 93-95]

R8 also suggested including board members in certain tasks like approving policies and
personnel decisions:

I really don't like to involve the board members in the day-to-day activities because once

you do that you kind of open Pandora's Box, and you really don't want to do that. The

114

main responsibility for the board is to approve policies, approve personnel requests

there. Provide the vision and the goals for the school district. [Lines 906-910]

Recruitment and geographic location. R7 shared that recruiting teachers is difficult for

his rural school system.

Well recruitment has always been an issue for us. Particularly diversification. I mean we

live in a society that has black and white people. Sometimes we have a hard time finding

white teachers. But we really want to expose our students to those types of things because

that's what they're going to face in the real word. [Lines 1028-1032]

R3 provided insight on teacher turnover:

One of the things that I saw on the internet on was the travel time to work. In our county,

I think we was about third in the state, the time to travel, and it was like 38 minutes. That

did present a problem. [Lines 606-609] *It's so mind-boggling because in this particular*

area is where most all of our industry is located, in our County, and you would think that

would be the higher paying income level, but it's not. A lot of the reason for that is that

those industries hire from outside of our county. [Lines 495-498]

R1 discussed how hard it is to find teachers to come to their county because of the

school's geographic location:

We had six teachers *that retired, and that's a lot for us, that retired last year. The new*

teachers, you know, it's hard to keep the new teachers, because like I said most of them

are traveling an hour or more in distance. It surprises me that we can't find people even

as close as in surrounding towns. [Lines 273-277]

R5 referenced to how difficult it is to find particular teachers like math teachers:

PE teachers, elementary teachers, they're a dime a dozen. History teachers are a dime a

dozen. Math, science and English teachers, and special education teachers, those are a

little harder to find. Special education teachers are really hard to find. As far as

recruiting, you know, my federal programs director, or one of her staff, would go to

various job fairs and set up a little booth. Of course, we would advertise traditionally

online through posting everything on our job boards throughout all our schools, you

know, just your basic needs of advertising for positions. [Lines 737-739]

R7's school system has 50% of science teachers not highly qualified:

I have two math teachers. 50% of them are not highly qualified. 50% of the science

teachers are not highly qualified. And that's the case for my other high school. It's just

really, really difficult to find these particular teachers. [Lines 944-947]

R7 reported that incentives such as receiving funds to work for their school system

worked with recruiting highly qualified teachers:

We were fortunate to get a teacher incentive fund grant where teachers would get

bonuses if they work for us. And that really helped. [Lines 967-969]

People were still in Teach for America but it was a different type of person that was in

Teach for America. You're going from say a person that I have here. This person

graduated from say ASU, which is where most of our teachers come from. This person

may of made a 20 on the ACT, may have graduated in let's say elementary education.

They graduated elementary education, and they're ready to teach. On a scale from 1 to

10, I would give that person about between a 8 and 8.5. A 10 is really, really good. One

was a 10. He was actually off the scale. I mean he was off the charts; he was just that

good. But when he and that group were a part of it the Teach for America teachers were

116

9s, 9.2s, 10s. In 2010-2011, the economy started to improve which is when these teachers

started getting jobs and left the mediocre teachers. [Lines 1062-1074]

Technology Needs. Some rural areas are fortunate to have funds to purchase technology

whereas other systems do not. Throughout the eight stories of the participants there were two

rural school systems that needed technology. Two systems reported they had plenty of

technology because they received a school improvement grant.

R2 is striving for their school system to become a one-to-one device for all students:

Any kind of technology that we can provide for the students to use in the classroom

greatly enhances their learning. Our goal is to provide the students with many learning

opportunities that they might not receive at home. We are striving to have a one-to-one

technology initiative as a school system. [Lines 383-387]

R1 was able to obtain plenty of technology with the school improvement grant:

If you go to the school, you will see that we have a very technology-rich school system.

Even our K-12 now every teacher has a Smart Board and all this, but the middle school

with that grant, we were able to get all new computer labs, new science labs and all that.

[Lines 40-43]

R4 has to search for grants to be able to purchase technology items:

The barriers to that have been, I think their desire to include technology and to integrate

it effectively. That's our next goal. Is to first be able to purchase the technology, so we're

looking for grants to get that done. [Lines 401-403]

The following figure provides a summary of the highlights and challenges of leading a

rural turnaround school system. (See Figure 3).

Highlights	Challenges
Family Atmosphere Data & Curriculum Professional Development Partnerships	Basic Needs for Students Being Flexible with Parents School Board and Media Teacher Recruitment Geographic Location Technology

Figure 3. Highlights and Challenges of Leading a Rural Turnaround School System

Summary

This chapter provided the findings from in-depth face-to-face interviews, reviewing the "End of Year" Status reports, and asking follow-up interview questions. The results were classified into codes and themes for each piece of data collected. The factors that facilitated the implementation of turnaround aligned with the factors from the three pieces of data. The only outlier was from the "End of Year Status Report" on effective use of time to include time for teachers to collaborate on teaching and learning.

The second piece of data that was collected was the state department of education form for differentiated support, "End of Year Status Report". This report was used for superintendents to complete on all principals as a whole with their performance in implementing the eight turnaround principles. The results of the report showed that principals in rural school systems need additional support in the following areas: school climate and culture, effective instruction, and effective use of time.

School culture and climate would be the principal implementing a culturally responsive system to improve non-academic factors such as social, emotional, and health needs of all students. Majority of the rural school systems reported that they are working on improving the culture and climate but still need additional support in this area. This finding proves that the information in the interviews was truthful.

Effective instruction includes principals implementing rigorous research-based instruction aligned with the CCRS. This was a common problem reported (R3, R4, R7, R8) in several counties student achievement had decreased because the school system curriculum was not aligned to the CCRS. This finding proves that the information in the interviews was truthful.

Effective use of time includes providing time for teacher collaboration to focus on improving teaching and learning. The participants (R2, R1, R7, R8) reported a lot about collaboration such as seeking input from teachers to improve the school system. There was not a lot of information reported on how teachers collaborated with each other about teaching and learning. This would be an area to focus on for further research.

The eight stories presented a story in regards to what facilitated and hindered the success of turnaround in rural school systems. One sentence here about the superintendent's role: what were the themes for this? The common factors that facilitated the implementation of turnaround were the following: collaboration, a continuous improvement plan, professional development, student engagement, stakeholder relations, and partnerships. The common factors that hindered the implementation of turnaround were: lack of knowledge, resources, and stakeholders. The highlights of leading a rural school system were the following: family atmosphere, professional development, curriculum and data, and partnerships. The challenges of leading a rural school system were the following: meeting basic needs for students, being flexible with parents, school board and media, teacher recruitment, geographic location, and technology needs. Both the highlights and challenges include items that rural systems need to have in place in order to sustain success in the school system.

Chapter V: Conclusion

This study sought to examine the experience of superintendents implementing turnaround in rural school systems. The study explored the factors that facilitated and hindered the implementation of turnaround. It is the hope of the researcher that the voices of the rural turnaround superintendents are heard as well as future research can be conducted to educate educational leaders about the needs in rural school systems. The investigator also provided follow-up questions to the superintendents as part of gathering more data for this study. This chapter presents a summary of the study and important conclusions drawn from the data presented in Chapter 4. It provides a discussion of the implications for action and recommendations for further research.

A descriptive case study approach was utilized for this research. Evidence was collected from a variety of sources including in-depth face-to-face interviews with eight participants, a review of "End of Year Status" report, and follow up questions. Themes emerged from the data collection process and those themes were used to develop the analysis reported in Chapter IV of this study. In this chapter, the researcher summarizes the major findings, presents implications for practice, discusses the findings related to the conceptual framework, and proposes recommendations for future research.

Overview of the Implementation of Turnaround and Findings

Turning around failing schools can be described as a work of art. It takes time, creativity, and practice to make the school a successful place. Failing schools have numerous reasons why they are listed on the failing school list. From this study, it is important to remember that every rural school system is unique with having limited resources available, partnerships are not the

same in every rural area, and community and stakeholder involvement varies from district to district.

The role of the superintendent in rural turnaround included the following themes, which were relationships, perception, data drives the instruction, and lead by example. The facilitating factors of the rural turnaround included the following: perceptions, collaboration, continuous improvement plan, student engagement, and partnerships with higher education. The hindrances comprised were lack of knowledge, resources, and stakeholders (school boards and media). Finally, the highlights of the rural turnaround in these districts involved the following: family atmosphere, data and curriculum, professional development, and partnerships. The challenges were identified as the following: basic needs for students, being flexible with parents, school board and media, teacher recruitment, geographic location, and technology.

The major findings from this study were the following areas: collaboration, continuous improvement plans, partnerships, professional development, and stakeholder relations. We have heard "collaboration is the key" which is what rural superintendents reported to use to move their school system forward. Superintendents collaborate with their leadership teams and school system employees through surveys, daily conversations about instruction, providing constructive feedback after visiting classrooms, being visible in schools daily, trusting and meeting with central office staff leadership team, and making improvements to school logos and buildings. In efforts to making improvements to the schools, the superintendents reported that updating websites, banners, signs, logos, and so forth has helped recruit more qualified teachers. These things make everyone feel, as they are part of something bigger rather than having a job in a school system.

The continuous improvement plan plays a vital role in leaders leading school stakeholders to get schools off the failing school list. First, teachers, principals, superintendents, students, central office leaders, and all other stakeholders must own their data. Participants in this study reported that the reason they were not moving forward in student achievement is because no one really understood the data except for a few people. Action plans serve as a roadmap to drive the instruction that needs to focus on attendance, school goals, formative assessments, and student needs. One student need that a lot of rural schools have to meet is poverty. Poverty is one large barrier that is possible to overcome when schools find resources to help students to obtain food. Parent meetings are necessary to be held at different times and at a central location to help increase the amount of parents coming to the meetings. One of the major findings was the alignment of the curriculum with the state standards. This is when new pacing guides and curriculum maps are created to keep teachers on the same path for preparing students to take the standardized assessment at the end of the year. There are no more days of teaching from Chapter One on page one to Chapter Twelve.

Rural school systems who have partnerships with community colleges or universities tend to have more resources and additional support available. Additional support is the opportunities to have student teachers come to work with students and learn about teaching in rural areas. These partnerships also provide dual enrollment programs that allow for students to take college classes while still being in high school.

Professional development is highly important in rural schools and helps to provide teachers with learning experiences that are necessary for teaching in a rural school. First, it is important to make sure teachers understand poverty and how it impacts a student's health and their achievement. Participants all reported that just because students come from poverty does

not mean they cannot succeed; it means there are a few more obstacles to overcome. One obstacle rural systems face with professional development is from not having enough funding to send teachers during the summer to receive professional development. It was made known to the investigator that rural systems do a lot with a little.

Student engagement is another vital piece in making the school and school system successful. A lot of rural schools have to meet the basic needs of students before they can get students fully engaged in learning. A few ways of meeting student basic needs are by providing programs like breakfast in the classroom that helps with students not being hungry but also attendance. Participants who have this program in their school system commented that the students want to come to school to eat breakfast so their attendance has increased. Student data books allow for students to be engaged in discussing their data and reports with their parents and teachers. One way a rural school does this is by having an event called, "Data and Doughnuts" which all students get to share how he or she is learning in the classroom. If student parents cannot make it, then central office staff can come in place of the parents. Last, it is highly important to celebrate any success to keep morale high and to show that employees are playing a huge role in moving the school system forward.

Stakeholder relations play an important role in rural school systems. Participants all reported that the church and school are two main hubs in the success of the rural school system. Community tutors are very helpful in working with the school board to help meet goals and to serve as an advocate for students. Church can provide food for students to have to take home. It was also reported that rural systems are able to do a lot with a little but it is also important to take care of your people. This meaning, that rural systems are more focused on a family type atmosphere in their school system.

The next discussion in this chapter will discuss the particular findings for each research question. It will also point out how the findings are related to the research from Chapter 2. Themes and codes were identified from eight interviews that allowed for all research questions to be answered.

Question 1: What was the role of the superintendent in implementing the eight turnaround principles, as perceived by the superintendents serving in the PACT grant?

The participants agreed that relationships were the most helpful in creating a positive climate and culture within their school system. It was evident that the participants felt that it was essential to continuously build relationships with stakeholders to help move the school system forward. When building relationships, participants often referred to their system as a "family" which indicates relationships are important. Research from Kowalski (2005), points out that superintendent obligations include the following: building relationships between the school district and community, informing the public of educational needs, bringing people together to create visions and goals, interpreting educational goals to the public, and building support for school initiatives. This implies that the rural superintendent is responsible for the development of positive culture and climate that fosters building relationships with all stakeholders. The participants also highly recommended leading by example. Evidence pointed to that leading by example allows for all stakeholders to develop more respect and follow the direction of the leader. Leading by example in a positive way that fosters building relationships will gain much needed extra support in the school system.

The second strongest factor was how perception greatly impacts the superintendent's ability to move the school system forward. Perception can bring about positive or negative opinions regarding the daily impact on school operations and success in the school system. This

can create more obstacles for the superintendent to find solutions to overcome or promote the

school system. One thing that all participants' felt is when stakeholders have a voice then it

contributes to a positive culture and climate in the school system. Stakeholders who have a voice

are able to provide insight to the perception of how things are in the school system. Research has

showed that effective leaders are thought to be intelligent, dependable, self-motivated, ones who

can lead the school through a variety of obstacles. These leaders are ones who can pick up

problems, fix them, and move on to the next problem. When schools have ineffective leaders, the

school culture and climate is greatly impacted by people perceptions and then confirmed with not

having much school success. In efforts to improve the culture and climate, leadership

replacement continues to be a popular choice in the executive toolkit (Howell et al., 1990;

Meyers, 2007). Participants reported that it is important for the superintendent to be visible at as

many events as possible. This helps with building morale in the community as well as getting to

talk with the superintendent. Research points out that the rural community expects the

superintendent to be visible at everything ranging from everyday activities at school to

community events. It is very important for the superintendent to maintain positive relations with

media about the school system. The media could damage a rural school system because the rural

community is always in the news (Jenkins, 2007; Maxwell et al., 2013).

The third strongest factor was how important it was for all stakeholders rural school

systems to know and own their data. This includes all teachers understanding their data not just

administrators. The point is that not one person needs to know the data but it needs to be

everyone involved and truly understands the data including students. Effective teachers have

increased student achievement in all types of schools. Even in the lowest-performing schools

effective teachers have increased student achievement by consistently reviewing data and re-

teaching skills until mastery (Fusarelli & Militello, 2012). Participants agreed that once

curriculum was aligned with the state standards, then the data became more relevant and

purposeful for everyone to analyze and interpret. School leaders, who have professional

conversations about data and student motivation, tend to close student achievement gaps

(Marrapodi & Beard, 2013).

This research question focused specifically on the role of superintendents in

implementing the eight turnaround principles. The major findings for this question pointed to

building relationships, perception, owning the data, and leading by example. The rural

superintendent is one who wears multiple hats in efforts of overcoming obstacles and moving the

school system forward. The four major findings explained what a rural superintendent needed to

do in implementing turnaround in their school system.

**Question 2: What were the factors that facilitated implementation of turnaround in rural
systems as perceived by the superintendents?**

The factors that facilitated implementation of turnaround in rural systems as perceived by

the superintendent were the following: perception, collaboration, continuous improvement plan,

student engagement, stakeholder relations, and partnerships. Participants felt that these factors

were the major ones that helped get schools off the failing school list as well as implementing

turnaround efforts effectively.

Perception plays an important role in determining the reputation of the school system.

Reputation is important because it can either draw people or have them wanting to leave the

school system. Participants reported that when all stakeholders feel that they have an invested

interest and the people in the school system genuinely care about their children then more

positive the perception. Evidence from the interviews showed how perception could be

monitored and changed through two main ways such as listening, monitoring operations, and providing surveys. Perception is also used to recruit new teachers into the school system. It has been noted, that when people say good things about a place, then typically it will provide additional benefits such as obtaining more resources or more highly qualified teachers. The rural community's perception about education is impacted due to most rural areas are in economic distress, which contributes to many problems that affect rural schools (Budge, 2006). The community typically has six habits of practiced ways of living, which are as follows: connectedness, development of identity and culture, interdependence with the land, spirituality, ideology and politics, and activism and civic engagement (Budge, 2006). With these six habits, the rural superintendent must understand and value them in order to continue to build and sustain relationships with community.

The idea of collaboration is more than talking with others. It is how instructional leaders create time for teachers and themselves to collaborate on teaching and learning. All the evidence showed how the superintendents and central office leadership team collaborated with each other. Further research could be conducted on how exactly teachers and principals collaborate with each other with discussing teaching and learning. For example, collaboration about assessments and student achievement would be very important for teacher to collaborate about. Teachers can learn from each other and how to help struggling students through collaboration. The only issue with collaboration is finding additional time and being creative in the schedule to allow for collaboration to happen.

One of the strongest factors that facilitated the implementation of turnaround was the focus of the continuous improvement plan. All evidence pointed to the curriculum being aligned and teachers owning their data. By doing this, they were able to increase student achievement

and get some schools off the failing school list. Evidence pointed out that leaders expected teachers and other leaders to understand their data but in reality they did not understand it. Research pointed out when examining data in a school, it is best to look at four steps in the continuous improvement process: root-cause analysis, solution development and action planning, reflective practice and evaluation, and collaboration problem diagnose (Bauer & Brazer, 2012). Rural schools must figure out what is the root cause of student achievement through analyzing data. Two common predictors for student achievement data are income and educational characteristics of families (Stump, 2015). Finding a solution to how to get families more involved would be the root cause and the school leadership team would develop a solution to put in place (Bauer & Brazer, 2012; Stump, 2015).

Another area that facilitates turnaround is for staff to receive and actively participate in professional development to enhance their abilities to improve student achievement. School leaders who take time to listen to their staff can easily identify professional development opportunities. Participants reported how professional development needs to be prescriptive in determining exactly what teachers need to learn in order to increase student achievement. Professional development should not be viewed as a way to fix teachers but it is providing continuous learning to increase student achievement (Marrapodi & Beard, 2013).

The student engagement piece came from participants reporting how they have an interest in getting to know the students in their county. Participants reported that they tried to visit schools every day to observe, talk to teachers and students. The effect that this has on the school system showed stakeholders how much the superintendent cares about their child and having a strong focus on teaching and learning. Further research could be conducted on how student engagement is strengthened within a school system among leaders.

Stakeholder relations play another important role in the development and implementation of turnaround efforts in a school system. Participants reported that the biggest stakeholder relations that must be maintained are with local school boards. Local school boards are often elected and typically have a business background with a focus on what is on the agenda for their community. Participants agreed that school boards should be primarily involved in daily operations, personnel, and finances. Research points out that one way for superintendents build relationships is through development an understanding of community values that align with school board expectations (Glenn & Hickey, 2009; Jenkins, 2007). Rural superintendents should create strategic plans with input from the community such as board members, parents, business leaders, and teachers (Winard & Edlefson, 2008). School board members should be educated on what is going on within the school system and educated to understand particular issues.

Partnerships are important to help provide student teachers and resources to rural school systems. The superintendents reported community colleges and universities opened doors by recruiting and training teachers to work in rural schools, supply additional resources, and create dual enrollment programs for schools. One of the reasons why rural systems have difficulty recruiting teachers is due to the lack of experience working in a rural school. One way to overcome this obstacle is through having partnerships with community colleges and universities to obtain more qualified teachers who have experience working in rural schools. Research findings support rural school in developing partnerships with universities that can offer courses and placement options for pre-service teachers to learn about rural schools (Barley & Bringham, 2008; Bell & Pirtle, 2012; Versland, 2013). In another study, it was reported that teachers would find it beneficial to include experiences interacting with rural schools in their teacher preparation program (Baser & Karaman, 2015). Research points out schools that invest the time and financial

resources on the family and community engagement principle are able to sustain student achievement longer. The idea is that one person cannot increase student achievement alone therefore by creating partnerships within and outside the community helps greatly (Browne-Ferrigno & Maynard, 2005; Fusarelli & Militello, 2012; Stelmach, 2011).

The six major findings were evident in the process that superintendents use to facilitate and implement turnaround efforts in the school systems. The findings can be thought as pieces of the puzzle that help the superintendent move the school system forward in turnaround efforts. Participants agree that it starts with perception, then collaboration should take place with development of a continuous improvement plan and partnerships are formed with the school system. Participants explained that as a rural superintendent you have to be able to put the pieces of the puzzle together in order to implement and sustain turnaround.

Question 3: What were the factors that hindered implementation of turnaround in rural systems as perceived by the superintendents?

The factors that hindered implementation of turnaround were narrowed down to the follow themes lack of knowledge, resources, and stakeholders. These three areas are common problems of practice that must be addressed on a regular basis. The lack of knowledge comes from the evidence that all employees in the rural school system do not understand how the curriculum is aligned to state standards as well as developing pacing guides. Resources are scarce and often superintendents are expected to do a lot with a little. Stakeholders such as local school boards and media can either make or break a superintendent. School board members sometimes do not have the educational background that can cause problems for the superintendent.

A lot of rural school systems reported that the curriculum was not aligned with the state standards. When school leaders develop new pacing guides and flow charts that are aligned to the curriculum the there is an increase in student achievement. The teaching and learning standard is enhanced by the superintendent leading change in the learning environment by collaboration with a variety of stakeholders about aligning the curriculum and assessments, using a variety of benchmarks, setting high learning expectations, and providing feedback to ensure accountability (Lewis et al., 2011). One major responsibility of superintendents is the development of having a strong central office staff. Research by McLaughlin & Talbert (2003), found evidence that having a weak central office limits school system improvement whereas a strong district central office promotes strategic distribution of responsibilities which makes stronger gains in school system achievement goals (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2003).

In a rural school system, resources can be scarce for many reasons, which limits the school system in meeting student needs. Poverty is an issue, which becomes a burden for the schools to find resources to help meet the basic needs of students. Superintendents reported that they do a lot with a little which implies they must be creative in how they allocate funds. Students from rural settings would struggle due to not having enough resources available (Johnson et al., 2010; Stump, 2015). Rural schools face the issue of not having enough technology resources due to geographic location or not enough funds to purchase equipment. There is not a one-size fits all approach for rural student achievement. School leaders must be flexible and wear multiple hats in implementing school turnaround. Rural districts should seek partnerships with other districts, organizations, and colleges to help with tutoring, apprenticeships, and learn through educational programs (Bell & Pirtle, 2012; Brown & Green, 2014; Rosenburg, 2011).

Stakeholders can require a lot attention from the superintendent especially elected local school boards. Board members are elected and often have agendas he or she would like to accomplish for their communities. Today, the school board and superintendent relationship is becoming more complex and must be maintained in meeting the mandates for high student achievement (Huang, 2012; Porch & Protheroe, 2003). The three factors with improving relationships superintendents face with their board and community are discussions about school improvement plans, the effects of state and federal accountability requirements, and the increase focus on student achievement (Porch & Protheroe, 2003). School board members can make school system matters political which impacts the superintendent's plan for success. Superintendents reported that school boards operate more efficiently when focused on daily operations, personnel, and finances. Research has pointed out that being a rural superintendent requires skills such as building relationships, listening and interacting with the community, maintain good relations with media, understand community values, recruit and retain qualified teachers, transportation costs, and lead the central office (Canales, 2008 et al.; Copeland, 2013; Maxwell et al., 2013). The rural superintendent can find him or herself to be the only administrator, chief executive in the community, and often the target of public criticism.

Question 4: From the superintendent perspective, what were the highlights and challenges of leading a rural turnaround school district?

From the superintendent perspective, the participants reported the following as highlights of leading a rural turnaround school district: family atmosphere, data, curriculum, professional development, and partnerships. Participants explained that leading a rural school system makes you feel that you belong or creates a family atmosphere. It is something that you might not experience in a larger school system. As a school superintendent, you are in charge of something

132

a lot larger and when you make educational gains from increasing student achievement, the reward of accomplishing a huge goal is very fulfilling. Partnerships are formed through developing relationships and building trust within the community. Partnerships with community colleges and universities create opportunities and provide more resources for students.

From the superintendent perspective, the participants reported the following as challenging outcomes of leading a rural turnaround school district: meeting basic needs for students, being flexible with parents, maintaining relationships with the school board and media, teacher recruitment, geographic location, and technology needs. Participants reported that in order for students to be successful in a rural school system, you have to help meet their basic needs first. Some students come to school hungry that can impact their motivation and concentration to learn. Rural superintendents are often finding way to meet needs like hunger for their students. Being flexible with parents involves being creative in picking more convenient times for parent teacher conferences. Families in rural communities might have to work more at night that can prevent them from coming to attend a conference at school. Transportation can be an issue as well so schools are looking at different ways to get to parents whether it be holding all meetings at one school or hosting meetings in communities. Maintaining relationships with board members and media can be challenging for superintendents. Participants explained that this is an area that superintendents need additional support in. Teacher recruitment can be difficult at times due to primary geographic location of the school system. Rural superintendents have to find ways to obtain technology either through grants or purchasing used materials. Participants reported it is possible to overcome these challenges that can lead the school system into having success for students.

Discussion and Reflection on the Findings and Conceptual Framework

The findings of this study focused on how the turnaround principles were implemented in rural school systems to determine if the original framework of this study is aligned with the findings or if the framework should be altered. The original framework describes the eight turnaround principles implied from the literature. The researcher wanted to determine how this framework related to the issues of how superintendents utilize and implement the eight turnaround principles in a rural school system. The original framework showed what specific areas to focus on when implementing turnaround (See Figure 1).
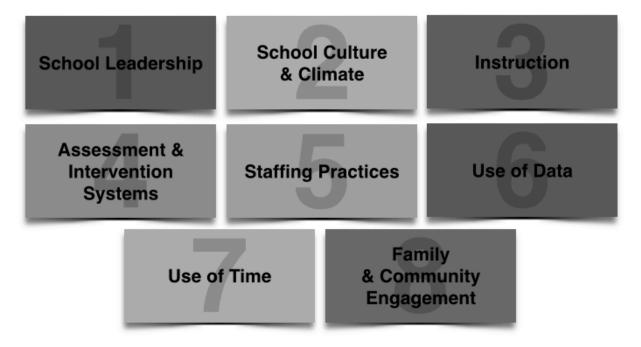

Figure 1. Original Conceptual Framework. Indiana Department of Education, 2016. Retrieved from website: http://www.doe.in.gov/outreach/turnaround-principles

Rural Superintendents	
SERVES	Community Involvement • Parades • Churches • Community Tutoring • Strategic Plan • Lunch with leaders
APPLIES	Professional Development • Quality Professional Development • Not a lot of funds for paying teachers to come in the summer
CONNECTS	Leading Central Office Staff • Weekly Meetings • Supporting schools • Follow up reports Leading Principals • Meetings Monthly • Data Meetings Bi-Monthly • Data-Attendance, Discipline, Formative Assessment • Dual Enrollment
ENGAGES	Student Engagement • Visiting Schools • Talking with students about learning • Providing programs to increase learning
RESPONDS	Teacher Recruitment • Hire the Best • Grow your own • Competitive Salary
BELONGS	Partnerships • Colleges – Teacher Training and Internships • Businesses • Grants for people in failing schools to earn a higher degree School Board • Managing information • Supporting schools • Follow up reports

Figure 4. Conceptual Framework of Rural School System Superintendents

Implications for Action

This section addresses the issue of how superintendents utilize and implement the eight

turnaround principles in leading turnaround in a rural school system. The stories told by the

participants share a unique perspective of implementing the turnaround principles. Rural superintendents utilized and implemented the eight turnaround principles and did so with the local rural context of their respective school systems.

Findings from this study should be shared with superintendents, central office leaders, teachers, and administrators in other rural school systems throughout the state. One important implication for action is to apply what was learned about factors that hindered the turnaround process in rural school systems. One suggestion would be to have rural superintendent meetings where they could share ideas on how to solve rural education problems.

One of the major hindrances that came about from this study was the lack of knowledge about curriculum alignment with the state standards. It is imperative for superintendents, district leaders, and principals to make sure the curriculum is aligned each year with the state standards. This includes leaders collaborating with teachers to make curriculum guides and pacing charts as well as providing professional development. It is suggested that curriculum guides need to stay in a similar format from year to year so that there is not much change with documents, and teachers can focus on instruction. Lack of resources was another hindrance for rural school systems. Technology resources were limited except in rural districts that had received technology grants. Because applying for grants is a way to receive funding for technology, local district personnel need to be trained in grant writing. In some of the systems studied, there was a lack of knowledge and expertise in this area. Fundraising in the local community is not always possible. Rural communities sometimes lack the business infrastructure to fundraise. Also rural means low numbers of citizens. Who do you sell too if there are not citizens in the community? Rural systems are forced to do a lot with a little.

The last implication discusses the relationship between superintendents and school board and media. School board members have the ability to vote against decisions made by the superintendent, which can negatively impact the school system. Unless school board members understand their role in moving the system forward, they can become a hindrance to the school system. Unless school board members have a fair amount of understanding about educational systems or have a background in education, informing them can become time consuming or difficult.

Considerations for Future Research

From the findings and analysis of this research, a plethora of potential research opportunities exist. As the stories from the participants were collected and the implications were identified several topics emerged. The considerations for future research are as follows: collaboration among teachers, partnerships, resources, and local school boards.

One area of consideration could be focused on partnership development between school systems and colleges and universities. Past research has emphasized the importance of partnering with local community agencies and businesses. Participants reported that partnerships with community colleges and universities have helped with providing resources and providing student teachers with rural teaching experience. One recommendation for future research would be to find out how rural systems can build new and strengthen existing partnerships with colleges and businesses. Less has been done in regards to specific areas within the higher education community. Teacher education program partnerships with rural school systems would be an area of expanded research. The same is true with educational leadership programs within higher education. Very little work has been done in this area with rural school systems.

A third area identified as a future research consideration is the allocation and funding for obtaining resources. A recommendation would be to research what grants were available and if rural superintendents would be able to apply for them. Research on school improvement grants for rural schools would be of benefit for superintendents. Grant writing appeared to be an area that the rural system does not attend to. It would be interesting to see what is currently being done by rural systems in this area. From that, future research could expand the possibilities of how to better support grant writing in the rural district.

The last area for consideration for future research would be to study the relationship between the rural superintendent and local school boards. The research could focus on how the superintendent and local school boards interact with each other, how meeting before and after board meetings are conducted, and what impacts a school board member's decisions. Another recommendation for research would be to study how relationships and trust can be built between the superintendent and local school board members in rural contexts.

Closing Statement

This study has identified the role of the rural superintendent in turnaround, the facilitating and hindering factors that were involved in rural turnaround and the highlights and challenges identified in leading a rural school system. The voices from the eight participants give a glimpse of how turnaround occurred in their school system. Rural turnaround school systems are unique and have a context that is missing in the literature.   It is the hoped their voices will be heard and future research can continue with rural school systems. These superintendents work hard and can do a lot with a little. Rural schools need qualified leaders who know how to lead in a rural school system, which is why partnerships are very important. Throughout this study, it was determined

that rural superintendents are able to utilize and implement the eight turnaround principles as well as assist schools in getting removed from the failing school list.

References

Alabama Code of Ethics (2016). Retrieved from www.alsde.edu.

Alabama Education Quick Facts (2008). Retrieved from www.alsde.edu.

Alabama Media Group (2015). Alabama release new list of 76 failing schools.

     http://blog.al.com/wire/2014/01/alabama_releases_new_list_of_7.html

Alabama Media Group (2016). Should all Alabama school superintendents be appointed?

     Proposal would end elections, www.al.com, Retrieved on April 11, 2008, from

     http://www.alsde.edu/AllReportCards/06 Annual Report.pdf

Alabama State Department of Education. (2008). Annual report 2005–2006. Montgomery, AL:

     Author. Retrieved from www.alsde.edu

Alabama State Department of Education Superintendents (2016). Retrieved from

     www.alsde.edu.

Alsbury, T. L. (2008). School board member and superintendent turnover and the influence on

     student achievement: An application of the dissatisfaction theory. *Leadership and Policy*

     in Schools, 7(2), 202-229.

Arnold, M.L., Newman, J H., Gaddy, B. B., & Dean, C. B. (2005). A look at the condition of

     rural education research: Setting a direction for future research. *Journal of research in*

     Rural Education, 20(6), 20-6.

Autti, O. & Hyry-Beihammer, E.K. (2014). School closures in rural finish communities. *Journal*

     of Research in Rural Education, 29(1), 1-17.

Balitewicz, T. (2015). *Principal leadership in high-achieving, high-poverty schools.* (Doctoral

     dissertation) Retrieved from ProQuest. (Order No. 3700587).

Barley, Z. & Brigham, N. (2008). Preparing teachers to teach in rural schools. *Washington, DC: US Department of Education.*

Baser, Z., & Karaman, A. C. (2015). Enacting the national curriculum in a rural elementary school: A qualitative study of a beginning language teacher's experiences. *Ilkogretim Online, 14*(1), 118-132. doi:10.17051/io.2015.67314.

Bauer, S. & Brazer, S. (2012). *Using research to lead school improvement: Turning evidence into action.* Sage Publications, California.

Bell. S. & Pirtle, S. (2012). Transforming low-performing rural schools. *Texas Comprehensive Center Briefing Paper. Austin, TX: Texas Comprehensive Center.* Retrieved from http://www.sedl.org/txcc/resources/briefs/number_10/Transformin_Low_Performing_Rura_Schools.pdf.

Berg, B. L., & Lune, H. (2012). *Qualitative Research Methods for Social Sciences*. Boston, MA: Pearson.

Bernard, H.R., & Ryan, G.W. (2010). *Analyzing Qualitative Data: Systematic Approaches.* Los Angeles, CA: SAGE.

Bogdan, R. & Biklen, S. (2007). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theories and methods,* (5th ed.). Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

Bolman and Deal (1997). School leadership: Some key ideas. Retrieved from http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13632439770140

Boring, M.R. (2003). *Superintendent Search.* Washington State School Directors Association, Olympia, WA.

Bottoms, G. & O'Neill, K. (2001). *Preparing a New Breed of School Principals: It's Time for Action.* Southern Regional Education Board.

141

Brendle, J. (2015). A survey of response to intervention team members' effective practices in

      rural elementary schools. *Rural Special Education Quarterly, 34*(2), 3-8.

Brooks-Young, S. (2007). Help Wanted. *T.H.E. Journal, 34*(10), 45-46.

Brouillette, J.E. (2009). *The Profiles, Patterns, and Practices of Females Superintendents in*

      Alabama's Public School Systems. (Doctoral dissertation) Retrieved from ProQuest

      (Order No. 3480200).

Brouwers, A., & Tomic, W. (2000). A longitudinal study of teacher burnout and perceived self-

      efficacy in classroom management. *Teaching and Teacher education, 16*(2), 239-253.

Brown, A.A., & Green, R.L. (2014). Practices used by nationally blue ribbon award winning

      principals to improve student achievement in high-poverty schools. *National Forum of*

      Applied Educational Research Journal, 27(1/2), 2-18.

Browne-Ferrigno, T. & Maynard, B. (2005). Meeting the learning needs of students: A rural

      high-need school district's systemic leadership development initiative. *Rural Educator,*

      26(3), 5-18.

Buchanan, G.S. (2013). *Mentoring programs for newly appointed public school superintendents:*

      An analysis of the need for ethical decision-making as a critical component. (Doctoral

      dissertation) Retrieved from ProQuest (Order No. 3596639).

Budge, K. (2006). Rural leaders, rural places: Problem, privilege, and possibility. *Journal of*

      Research in Rural Education, 21(13), 1-10.

Cambron-McCabe, N., & McCarthy, M.M. (2005). Educating School Leaders for Social Justice.

      Educational Policy, 19(1), 201-222.

Canales, M.T., Tejeda-Delgado, C., & Slate, J.R. (2008). Leadership behaviors of superintendent/principals in small, rural school districts in Texas. *Rural Educator, 29*(3), 1-7.

Cawelti, G. & Protheroe, N. (2001). *High student achievement: How six school districts changed into high-performance systems.* Arlington, VA: Educational Research Service.

Connell, P. H., Cobia, F. J., & Hodge, P. H. (2015). Women's Journey to the School Superintendency. *Alabama Journal of Educational Leadership, 2*(1), 37-63.

Connelly, F., & Clandinin, J. (1990). Stories of experiences and narrative inquiry. *Educational Researcher, 19*(5), 2-14.

Copeland, J.D. (2013). One head – many hats: Expectations of a rural superintendent. *Qualitative Report, 18*(39), 1.

Creswell, J. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design.* (3rd ed.) Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

De la Torre, M., Allensworth, E., Jagesic, S., Sebastian, J., Salmonowicz, M., Meyers, C., & Gerdeman, R. D. (2013). *Turning around Low-Performing Schools in Chicago.* Research Report, The University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago school research.

DeCuir-Gunby, J., Marshall, P., & McCulloch, A. (2011). Developing and using a codebook for the analysis of interview data: An example from a professional development research project. *Field Methods, 23*(2), 136-155.

Digest of Educational Statistics (2001). Retrieved from https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2002/2002130.pdf.

Dodman, S. (2014). A vivid illustration of leadership: Principal's actions propel struggling school's turnaround. *Journal of Staff Development, 35*(1), 56-58.

Duke, D. (2006, June). What we know and don't know about improving low-performing schools. *Phi Delta Kappan, 57*(10), 728-734.

Edwards, M. E. (2006). *The modern school superintendent: An overview of the role and responsibilities in the 21st century*. iUniverse.

Epper, R. & Bates, T. (2001). *Teaching faculty how to use technology: Best practices from leading institutions*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group.

Executive Office of the President (2015). *Every student succeeds act: A progress report on elementary and secondary education.* Retrieved from the web address: https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/whitehouse.gov/files/documents/ESSA_Progress_Report.pdf

Fairbanks-Schutz, J. M. (2010, January 1). *The Superintendent Beliefs and Leadership Practices in a School District that Has Successfully Increased the Achievement of Traditionally Marginalized Students.* (Doctoral dissertation) Retrieved from ProQuest (Order No. 3421935).

Forner, M., Bierlein-Palmer, L., & Reeves, P. (2012). Leadership practices of effective rural superintendents: Connections to waters and Marzano's leadership correlates. *Journal of Research in Rural Education, 27*(8), 1-13.

Fusarelli, B., & Militello, M. (2012). Racing to the top with leaders in rural, high poverty schools. *Planning & Changing, 43*(1/2), 46-56.

Gittisriboongul, P. (2013). *A Study of California public school district superintendents and their implementation of 21st century skills.* (Doctoral dissertation) Retrieved from ProQuest (Order No. 3609887).

Glenn, J. & Hickey, W. (2009). The superintendent search: Who are the consultants and what are the barriers. *International Journal of Educational Leadership Preparation, 4*(3), 1-10.

Gorman, L. (2012). CAD/CAM, creativity, and discipline lead to turnaround school success. *Tech Directions, 71*(7), 16-19.

Grissom, J. A. & Loeb, S. (2011). Triangulating principal effectiveness how perspectives of parents, teachers, and assistant principals identify the central importance of managerial skills. American Educational Research Journal, 48(5), 1091-1123.

Harmon, H. L. (2001). *Attracting and Retaining Teachers in Rural Areas.* Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Association of College for Teacher Education, Dallas, TX.

Harrington-Lueker, D. (2008). Rookies no more. *School Administrator, 65*(11), 22-24.

Hatch, T., & Roegman, R. (2012). Out of Isolation: Superintendents Band Together to Improve Instruction and Equity in Their Districts. *Journal of Staff Development, 33*(6), 37-41.

Herman, R., Dawson, P., Dee, T., Greene, J., Maynard, R., Redding, S., & Darwin, M. (2008). Turning around Chronically Low-Performing Schools. IES Practice Guide. NCEE 2008-4020. *National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance.*

Hoff, D. L., & Mitchell, S. N. (2008). In search of leaders: Gender factors in school administration. *Advancing Females in Leadership, 27*.

Howell, J., Bowen, D., Dorfman, P., Kerr, S. Podsakoff, P. (1990). Substitutes for leadership: Effective alternatives to ineffective leadership. *Organizational Dynamics, 19*(1), 21-38.

Howley, A., & Howley, C. B. (2005). High-Quality Teaching: Providing for Rural Teachers' Professional Development. *Rural Educator, 26*(2), 1-5.

Huang, L. L. (2012, January 1). *Strategies for Relationship and Trust Building by Successful Superintendents: A Case Study.* (Doctoral dissertation) Retrieved from ProQuest (Order No. 3514186).

Hulbert, Therriault, & Le Floch (2008). AIR research brief. Retrieved from http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED502719.pdf

Indiana Department of Education (2016). Eight Turnaround Principles. Retrieved from https://www.doe.in.gov.

Iverson, A., Thomas, A. & Grimes, J. (2002). Best practice in problem-solving team structure and process. In A. Thomas & J. Grimes (Eds.), *Best practices in school psychology IV*, Vols. 1-2, (pp. 657-669). Washington, DC, US: National Association of School Psychologists.

Jacob, B. A. (2007). The challenges of staffing urban schools with effective teachers. *Future of Children, 17*(1), 129-153.

Jenkins, C. (2007). Considering the community: How one rural superintendent perceives community values and their effect on decision-making. *Rural Educator, 28*(3), 28-32.

Johnson, J., Showalter, D., Kein, R. & Lester, C. (2014). Why rural matters: The condition of rural education in the fifty states. *A report of the Rural School and Community Trust*, Washington, DC.

Johnson, J., Strange, M., & Madden, K. (2010). The rural dropout problem: An invisible achievement gap. *A report of the Rural School and Community Trust,* Washington, DC.

Jones, J. (2004). *Management skills in schools: A resource for school leaders.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Paul Chapman Educational Publishing.

Katz, R. L. (2009). *Skills of an effective administrator.* Harvard Business Review Press.

Key, L. (2010). State Education Finance and Governance Profile: Alabama. *Peabody Journal of Education, 85*(1), 49-53.

Kowalski, T.J. (2005). *The school superintendent: Theory, practice, and cases*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Kowalski, J. & Oates, A. (1993). The evolving role of superintendents in school-based management. *Journal of school leadership, 3*(4), 380-90.

Kowalski, T.J., McCord, R S., Peterson, G.J., Young, P.I., & Ellerson, N.M. (2010). *The American school superintendent: 2010 Decennial study.* Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Education.

Kruse, S. D. (2001). Creating communities of reform: Continuous improvement planning teams. *Journal of Educational Administration, 3*9(4), 359-383.

Lachlan-Haché, J., Naik, M., & Casserly, M. (2012). *The school improvement grant rollout in America's great city schools: school improvement grants.* Washington, DC: Council of the Great City Schools.

Lamkin, M. L. (2006). Challenges and changes faced by rural superintendents. *Rural Educator, 28*(1), 17-24.

Landry, C. L. (2009, January 1). *Leadership frame preferences of elected and appointed school district superintendents in Alabama, Florida, and Mississippi.* (Doctoral dissertation) Retrieved from ProQuest (Order No. 3400275).

Lawless, K. A., & Pellegrino, J. W. (2007). Professional development in integrating technology into teaching and learning: Knowns, unknowns, and ways to pursue better questions and answers. *Review of Educational Research, 77*(4), 575-614.

Le Floch, K. C., Birman, B., O'Day, J., Hurlburt, S., Mercado-Garcia, D., Goff, R., … & Angus, M.H. (2014). Case Studies of Schools Receiving School Improvement Grants: Findings after the First Year of Implementation. NCEE 2014-4015. *National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance.*

Lewis, T., Rice, M., & Rice, R. J. (2011). Superintendents' Beliefs and Behaviors regarding Instructional Leadership Standards Reform. *International Journal of Educational Leadership Preparation, 6*(1).

Mann, R. S. (2014). *Leadership practices: Perceptions of principals and teachers of a small rural school district in western North Carolina.* Gardner-Webb University.

Maranto, R., & Shuls, J. V. (2012). How do we get them on the farm? Efforts to improve rural teacher recruitment and retention in Arkansas. *Rural Educator, 34*(1).

Marrapodi, M., & Beard, O. (2013). A powerful partnership: Principal and external provider lead the turnaround at a low-performing urban school. *Journal of Staff Development, 34*(2), 50-54.

Maxwell, G. M., Huggins, K. S., & Scheurich, J. J. (2010). How one historically underperforming rural and highly diverse high school achieved a successful turnaround. *Planning and Changing, 41*(3-4), 161-186.

Maxwell, G. M., Locke, L. A., & Scheurich, J. J. (2013). Case Study of Three Rural Texas Superintendents as Equity Oriented Change Agents. *Qualitative Report, 18*(11), 1-23.

Murphy, J. and Meyers, C. (2003). Turning around failing schools: Leadership lessons from the organizational sciences, First Edition, p. 1-134. Corwin Press, California.

McGriff, T. H., Bishop, H., & Rice, M. (1997). *Work-Related Behaviors of Elected and Appointed Local Superintendents of Education in the State of Alabama.* Paper presented

at the Annual Meeting of the Mid-South Educational Research Association, Memphis, TN.

McLaughlin, M. & Talbert, J. (2003). *Reforming Districts: How Districts Support School Reform. A Research Report. Document R-03-6.* Seattle, WA: Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy.

Merriam, S. & Tisdell, E. (2016). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* (4th ed.). San Francisco, CA: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Merriam, S. B. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Meyers, C. & Murphy, J. (2007, September). Turning around failing school: An analysis. *Journal of School Leadership, 17*(5), 631-659.

Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook.* Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.

Miller, B. (1995). *The role of rural schools in community development: Policy issues and implications.* Portland, OR: Northwest Regional Lab, Rural Education Program.

Miller-Whitehead, M. (2003). Surviving the Superintendency: What District and State Education Report Cards Can Tell Us.

Mintrop, H., & Trujillo, T. (2005). *Corrective action in low performing schools: Lessons for No Child Left Behind implementations from the state and district strategies in first-generation accountability systems.* Los Angeles, CA: National Center for Research on Evaluation Standards and Student Testing.

Odum, R. D. (2010). *The lived experiences of female superintendents in Alabama, Florida, and Georgia.* (Doctoral dissertation) Georgia State University. Retrieved from Electronic Theses & Dissertations, 360.

Porch, S. & Protheroe, N. (2003). *School Board-Superintendent Relations in Support of High Student Achievement.* The Informed Educator Series. Arlington, VA: Educational Research Service.

Promisee-Bynum, Y. (2010). *The Impact of Mentoring Relationships and Influences on the Career of Females Superintendents of Alabama.* (Doctoral dissertation). ProQuest (Order No. 3430603).

Ravitch, D. (2010). *The death and life of the great American school system*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

Reform Support Network (2014). Strategies for community engagement in school turnaround. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from http://www2.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/ implementation-support-unit/tech-assist/strategies-for-community-engagement-in-school-turnaround.pdf

Rosenberg, S. (2011). *The challenges for implementing school improvement grant models in rural high schools.* Alliance for Excellence Education, Duke University.

Rosenberg, L., Christianson, M. D., Angus, M. H., Rosenthal, E. (2014). A focused look at rural schools receiving school improvement grants. NCEE Evaluation Brief. NCEE 2014-4013. *National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance.*

Rowley (2002). Using case studies in research. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/41674218_Using_Case_Studies_in_Research.

Rubin, B. C., Hayes, B., & Benson, K. (2009). It's the worst place to live": Urban youth and the challenge of school-based civic learning. *Theory into Practice, 48*(3), 213-221.

Schuh, J. & Herington, C. (1990). *Electing versus appointing district superintendents of schools.* Research Park, NC: Southeastern Educational Improvement Lab.

Skolits, G., Lashley, T., & King, P. (2003). *The sustainability of gear up project initiatives in east Tennessee middle schools: A study of the residual impacts of the university of Tennessee gear up partnership.* Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Mid-South Educational Research Association, Biloxi, MS.

Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond (2001). Investigating School Leadership Practice: A Distributed Perspective Retrieved from http://www.distributedleadership.org/assets/2001.-spillane%2C-halverson%2C-diamond.-investigating-school-leadership-practice-(er).pdf.

Stake, R. E. (1995). *The Art of Case Study Research.* Thousand Oaks: SAGE.

Stake, R. E. (2004). Qualitative Case Studies. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.) *Strategies of qualitative* inquiry (pp. 119-149). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Stake, R. E. (2006). *Multiple Case Study Analysis.* New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Stelmach, B. L. (2011). A synthesis of international rural education issues and responses. *Rural Educator, 32*(2), 32-42.

Stump, E. K. (2015). *Students beating the odds: A multilevel analysis of factors relating to academic achievement among children living in persistent poverty.* (Doctoral dissertation) Retrieved from ProQuest (Order No. 3704270).

Synyard, J. A. (2010). *What strategies do urban superintendents utilize to address global challenges in the implementation of 21st century skills.* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation) University of Southern California.

Taylor, J., Stecher, B., O'Day, J., Naftel, S., & Le Floch, K. C. (2010). State and Local

      Implementation of the "No Child Left Behind Act". Volume IX--Accountability under

      "NCLB": Final Report. US Department of Education.

Tilly, W. D. (2008). The evolution of school psychology to science-based practice: Problem

      solving and the three-tiered model. *Best practices in school psychology V*(1), 17-36.

U.S. Census Bureau (2016). Retrieved from https://www.census.gov/topics/population.html.

U.S. Department of Education. (2012). *Turning around the lowest-performing schools*.

      Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/guid/esea-

      flexibility/resources/turn- around.pdf

U.S. Department of Education (2015). *Profiles of school turnaround strategies in selected sites*.

      Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from

      http://www2.ed.gov/programs/sif/sigprofiles/index.html

Van Tuyle, V., & Reeves, A. (2014). "Forgottonia"? The status of rural Schools in Illinois'

      principal preparation reform. *International Journal of Educational Leadership*

      Preparation, 9(2), 111-127.

Versland, T. M. (2013). Principal efficacy: Implications for rural "grow your own" leadership

      programs. *Rural Educator, 35*(1).

Wallace Foundation. (2012). *The school principal as leader: Guiding schools to better teaching*

      and learning. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from

      http://www.wallacefoundation.org

Wallin, D. C., & Newton, P. (2014). Teaching principals in small rural schools: "My cup

      overfloweth." *Alberta Journal of Educational Research, 60*(4), 708-725.

Wilson, J. S. (2011). *A descriptive study of superintendents' and school board members' perceptions of the superintendent's leadership in rural districts in three Mid-Atlantic States*. (Doctoral dissertation) ProQuest (Order No. 3499895).

Winand, B. L., & Edlefson, C. (2008). Rural community input to school district strategic planning: An action research model using focus groups. *Rural Educator, 30*(1), 32-38.

Yin, Robert K. (2013). *Case study research: Design and methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Appendix A

Institutional Review Board

AUBURN
UNIVERSITY

(Note: DO NOT SIGN THIS DOCUMENT UNLESS AN IRB APPROVAL STAMP WITH CURRENT
DATES HAS BEEN APPLIED TO THIS DOCUMENT.)

INFORMED CONSENT
for a Research Study entitled
"A Descriptive Case Study of Rural Turnaround Superintendents: What matters most in
sustaining turnaround?"

You are invited to participate in a research study to describe how rural
superintendents utilize the eight turnaround principles to foster and sustain improvement
in the school district organization. The study is being conducted by Bonnie Sullivan,
Doctoral student, under the direction of Dr. Ellen Reames, Associate Professor, in the
Auburn University Department of Educational Foundations, Leadership, and
Technology. You were selected as a possible participant because you are serving as a
rural superintendent and are age 19 or older.

What will be involved if you participate? If you decide to participate in this research
study, you will be asked to answer interview questions about your experiences as a rural
superintendent with implementing the eight turnaround principles in your school system.
The interview process will be a guided interview based on an arranged location and an
established format. Your anonymity will be protected. The interview will be recorded by
using a digital recorder, transcribed, and each recording will be coded. The recording
will be heard only by the principal investigator and the transcriber. Your total time
commitment will be approximately one hour.

Are there any risks or discomforts? There are no foreseen risks associated with this
study. All information will be kept confidential. Information reported in an anonymous
manner and no identifiable information will be used. All information collected in this
study will be kept anonymous.

Are there any benefits to yourself or others? If you participate in this study, you can
expect to contribute to the knowledge of school system turnaround as a superintendent,
which will benefit future superintendents and educational research.

Will you receive compensation for participating? If you decide to participate, there
will be no compensation given.

Are there any costs? If you decide to participate, there is no associated cost.

If you change your mind about participating, you can withdraw at any time during
the study. Your participation is completely voluntary. If you choose to withdraw, your
data can be withdrawn as long as it is identifiable. Your decision about whether or not to
participate or to stop participating will not jeopardize your future relations with Auburn
University, the Department of Educational Foundations Leadership and Technology.

Participant's initials _____   Page 1 of 2

The Auburn University Institutional
Review Board has approved this
Document for use from
04/13/2017   to   04/12/2018
Protocol #   17-023 EP 1704

155

AUBURN
UNIVERSITY

Your privacy will be protected. Any information obtained in connection with this study will remain confidential. All information collected in this research study will remain anonymous. There will be no identification tags attached to any participant of this study. Furthermore, in addition to the data remaining confidential by the researcher, as a participant one must agree not to speak of any information attained in this study. The information found in this research study can be published in a professional journal, book and/or presented at a professional conference/meeting. By consenting to participate in this study you give the researcher permission to maintain transcripts indefinitely for future research opportunities stated above. All information collected in this research study will remain anonymous.

If you have questions about this study, *please ask them now or contact* Bonnie Sullivan at 334-430-2263 or via email BGS0008@auburn.edu. You may also contact Dr. Ellen Reames at 706-573-7563. A copy of this document will be given to you to keep.

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Auburn University Office of Research Compliance or the Institutional Review Board by phone (334)-844-5966 or email at IRBadmin@auburn.edu or IRBChair@auburn.edu.

HAVING READ THE INFORMATION PROVIDED, YOU MUST DECIDE WHETHER OR NOT YOU WISH TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY. YOUR SIGNATURE INDICATES YOUR WILLINGNESS TO PARTICIPATE.

4036 HALEY CENTER

AUBURN, AL 36849-5221

_____   _____
Participants signature   Date   Investigator obtaining consent   Date

TELEPHONE:

334-844-4460

_____   _____
      Printed Name   Printed Name

FAX

334-844-3072

                                        _____
                                        Co-Investigator   Date

                                        _____
                                        Printed Name

www.auburn.edu

Page 2 of 2

End of Year Status Report

1. School Leadership <div style="float:right">#DIV/0!</div>

Evidence indicates the principal has the ability to lead the turnaround effort.

1.1	Review the performance of the current principal, and replace the principal if such a change is necessary to ensure effective leadership	
1.2	Demontrates to the SEA that the current principal has a track record in improving achievement and has the ability to lead the turnaround effort.	
1.3	Principal has operational flexibility in the areas of scheduling, staff, curriculum, and budget.	

2. School Climate and Culture <div style="float:right">#DIV/0!</div>

Establish a school environment that supports the social, emotional, and learning needs of all students.

2.1	Implements a culturally responsive support system to improve safety, discipline, and attendance.	
2.2	Impements a culturally responsive support system to improve non-academic factors such as social, emotional, and health needs of all students.	

3. Effective Instruction <div style="float:right">#DIV/0!</div>

Ensure that teachers utilize research-based, rigorous, and effective instruction to meet the needs of all students.

3.1	Implements rigorous research-based instruction aligned with CCRS.	
3.2	Implements differentiated instruction for all students based on individual needs.	

4. Curriculum, Assessment, and Intervention <div style="float:right">#DIV/0!</div>

Ensure that teachers have the foundational documents and instructional materials needed to teach the rigorous college and career ready state standards.

4.1	Curriculum, resources, and assessments are aligned with CCRS.	
4.2	Implements research-based instructional strategies.	
4.3	Uses formative assessments to guide instruction.	
4.4	Provides appropriate interventions to meet the needs of all students.	

157

	Levels of Implementation			
	1-In Need of Support	2-Close	3-Ready	4-Exceeding

5. Effective Staffing	#DIV/0!

Develop skills to better recruit, retain, and develop effective teachers.

5.1	Review the quality of all staff and retained only those who are determined to be effective and have the ability to be successful in the turnaround effort and prevent ineffective teachers from transferring to these schools.	
5.2	Provide job-embedded, ongoing professional development informed by the teacher evaluation and support systems and ties to teacher and student needs.	
5.3	Provide the principal with the operational flexibility in the areas of scheduling, staff, curriculum, and budget.	

6. Enabling the Effective Use of Data	2.3

Ensure the school-wide use of data focused on improving teaching and learning.

6.1	Utilize data to make instructional and curricular decisions.	2
6.2	Use data to identify and prioritize needs.	2
6.3	Provide PD on analyzing and using data to inform instruction and provide collaborative time for review and use of data.	3

7. Effective Use of Time	#DIV/0!

Redesign time to better meet student and teacher learning

7.1	Design and/or redesign to meet individual student needs and increase time for learning.	
7.2	Provide time for teacher collaboration focused on improving teaching and learning.	

8. Effective Family and Community Engagement	#DIV/0!

Hold community meetings to review school performance, collect perception surveys, and engage families and the larger community in the school learning process with a focus on academic achievement for all students.

8.1	Hold community meetings to review school performance.	
8.2	Discuss the school interventions to be implemented.	
8.3	Complete school improvement plans in line with the intervention model.	
8.4	Collect perception surveys.	
8.5	Engage parents, family, and community in the school learning process with a focus on academic achievement for all students.	

Comments

Leadership has focused on data to close the gap for the special education group. They have used the PST process to develop individualized support. The team is analyzing STAR data by teacher groups to identify growth in reading and math. Next step: Leadership will continue to use the data process to address gaps.

What data do you wish you had to help facilitates decisions? (Data, Curriculum, Leadership, School Culture and Climate, Assessment/Intervention Systems)

7. What is hierarchy of the central office look like in your school system? – Flow Chart

8. How do you recruit teachers and principals to your school system? How do you get them to stay? (Leadership, School Culture and Climate, Staffing Practices)

9. Do you have a mentoring relationship with someone who provides advice in time of discouragement or celebrations? How do you keep a trusting relationship with your mentor? What helps you decide not to give up on your goals?

10. Are there family and community engagement opportunities for your school system? What are the internal and external partnerships to engage the community for your school system? How do you form partnerships with parents, community – what have you done and how can you improve? (Family Community Engagement)

11. Is there anything else that should be mentioned concerning leadership practices for school superintendents who are working in rural high poverty turnaround systems?