THE INTERSECTION OF LEADERSHIP FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT AND SCHOOL CLIMATE: A CASE STUDY OF ONE ADMINISTRATIVE TEAM'S JOURNEY TO BUILD AN EFFECTIVE AND EQUITABLE SCHOOL

by

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ABSTRACT

Educational leaders have insisted that successful schools do more than meet the academic needs of students but also address the social, emotional, and psychological health of their student body. School leaders in low-performing institutions may view the pressure to boost academic achievement that comes from federal and state mandates and the push for schools to support whole-child development as competing agendas. However, school climate literature paints a different picture. Climate researchers insist that, if school leaders assess and address school climate needs, they can boost academic achievement and support positive social, emotional, and psychological development. There is a rich body of literature indicating the connection between school climate and student academic, social, and psychological well-being; however, the vast majority of these studies are quantitative and rely on correlational analyses. In 2007, the National School Climate Council asserted that they could not locate any systemic studies of school climate improvement. The purpose of this case study was to explore how the administration at one urban secondary school that underwent a state-mandated school improvement process addressed school climate. The school site central to this study was locally and nationally recognized for gains in student academic achievement. Data were collected via in-depth interviews with administration, district leaders, and educators as well as focus group interviews with teachers, staff members, and students. School

improvement documents were also examined. Findings indicate that leadership efforts to ensure commitment to the improvement work, to enact meaningful instructional leadership practices, and to repair school structures and systems supported the school improvement process and addressed school climate.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This case study sought to retrospectively explore how one secondary school administrative team worked to enact school change within the context of a state-mandated school improvement effort and how these change efforts also attended to school climate. It is anticipated that the knowledge produced by this investigation can offer new insights into social justice leadership efforts for school turnaround. The coming sections of this chapter describe the mission of the K–12 public education system, a mission that frames the study. Additionally, the chapter will present an explanation of state-mandated improvement, an explanation of the urban school, and the connection that can be made between school improvement and school climate. Following this is the problem statement, the statement of purpose, and research questions. This chapter concludes with a summary of information presented.

Background and Context

Contrary to what some may believe, the mission of the K–12 public education system in the United States is not simply to ensure that students are academically capable. Schools are to support efforts that promote student development in areas of critical thinking, positive relationship development, and physical health. Schools have met their responsibility in aiding development when all students develop a solid sense of self-worth and possess personal identity and direction (Cohen, 2006; Levine, 2007;

Pittman, Irby, Tolman, Yohalem, & Ferber, 2011). Diamond (2010) eloquently stated, "A human being is not just an intellect or just a body but also emotional and social. We ignore any of those dimensions at our peril in raising and educating children" (p. 781). In other words, for cognitive growth to occur, one could not ignore the need for whole-child development (Diamond, 2010).

The idea of schools as a force for whole-child development is not new. In 1837, Horace Mann stated that schools are accountable for the academic, physical, psychological, and social health of students (Rothstein & Jacobsen, 2006). John Dewey (1902) discussed the need for schools to create citizens where citizenship is discussed more dynamically than simply having an informed voting population. Citizens, according to Dewey, should have the ability to work alongside and develop relationships with diverse populations in an increasingly diverse local and national community. Dewey argued that to achieve this goal, the school would not be able to simply focus on instruction but would need to work to end intolerance and violence while promoting life-long learning (Dewey, 1902). The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Children in 1948 called for governments to guarantee that each child has access to schools that value the child's dignity and demonstrate this value by "creating a climate of tolerance, respect, and appreciation for human differences and bar tolerance of bullying" and harmful disciplinary practices (National School Climate Council, 2007, p. 10). Finally, in 2010, the US Department of Education indicated that for equity to truly occur in schools, academic supports as well as any additional student supports including social-emotional and psychological would have to be provided in schools (The Equity and Excellence Commission, 2010).

Mandated School Improvement

Educational leaders are calling for schools to be responsive to needs of the whole-child (Diamond, 2010; National School Climate Council, 2007; The Equity and Excellence Commission, 2010) at a time when many urban Title I schools, and more specifically school leaders, are pushed to increase the academic success of students. In 2001, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) called for low-performing schools to increase student academic progress (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). The pressure affiliated with this call is intensified in Title I schools, or schools where a minimum of 35% of students are from low-income families, as these schools receive additional federal funding to meet the needs of students ("Title I, Part A Program," 2014). Persistently low-performing Title I schools that fail to demonstrate student academic progress on standardized exams are labeled as such and can be closed or reconstituted. It is important to note that in secondary schools, performance ratings are also linked to graduation rates (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).

Under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), each state is allowed to ask for flexibility or additional time for low-performing schools to meet student achievement requirements if the schools undergo a rigorous improvement process. As a component of the ESEA waiver in Utah, low-performing schools, called Focus or Priority Schools, are required to undergo state-mandated and comprehensive improvement efforts that result in student academic improvement. If the improvement effort fails, schools face sanctions such as school closure or restructuring where members of the faculty and/or administration can be replaced (Utah State Board of Education, 2012). It is important to note that low-performing Title I schools are disproportionately urban (Editorial Projects in Education Research Center, 2004). This is not necessarily

surprising as research on school achievement illustrates that standardized test achievement (Berliner, 2007; Lleras, 2008; C. Marshall & Oliva, 2010) and graduation rates (Dillon, 2009; Orfield, 2004; Sable, Plotts, & Mitchell, 2010) are significantly lower in urban schools than their suburban counterparts.

Urban Schools in the United States

It is important to note that the term urban, when used in educational research and social commentary, is more of "a social or cultural construct used to describe certain people and places" (Noguera, 2003, p. 23). Urban has historically been defined more generally as a city or town (in Merriam-Webster.com, 2014). Urban has now become the way to describe places in cities that are poor and non-White (Noguera, 2004). Urban schools in the United States serve 11.1 million students in 16,905 schools. Students in urban school settings are more likely to come from historically marginalized populations. Sixty-three percent of urban school students are Hispanic or Black. Fifty-six percent of students in urban schools are eligible for free and reduced lunch (Sable et al., 2010). This demographic description is in direct contrast to other school settings. When urban schools are compared to suburban and rural districts, one notes that there is greater ethnic or racial diversity, larger immigrant populations, increased rates of student mobility, and greater poverty rates in urban schools (Kincheloe, 2004; Steinberg, 2010).

Social Justice Leadership for School Improvement

Social justice leaders or administrators view the ethnic, cultural, and linguistic diversity at urban schools as assets to the learning experience (Bogotch, 2002; K. M. Brown, 2004; Frattura & Capper, 2007; C. Marshall & Oliva, 2010). Operating with the belief that all students can achieve at high levels, such leaders work to alter low-

performing schools into places that promote educational equity and success for each individual (G. Theoharis, 2007). While NCLB may have politically placed pressure on these leaders, these leaders are innately driven to improve outcomes for all students, but especially students from historically marginalized populations (Bogotch, 2002; K. M. Brown, 2004; Frattura & Capper, 2007; C. Marshall & Oliva, 2010).

Climate as a Possible Solution

Justice-driven leaders may view the pressure to boost academic achievement that comes from federal and state mandates and the push for schools to support whole-child development (Diamond, 2010; National School Climate Council, 2007; The Equity and Excellence Commission, 2010) as competing agendas. However, school climate literature, more fully explored in Chapter 2, paints a different picture. Climate researchers express that addressing school climate needs will ensure that students have access to high quality academic experiences and strong social relationships with adults and students in environments that are physically, socially, and emotionally safe (C. S. Anderson, 1982; Cohen, 2006; National School Climate Council, 2007). The school climate agenda, therefore, is not simply seen as one that supports academic success but the whole child (Cohen, 2007).

Recent research has indicated that addressing school climate can moderate the effect of social and psychological struggles and in turn allow students to achieve academically (Lopez et al., 2012; Marchant, Paulson, & Rothlisberg, 2001; Mattison & Aber, 2007; Reyes et al., 2012; Suldo, Riley, & Shaffer, 2006; Wang & Dishion, 2012). This body of research identified that, in urban secondary schools, addressing climate domains such as safety, relationships, connectedness, teaching and learning, and school

environment positively impacted academic achievement after controlling for race, socio-economic status, and urbanicity or the degree to which a geographical area is urban. It can be argued then that low-performing secondary urban schools can meet both the mission of educating the whole child and the requirements of school academic improvement through the creation of positive school climates. Finding that climate positively impacts whole-child development is meaningful but such findings have not yet led to a research-based discussion regarding how school leadership efforts to alter or increase the effectiveness of schools related to school climate or climate domains (Finnigan & Stewart, 2009; Leithwood, Harris, & Strauss, 2010; National School Climate Council, 2007; Orr, Berg, Shore, & Meier, 2008; Pepper & Thomas, 2002; Shore, 1995).

Statement of the Problem

Under the pressures of the school improvement process, leaders are asked to recreate low-performing schools into organizations that are highly effective in meeting the academic needs of students (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). A body of educational literature argues that for a school to be successful, it must develop the whole-child (Diamond, 2010; National School Climate Council, 2007; The Equity and Excellence Commission, 2010). School climate researchers insist that addressing school climate could be the way in which to meet both demands (Cohen, 2006; Cohen & Geier, 2010; MacNeil, Prater, & Busch, 2009; Reyes et al., 2012). While addressing school climate during the school improvement process may then become a goal, little research exists that describes how to do so (National School Climate Council, 2007).

Research, presented more deeply in the literature review, provides leaders with ways to measure or assess school climate (Freiberg, 1998; Freiberg, 1999; Hoy & Tarter,

1996; MacNeil et al., 2009). There is also a rich body of literature indicating the connection between school climate and student academic, social, and psychological well-being. Unfortunately, we lack a research base describing what leaders should do with school climate data (National School Climate Council, 2007). In 2007, the National School Climate Council asserted that they could not locate any systemic studies of school climate improvement. Moreover, while turnaround literature insists that addressing climate during the improvement process is important, there are few studies explaining how leaders systematically addressed climate or climate domains within the school improvement process (Day, Hopkins, Harris, & Ahtaridou, 2009; Leithwood et al., 2010; Nor & Roslan, 2009; Sizemore, 1988). For leaders wishing to leverage climate as a means of addressing school improvement, they have little information to guide them.

Purpose Statement

A review of literature, which will be discussed in Chapter 2, indicates that a lack of evidence-based research exists regarding systemic school climate change (National School Climate Council, 2007). Moreover, there is little research indicating how school leaders worked within the context of school improvement to specifically address each school climate domain (Brand, Felner, Shim, Seitsinger, & Dumas, 2003; Edmonds, 1982; Freiberg, 1999; Huberman & Miles, 1984; McPartland, Balfanz, Jordan, & Legters, 1998; National School Climate Council, 2007). This disconnect can leave school leaders wondering how to best leverage school climate during the school improvement process.

The purpose of this case study was to retrospectively explore how the administration at one urban secondary school that underwent a state-mandated school improvement process addressed school climate. It is anticipated that identifying how one

school administrative team approached the school improvement process and how this approach addressed climate can contribute to the literature regarding leadership for school improvement.

Research Questions

Using a qualitative case study, I will explore the following:

1. What aspects of the school climate are addressed during a school's mandated improvement to raise student achievement?
2. What is the role of the leadership team in addressing school climate within a mandated school improvement to raise student achievement?

Summary

The mission or purpose of public schools in the United States is to develop the whole child. Unfortunately, many schools, especially urban secondary schools, are failing to meet the mission (Blanchett, Mumford, & Beachum, 2005; Boyer, 1983; Dillon, 2009; Esposito, 1999; Hemmings, 2012; Noguera, 2004). When schools fail to meet the academic needs of students, based on performance data, they may have to participate in a mandated school improvement process (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). The social-justice leader takes urban school failure quite personally, viewing the act of developing these schools into places of success for all students a central to their leadership mission (Theoharis, 2007). However, social justice leaders align more with the objective of educating the whole child than simply reforming the school to ensure academic success (Bogotch, 2002; Frattura & Capper, 2007; Theoharis, 2009). For social justice leaders, addressing school climate may be the answer to meeting both demands (Brand et al., 2003; Cohen & Geier, 2010; McPartland et al., 1998) yet these leaders have little

research on school climate improvement efforts (National School Climate Council, 2007) and little research on how to systemically address climate within the school improvement process (Brand, Felner, Shim, Seitsinger, & Dumas, 2003; Edmonds, 1982; Freiberg, 1999; Huberman & Miles, 1984; McPartland, Balfanz, Jordan, & Legters, 1998; National School Climate Council, 2007) that could guide their efforts. This exploratory case study hopes to contribute to the literature by examining how one school administrative team addressed climate within their mandated improvement efforts.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this case study was to retrospectively explore how the administration at one school that underwent a state-mandated school improvement process addressed school climate. Specifically, how did leadership in a school undergoing systemic change effort work to raise student achievement and address school climate and what elements of school climate were addressed during this process? The research intent grew from an extensive review of literature on school climate and justice-driven school leadership for change. In order to fully capture the gestalt of literature relevant to the research questions and the guiding framework of this study, literature will be presented in four sections. First, a description of the Ecological Framework, or the guiding frame of the study, will be provided. Second, the review will describe school climate and the manners in which school climate is measured. Third, the literature review will summarize a wealth of quantitative data that insists that school climate will increase the effectiveness of the urban secondary school in that students in more positive climates have increased academic, social, and psychological successes. Fourth, as the intent of the case study was to identify how leaders enacted improvement efforts, an explanation of the overlap between school climate, social justice leadership, and school change will be provided.

Ecological Framework

As described in the introduction, the purpose of public schools was to support whole-child development, although as a system we seem to fluctuate on our commitment to this ideal. Regarding the school as a societal social center that works to ensure academic, social, and psychological well-being of students aligns directly with the social-ecological framework. The social-ecological framework for development forces us to consider how cultural attitudes, social service, legal policies, health services, church, family, school, and peers influence the individual student's growth. A leading ecological theorist (Bronfenbrenner, 1994) explained that "ecological models encompass an evolving body of theory and research concerned with the processes and conditions that govern the lifelong course of human development in the actual environments in which human beings live" (p. 37). The entire system in which someone lives is important as it serves to support and guide their development. A person's interaction with the environment in which they live has a direct influence on their personal development (Way, 1990). Elements of the microsystem such as the school, church, family, peers, and health services are the child's reference point for learning about the world (Way, 1990). These elements can serve to nurture a child or provide the child with a scary view of the world (Swick & Williams, 2006). As a societal structure that exists in the child's microsystem, schools have direct and regular contact with the child. The school therefore has the ability, whether they choose to accept this responsibility or not, to shape whole-child development.

Swearer and Doll (2001) discussed the relationship of child development to schools considering the ecological frame. They explained that "the ecological theory presumes that simultaneous with development in language, cognition, social competence

and physical integrity, children also accommodate their immediate social and physical environment" (p. 9). Swearer and Doll can be interpreted as meaning that when or if a child struggles in any of these developmental areas, it can be seen as a reflection of the environment and not the individual child's characteristics. It is problematic when one examines the struggles of urban schools and does not look at the environmental conditions within those schools. Children are not at risk simply because they attend urban schools or because they are members of historically marginalized groups. Children are at risk because the environments of the schools are ill equipped to respond to the multiple needs of students (Johnson, 1994).

To date, research that focuses on the school as a societal institution working to develop the whole child falls in the school climate arena. Climate researchers express that addressing school climate needs will ensure that students have access to high-quality academic experiences and strong social relationships with adults and students in environments that are physically, socially, and emotionally safe (C. S. Anderson, 1982; Cohen, 2006; National School Climate Council, 2007). The school climate agenda therefore is not simply seen as one that supports academic success but the whole child (Cohen, 2007). Viewing schools with an ecological lens means you perceive schools as having a responsibility in the academic, social, and psychological success of students. Moreover, to realize whole-child development, a leader would have to pay attention to the environmental conditions of the school, the temperature of the organization (Cohen, 2006, 2007; Orpinas & Horne, 2010); the leader would have to be attentive to school climate.

School Climate

To fully understand what school climate is, or what it would mean to view school climate as a moderator of these academic, psychological, and social struggles, one must understand school climate and how school climate is assessed. To date, research that focuses on the school as a societal institution working to develop the whole child falls in the school climate arena. School climate has been of interest to researchers for decades as it is viewed as a way to enhance overall outcomes for the student body (Pallas, 1988). School climate studies have examined what particular school characteristics have impact on student success. "The focus then is not only on student background and motivational factors but also on school context and the quality of interactions among and between students and teachers as explanations of student achievement" (Haynes, Emmons, & Ben-Avie, 1997a, p. 322). School climate is a term often interchanged with words like school culture and learning environments, but these are different concepts. The study of school climate is more frequently associated with the psychology and social psychology fields (an examination of the school's health or personality) versus the study of school culture that is more associated with the anthropology and sociology fields and often more subjective (Hoy & Tarter, 1996). Here I turn to Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, and Pickeral's (2009) definition of school climate, as they explained, school climate is "the quality and character of school life...based on patterns of people's experience of school life and reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures" (as cited in Zullig, Huebner, & Patton, 2011a, p. 135).

An important detail in Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, and Pickeral's (2009) definition of climate is the use of the term "people's experience." The definition of climate

therefore does not simply involve how students or teachers experience climate; rather, this definition makes clear it is important how multiple stakeholders (teachers, students, administration, parents, and community members) feel about and experience the school institution. To best explore the holistic school experience, the concept of climate has been broken down into multiple elements. School climate is assessed and discussed using five dimensions: safety, relationships, teaching and learning, institutional and physical environment, and school connectedness (Zullig et al., 2011; Zullig, Koopman, Patton, & Ubbes, 2010). Safety refers to the feeling of being socially, emotionally, physically, and intellectually safe in your learning environment. For example, a student should not simply feel their school or classroom is free from bullying, they should also feel safe taking academic risks or asking questions without insult. The relationship domain assesses if stakeholders feel they have the ability to form positive associations with members of the school community and have the feeling that diversity is respected (Orpinas & Horne, 2010). For the school to be considered successful in this particular domain, relationships between (i.e., teacher to teacher) and amongst (i.e., student to teacher) stakeholders should be positive or healthy (C. S. Anderson, 1982; Cohen et al., 2009; Hoy & Tarter, 1996).

Teaching and learning, as an element of climate, is considered strong when all student groups are expected to learn at high levels and if classroom lessons are specifically designed to support social, emotional, civic and intellectual development (Cabello & Terrell, 1994; Freiberg, 1999; Mayer, Mitchell., Clementi, Clement-Robertson, Myatt, & Ballura, 1993; O'Reilly, 1975). While the breadth of social-emotional learning is beyond the scope of this study, researchers consider teaching and

learning for school climate stronger when educators weave academic activities with opportunities to develop stronger social-emotional skills (Cohen, 2006; Zins, Bloodworth, Weissberg, & Walberg, 2007). Moreover, in the teaching and learning domain, it is considered important that students and families do not perceive certain groups are excluded or that other groups are privileged within the school learning environment; it should not be apparent to students or parents that one demographic or ability group receives preferential treatment from the faculty or staff (Zullig et al., 2010).

Institutional or physical environment is considered positive when school spaces, resources, and scheduling are organized for greater feelings of equity as well as social, emotional, and intellectual safety. For example, honors coursework should not be restricted to demographic groups and the building would feel welcoming to all populations (Cohen, 2007; Cohen & Geier, 2010; Cohen et al., 2009; M. L. Marshall, 2004). Finally, school connectedness means students feel linked to the adults in the building and the learning process, students are excited and engaged learners whose voices are valued (Osterman, 2000; Zullig et al., 2010). More recently, added to the connectedness domain has been the opportunity for students to experience culturally relevant learning opportunities (Boateng, 1990; Brand et al., 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1992).

It is important to note that, as this study utilizes a social justice perspective, the domains of school climate were considered with respect to social justice theory (Cohen et al., 2009; Frattura & Capper, 2007; McKenzie & Skrla, 2011). For example, some school climate work has argued that for school climates to be positive in the relationship domain, the school leader must protect the school from outside voices including those of

parents and families. A more social-justice-oriented perspective of climate would require that parents and community members be authentically involved with the school (Tschannen-Moran, Parish, & DiPaola, 2006). For the purposes of this research, it was important that all stakeholders (teachers, administration, family members, students, and community members) and all demographic populations (race, religion, ethnicity, socio-economic status, etc.) have positive experiences in each domain in order for the school to have a positive climate overall. For example, if the students view school as a place where they can build relationships but parents do not feel welcome within the building, the school will not satisfy the needs of each stakeholder and would not be considered fully positive in the relationship domain.

School Climate Measurement

Several measures or ways of assessing school climate exist for leaders. There is some argument that most districts and schools fail to accurately measure climate or select measures in which only one stakeholder group (usually teachers) complete the questionnaire (Cohen et al., 2009; Zullig et al., 2010). The Comprehensive Assessment of School Environments (CASE), the Organizational Climate Index (OCI), and the Comprehensive School Climate Inventory (CSCI) are some examples of measures that request information regarding climate from multiple stakeholders while the Organizational Climate Description Questionnaire (OCDQ) and the Organizational Health Inventory (OHI) are administered to school staff exclusively.

Each measure combines various subscales that assess each domain of school climate. Each subscale is examined individually to assess school climate needs within specific domains. After examining school climate within each domain, each measure is

looked at in its entirety to provide the gestalt of school climate for that particular school. Trust, teacher-student relationships, school connectedness, perceived exclusion/ privilege, instructional management, discipline, and academic press are examples of subscales used in measures to assess specific climate domains. There is argument within school climate research community about which subscales best assess specific climate domains. This argument has resulted in much confusion. As Tschannen-Moran, Parish, and DiPaola (2006) explained, "there is a confusing multiplicity of facets and dimensions of the various school climate instruments, which has made interpretation and comparison difficult in the scholarly realm, as well as recommendations for action in the realm of practice" (p. 387). For example, the safety domain on the CASE uses a subscale titled security and maintenance while the CSCI has a subscale titled safety, and the OCI does not have a specific safety subscale but uses the subscale achievement press to determine students' academic but not physical feelings of safety.

Additionally complicating matters is how each scale views the school-community partnership. While the CASE tool assesses parent, community, and school relationships on a subscale viewing these relationships as having a positive influence on climate, the OHI views environmental influence on the school as a threat to institutional integrity (Hoy & Tarter, 1996; Tschannen-Moran et al., 2006). These arguments can make selecting an appropriate measure difficult for school leaders. However, there is some agreement amongst the field regarding school climate. All researchers agree that assessment is important. As explained by MacNeil, Prater, and Busch (2009), "diagnosing the climate or health of schools in order to capitalize on existing leadership strengths and to identify improvement priorities should be the goal of every school

principal" (p. 76). The climate measure allows the leader to truly see the holistic picture of their school and plan for how to address gaps in school climate.

The Promise of School Climate

Several studies have used climate measures to assess the relationship between school climate and student academic, social, and psychological well-being. As explained in Cohen's (2007) review of school climate research, studies indicated that positive climates can be both predictive of and associated with positive academic, social, and psychological student well-being. Using a range of quantitative literature, I will explain the connection researchers have found between school climate and the academic, social, and psychological student success.

School Climate and Academic Achievement

Researchers have worked to identify if a connection between academic achievement and school climate exists. Positive school climates have historically been linked to improved student learning and increased student motivation (Comer, 1984; Eccles et al., 1993; Freiberg, 1999; Goodenow & Grady, 1993). Too often, student academic failure is attributed to cognitive inabilities or deviant personal values. While cognitive disabilities may be present in a population of students, school climate research demonstrates that student failure is more accurately linked to a school's inability to develop a positive climate for students to exist and learn within (Haynes et al., 1997). Esposito (1999) explained that "children who attend urban schools in low-income areas consistently show the lowest academic achievement and the poorest social skill development in this country, and the schools they attend have the lowest ratings of school climate" (p. 365). Studies that examine school climate in urban schools indicate that

schools which predominantly serve minority students, as many urban schools do, often rank lower on climate and school satisfaction measures than schools serving predominantly White students (Baker, 1998; Esposito, 1999).

Schools that demonstrate high academic success for all student populations have produced stronger climate scores, as assessed by one of the climate measurements discussed in the previous section. Studies of urban elementary school climate indicate that positive school climates can support both academic and social success for a diverse student population. Closely examining 152 low-income and minority students longitudinally (kindergarten to second grade) using parent and teacher surveys of climate, student social skill rating scales, and academic competency scores, Esposito (1999) found that climate was related to school adjustment for the child and academic competency. In Ontario, Canada, researchers Parker, Grenville, and Flessa (2011) examined 11 elementary schools in low-income communities using focus groups with teachers, parents, community members, and school administration, school observations, and document analysis. Findings indicated that successful schools were those that had positive climates where care and inclusion, including inclusion of multiple stakeholder groups, were present. Successful schools did not adopt packaged climate remedies but created a caring environment where collaboration with parents and community members was conducted for the good of the students.

Heck (2000) examined Hawai'i' public schools and student achievement with data from 6,970 students in both elementary and secondary schools. Student academic achievement was assessed using the Stanford Achievement Test. Standardized achievement scores were analyzed alongside student demographic data and teacher

responses on the Effective School Survey, which assesses school climate and community relationships, using a multilevel model. Importantly, Heck asserts, "the findings of this study demonstrate a pattern of achievement advantage favoring schools with stronger educational environments [school climates] . . . after controlling for the composition of their students" (p. 538). Teachers and leaders in academically successful schools focused on high expectations for all learners, student safety, teacher caring, and home-school relationships so rigorously that they were able to produce student academic outcomes beyond expectations. Heck's (2000) findings align with assertions made by Johnson, Perez, and Uline (2013) whose text describe best practices found in high-performing urban schools. Featured schools in this text are those that achieved the National Excellence in Urban Education Award for demonstrating strong academic achievement for all student groups at a rate exceeding other schools in the state. Johnson et al. highlight that schools identified as highly successful urban schools have commonalities in that they demonstrate high expectations for all learners, ensure that students and adults have strong positive relationships, provide students with rigorous and engaging learning experiences, and ensure attractive physical environments. These qualities speak to the climate domains of teaching and learning, institutional and physical environment, and connectedness.

Some researchers have examined the association of academic success and school climate with an exclusive focus on the secondary school setting (Hoy & Hannum, 1997; Hoy, Tarter, & Bliss, 1990; MacNeil et al., 2009). Academic success or academic achievement in these studies was measured using standardized testing data. School climate was assessed using the Organizational Health Inventory (OHI). All researchers

found that climate was positively associated with academic achievement. However, these studies lacked representation of urban schools and traditionally low performing.

There is a body of research that has exclusively examined the school climate and academic performance connection in secondary urban schools. In a specific look at the climate domain of connectedness, Saud, Jones, and McLaughlin (2011) found that urban, low-income, high school students who were more connected with the school had higher academic outcomes (GPAs at or above 3.4) and graduation rates (all graduated). In a similar study of six urban middle schools, Goodenow and Grady (1993) compared sense of belonging in school, affiliated with the relationships and connectedness domains of climate, to student's academic motivation. Researchers found that 41% of students were more inclined to be motivated if they felt supported in the school setting. School belonging correlated with both valuating school work ($r = .55$, $p < .01$) and academic motivation ($r = .46$, $p < .001$). Wilkins and Kuperminc (2010) compared 12- to 14-year-old urban Latino students' ratings on academic climate scales to the student's individual achievement motivation scores over 2 years of schooling. Researchers compared means of two student cohorts and discovered an association between student achievement motivation and student perceptions of climate. The stronger the students perceived school climate, the greater the motivation to academically achieve. While these independent studies each indicate the importance of one particular domain of school climate, none of the researchers argue that the domain of focus in their study was more important than other school climate domains. Rather, they argue that these studies speak to the importance of school climate overall.

There is a small body of research that utilized full climate inventories to examine the connection between school climate and student academic success in secondary schools. Full climate inventories assess every domain of climate and climate as a whole. Tschannen-Moran et al. (2006) examined 82 middle schools throughout the state of Virginia and urban secondary schools were a part of the sample. Tschannen-Mornan (2006) found that teacher behavior connected with climate including frustration negatively correlated with climate and student achievement (r = .6). Moreover, Tschannen-Moran reported that environmental press, defined as productive pressure to achieve with support from stakeholders, was strongly correlated with student achievement (r = .9). The report *A Climate for Academic Success,* authored by Voight, Austin, and Hanson (2013), reviewed climate and standardized test scores of over 1,700 California secondary schools. The report recognized "beating-the-odds" urban secondary schools or those that were performing 0.25 standard deviations above the mean on state academic examinations. Researchers here compared beating-the-odds schools with other demographically similar locations that were identified as chronically underperforming schools. Where the "beating the odds" schools had climate scores at or above the 82nd percentile, chronically underperforming schools scored nearly 100 points lower overall on student-assessed California climate inventories with scores below the 49th percentile (Voight, Austin, & Hanson, 2013). Considering the results of the Voight, Austin, and Hanson (2013) study, as well as other studies mentioned here, it can be argued that for urban secondary schools to successfully support students academically, they must work to address school climate.

Quantitative studies have found that school climate is correlated with academic success (Heck, 2000; Saud et al., 2011; Tschannen-Moran et al., 2006; Voight et al.,2013). Schools with higher academic scores also demonstrate strength on school climate measures. Viewing this research base from the perspective of the school leader, addressing climate seems to provide a route to increasing academic successes at their school site. However, as all of these studies are quantitative, they solidly review the measure of climate used and the climate connection to achievement data but fail to describe how the school leader or leaders created positive school climates.

Climate and Social-Psychological Well-Being

While the link between climate and academic success is highly important, as the frame of the study centers on schooling as a force for whole-child development, it was also important to determine if school climate was connected to student social or psychological well-being. Research has indicated promise in that schools with positive climates have reduced school safety concerns while increasing student overall social-psychological well-being (Cohen & Geier, 2010; Haynes et al., 1997; Voight et al., 2013). Research regarding the impact of school climate on student well-being often includes measures or scales of social and psychological health together and therefore report on them simultaneously. For the purposes of clarity in reporting this literature, climate impacts on students' social and psychological well-being are reported together here.

Research on school climate indicates that, when considering school related conditions or attributes that increase the likelihood of student success, positive school climates have been associated with reductions in problem behavior, reductions in

suspension rates, and increases in student attendance (Cotton, 1996b; Haynes et al., 1997; Pink, 1982) Therefore, stronger school climates, where students feel safer, promote a student's desire and ability to attend school and to behave appropriately. Eliot, Cornell, Gregory, and Fan (2010) surveyed 7,363 students in 291 secondary schools in Virginia. Questions on the survey related to the climate domains of connectedness, relationships, and safety. Comparing student responses on willingness to seek help and supportive school climate measures, findings indicated that students who perceived their teachers as caring, respectful, and personally interested in them were more willing to seek help from staff regarding bullying and school violence (F (3,291) = 36.72, $p < .001$).

Teachers have also noted the impact of school climate on their personal feelings of safety. Gregory, Cornell, and Fan (2012) studied the relationship of secondary school climate to teacher's perceptions of safety. Faculty safety ratings were associated with four school climate variables. Findings from these two studies implicate that schools with positive climates provide perceptions of safer environments for students and teachers. There are more student outcomes associated with school climate beyond feelings or perceptions of safety. Reductions in school violence, school crime rates, and bullying can be seen in schools with higher climate ratings. Limbos and Casteel (2008) examined 95 Los Angeles Unified School District secondary schools using linear regression to test a relationship between school crime, student academic performance, and the climate domain of connectedness. Schools with higher rankings on the connectedness domain had higher academic performance scores and a lower school crime rate. Klein, Cornell, and Konold (2012) worked to correlate student bullying and risk taking behavior with school climate assessments. Klein et al. surveyed 3,635 secondary students in two Virginia

school districts. Using structural equation modeling to examine climate and reported social behaviors of students, Klein found that positive school climates are associated with lower levels of student involvement in high-risk and bullying behaviors. Findings indicate that positive climates decrease student experiences with bullying and risk-taking behaviors. Here, Limbos and Casteel (2008) and Klein et al. (2012) indicate that positive climates are associated with more positive social student outcomes but fails to address the relationship between school climate and student psychological health.

Research conducted on positive school climate has overwhelmingly found correlations between healthy school climate and students who are stronger both socially and psychologically (Gottfredson, Gottfredson, Payne, & Gottfredson, 2005; Haynes et al., 1997; Orpinas & Horne, 2010; Way et al., 2007). In a specific examination of urban schools, Baker (1998) examined low-income African-American elementary school students using student self-report measures of classroom climate, social support, school stress, psychological distress, academic self-concept, and quality of family life. Baker used a path analysis to evaluate the causal connections between classroom climate, student stress, student perceptions of social support, student psychological distress, family life, and academic self-concept. Baker found that classroom social climate had the strongest correlation with school satisfaction. Moreover, Baker found that poor school climate negatively impacted student stress ($r = .47$, $p < .0001$) and psychological distress ($r = .16$, $p < .05$). While this study is informative as it explains the connections between classroom climate and social-psychological health, the connection made was for elementary school students who predominantly remain in one classroom.

Jia et al. (2009) and Wang (2009) both examined climate and social-psychological well-being in urban schools at the secondary school level. Jia et al. (2009) compared 706 eighth grade Chinese adolescents from three middle schools with 709 US seventh-grade students from five middle schools in New York City. Jia et al. examined the climate domains teacher support (emotional and academic) and peer support to assess climate as well as psychological scales to assess student depressive symptoms, self-esteem, and GPA. Jia conducted a correlational analysis of variables and found that the stronger the teacher support rating, the lower the depression rating ($r = .25$, $p < .01$). Increased feelings of peer support also correlated with decreased student depression ratings ($r = .25$, $p < .01$). Jia also found that teacher support was positively correlated with student self-esteem ($r = .33$, $p < .01$). Peer support was also positively correlated with student self-esteem ratings ($r = .27$, $p < .01$). Wang (2009) looked at climate more holistically by asking students to complete full climate assessment inventories. Wang assessed 1,042 students longitudinally, at six points in time, from their seventh grade year through high school and beyond. Student participants were from 23 East Coast public schools. Participants completed scales assessing depression, school climate, and social competence as determined by their levels of deviant behaviors. Wang used path analysis to examine the connections between climate variables and student adjustment variables. After controlling for gender, race, and socioeconomic status, all school climate variables were found to contribute to deviant behavior and depression amongst middle school students. That is, in more negative climates, more deviant behavior and depression occurred amongst the student population. The strongest predictor of deviant behavior ($\beta = .23$, $p < .0001$) and depression ($\beta = .32$, $p < .0001$) was a lack of teacher emotional

support.

While most studies of climate and psychological student wellness used student report measures, only one study incorporated teacher ratings of climate. Brand, Felner, Seitsinger, Burns, and Bolton (2008) provided teachers in 761 secondary schools with the Inventory of School Climate-Teacher (ISC-T) measure and determined an average climate rating for each school. Students at these schools were administered surveys assessing self-efficacy, delinquency, substance abuse, self-esteem, and anxiety and depression. The team also collected student academic achievement as measured by standardized test scores. Brand et al., used hierarchical linear modeling to examine the relationship between educator ratings of school climate and the aforementioned measures of student wellness including risk taking behavior and mental health. After controlling for socio-economic status of the students, Brand et al. found correlations to educator ratings and student reports of social and psychological well-being, including the correlation indicating that students in schools which ranked highly on climate measures as reported by teachers had lower rates of student substance abuse. Moreover, in such schools, students reported possessing stronger relationships with teachers and peers.

As a school leader, these correlational studies can inform you that climate and student social-psychological health are connected. Yet they leave the researcher or school leader to wonder if positive climates created the conditions for stronger student outcomes or if a more socially and psychologically stable student population meant fewer school climate challenges.

Some researchers have addressed this wondering through the examination of the moderating effects of climate. Birkett, Espelage, and Koenig (2009) surveyed 7,376

Midwestern seventh and eighth grade students using bullying and victimization scales as well as questions asking students to indicate their sexuality and risk-taking behavior. Researchers used ANOVA statistical analysis to examine if climate had a moderating effect on social issues such as bullying, risk-taking behavior, and truancy. Interaction results indicated that climate moderated student's risk taking behavior. Students were less likely to experience social struggles or take risks if they attended schools with positive climates. These findings were echoed by other studies that have found that when considering student academic achievement and student social-psychological well-being, climate has had a moderating effect (Lopez et al., 2012; Marchant et al., 2001; Mattison & Aber, 2007; Reyes et al., 2012; Suldo et al., 2006; Wang & Dishion, 2012). Finding that climate is a moderating variable means that climate effects the strength of the relationship between the two variables (in this case urban school-community conditions and indicators of student well-being (Baron & Kenny, 1986). As climate is effecting the strength of the relationship between variables, the more positive climate is, the stronger are the student outcomes, despite other urban-school-community variables. The inverse, then, is also true, that the more negative a school climate is, the more likely students are to participate in socially or psychologically harmful behavior or to academically struggle.

Drawing conclusions from these studies, many coming from different research arenas (i.e., child psychology, educational research, physiology) can be difficult. The research here highlights the challenge discussed in the climate measurement section of this review (Freiberg, 1998; Freiberg, 1999; Hoy, Tarter, & Kottkamp, 1991; Tschannen-Moran, Parish, & DiPaola, 2006). Varying means of assessing school climate were utilized in each study. Moreover, researchers attempted to correlate or to create a causal

argument for the importance of school climate as it relates to social well-being, psychological well-being or both using different scales (i.e., depression ratings, psychological distress, ratings, self-esteem ratings, etc.). I argue that the takeaway here should be that despite the multitude of ways climate was assessed or the social-psychological variables employed in the study, positive school climates had a positive relationship with student social and psychological wellbeing and therefore, addressing school climate could be a powerful way of addressing challenges in urban secondary schools.

Quantitative school climate literature has illustrated that school climate is strongly connected with student academic, social, and psychological success (Salmon, James, & Smith, 1998; Voight et al., 2013; Wang, 2009). I posit that addressing school climate could be the key to transforming struggling urban schools. This could be great news for the justice-oriented school leader who has the desire to shift their underperforming school into an organization that serves the needs of all students. Unfortunately, the quantitative literature presented thus far fails to describe the schools and explain how positive climates are created or what particular climate domains were addressed during climate transformation. None of the literature above provides guidance for leaders on how to leverage school climate to meet school improvement needs.

Guidance in the Literature

There are a few studies that discuss school climate as an element of school turnaround or school change efforts. This small body of research, presented here, begins to provide leaders with more direction regarding how to address school climate and attend to school climate change. Much of this literature comes from the school leadership

arena.

An attempt to describe leadership specifically for school climate change was found in two articles. Shore (1995) described a high school that was declining in academic performance while experiencing increases in suspendable student behaviors. Shore explains how the implementation of a school-violence campaign, an intervention program for their most at-risk students, and block scheduling increased student perceptions of school climate on a school climate assessment. Pepper and Thomas (2002) used autoethnography to examine personal practices in implementing school climate change. Working in a low-income, urban, elementary school, Pepper and Thomas noted that talking with students about discipline and developing a shared decision making structure amongst faculty and the parent-teacher association decreased teacher complaints and made a small impact, 3% gains, on student achievement. While both of these studies work to indicate that the leaders addressed school climate, it is difficult to ascertain why the leaders selected these specific programs or how they were implemented. Moreover, the discussion in both articles is limited to programs rather than a systematic examination regarding how all domains of climate were or were not addressed during an improvement effort.

Literature on leadership for school turnaround often alludes to school climate, but again fails to fully address climate or the climate domains as a component of school turnaround. Leithwood, Harris, and Strauss (2010) describe leadership activities in three countries, the United States, Canada, and England, which have led to school turnaround. These activities include setting a vision, creating a culture of high expectations, communicating effectively, increasing collaboration amongst the faculty and with

families, and monitoring instruction. Similar work by Jacobson, Brooks, Giles, Johnson, and Ylimaki (2007) depicts how three historically underperforming elementary schools in New York improved student achievement by physically securing the building, greeting students at the door, and using professional development to build a cohesive faculty vision. Other research conducted by Orr, Berg, Shore, and Meier (2008) worked to identify how six principals in low-performing schools worked to promote school change by implementing professional development, creating smaller class sizes, utilizing Success for All (a reading program with large literacy blocks), and a creating school leadership team resulted in academic gains for four of the participating schools. Finally, Finnigan and Stewart (2009) describe turnaround efforts in 10 Chicago elementary schools, explaining that the schools that improved had leadership that developed a shared vision, established times for collaboration, and managed school structures and norms. While this literature provides more solid guidance on what leaders could do to meet the needs of school change, and while some of these activities involve school climate or a school climate domain, school climate is not specifically discussed in this research as a specific element of their improvement effort. Moreover, solutions provided here are summaries of what turnaround leaders did rather than a deep look at how leaders conceptualized change and addressed change in their environment and how such change led to school improvement. What is missing from the literature is an explanation for how leaders addressed school improvement and how these improvement efforts attended to all school climate domains and school climate needs.

The Climate–Leadership Connection

There is a strong rationale for viewing the school climate literature from the perspective of the school leader. While climate researchers indicate that school leaders are responsible for assessing or diagnosing school climate (Brand et al., 2003; Cohen, 2007; Fraser, Docker, & Fisher, 1988; Freiberg, 1999), an additional body of literature explains that addressing school climate needs (Boyer, 1983; Freiberg, 1999; Hallinger &Heck, 1996; MacNeil et al., 2009) is a major responsibility of the school administration. Researchers above insist that one of the central ways administration effects student outcomes and overall school success is through their leadership efforts in supporting school improvement and school climate improvement efforts. It is necessary to restate that despite the insistence that that addressing climate is important, as discussed in the review thus far, there is little research that explains how leaders addressed climate and climate domains within the improvement process.

Examining How Climate Is Addressed Using a Social Justice Lens

Leveraging the school improvement process to address whole-child needs and turn around persistently underperforming schools can be easily connected to the mission of the social justice leader. Research argues that the successful social justice leader possesses a lens for justice centered on increasing opportunity and access for all student groups and promoting positive school environments for all (K. M. Brown, 2004; McKenzie & Skrla, 2011; Shields, 2010). The term social justice and advocates for social justice are concerned with equality, fairness, and human rights regardless of race, gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status, or sexual orientation (Marshall & Oliva, 2010, p. 20). Social justice minded leaders pursue equity and access for all students (Capper,

Theoharis, & Sebastian, 2006; Capper et al., 2006; Jean-Marie, Normore, & Brooks, 2009; McKenzie et al., 2008) and pay particular attention to the conditions in their schools that have marginalized student populations and work to alter those conditions to ensure their school serves all students (Theoharis, 2007).

When reviewing the social justice literature regarding how to address conditions in schools that has marginalized student populations, several concepts align with school climate. For example, school climate domain literature insists that students' feel connected to their learning, one route of this being through culturally relevant learning opportunities (Zins et al., 2007), whereas culturally relevant education is also a component of social justice leadership. Principals with social justice agendas see each student as individually important and therefore ensure that the instructional program celebrates the individuality and personal histories of all of their students (Marshall & Oliva, 2010). According to Frattura and Capper (2007), instructional leadership with the goal of celebrating individuals means ensuring educators develop and enact a "culturally relevant, differentiated curriculum and instruction" (p. 9). Where school climate literature asks the school leader to ensure that parents and community members, within the relationships domain, feel they have the ability to create strong connections the school, social justice literature asks that leaders bring parents and community members into the educational process, sharing the power with those that can directly benefit from having a highly functioning school in that neighborhood (Robinson, 2011).

Social justice leaders see transforming schools and promoting success for all as central to their work. *Social Justice Educational Leaders and Resistance* (2007) insists that there is a difference between good leaders and social justice leaders regarding how

they enact their leadership roles. Good leaders care about students, motivate faculty to work as a team, and have compassion for the community they work within. Good leaders work hard. However, in schools with good leaders if some students fail, the good leader accepts this failure. They believe that the loss of the most struggling students will happen. Social justice leaders, however, work within classrooms, schools, and communities as advocates for individual student and school wide success with the knowledge that there is no compromise to the idea of success for all students (Theoharis, 2007). These leaders are working to establish educational systems and individual schools that strive to offer a high-quality educational experience for all students from all backgrounds without requesting that a student assimilate or sacrifice personal history and culture in the process (Williamson, 2007).

The connection of social justice leadership and climate may seem clear to some, but similar to the research on school turnaround presented above, the connection between justice oriented leadership practice and school climate has not specifically been made (Frattura & Capper, 2007; Marshall & Oliva, 2010; Theoharis, 2007). Leaders working to enact their social justice mission to transform schools into places that promote success of all students therefore may be enacting school climate change. There is no clear research base explaining how a school leader, or a leader with a justice orientation, systemically approached school change within a mandated improvement process, and how this systemic change supported school climate development.

Summary

This literature review has been presented in five parts. The first segment of the literature review provided the reader with an explanation of the Ecological Framework

for viewing schools as a force for whole-child development. Second, a description of school climate and school climate measurement was provided. Third, a collection of quantitative research was reviewed. Research here indicated a connection between school climate and student academic, social, and psychological outcomes. Fourth, the review provided a summary of literature that attempted to describe how school climate and school change were interrelated. Conclusions of the review being that the literature could prompt a school leader to consider focusing on school climate to promote change in their school, this research does little to truly describe what school leaders do to enact systemic change and how these change efforts relate to school climate. Finally, a connection between school leadership, school climate, and social justice was made, a connection that will be considered throughout the course of the study.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this case study was to retrospectively explore how the administration at one school that underwent a state-mandated school improvement addressed school climate. This study addressed a gap identified in the literature review. Simply, there was a lack of knowledge and understanding regarding how administrative actions during improvement processes attended to school climate or school climate domains. Conducting a qualitative case study, I examined how urban secondary school leaders in the state of Utah considered and directed the school improvement process to promote social justice for their entire student population. Specifically, the study addressed the following questions:

1. What aspects of the school climate are addressed during a school's mandated improvement to raise student achievement?
2. What is the role of the leadership team in addressing school climate within a mandated school improvement to raise student achievement?

Rationale for the Research Tradition and Methodology

Qualitative inquiry has become an important research tradition for those interested in examining experiences holistically. The goal of qualitative research is to determine how individuals or groups interpret and respond to social experiences or problems

(Cresswell, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Examining school climate change qualitatively allows the research to provide insight regarding the perspectives of the leader who is assessing and enacting change in their school environment. Moreover, qualitative research employed for this purpose pushes the current research base by allowing the researcher to examine the settings and context in which the change events are taking place (Creswell, 2012). As explained by Gall, Gall, and Borg (2007), qualitative research allows for variables in the environment for context to influence the research. The case study approach permits the researcher to examine complex or multifaceted experiences within the setting the experience occurred (Merriam, 1988; Yin, 2013). Where research has identified the importance of the leader in addressing school climate in urban secondary schools (Bryan, 2005; Cohen, 2007; Esposito, 1999; Fraser, Docker, & Fisher, 1988; Saud, Jones, & McLaughlin, 2011) and the connection between climate and student outcomes (Brand et al., 2003; Tschannen-Moran et al., 2006; Voight et al., 2013), there is to date a lack of understanding regarding the relationships between leadership actions during school improvement and school climate (Leithwood et al., 2010; National School Climate Council, 2007; Sparks, 2013).

Qualitative Case Study

While most genres of qualitative research (e.g., case study, ethnography, phenomenological, and narrative) provide the researcher with the ability to view the study holistically in the natural setting, it is important that the researcher select the qualitative method most aligned with the information they hope to gather (Creswell, 2012). The school leader's perceptions of the school climate concerns are relevant as these perceptions are what encouraged the leader to take action or to lead school climate

change efforts. Seeking understandings of perceptions where the leader interprets his/her setting and plans for change is inherent in the case study's particularistic nature. The case study, as explained by Merriam (1988), "is an especially good design for practical problems- for questions, situations, or puzzling occurrences arising from everyday practice" (p. 29). This study was conducted with the intent of better exploring how an urban secondary school leadership team, within their everyday practice, worked to address school climate within their mandated improvement and what domains of climate were addressed in the process. Case study methodology is most aligned with the intent of the research. Yin (2005) insisted that determining the what, how, and why is synonymous with the purpose of qualitative case study methodology.

What sets case study methodology apart from other qualitative traditions is the bounded nature of the case, meaning that the case, as explained by Merriam (1998), "is a thing, a single entity, a unit around which there are boundaries" (p. 27). As such, it is important that parameters are placed on this research. For the purpose of this study, these parameters include exploring one administration's efforts to address state-mandated improvement at one site within the time framer of their state-mandated improvement effort. Other schools were not incorporated in to the study and efforts conducted to improve the school that are outside of the time frame involving their mandated improvement effort were not included.

Additionally, case studies are employed when the investigator desires to "retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events" (Yin, 2009, p. 4). Real-life events in this case are the leadership efforts that were enacted with the intent of supporting change in a school, more specifically, how school leaders conducting their

daily work tackled mandated school improvement needs. Moreover, how was climate addressed during the improvement process and what elements of climate were addressed? The concern here is with processes and not outcomes, in discovering how actions and strategies were employed. More than just the actions and strategies, however, the concern is the nuances and the nature of how processes occurred (Merriam, 1998). These nuances, the nature of how change was implemented, how change addressed school climate, and how the leader worked to enact school change within their leadership roles, speaks to Merriam's explanation of descriptive research. According to Merriam (1988):

> Descriptive research is undertaken when description and explanation (rather than prediction based on cause and effect) are sought, when it is not possible or feasible to manipulate the potential causes of behavior and when variables are not easily identified or are too embedded in the phenomenon to be extracted for study. (p. 7)

This case study was conducted with the intent of describing how the leader addressed school climate during the school improvement process and what elements of climate were addressed, producing a detailed account of information. Descriptive research has the ability to take a number of intermingled variables (i.e., leadership actions for organizational change, leadership roles, school climate and climate domains, and the context of the school) and create a thick description or meaningful interpretation. Thick descriptions, as opposed to thin, provide an explanation and interpretation of the administrations thoughts and actions in relationship with the context of the school (Geertz, 1994).

Research Setting

The research setting was an urban, secondary school that had been identified as a Priority or SIG schools. Priority schools are labeled as such when the schools are the

lowest performing (bottom 5%) Title I schools in the state of Utah. Performance is determined by standardized achievement data and, for secondary schools, graduation rates. As a component of the Utah ESEA waiver, Title I schools that are consistently identified as low-performing have to undergo state-mandated school improvement efforts and raise student achievement. Title I schools are those with large percentages of students from low-income families. These schools are given additional federal funds to support the school meeting the needs of students in poverty ("Title I, Part A Program," 2014, p. 1). Priority schools are eligible to apply for a competitive School Improvement Grant or SIG grant. This is a federal funded grant awarded through the Utah State Office of Education. The SIG, if awarded, can provide significant money to support enactment of the school improvement process (Utah State Board of Education, 2012).

Franklin Middle School,[1] the study site, is located on the west side of what is classified as an urban region of Utah. Franklin serves students in the seventh and eighth grades. Similar to many urban communities, this one possesses a dividing line. East side schools generally serve higher income students and have, by school population percentages, fewer ethnic or racial minority students. West side schools are, more often, Title I district schools with majority-minority student populations. The school serves approximately 800 students in the seventh and eighth grades. Of this student population, 89% are classified as racial or ethnic minorities, and 29% are classified as English language learners (ELLs). Of the ELL population, the school estimates that, due to a large refugee population, 29 different home languages are present in the building. Ninety percent of the student body qualifies for free and reduced lunch. Franklin underwent

[1] Pseudonym

mandated improvement with the SIG beginning in the 2010–2011 school year and exited the mandated improvement process in the 2012–2013 school year. Data for this study were collected in 2014.

A Title I school under mandated improvement was selected as these schools most align with the type of institutions that school climate literature insists have traditionally lower ratings of school climate (Esposito, 1999; Noguera, 2004; Wang, 2009; Wilkins & Kuperminc, 2010). Moreover, as a part of the state-mandated improvement process Priority or SIG schools have to regularly document and report on their school improvement efforts, specifically efforts to increase student achievement, to the state. These records benefited the study as reviewing the reports assisted the research in developing interview questions regarding specific improvement efforts and provided me with a starting point for requesting further evidence documents. In addition, Utah's Elementary and Secondary Act Waiver, explaining how school improvement for Priority and/or SIG schools in the state will unfold, specifies that school improvement work must include collecting stakeholder survey information regarding the school improvement process (Utah State Board of Education, 2012). The stakeholder survey information can serve as a simple assessment of school climate and provided valuable information to the researcher regarding the baseline in which the leader began their efforts. The end result of the research can assist other leaders in the field by providing a thick description (Geertz, 1994) regarding how school administration approached state-mandated school improvement to raise student achievement and how this approach addressed school climate.

Research Sample

As the focus of the study was leadership efforts in the school, the school administration was the central unit of analysis. It was important that the administrators had engaged in mandated improvement efforts at their site for 2 or more years so the depth of their processes could be explored. More than simply exploring the depth of process, the longer the school had been engaged in the change effort, the more the leaders had an opportunity to reflect upon, assess, and refine their efforts, which provided the researcher with a more meaningful, multilayered view of the change effort. Purposeful sampling was employed to select an administration that had been involved in meaningful efforts to achieve school climate change in urban, secondary schools (Creswell, 2012). Purposeful sampling is enacted in qualitative research when the researcher desires to capture comparable cases relevant to the research purpose and research questions to provide information that could not be gleaned otherwise (Maxwell, 2005). The following criteria, aligning with the previous discussion regarding site selection and the rationale of purposeful sampling, was employed to select participants:

1. The administration must have been employed at a Title I Focus or Priority School.
2. The administration must have been employed at the selected school site for over 2 years.
3. The 2 years of employment must include time in which the school employed a change effort mandated by the state.
4. The school site must have been located in an urban setting.

Data Collection

To gather all of the necessary data (contextual, demographic, perceptual and theoretical) required for this study, multiple sources of data were collected. As discussed by case study researchers (Cresswell, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Merriam, 1988; Yin, 2009), multiple sources allow for thick description to be developed and for the researcher to gain a holistic view of the case. As administrative work for school change is a multifaceted and complex process, case study approach better allows the researcher to explore this process holistically, using multiple data collection methods. As explained by Orum, Feagm, and Sjoberg (1991) "the case study provides a clear advantage over other research methods" (p. 19) in that this methodology allows for data to be gathered from multiple sources and therefore reinforces internal validity. Data collection involved in-depth school interviews with the identified administrative participants, district leaders, and teachers, as well as focus group interviews with student, staff, and educator stakeholder groups. It was originally intended that parents would be included in the study and would participate in focus groups. However, the researcher was unable to obtain parent participants. The research additionally analyzed school documents related to the mandated school improvement effort.

Sources of Data

Multiple source points, due to the multiple methods of data collection, allowed me to present a multilayered view of the leadership efforts for school climate change. Such a thick description can only be created when the leader's viewpoints and strategies of change are discussed through the lens of other stakeholders (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Moreover, multiple sources of data allowed for triangulation of data, meaning that as data

sources come together, the facts and findings in the case can be supported (Stake, 1998). Triangulation addressees concerns of construct validity as the researcher is allowed to measure the phenomenon at several points (Yin, 2009, 2013).

Interview Data

Interviews are a highly valuable source of information as they allow the case study research to identify the rationale, insights, and actions taken by participants (Seidman, 1991; Yin, 2013). Administrators were asked to participate in four focused case study interviews lasting approximately 1 hour each; interviews were audio-recorded. Interviews were conducted in November, December, and January of 2014. Each interview targeted a particular aspect of the case study topic and research questions. The first interview requested that the administration describe the context of the school, explain how the leadership approached the state-mandated improvement process, and express what specific efforts were undertaken during the process including why these efforts were selected. Interview 2 asked the leaders to discuss both their thoughts on the improvement process and how they enacted improvement. Finally, Interviews 3 and 4 allowed for follow-up regarding initial interview responses on school improvement efforts and climate with deeper probing questions regarding specific climate change efforts related to the five school climate domains.

Interviews were also conducted with school district personnel that supported or oversaw the mandated school improvement process. Two district leaders assigned to supervise or support the school were interviewed in January of 2014. These district leaders provided insight into the context of the school including the school's history, the school's demographics, and the school's relationship with the community from an

external perspective. Moreover, the district administration provided insight regarding how they perceived the school's improvement effort and how they supported the school's improvement effort.

Teachers also participated in this study via in-depth interviews. Teacher perspectives of school improvement were collected in focus groups (described below). However, during data collection, it became clear that individual teacher perspectives needed to be explored further. During focus groups, it was clear that each teacher participant represented various departments (math, social studies, etc.) and had different experiences with school improvement. It became important to invite teachers to participate in individual in-depth interviews. All 6 teacher focus group participants elected to participate in a one-on-one interview. One teacher participant of the 6 was unable to complete the individual interview due to health concerns.

The interviews were in-depth and semi structured. Interview protocols were designed with the intent of gaining details regarding the perceptions of the improvement process and explanations related to their change efforts (Yin, 2013). The semi structured format allows for questions to be added to the discussion that probe for further information. If an interviewee needed to elaborate further on an activity or program, the interviewer, using the semi structured interview method, was able to probe to get a sense of the details or complexity needed in case study research (Glesne & Peshkin,1992). A complete set of interview protocols and focus group protocols is attached (Appendix A).

Focus Group Data

Focus groups generally consist of 7 to 10 people who are familiar with the key elements of the study (Marshall & Rossman, 2004). Focus groups allow for the

researcher to identify how multiple stakeholders interpret the school climate change efforts of the administrator. Specifically, focus group participants can attest to their personal experiences with school climate and how or if climate has changed during the school improvement process. In the climate measurement segment of the literature review, it was explained that researchers insist that multiple viewpoints regarding climate be collected when assessed (Fraser et al., 1988; Tschannen-Moran et al., 2006). Aligning with this perspective, it was important to not only hear from an administrative perspective how they enacted school change and possibly how this change affected climate but also to understand how that effort was experienced by multiple stakeholders.

Focus group data added a layer of validity checking (i.e., triangulation) to the administrative interviews. I was able to identify if the administrators' perceptions of how school improvement and climate change efforts took place aligned with viewpoints of other members of the school community. While the administration was the focus of this study, it was important to gain perspectives from other stakeholders regarding how the change efforts were experienced on the ground level. Successful change efforts require that leaders support the stakeholders in developing a common vision and mission. It was important to determine how connected students, staff, and teachers were to the mission and vision for change. Interviews with faculty, staff, and student stakeholder groups also provided insight regarding how institutionalized the change effort had become (Adelman & Taylor, 2007; Cox Jr, 2001; Hallinger, 2003).

In order to hear from multiple stakeholders, educators, staff members, students, and parents were invited to participate in focus group sessions using a formal letter of invitation. Educator and staff participants were provided the invitation letter at Franklin.

Five staff members signed on to participate in three focus group sessions. Six teachers signed on to participate in two focus group sessions. As mentioned earlier, each of the 6 teachers were also able to participate in in-depth interviews, and 5 did so. As this was a retrospective study, students who were present at Franklin during improvement were no longer present at the site. Students were provided a study participation letter at their local high school. Three students participated in an after-school focus group. Another 13 student participants had parents sign permission slips so that they could participate in the focus group sessions during an elective class. The 13 students were divided into two focus groups. Each of the student focus groups met twice. It was important that stakeholders who participated in the focus group experience were at Franklin during the school improvement process to ensure that they have an understanding of how the school changed before, during, and possibly after the improvement effort. Parents were invited to participate in the study twice. First, administration sent an email to parents formally inviting them to participate. Second, a sign-up sheet with information at the study was displayed at a parent-conference school event. Unfortunately, I was unable to gain parent participants. Again, purposeful sampling was employed (Creswell, 2012). Focus group participants were solicited and selected if they had been at the school or involved with the school for 2 years or more. A complete list of interviews and focus groups is provided in this document as Appendix B.

As indicated by the attached interview protocols, student, staff, and teacher focus groups were asked to respond to some questions based on their personal experiences as a student, teacher, or staff member. The questions that are specifically aligned with the stakeholder population gave insight into their unique experiences in the school (i.e., as

learners, as event attendees, as members of teacher teams). However, the majority of the questions were the same. Asking these groups to discuss some identical questions allowed for comparisons between groups of their experiences. Separate focus group participation times were provided for each stakeholder group. Separating groups was vital as it decreases the possibility of some stakeholder groups intimidating or influencing other stakeholder groups. Additionally, separate focus groups allowed for the unique perspectives of the groups to be examined first individually and later, collectively. Interviewing style during focus group sessions mimicked the in-depth, semistructured interview process discussed previously. Overall, the focus group interviews sought to identify how multiple stakeholders interpret school improvement efforts enacted by the leadership and how these efforts related to school climate from their perspective.

Document/School Data

Collecting documents related to your study has multiple benefits. First, this type of information can cover a long span of time and is generally considered unobtrusive (Yin, 2013). As this study was specifically focused on leadership actions during the school improvement process, documents collected were related to school improvement efforts and the school climate domains. Letters/communications, agendas, administrative documents, and news-clippings will be collected if they demonstrate school change efforts affiliated with the climate domains of teaching and learning, safety, relationships, connectedness, and instructional environment. A complete list of collected documents is provided in Appendix C. The documents served to provide details regarding and corroborate information gained from administrative interviews (Yin, 2013).

Data Analysis

Analysis of qualitative data is continual and layered. The same data piece may be interpreted several times using multiple methods. Merriam (1988) expressed this best, stating:

> Data collection and analysis is a simultaneous activity in qualitative research. Analysis begins with the first interview, the first observation, the first document read. Emerging insights, hunches, and tentative hypotheses direct the next phase of data collection, which in turn lead to refinement or reformulation of one's questions, and so on. (p. 119)

While data collection and analysis processes were fully outlined prior to the study, qualitative research requires that the researcher be flexible and responsive to the process. Any necessary changes to the collection or analysis plans are noted.

Analysis of Interviews and Focus Group Data

All recorded interview and focus group data were transcribed verbatim. Each source of data, including transcribed interview, focus group data, and documents, was loaded into HyperResearch, a qualitative data analysis software program. Each interview, observation protocol, and school document was analyzed through several rounds of coding. Before coding is thoroughly discussed, it should be explained that during each round of coding, and after interviews or focus groups were conducted, memos were prepared. A list of prepared memos is provided in Appendix C.

Memos, as explained by Charmaz (2006), help to capture thoughts and ideas as they arrive both during the data collection process and during analysis. Charmaz (2006), using constructed grounded theory, describes this as a crucial step to assessing nuances of the data collection process, connections between data and theory or between data from various sources, or processes that might get overlooked if one waits to dive into the data

and reflect on interviewing when all data are collected. Each memo had one specific topic. While memos varied based on the data collected and the interview and focus group experiences, some memos explained a code or theme that was appearing regularly during the coding process, made comparisons amongst focus group data collected, or identified gaps in the data that have been gathered thus far.

Open coding as described by Charmaz (2006) was used to complete the first round of coding. During this process, each piece of data was chunked into a sentence, meaningful statement or paragraph. A code or label was attached to each meaningful chunk of data. The code will describe best what these data represent. As I participated in the open coding process, I concurrently memoed about the data, noting specifically what I was learning from the evidence, meanings I derived from the data, and questions that were unanswered as a result of the phase of interviewing. Memos each had their own topic that was determined as data analysis took place (Given, 2008). Memos were important as they helped me maintain ideas or thoughts regarding the collected data. Reflective memoing additionally supported trustworthiness or assurances that the qualitative research is credible.

A second round of coding specifically connected the line-by-line coding to some specific data categories. The intent of the research was to identify how a leader instituted change efforts and how change efforts related to school climate. This purpose helps direct the second round of coding. While data categories can be chronological or thematic, for the purpose of this study, the categories were climate domains (Safety, Institutional and Physical Environment, Relationships, Teaching and Learning, and Connectedness) and stages of organizational change (vision setting, establishing a change-oriented leadership

team, capacity building, assessing and institutionalizing change). Coding for stages of organizational change produced mixed results. Many individuals discussed the change efforts but due to the retrospective nature of the study could not identify the order of implementation.

Finally, a third round of coding was conducted where the chunks of meaningful data or codes were reviewed and grouped based on patterns or themes that emerged. Charmaz (2006) explains that these chunks can, when examined, begin to create clusters or large, thematic categories in which a thick description can appear. I grouped emerging clusters with each research question to determine what themes or patterns had appeared in relationship to the questions that propelled the research initially. I then regrouped emerging clusters into the themes presented in Chapters 4 and 5 of this report as the research questions had little connection to the outcomes.

Document Analysis Procedures

Documents, as a valuable data source in qualitative research, were analyzed using a grounded theory approach. Documents could contain text, images, data, or graphs. Bowen (2009) describes such an approach calling for an initial round of analysis or a "first pass" determining which parts of the document are meaningful to the study. Non-pertinent information was discarded. Next, thematic analysis of documents included rereading data and using predefined codes. Bowen recommends that codes used in analysis of interviews be reapplied to document analysis. Codes for this analysis aligned with codes used in the third round of interview and focus group coding. The coding categories were climate domains (Safety, Institutional and Physical Environment, Relationships, Teaching and Learning, and Connectedness), leadership roles

(instructional, managerial, political-relational), and stages of change outlined in organizational change theory (vision setting, establishing a change oriented leadership team, capacity building, assessing and institutionalizing change). Findings from document analysis were used in the triangulation process as the documents should either support or challenge statements made during interview and focus group sessions.

Research Considerations

Ethical Considerations

It is important that overall, however, ethical research guidelines are followed through the duration of the study. Ethical research guidelines discussed here have been derived from Yin (2014), Merriam (1998), and Miles and Huberman (1994). First, the researcher must demonstrate they have the abilities to conduct case study research. My previous experiences conducting research alongside professors Rorrer, Groth, Yoon, Aleman, and Parker have given me several opportunities to build the skills of a qualitative researcher and interviewer. I have the ability to listen intently to responses and to adjust questioning strategies or style as needed. My experiences as a researcher and experiences in the educational arena helped build relationships and trust amongst participant groups. I am knowledgeable on the subject of school climate and secondary school leadership so I was able to decode or comprehend educational lingo used in the interview.

Institutional Review Board

Next, the researcher must also consider how the process of participating in interviews or focus groups could cause harm to their participant and take all steps to ensure participants are safe. Initially, possible administrative participants and their

superintendents were solicited with a personal letter regarding the research and research intent. The personal letter included a summary of the research purpose as well as institutional review board (IRB) confidentiality agreements and consent forms. In-depth interviewing has the ability to make a participant feel uncomfortable or embarrassed. In this instance, however, the participant's condition could be improved (Merriam, 1998, p. 214). When the respondent is asked to discuss how their work efforts have been successful in, for instance creating more successful schools, the respondent is more likely to feel a sense of happiness or accomplishment. Reviewing successes is usually a more enjoyable process for the interviewee. Nonetheless, considering the possible discomfort or stress that the interviewee can experience, precautions were taken. The administrative participants, including the district representative being interviewed, were provided with an overview of the purpose of the study, the data collection timeline, and the possible but minimal risks of participating. The administrative participant signed consent using IRB forms. While administration was the central unit of the study, and administration and district representatives were adults with some power, their participation in this study was considered minimal risk (Penslar, 1993).

Focus groups, however, were conducted with school staff, teachers, and students and therefore included more vulnerable populations. To address the concerns that might arise during focus group discussions, focus group participants were provided IRB consent forms that describe the nature of focus group conversations. Focus group forms also described the research intent, explained the focus group process, explained the minimal risks of participating, and listed focus group dates, times, and locations. Secondary students, as focus group participants, were the most vulnerable participants. Parents of

the selected secondary students were provided with the IRB consent forms. This research also requested that students complete assent forms. Students were only selected to participate in focus groups when the parent signed an IRB consent form and the student agreed to participate by signing the assent forms.

While consent forms were provided to each participant, the forms were also read to each participant prior to any interview or focus group interview that took place. Information provided at that time included the intent of the research, possible uses of research, privacy protection measures, audio recording measures, and the parameters of voluntary participation. First, all participants were informed that the intent of the study was to identify how school improvement efforts were approached in their school. Moreover, the results from the study could support future school improvement efforts. Second, participants were told that information that they provide was valuable and can help their school become stronger in the future. Study findings were presented to the participating school administration. Additionally, findings of the study were formally presented via my doctoral dissertation. This research may be shared in the future via possible subsequent publications. Third, participants were informed that no identifying information regarding any participant will be used in the presentations of the findings. To protect privacy and confidentiality of participants all recordings were transcribed. Pseudonyms were attached to each interviewee and all data were stored on a password-protected computer. My dissertation advisor and I were the only individuals who had access to the interview data, documents, or focus group data. My dissertation advisor and I were the only individuals who knew the personal identify of participants. Focus groups and interviews were audio recorded. The IRB form contained an explanation of the audio

recording process. The intent of audio recording was simply to ensure that I had the most accurate representation of the data provided in interviews. Finally, no participants were financially compensated for their participation in this study, and all were reassured that participation was purely voluntary.

Political Considerations

The administrators selected for this study were selected because they had participated in a state-mandated school improvement process. There is a severe amount of political pressure, leveraged by state and local stakeholders, for these schools to reform. At the state policy level, schools that fail to perform (increase student academic successes) under this improvement process force sanctions such as closure and the removal or termination of faculty and administration (Utah State Board of Education, 2012). As the spotlight is on these schools, it was important to keep in mind the political pressure that these leaders have faced. The researcher took steps to ensure that the administration, through sharing of their story, did not face further stresses or scrutiny. As such, following confidentiality guidelines outlined in the IRB, protecting the identity of the administrators was followed strictly.

It was additionally important to consider how findings are disseminated and presented to the administration and to members of the stakeholder groups. As is unlikely that participants will review a dissertation, it is important that all had access to findings in a manner that is more consumer friendly. Moreover, how the findings are presented can be political in how they depict the actions of the administration. My work in education led me to the belief that the findings should be presented in a manner that reflects the hard work and dedication of individuals involved in the school change process. A limited

amount of data indicated that more actions could have been taken to meet school needs, I provided these data as possible next steps or action guides in the improvement process to the school leaders. In the interest of reciprocity, presenting findings to the administration and assisting the administration in developing a plan for how findings can best be presented to stakeholder groups and other study participants became a final stage of the research process (Harrison, MacGibbon, & Morton, 2001).

As the researcher, I also have to consider my political involvements and how they might affect the study or the study's findings. As I am employed with the Utah Education Policy Center (UEPC) as a member of a school support team (SST); I have experiences working externally to support schools that have been identified as Focus, Priority, or SIG schools. To avoid bias, I elected not to study one of the schools that I have supported. Politically, the selected school would then have experienced change with a different support system. I made note to be careful my affiliation with the UEPC or the UEPC methods to affect my analysis of the data.

Trustworthiness

Specific measures were taken to enhance the credibility of the study. These measures assured the trustworthiness of the research methods and findings. Three specific methods of establishing trustworthiness included establishing the collecting data using multiple methods, using peer debriefing processes, and researcher's credibility and bias will be discussed here.

First, this research addressed issues of trustworthiness by collecting data from multiple sources. As this study gathered data from in-depth interviews, focus group interviews, and from historical school documents, there were three points of evidence that

could corroborate findings. As discussed in the data analysis section of this chapter, data were triangulated (Stake, 1998) to increase credibility. Triangulation means that as data sources come together, the facts and findings in the case can be supported (Stake, 1998). Triangulation addressees concerns of construct validity as the researcher is allowed to measure the phenomenon at several points (Yin, 2009, 2013). Second, to increase trustworthiness of the study, I enacted a member checking process. During the final or third phase of coding, where interpretation of the interview data is at its height, administrative participants were provided with a preliminary interpretation of the data (Carlson, 2010). The intent of member checking was to identify with the participants if the interpretation is accurate in their eyes. Aligning with Doyle (2007), this process increased both engagement and voice of the participants within the study findings while increasing the trustworthiness of the findings.

Positionality

Qualitative research requires the researcher reflect on how their personal lives impact interpretation and shape the study (Merriam, 1998). Qualitative data analysis is centered on interpretive inquiry; the researchers make an interpretation of what they see, hear, and understand (Creswell, Hanson, Plano, & Morales, 2007). If the researcher has not, from the outset, explored possible prejudices they hold in relationship to the work, they have the ability to improperly influence the study's findings.

I have previous experiences as an educator. I realize that these experiences serve as my motivation for this work and also contribute to researcher bias. These experiences drive my belief that school climate is essential to highly functioning schools, and that climate, when ignored, can lead to catastrophe. I have been present in a school during a

shooting and have been employed at schools where a bombing took place and where a teen dating violence-related incident resulted in the death of a young woman. I recognize that my experiences in public education can cause me to have a visceral reaction when I hear individuals in schools discussing a lack of care or empathy for students and families. Moreover, when I observe flaws in the organizational structure that could lead to decreases in student and family feelings of social, emotional, or physical safety, I am driven to repair these flaws. I regularly worked to recognize that my reaction to information provided during the course of this study can influence the outcomes of the study and utilized memoing to deal with information that I found difficult to accept. During data analysis, I reviewed these memos to ensure that my reactions to data collected would be reactions that others with a social justice orientation would have. For example, if I created a memo documenting concerns that arose during an interview or focus group, I would review this memo during analysis to identify if these concerns are mine alone related to personal experiences or if these concerns would be present if a different, social justice-based researcher, would identify.

When preparing findings, I made sure that any lingering concerns regarding how the school is functioning organizationally were discussed with the administrative participants prior to completion. As I was working with an administrative team that remains truly dedicated to bettering their school for the good of the students, sharing possible organizational flaws during the findings presentation with the intent of identifying ways to help them identify solutions and move forward could serve as an element of reciprocity. Aligning with Lather (1986), the sharing of data with the intent of supporting the school in moving forward should be central to the praxis of research.

Despite the fact that the experiences I am describing have been mostly negative, I believe that my involvement in urban secondary schools also served as a strength. I have a solid understanding of how challenging these school settings are generally and how trying changing secondary urban schools can be. This understanding enabled me to establish relationships and trust with the administrative participants as well as the educator focus group participants. Furthermore, I have years of experience working with and developing positive relationships with secondary age students and their parents. My experiences allowed me to gain trust in the student focus group environment as well. Additionally, the lack of implementation- and change-based research regarding school climate paired with the fact that I have never been employed at a school implementing a strategic change effort left me with little preferences as to how climate should be addressed. Lacking preference for specific activities or tasks or the order in which climate needs are addressed was helpful in allowing me to see each effort anew. I made a commitment to continuously explore bias as it appears during the research process. In order to do so, I maintained field notes including my feelings, reactions, and observations to interviews, focus groups, or documents immediately after collecting the data to ensure that my personal preferences or opinions were recorded, examined, and interrogated before data are analyzed (Merriam, 1998).

Limitations and Delimitations

The intent of this study is practical in that it provides a detailed and thorough explanation of how a leader enacted school change and how this change related to school climate. While this single case study cannot be generalizable to all settings, deep descriptions are provided including context, background, and findings (Geertz, 1994).

This depiction should give the reader (i.e., other school leaders) a picture of the school and the context in which the change efforts occurred so that they can determine if similar or modified versions of such change efforts could work in their setting.

Delimitations, or restrictions I have imposed on the scope of the study (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006), include limiting to one administration team and how they worked within a mandated school change effort in a secondary urban school in the state of Utah. This has been intentional as I am predominantly interested in secondary urban schools. These are schools that I have been involved with and schools that, as discussed in the literature review, are struggling the most with regards to meeting the needs of students. Moreover, in order to appropriately provide the thick description discussed above, it is important that I be engaged deeply in a site. As a result, conducting the research at one location is necessary at this time. Purposeful sample selection, the small (one case) sample size, and the elements of researcher bias discussed previously also present limitations.

An additional limitation to the study is the study's reliance on leaders' perspectives and recollections of a process that has already been enacted rather than observing personally as the process unfolds. However, for the purposes of this case study, the benefits of hindsight or the benefits of a leader having time to plan, implement, and assess or evaluate their work is valuable (Merriam, 1988; Yin, 2009).

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS

The purpose of this case study was to retrospectively explore the school improvement process at a school that had successfully exited state-mandated improvement status. The school site examined here was nationally and locally recognized for their improvement results as assessed by standardized test scores. Franklin entered mandated improvement efforts and was awarded a School Improvement Grant (SIG) in the 2010–2011 school year and exited this process officially in the 2012–2013 school year. Data collection was enacted in 2014. Interview and focus group data were gathered from stakeholder groups including district leaders, administrators, teachers, staff, and students. In all, a total of 30 interviews were conducted. Documents aligned with the improvement effort were also collected at this time. I believed that a better understanding of how administration enacted school improvement, why certain improvement strategies were selected, and how these strategies addressed school climate would contribute to a stronger understanding of both the school improvement process and the role of school climate within this process.

Analysis of the data presented one central theme, that of a largely changed or transformed school or the before and after of Franklin Middle School. The SIG was seen as a catalyst for the change process to begin. Beyond this catalyst, as the data were analyzed, it became apparent that this school was transformed via three intersecting

streams or major subcategories: (a) modifications to leadership and faculty assignments, (b) altering the nature of educator practice in the building, and (c) shifting the manner in which administrators enacted their role. The analysis suggested that school transformation was possible via successful enactment of improvement processes or strategies within these three categories. Therefore, interpretation of the data is presented here with these three themes in mind. While the overwhelming experiences of those interviewed noted a positive overall change at Franklin, the voices of those that noted negative experiences within the change process are included.

The Before and After

In interviews and focus groups, teachers, students, staff, and school administration described Franklin Middle School in a very dichotomous fashion. Participants clearly expressed that there was one Franklin that existed before the SIG and a different Franklin that existed after SIG. Details regarding how Franklin made these changes and the particular strategies they enacted will be provided later in this chapter. It felt necessary first to provide a picture of these two Franklins to ensure the extent of change Franklin accomplished during school improvement is clearly portrayed.

Franklin Before Improvement

Interviewees within multiple stakeholder groups indicated that the time before the SIG was a rather bleak time at Franklin. Individuals expressed that the community overall held the impression that the school was a sort of remedial education building. The school, according to teachers, staff, students, and administrators, definitely held a negative reputation in the community. A teacher participant, who had previously worked in another district elementary school that fed into Franklin, recalled that “families at the

school I was at, that had really successful children, did not want them to come here. This school was not known for being an academically successful school." One student participant echoed that her family had these thoughts as well; she recalled that her "parents were worried" about her attendance at Franklin due to the historical reputation of the school. According to this student, her parents felt the school generally "wasn't a good place to be." These sentiments were echoed by staff members in a focus group conversation.

> Staff Member A: There was a definite reputation in the neighborhood. This is where my kids go and there is a definite reputation of at the time that you didn't want your kid at *Franklin* because it was a gang school, it was a bad school, it was the dumb school, it was the school for the dumb people.
> Staff Member B: It was a remedial school.
> Staff Member A: Yeah, a lot of the people within in my neighborhood were taking their kids to the other schools or to charter schools.
> Staff Member C: Even I took my kids to a charter school.
> Staff Member B: I considered it. I really did consider it, but I'm glad I didn't. My daughter was here at the beginning of what was going on, and then my son at the very end of it. I saw improvements.

Interviews with staff members, teachers, and students illustrated that the school suffered from a poor reputation due to a lack of academic urgency. Principal Peter O'Connor,[2] placed at Franklin during the SIG grant and a central participant in this study, expressed an agreement with this sentiment.

> Yeah and there was just no bar set. We were passing time. It was yup, let's just pass time. There wasn't a let's shoot for this goal…I don't know if walking in, looking at just the master schedule you'd say it looks like a remedial school but when you saw the lack of rigor and the expectations in the classroom, then you'd say, "Oh geeze." . . . No one is going to get challenged here. You're just going to, you're basically putting in your 180 days a year of seat time as a student. There wasn't really ever a challenge to learn more, go above and beyond. (Peter O'Connor)

Peter here well summarized the sentiments of multiple stakeholders who felt that Franklin

[2] All names presented herein are pseudonyms

was previously known a place to hold students rather than a place that supported academic growth. Stakeholders felt Franklin was not a school that stimulated academic achievement and did not sense urgency for the school to change. One staff member expressed that maintenance of the status quo was directly connected to the last two school principals. She recalled that "it was [that] the school for me had been so status quo for so long. Even the principal before *Peter,* the principal before that principal when it was Miss F., everything was so just status quo." The lack of urgency and complacency at Franklin had been present for years.

Peter and other participants connected this lack of urgency and the poor reputation at Franklin with one particular factor, declining school enrollment. They believed that parents, who were seemingly aware of low-expectations in the building, enrolled their children in other local public or charter locations nearby. Estimates indicated that enrollment declined to 650 from 800 students. Staff participants in focus group sessions remembered responding to numerous petitions for "special transfers" out of the building. Special transfers allow students to attend a school other than their "home school" in the district. One particular staff member described the enrollment decline phenomenon stating "we had high numbers when I first got here, and then every year they'd dwindle down…I think the community learned that they had stopped coming because of the bad reputation that Franklin had." This statement can be connected back to the staff conversation presented previously, where even some staff members considered or did move their student to other educational institutions due to the negative school reputation.

Staff, students, teachers, and leaders emphasized in a focus group that declining enrollment was not only due to a poor academic reputation but also because the school

had a negative reputation concerning student safety. Students in particular discussed how older siblings, relatives, and neighbors would warn them about attending Franklin. When asked the question “what did you hear about Franklin before you went there?” numerous student respondents recalled hearing that student physical or social safety was a concern. One student remembered telling a family member she would be attending Franklin in the next school year and having the family member reply "Oh no! You're going to get beat up.” Other students had similar experiences. One student recollected that her older brother said Franklin “was crazy, like lots of fights,” while another student remembered her older brother’s warning: “I know he told me that there was like a lot of drama.”

Teachers and school administrators echoed these student sentiments. They felt that student social and physical safety was an overwhelming concern at Franklin before the School Improvement Grant or school improvement process was enacted. One teacher declared, “We used to have a lot of fights in the halls and stuff. There were student issues.” Administrators Peter O’Connor, Dana Billings, and Amy Clark, who were all placed at the school during the first year of the School Improvement Grant, also recalled safety and bullying as a concern. Amy remembered that there were many students based “issues” when she arrived at Franklin. Dana specifically expressed that a population of students were trying to identify as gang involved and were trying to run the school. Peter had a more general recollection of student safety concerns at Franklin. When asked about student safety at the beginning of the school improvement process, he recalled analyzing his observations of student problem or risk taking behavior at the beginning of his appointment as principal. He remembered:

> Some of the problems that our kids were having were the kind of problems that you see from juniors in high school, not seventh graders. Whether it be unwanted

> pregnancy, whether it be drug use, just behavior, just behavior period of that kind of behavior was more prevalent among the students at that point too. Those were probably the two biggest things that I saw. A lot of those student behavior was because there weren't a lot of adults in the building that had any expectation of them doing anything except behaving poorly. Those were the biggest things I saw when I walked in. (Peter O'Connor)

Peter, Dana, and Amy alongside other stakeholder groups were all concerned that students were demonstrating risk-taking behavior normally affiliated with older students. Interestingly, Peter connected the poor academic reputation and safety reputation at Franklin with low expectations from adults in the building. Peter argued that the combination of low academic expectations with student violence or bullying behaviors seemed to lead to an increase in student risk-taking behavior overall. This belief was echoed by new Assistant Principal Amy Clark who felt that the lack of academic press and academic support students received at Franklin made students feel less successful and, in turn, made students act out behaviorally.

While staff indicated that a lack of urgency to improve Franklin was present during the administrations prior to SIG, it was also presented that administrators prior to SIG fostered a negative professional environment. Teachers and staff who were employed at Franklin prior to the SIG expressed a sense of a division among faculty and staff and community. Many cited that administration, before SIG, was harsh, militant, and played teachers against one another. Reportedly, teachers that were selected as administrative pets were given priority on scheduling and other resource allocations. A staff member described the teacher divide previous administrators had created:

> I think part of it was there seemed to be specialty groups. There were cliques or whatever. Some people felt, I don't know how to put it. There were a lot of them that thought they were privileged teachers and that were the principal's pets, so there was a lot of division amongst the faculty, I think.

In response to this statement, another staff member asserted "No one wanted to be here and the people that were here constantly were fighting… It [drove] everybody else away and it was horrible." According to some teachers and staff, prioritized teachers and staff members were not determined by student achievement or by commitment to the school but rather by how well the administrator connected with them personally. District leaders who participated in interviews agreed that the administration directly before Peter was too unforgiving and combative to unite the school towards any change effort. This leadership style, the district leaders considered, related directly to why previous school reform projects had not been adopted or implemented by the faculty and staff in any meaningful way. It is important to note that a few of focus group participants did not work with the previous administrators or feel that the previous administration was divisive or was a part of low-morale in the building.

Being employed in a building with such a negative environment that showed little chance of improving seemed to take its toll on some. It was presented that many strong educators left before the school improvement process began due to the tense administrative environment and the desire to work in a building with less student violence. It was also argued that, as the school had had unstable or inconsistent success on standardized test scores, Franklin was regularly dropping onto state watch lists. One educator described this phenomenon stating "before the SIG grant, there were times when the scores were good. But if you look at it as a graph, it looks like a roller coaster. It looks . . . up, down, up, down, up, down." These swings in scores meant that the school was regularly warned by the state office of education that it needed to make improvements. Stakeholders believed that the school would close if it continued to

receive such warnings. Teachers wanted to get out before their reputation was attached to a failing and then closed organization. Staff members, who felt they were hearing a lot about negative teacher climate from the teachers themselves, remembered that many teachers exited prior to the SIG grant or improvement process.

> Staff Member D: There also teachers were moving.
> Staff Member C: Yeah, teachers were moving out.
> Staff Member A: There were a few that we wished would move out wouldn't, but.
> Staff Member B: The [gist] was we're running away.

Staff members and educators felt that teacher exits were due to fear of school closure and a negative work environment.

Administration presented a different argument regarding faculty exits prior to improvement. Peter O'Conner posited that educators did not know how to respond to low performance or increase standardized achievement through classroom practice. Administration felt that exits were connected with teachers feeling unsuccessful in promoting student achievement. Peter and Dana felt that if teachers were to have personally realized that they could make an academic difference for students, they would have been more likely to stay on at Franklin. Peter and Amy linked this lack of understanding with regards to how to promote academic success at Franklin with deficit perspectives and low expectations for their student population. Assistant Principal Amy Clark described low expectations for student performance resulted in teachers creating caring environments but not academically demanding or rigorous environments. Teachers were not demanding much because they did not feel their students could handle academic demands coupled with all of their other presumed life struggles. Peter O'Connor described this dissonance within teachers who truly feel they are doing all they can and both fail to see results and fail to recognize how some of their actions are holding

students back.

> So, here's the downside of that. Okay, so if you go into a situation that you feel that way, but you have, let's say you have 5 years in a row of low performance. Then, as an adult, I would imagine, as an adult, you'd start to say…That's a really hard, that's hard to sleep with, thinking this is about me, not about them. I mean it's . . . So it's kind of a self-preservation, I think, that some people do. I don't think that it's a malicious attempt to think of somebody as at risk. It's like, man, it's a lot easier to blame all of this over here, than to really take ownership of this. (Peter O'Connor)

This dissonance, according to Peter, led teachers to blame students for low performance. While it may seem easy for educators to point fingers at students, it is important to note how he referred to the teachers acting in this manner out of "self-preservation." Peter and Amy both expressed the belief that educators did not know how to promote academic achievement with their student population. Without solutions, teachers that became long-term employees at Franklin became resentful and blamed others for school failings. The lack of knowledge regarding how to make things better, paired with the negative environment previously described, were offered as descriptions of life at Franklin prior to SIG or the school improvement process.

Low morale in the building was considered rampant. Educators felt unsuccessful and that they could not get along with colleagues due to unequal distribution of privileges previously described. Staff felt the pressure of responding to the needs of many educators who often did not get along and to respond to the pressures associated with regularly deescalating student violence. Finally, students felt that teachers and staff members rarely cared to fix anything about the school that they considered broken. One student specifically stated "Like if something bad were to happen, there would be a few people who would really care and try to fix the problem. Then everyone else would just be like, 'Oh, okay. It's a problem,' and not really do anything about it." Students who were at

Franklin before the school improvement process began or during the first year of improvement had observed the complacency and lack of urgency present at Franklin. The school was, overall, described as a hard place to work, learn, and grow. Results of this environment were seen in low student academic performance, declining student enrollment, teacher flight, and a negative community reputation. A staff member summed the "before" picture of Franklin quite nicely stating "It was broke. You couldn't see it was broken on the outside but looking in, you could." After "looking in" for the purposes of this case study, it became quite interesting to compare this before picture with what administration, students, teachers, staff, and faculty describe as the after SIG or school improvement process.

Franklin Middle School After Mandated Improvement

For the purposes of this retrospective case study, interviews and focus groups held with stakeholders from Franklin were conducted after the SIG or school improvement process had officially been officially completed. Participants were asked to describe the differences between Franklin before SIG or the school improvement process, and after. When participants considered the aftermath of the improvement process, they provided a radically different perspective of Franklin. It should be noted that upon officially exiting the school improvement process (the after), Franklin was nationally and locally recognized as it went from the bottom 10% of middle schools in the state to the top 25%. The school had realized dramatic overall increases in student academic performance. This increase was described by Principal Peter O' Connor. "I think we were [according to the state system, which is based on] language arts, math, science, writing and then progress in those areas, not just proficiency but progress. I think we were number 132 out of 139

schools . . . in the state. Then this last, then the last year of [testing], I think we were number 31." The academic student progress was considered astounding. However, it was not simply academic scores that teachers, staff, students, and administrators described as being different in the building.

Teachers, school and district leaders, and staff discussed now having a united, grounding vision focused on growth and academic achievement for all students. Teachers and staff expressed feeling like they were part of a team. They mentioned enjoying coming to work every day. This more positive faculty environment can be highlighted by 2 particular educators who appreciated the new, more unified work environment. One educator asserted that the Franklin faculty environment is "more positive just generally, in my view. Everywhere. The whole faculty is more cohesive. It's just better in the way I look at it." Where staff and educator descriptions of Franklin before improvement highlighted a divide between teachers, educators now felt the faculty were acting in a more unified manner. Where staff, educator, and administrative interviews described educator flight as a problem before school improvement at Franklin, now teachers wanted to stay. A second educator explained the impact of the newly unified school stating:

> When I think about ooh, would I want to go somewhere else? I'm like, we've got a good group of people really wanting to work hard and making change and really in it for kids. I don't know that all schools have such a gung-ho attitude to just charge through difficult times and try to help kids be successful. We're not all similar people. We're actually really very, I think a very different group of teachers. That how somehow is quirky and funny and weird and dorky. Just all these things all at once. Somehow we all get along…You're just working with all these different people. Just using all our resources together to be one amazing thing. (Teacher)

Teachers were now, apparently, unified and able to work together despite any differences. This is a very different description than the one provided in the previous

section, where constant in-fighting was the norm. Staff recall developing a renewed faith in the school faculty as a whole. While in previous "before" descriptions, staff felt the stress of working in an environment where few got along, this seemed to have changed into a sense of pride for the teaching at Franklin. In one discussion about the faculty, staff described how faculty now really care about students.

> Staff Member A; I believe that our teachers really care about our students and their success, definitely.
> Moderator: Would you have said that before school improvement?
> Staff Member A: No.
> Staff Member B: We had a few, maybe.
> Staff Member C: Maybe not as many.
> Staff Member A: Not the mass.
> Staff member D: You're right.
> Staff Member A: Not, yeah, not as a whole, whereas now it's much more a whole.
> Staff Member B: I tell the community that there's been a complete climate change at the school because there's so much more positive things going instead of seeing so much negative all the time. There's a lot more positive.
> Staff Member C: We kept moving forward.

The change in how staff viewed faculty could have been attributed to teacher turnover, which will be discussed further in later sections. However, while many teachers exited during the improvement process due to remediation or resignation, many others stayed on through the entire improvement process. All teachers who participated in the educator focus group sessions were hired on at the beginning of the SIG improvement process or had been at the school before the improvement process began. One educator, who had previously hesitated to send students to Franklin from the elementary school where he was employed, now felt that all students at Franklin were well cared for. This educator stated, when describing Franklin now:

> For me even though it's only been a couple years it's I can say with a lot of a sense of confidence that their kids will definitely be taken care of here. That there is a very strong focus on making sure that the kids are successful academically and socially as well too because there are other things that are going on, but if they

> want a really good school with a strong academic focus and with faculty and staff that and administration that really focuses on their success this is a good school to come to. It is a very strong school. (Teacher)

It was not just employees that noticed improvements in teaching and learning at Franklin. Students noted the teaching component of the school improvement process personally, saying that, when considering teaching, "it was like it got better over the years." Students felt that teachers knew them and were invested in them personally. One student recalled teachers communicating that the school was trying to improve and wanted all students to "get to excellence and stay there." Improving student academic success with an expressed goal of excellence seems to strongly differ from the Franklin described before, which lacked academic press and urgency.

This change in reputation amongst the staff, teachers, and students had also reached the greater community. The declining enrolment at Franklin was one piece of evidence previously provided to describe the negative school reputation. Where staff had noticed many student transfers out of the building before, they are now noting a large decline in this practice. Enrollment was now going up. One staff member described this shift stating that:

> Every year it's gotten better because our kids are staying, whereas when I first started, we would have fifty to one hundred kids. It was a mass exodus…They wanted to go anywhere except here, and now I think last year we only had two open enrollment forms of kids who wanted to leave that area and go somewhere else, so this year when we started school, we started one hundred kids over what we were scheduled to have….Now we're busting at the seams. Now we have more kids than we know what to do with. (Staff Member)

Staff members believed that increasing enrolment indicated that the school's reputation was changing in the community. They felt that parents now felt significantly more comfortable brining their child to that particular learning institution.

Some enrollment stability or increases may be connected to an overall increase in quality teaching at Franklin Middle. However, administrators, teachers, and students also noted a decrease in overall student violence or risk-taking behavior. Principal Peter O'Connor, who had expressed concerns with student risk-taking behavior, recalled specifically noticing a change in student activity. Peter said, "I remember it was finally in year three [of the improvement process] it was like, all right! Our middle school students are now given the just typical middle school problems." Peter felt student behavioral concerns had lessened and were now more middle school appropriate. Assistant Principal Dana Billings noted an increase in students smiling and being positive towards one another in the building overall. Peter and Dana's sentiments were backed by three educators who all spoke to a decline in risk-taking or violent student behavior and increase in student happiness overall. From the student perspective, things had improved as well. Several students noted decreases in violence in the building overall while they attended Franklin. One student participant recalled the following:

> At the beginning of my seventh-grade, that's when you would see bullying. All the time, everywhere. If you looked to your left, you would see someone getting beat up, getting yelled at, or threatened, whatever it was. Months passed. [Later that year] you would see a little less because the administration tried really hard to either move students who weren't doing so well to a different school, counseling them, or getting them help. By the end of the year, the bullying and the fights, they were still there just not as much. Then when my eighth grade year started, it was gone. (Student)

A majority of teachers and staff members who participated in this study also indicated that there had been a decline in the number of student behavioral concerns and the intensity of negative student behaviors. It should be noted that 1 teacher expressed that she did not personally see an impact on student behavior during the improvement process but this was a singular voice in the overall data. School safety appeared to

increase alongside an increase standardized achievement scores, an increase in the amount of teachers working commonly for student achievement, and an increase in student enrollment. The school improvement aftermath seemed to have dramatically boosted the sense of school pride at Franklin. Students, teachers, staff, and administrators, with the exception of 1 interview participant, described a school they were proud to attend or work within. Perhaps the after or end result of the formal school improvement process at Franklin was best stated by a student participant who, when asked to create one sentence to describe Franklin now stated "It's a good school. You have fun there and can succeed." The before and after conversations with Franklin stakeholders were presented as dramatically different. So the questions remained. How did this happen and what did they do? The answers to those questions are presented in the coming findings sections.

Findings presented in this chapter attempt to present the story of school improvement at Franklin as told by district leaders, school administration, educators, staff members, and students. These stakeholders explain that changes in school learning and financial resources, shifts in who was employed at Franklin, alterations in how educators and administrators conducted their work, shifts in how educators were supported in conducting their work, and adjustments to student schedules and offerings are what led to successful school improvement at Franklin.

Increasing Learning Resources and Financial Resources at Franklin

The following sections of this analysis report will specifically discuss strategic changes that were enacted at Franklin that helped the school make this before-after transformation. It should be mentioned that while Franklin had many improvement needs,

the building's environment (i.e., layout, cleanliness, physical structure) was considered positive from the start. The district representatives interviewed believed that the new school building, constructed years before the improvement process, helped frame the change for the community. One district leader participant stated that the new building "demonstrated an investment in the community" but had failed to transform the school wholly as it did not address the tensions within the building. The school improvement process was begun, however, in a building that was designed to support student learning. Students expressed feeling that the building was a physically fine place to learn. Student voices about the physical nature of the building were clear in this interview conversation.

> Student H: It's cleaned right.
> Student D: It's not too big. You're not ever late.
> Student D: There are a lot of windows everywhere.
> Student A: I like how it was organized.
> Student A: The pods, every pod would have like a different color. That's how you would know the classroom. Like the numbers were organized too as all. Like different pods.

Franklin, according to most stakeholder participants, was a great educational facility. Only 1 school leader, Amy Clark, mentioned having to make any physical changes to the building. As the school was generally a well-maintained learning environment, she modified art on the walls to make it feel more representative of middle-school-aged students rather than elementary school students. New artwork displays in the hallways were changed to represent work students created while attending Franklin. Additionally, Amy recalled that school leaders elected to add national flags representing the countries of origin of their students and families to Franklin's hallway display. When considering resources at the building, very few traditional learning materials were added to the building overall. Peter remembered purchasing some science and art-based

learning resources for teachers and students to ensure that more hands-on learning experiences could occur within those course areas. However, technology resources for students and teachers dramatically increased at the start of the school improvement process. Just as the School Improvement Grant (SIG) was being submitted (SIG specifics discussed in the next section), a district leader had written and applied for a technology grant with Franklin in mind. This grant was awarded and boosted technology throughout the building, providing $1,000,000 in funding for Smart Boards, document cameras, iPads and iPods, and student response "clicker" systems. Teachers and staff felt that technology made a large difference in the building. Teachers and administrators felt the school now had technological resources needed to make instruction more dynamic while staff members felt students were now learning in ways relevant to the technological age students lived in and would be working within. In interviews, students seemed to especially appreciate the new technology. In a conversation with students regarding their access to learning resources, students responded stating:

> Student B: Yeah we had a smart board and netbooks which we don't have here [at the high school]. Also, calculators.
> Student F: Those are laptops dude.
> Student B: We had iPads. We were talking technology.
> Interviewer: So you were taught using the technology. You use the tools a lot. Do you remember any particular thing that you did with the technology? With the iPads or…?
> Student G: I remember we had a writing class and used our iPods and a lot of people were really excited because in elementary we didn't have iPods. It was something really exciting and cool when we got into seventh grade.
> Interviewer: You had iPods?
> Student G: Yeah we had tests on there.
> Student B: Oh yeah when we were taking a test and they—
> Student G: To play a video or something.
> Student B: No. If we couldn't read it ourself we got an iPod and it would read us the [passage].

All student interview groups reflected on the numerous technology tools they had

access to in their middle school years. They all seemed to appreciate the multiple ways that these particular resources both supported learning and engaged them in learning. These tools were not simply given to the school. Educators had to attend professional development throughout the school year that taught them how to use these new devices to enhance teaching and learning. Educators attended the technology trainings with a benefit in mind. The professional development allowed teachers to earn a technology endorsement, which was later attached to their state teaching credential. Franklin realized an influx in the technology to support moving the school forward so that students and teachers were working with resources more aligned with what students are expected to learn from or with in this new generation. Administration, teachers and students saw this tech grant as a real opportunity to create some instructional change in their building. However, no individual saw the technology as essential to the school improvement process. While Peter stated that technology made them more "generationally relevant," interviewees overall felt the tech was nice to have during improvement but not essential to the change.

The school, physically, should have been a positive place to learn. It was clean, bright, and new. Minor changes during the improvement process allowed for the school to now display student work and promote the ethnic background of their individual leaners. The technology influx allowed for teachers and students to learn in a more technologically relevant way. While the school environment, including the technology influx, were not considered in interviews as essential components of the school improvement process at Franklin, this could have been due to the fact that the environment was physically strong to begin with. It could have also been connected with

the fact that other financial resources stemming from the SIG were leveraged into the improvement process at the same time.

The School Improvement Grant

Systemic change at Franklin Middle School began with one major opportunity as the school was awarded with a SIG, or School Improvement Grant. This grant is available for schools that are identified as low-performing in the state as according to Utah's ESEA waiver. This waiver allows for the lowest performing 5% of Title I schools in the state to apply for a School Improvement Grant. While this grant is federally funded, applications are submitted to and are awarded by the State Office of Education.

SIG applications are completed by district leaders on behalf of their lowest-performing schools. According to district leaders, Franklin's local district had 10 schools that, at the time, were eligible to apply for this grant. District representatives, during interviews, discussed their in-house decision to make a rather bold move. They wanted to request a larger amount of SIG funding to support four schools as they went through the school improvement process. They believed that instituting school improvement efforts at a rigorous level required a focus and attention on four schools (a smaller amount of organizations) at a time. One district leader recalled that there was a specific dedication, from the district office, for supporting these schools. Despite holding a position that oversaw progress in over a dozen buildings, this leader committed to working personally at each of the four improvement sites for 3 to 4 hours a week. District supervision of the school improvement progress at these locations meant supporting leaders in ensuring that school improvement priorities, outlined within the SIG, were being planned for and enacted. Moreover, this district representative expressed that these schools were of the

highest priority and that meant numerous hours of support. This demand felt more reasonable when tackling four schools at a time. Both Dana Billings and Peter O'Connor mentioned that they did feel they received additional district attention and support from the district during the improvement process. Their statements reflect the district commitments made when preparing the grant.

As the district was applying for fewer schools to support, district leaders hoped to increase how much funding was awarded to each school. Rather than apply for the 10 schools to receive what is traditionally a one million dollar 3-year School Improvement Grant, the district asked for $2.3 million for each of the four schools. The state office of education requested that the district lower their request for the funding, yet district representatives discussed refusing that lowered request, stating that they truly believed that the financial support and the district support that they could give four schools for this 3-year improvement process was essential to the schools' ability to create major change over what was considered a short improvement timespan. A second district leader recalled specifically opposed lowering the amount requested in the grant as he felt it would be sending a negative message to educational policy makers and the teaching community. Where some of the school improvement monies provided to the school via the SIG grant were connected to professional learning and resources, the majority of the funding was connected to compensation for teacher work. Specific compensation will be discussed later. This district leader acknowledged that the school improvement process would take a large effort by the teaching community and far more work. He did not want to make the political statement that schools could transform by compensating teachers with little money. The extra funding written into the SIG grant was provide payment for

educators as they worked the additional hours required by school improvement. When asked why the district applied for a larger grant amount, this district leader stated simply:

> We went after [the additional money within the school improvement] grants is to prove that you can't go out and expect to support the teachers professionally and change behaviors with a few hundred dollars and think that that is the secret sauce in our schools. We wanted to demonstrate that it took significantly more money to make that happen…[the state eventually] gave us an ability to negotiate enough resources to at least give us a shot at trying to demonstrate collective impact on student achievement. If you're a core teacher, but also if you're a nonassessed teacher, you had to have a stake in changing the climate of the school and the performance of the kids for everybody. (District Leader)

Both district leaders interviewed articulated that more time, energy, and funding would be needed to radically transform Franklin. The district was invested in the cause and would dedicate the time, and the state was being asked to provide the funding via the SIG grant. This particular grant writing process including negotiations with the Utah State Office of Education were conducted at the district level. Teachers and staff at Franklin did not participate in the process and therefore did not mention in interviews or focus groups how the grant was obtained. A few teachers did express feeling left out of the grant process as a whole. These educators argued that the work outlined in the grant was not made clear to them until after the SIG was awarded. Sentiments of these educators are provided in more detail in later sections of this chapter. Franklin was awarded the SIG funding, and $2.3 million was inserted into this opportunity to change for the school.

Modifying Leadership and Faculty Assignments at Franklin

SIG funding seemingly allowed for the school improvement plan to be enacted, and it provided vital monetary resources into the school improvement process. Funding was simply the catalyst for the improvement process. At the time of this grant cycle, all

schools in the state that were awarded a SIG were asked to adopt the Transformation Model, which has been outlined by the state within their ESEA Waiver ("Utah: ESEA Flexibility Request," 2012) and further explained by the Wallace Foundation (The Wallace Foundation, n.d.). The Transformation Model for school improvement mandates the replacement of the school principal and requires that the school release or rehire teachers based on skill and/or commitment to the improvement process.

Administrative Replacement

The replacement of the principal appeared to be an important opportunity for Franklin. Interviews indicated that the previous administration had a reputation for being militant and for dividing the faculty or for pitting faculty members against one another. One teacher commented in the interview that they felt the leadership (re)placement was one of the most important moves that the SIG grant allowed for because it allowed for the district to select a new leader for Franklin. Principal replacement was important for many teachers who stayed on at Franklin as they felt that the new leaders could make the changes in the school that not even money could provide. This new leadership was intended to provide a fresh start for a fractured school community.

District leaders remembered initiating a call to their current practicing administrators for leading change in the four buildings awarded the SIG. One district leader specifically recalled that "we advertised that these were going to be tough spots [to work within]. Is anyone interested?" While this might have seemed a desperate cry for leadership, district leaders viewed this as an opportunity to restart the schools with individuals inspired to lead change. The district expressed receiving close to 40 in-house applications representing individuals interested in becoming a leader of these four

schools. The leader selected for Franklin Middle and a central study participant was Peter O'Connor.

District leaders expressed that they personally selected Peter O'Connor because he had a strong reputation for building community and for creating positive school environments. Peter had had past experiences in administration, instructional coaching, and science education. He was well liked and seen as a clear choice for this Franklin position. Leadership placement here was viewed as a huge opportunity to restart the school by placing an individual that was not only passionate about leading change, but had what they felt were the qualities needed to lead radical change in the school community.

Relationship building skills were considered especially important to the selection of a leader for Franklin. As previously explained, the prior administration had fractured the community. One teacher explained that “the principal before Peter O’Connor, there was a split on whether people were with or against him.” This was echoed by district leaders who felt that the strict demeanor of the previous administrator prevented him from building a team or common vision. One district leader described the more militant style of the previous administrator. This district leader felt the previous principal was one that led by command. “If you give orders, you expect people to take them. That’s not how you change the culture of a school.” The previous administration left little room for people to learn why they were asked to make specific changes. While some teachers and staff were able to take the commands without understanding why, other teachers and staff resisted leadership efforts because they wanted to fully understand the rationale for changing the way they worked. Educators and staff who followed commands and those

who did not became separate factions working within the same building. As previously explained in a previous section of this chapter, the school community was divided. One staff member explained that the strict attitude held by the previous administration carried over into how the leader interacted with parents. She recalled that, as a school parent, "the previous principal had scared a lot of people off because he wasn't friendly." Leading improvement at Franklin was going to take, according to employees, the right individual, one who could build a strong community.

When reflecting on Peter's placement at Franklin, teachers and staff felt that he was the correct person for the task of leading school improvement. One staff member recalled that Peter especially strong at building relationships amongst the teaching staff and supported teachers in feeling stronger about the idea of growing their practice.

> I think when Peter was here he was a very good cheerleader to the teachers. He made the teachers feel good about what they were doing. He encouraged them to always get better. We have some phenomenal teachers in this building but they could always get better. That's what he always encourages them. He always encouraged them that you are a great teacher and you're doing great things but you can always get better. He pushed them to better themselves. (Staff Member)

Peter was considered different because he had the ability to foster relationships during the school improvement process. Peter was also considered different from the previous administration because he had an agenda but was willing to listen, consider multiple perspectives, and explain why final decisions were made. One teacher stated "Peter was willing to listen to suggestions, He had definite things he wanted to see done but he wasn't set on everything begin done only his way. He was willing to listen." Overall, school employees felt that Peter's ability to build relationships was an essential component of the school improvement effort. Peter's strengths were important to school improvement, according to teachers, staff, and the district leaders, as new leadership

could make the changes in the school that not even money could provide. This new leadership was going to provide a fresh start for a fractured school community. While Peter O'Connor was assigned as the next Franklin principal, the SIG did not require that the school replace their assistant principals. The two assistant principals that were at the school when the SIG was awarded were expected to remain at Franklin.

New Assistant Principals

A later opportunity for change came in the school leadership arena when one of the two assistant principals resigned midyear. That particular assistant principal was perceived as not being very strongly invested in the change process. One staff member recalled that this particular school leader was “in and out the door and didn’t do anything.” It was posited that the individual probably felt they were asked to work harder than they had truly expected or desired in order to lead the change effort as an assistant principal.

The other assistant principal at the school, midyear, became ill and passed away. While the passing of this leader was very tragic, the overall perspective that was presented in interviews by teachers, school leaders, district leaders, staff members was that these two assistant principals were not up for the radical change effort that was upon them. A second teacher recalled the need for these assistant principals to be replaced, stating, “I don’t think that either one of these two leaders could have gotten the job done.” Stakeholders perceived that this was actually an opportunity for the school to realize greater change. Now the district could place two additional assistant principals who were also interested in being a part of the change effort.

Amy Clark was one of the assistant principals selected. Amy was asked to move

over to Franklin from her post as assistant principal (AP) at a local high school. The rationale presented by district leaders for her placement was that, as a new leader, she had a lot of energy that she could supply into to the improvement effort. This was consistent with how Peter and Amy recalled the selection process for the new AP. Peter asked for a "go-getter" although he was left out of the official selection process. Amy remembers being told by district recruiters that she had "the energy for the job." While energy and enthusiasm might have been considered to leading the school improvement process, Amy also brought other skills to the position. She had a background in special education and strong managerial leadership skills. According to one district leader, Amy Clark held a reputation for possessing a strong grasp of district "protocols and procedures" that would be meaningful to the improvement process. Students remembered that Ms. Clark was the administrator that always kept them up to date on what was going on at Franklin and where they needed to be.

Dana Billings was the second assistant principal selected for Franklin. Dana had been working in district office prior to her placement at Franklin. The district leaders expressed holding a strong belief in her leadership abilities. Dana felt that her past experiences with English language learners was valuable given the school population at Franklin. Dana had a strong grasp on educational research and had led several conversations with district teams regarding equity and access. As described by one district leader, "She just thinks in 'what's best for kids' kind of ways and holding people accountable." Dana was seen as someone who could push an equitable or justice-oriented agenda at Franklin that would promote increased success for all students.

Interestingly, district leaders did not consider if they would get along when

placing the administrators at Franklin Middle School. A district leader expressed that there was "no expectation that it was going to be . . . a marriage made in heaven. But we knew all three of them brought with them great strengths, and if they could bring that together it would be very good for the school." These strengths were identified as being the varied backgrounds or areas of expertise they were bringing to the building. Teachers described that, at first, the team did not "know how to mesh" and lacked a united vision for how school improvement strategies should be implemented. They then acknowledged that after the first semester of collaborating, they figured out how to complement one another. This was echoed by the district leader who stated that "they ended up complimenting each other in ways that surprised them and others…That depth of teamwork is not as common as it ought to be. They developed trust." For Franklin, administrative placement ended up well as the team worked well together.

In interviews with administrators where they were asked to reflect on their placement and the placement of leaders in the improvement context overall Amy, Dana, and Peter all stated that more strategic action regarding administrative placement in schools in need of improvement should be considered for future efforts. Peter recalled having not been involved in the selection of the assistant principals assigned to the building. Peter insisted that he ended up with the right administrative team. However, when asked what he would change about the improvement process, he clearly stated that he would want a hand in "selecting his team." The team had to work closely with one another to enact school improvement and it ended up working well, but he did not want to take that chance again. Amy Clark explained that the end result of the administrative placement at Franklin, one that led to all leaders working together well, was "lucky when

you shouldn't wait for lucky to happen again." Amy, Peter, and Dana believed that administrators should be selected based on interest in leading school improvement efforts but that selection had to go beyond this. Needs of the specific schools, strengths of the individuals interviewing, and complimentary skill sets of the administrative team were not deeply considered at Franklin when placement occurred. Peter and Amy felt this was an oversight that worked out at Franklin but could be avoided. Amy went further, expressing that specific dispositions that allow administrators to lead the improvement process should be considered as leading improvement or systemic organizational change is not for everyone. Amy described the improvement process as one that is "uncomfortable all the time… You're not sure you're doing the right thing or you're not sure if your pushing too hard or too easy…It's a different experience and it's hard." Personally, Amy reflected that the school improvement process was not one she would want to embark upon again. She believed that some may be energized by the change effort. Others would be mentally exhausted by the experience. Ability and the disposition to lead change should be, according to Franklin administrators, considered by those hiring to fill these roles.

The SIG Transformation requirement and assistant principal vacancies at Franklin resulted in the assignment of three new leaders during the first year of the SIG. It appeared important to the improvement that the school had three new leaders who understood that they were committing to a school improvement effort and understood that the school improvement effort was going to take more time and energy than administrative work within a different setting. Moreover, these three leaders were united from the start with a common purpose of improvement.

Teacher Reassignment

Assigning a new principal to Franklin that could lead the change effort was both important to school improvement and required by the SIG grant. An additional clause in the grant asked that all teachers commit to the school improvement process and to enacting the school improvement strategies outlined within the SIG. District leaders and newly selected administrator Peter recalled communicating early and often that "if this isn't the process for you, we understand." Educators who did not want to participate in the improvement effort could opt for a voluntary transfer that was offered before the 2010 school year, when the improvement process and SIG began. One educator remembered being given some papers and "given the opportunity to pass [on improvement] and put in for a transfer . . . if we didn't want to do that." Seven of 40 teachers opted out initially. This was seen as a positive school improvement step as it ensured teachers who were not committed to school improvement or to the work embedded within the school improvement process were exited out of the building.

Administration and teachers posited that fewer teachers left when the transfer offer was available than probably needed. Many, they felt, decided to wait it out and see if the process actually continued after year one. One educator remembers hearing people state "I probably should have got out the first year, I really didn't think this was going to happen." Another educator backed this statement explaining there was a false sense of "this shall pass too, and when the SIG is gone, we'll go back to the way things were." Some educators were hanging on to the belief that the improvement effort would not affect their work significantly and elected to wait out the improvement process rather than accepting a transfer. Despite Peter's efforts to communicate clearly that the process

would take place, some were not convinced. In interviews, teachers expressed that some may have remained because teachers were not personally invested in the SIG and did not understand the improvement strategies to be enacted. According to these participants, teacher voice was not included in the preparation of the grant.

Three educators, in interviews, insisted they personally did not write the SIG grant and therefore initially felt disinvested in the process. Specifically, teachers remarked that this disinvestment was due to the perceived disinterest in what teachers had to say when the SIG was being written. The previous section of this chapter explained that district leadership did write the grant and negotiate grant terms with the State Office of Education without teacher input. One educator explained teacher's lack of clarity for what the SIG grant stated, expressing "the SIG grant was given to us and were going to make these changes… I remember feeling like it was a bit of a betrayal, like there wasn't enough discussion or we didn't have buy-in exactly." Other educators backed this sentiment recalling that they were not really involved until the SIG was written and granted. Many educators and staff members recounted that they knew that things were going to change and fast but they lacked an understanding of how. What was not working before had to go but what was that exactly? What was not working? How would this look differently for them?

According to Peter, many teachers and staff were uneasy about improvement as many teachers, or approximately 90% was an estimate provided, felt they were doing all that they could personally to impact student learning. Peter felt that a stronger explanation of SIG and school improvement strategies would have benefited the entire community. The explanation would have encouraged more hesitant educators to be on

board with improvement. The communication would have also ensured that more educators who lacked commitment to the improvement effort but were unclear about the improvement strategies or work required to enact the improvement strategies would have exited out. Teachers, staff, and administrators noted that because the improvement process was not abandoned at Franklin, several additional resistant educators opted for a transfer out of the building at the end of the first improvement year.

Hiring of New Educators

With numerous educators transferring out of the Franklin community due to the school improvement process, administrators had vacancies to fill. Having the ability to hire individuals committed to the school improvement process or change effort was a huge opportunity that schools in Utah who are not SIG grantees rarely have. As 7 teachers opted out prior to the SIG implementation, leaders had the immediate opportunity to hire. Teachers and administrators expressed that in years 2 and 3 of the SIG, there were more hiring opportunities as individuals left who could not commit to the time or effort required for improvement work or as teachers were remediated out. Administration reported that as a result of these hiring opportunities, they are currently close to having their ideal staff.

Administrators believed that hiring and recruitment was essential to building the team that they wanted and needed for school improvement. They were gathering together the team of individuals who they felt could truly be successful with their students. These school leaders expressed that the work to recruit, hire, and place new educators appropriately was of the utmost importance to their success at school. It was an opportunity for them to identify who could make changes for this school and for students.

In order to hire, they had to get applicants. Peter recalled that the school's mathematics instructional coach would advertise to the greater educational community if a position was available at Franklin. Peter and Dana developed an information booklet about the exciting change efforts at Franklin; the booklet promoted the idea that teacher at Franklin could be an exciting opportunity as you would become a part of the school improvement process. One district leader recalled that "Peter and his team, Amy and Dana, were able to go recruit under that notion. 'Here's what we're doing, it's different. We need you. Come help us.'" Applications started to come in. Dana specifically remembered looking for diverse applicants. "I want diversity. I want the adults in this building to represent the kids, so yes, when I look through the applications, I look to see where they're from." In addition to diversity, Principal O'Connor described that he wanted educators who had the desire and were successful in meeting student academic needs. Peter went on to explain that he wanted to see teachers who were not simply happy providing a safe space for students but were happiest when they saw students achieve academic success. To ensure that they were getting teachers with the dispositions and qualities they hoped for, the administrators had to ask the right questions.

Administration revised the school's traditional interview protocol in order to promote educator discussion of what they would do or how they would respond to certain educational situations. They also wanted to use the interview process to learn about the interviewee's perceptions of and previous work with historically marginalized student populations. Amy insisted that this reorganization was necessary to ensure that they were hiring on individuals who could truly fit into the new way of working and thinking at Franklin. Restructuring the interview protocol at Franklin appeared to help administrators

select the right individuals for the job. Amy remembered that, in addition to conducting the interview protocol, the leaders also provided school improvement information to interviewees to ensure that prospective educators knew what they were signing up for. One teacher interviewed called this advertisement a "scare sheet" that listed all of the educator work requirements at Franklin. This particular educator felt that the advertisement worked. It scared off individuals who were not committed to the school improvement process but enticed those who saw the process as an exciting opportunity.

Attracting Via the Challenge

Interview and focus group data indicated that administrators and teachers who were recruited into Franklin's improvement process were interested in being a part of Franklin's community for two reasons. The first reason was personal; teachers and leaders expressed wanting to be a part of the opportunity presented at Franklin: to take a historically low-performing school and create an organization with high student performance results. The second factor was financial as moving students forward academically meant the possibility of achievement bonuses at the end of the year.

SIG and the overall improvement effort allowed for the school district to place a leader at Franklin who was focused and driven by the idea of school transformation. The principal, Peter O'Connor, expressed that school transformation was something that he could take with him for the rest of his life, that realizing school transformation would be the apex of his professional career. It appeared as if he felt confident in his ability to lead change as well, and the sense of personal efficacy drew him to the job. It was not just Peter who wanted to be a part of changing the trajectory of the school. The assistant principals were also motivated by the transformation opportunity. Dana Billings and Amy

Clark indicated that they felt that the job was doable, and that they had the skills necessary to do that job. More importantly, however, all administrators felt that this was an opportunity to become a part of the greater educational conversation about what was possible for student achievement within Title I schools. While leaders were clearly motivated to do something positive in the community, one administrator noted that towards the end of the improvement process, they realized the work of leading in a turnaround context was not the ideal position for them. According to this leader, the level of work-related stress associated with "constantly questioning yourself and your actions" and if those actions will lead to meaningful improvement was something she would not want to experience again.

Teachers also desired to become a part of the educational conversation and a part of the transformation process. Two educators who were part of the teacher focus group specifically transferred into Franklin during the school improvement process. These educators expressed being motivated by the challenge of turning around a school. A teacher recalled that she took the informational sheet about the school improvement process home after her interview and reviewed it. Her response to the document was "I am doing this. I am in!" These teachers felt that they had been successful in other school settings and wanted to demonstrate that their success in another school setting could be achieved at Franklin or at any school with the demographics of Franklin. They felt that they could prove to naysayers that change on the west side was possible. Some teachers that remained on at Franklin were motivated by the opportunity to participate in a change process. They saw this as an effort worth engaging in. Another educator said that, personally, she would not have remained at the school if the school was not committed to

some major change effort. To this educator, working at the school before that had such a poor educational climate was simply too hard. A third educator recalled, when hearing about the improvement process "I wanted to make a difference. I was kind of excited about it." They interpreted this, as Peter did, as their opportunity to be a part of something really special, to participate in changing a school from a low-performing to a high-performing school. While all educators mentioned wanting to be a part of the change and improvement process, the majority of them mentioned the high amount of stress associated with the work and insisted that teaching within the school improvement environment is not for everyone.

The SIG and transformation process meant an opportunity that allowed teachers and leaders to be a part of something really meaningful, and a meaningful part of the educational conversation, locally and nationally. This was a risk. There was no guarantee that those who committed or recommitted to the school improvement process were going to be acknowledged or that the process would work. Yet they seemed to see the possibility or opportunity to create a high performing urban school. This opportunity did come with a motivating factor of a possible reward at the end of the improvement effort.

Attracting Via Performance Pay

Beyond personal pride and sense of accomplishment, there was also an opportunity to receive additional pay as a result of school improvement. Compensation was given to educators for increasing student success. Performance pay or pay for work performed was written into the SIG grant and became a part of the improvement effort at Franklin. Within the SIG grant, achievement bonuses could provide up to an additional

18% of a teacher's base pay for Core assessed teachers and Core support faculty. This included those within the math department, science department, language arts department, instructional coaches, and principals. These bonuses were realized if student achievement goals were met. A 9% achievement bonus could be awarded to nonassessed teachers and assistant principals. This meant that core-assessed educators could earn above $10,000 a year for student achievement bonuses, and approximately $7,000 more for additional days of work, planning, and professional development sessions. Non-assessed core teachers could earn just over $5,000 in student achievement bonuses, and nearly $3,000 for additional planning and professional development.

Due to previously mentioned district negotiations for a larger SIG grant, performance pay at Franklin was significant. Some teachers were earning an additional 10 to 12,000 dollars a year, on top of their base salary, to improve student academic scores. Dana Billings insisted that it should really be called "pay for work" performed because in order to earn those monies and show student growth, teachers had to work significantly harder. This harder work was connected to school improvement strategies discussed later in this chapter, specifically, collaboration in PLCs, work with instructional coaches, protecting instructional minutes, supporting afterschool programs, enacting the new tardy program, and participating in the administrative mentoring process. Administration believed that these strategies or processes worked well together to increase teacher practice and make performance pay possible.

While one might infer that differencing financial possibilities for educators based on content area would divide the faculty between the assessed and nonassessed educators, teachers did not tell that story. Many said that there was some tension at first, but once

nonassessed educators realized how much pressure other assessed teachers were under, they did not mind the pay difference. Others expressed simply that assessed educators ended up doing more work. All teachers insisted that this potential earning was exciting and part of what attracted them to the role. One educator told a story about individuals who used to look down on her for working at Franklin. She stated that some expressed that teaching on the "west side" was a lower form of teaching when compared with east side schools. It appeared there was a hierarchy of teaching positions. The better the school you worked at, the better you were as an educator, and most of the high performing schools were on the east side. However, when the bonuses arrived, and she shared what her extra work earned her, her extra work that led to increased student performance towards proficiency of state standards and much student growth in her academic subject area, the naysayers were quiet.

The reward connected with increased student performance seemed to be both empowering and reaffirming to teachers who felt looked down upon for being employed at that particular school setting. Some educators that relocated to Franklin from other schools said they were personally happy and successful at other schools, but that the concept of performance pay attracted them. One teacher expressed that he would not have left a job he enjoyed and was doing well at without the attraction of the extra monies. Administrators saw performance pay as so closely linked to teacher motivation and the successes at Franklin that they went after a private grant to continue offering performance pay the year after the school improvement process ended. The grant was awarded but smaller than the SIG award and therefore reduced bonus monies awarded to each teacher. However, educators appreciated the reduced amount and appreciated the work

administrators did to obtain performance pay financing.

Changing the Nature of Practice

The SIG required replacing the principal and required that teachers not committed to the improvement process were offered transfers out of the building. This allowed for the placement of new administration and for the addition of some new educators to the school community. The SIG also outlined the specific strategies that had to be enacted at Franklin to create some fundamental shifts in the areas of teaching and learning. These strategies included the following: (a) establishing 45 minutes of daily collaborative time for teachers to work within professional learning communities (PLCs) or participate in professional development; in addition, other changes were made including the teacher contracted work day was extended to 8.5 hours per day; (b) there was increased instructional coaching in the building; and (c) student schedules were altered to increase student access to courses that were aligned with student learning.

Professional Learning Communities

Daily collaboration and professional learning was one strategy outlined in the SIG grant. This strategy was supported through the grant as the grant increased educator contract hours. Daily collaboration and learning via professional learning communities (PLCs) was described by teachers and administration as vital to the improvement process. Educators now had contracted time they were compensated for to work within professional learning communities. Prior to this opportunity, educators were expected to change how they impacted student academic performance individually in their own classrooms. In previous years, as time for collaboration was limited, the only manner in which teachers collaborated was via teaming.

Teaming was the practice of grouping a cross-circular unit of teachers who supported the same group of students. Pods of teachers who taught the same core students throughout the day would collaborate in these teams. Seventh-grade Team A, for example, would have a math, science, social studies, and language arts teachers as participants. Then seventh-grade Team B would have a different set of core math, science, social studies, and language arts teachers present. Peter, Amy, and Dana expressed that teaming fostered a negative school culture. Dana specifically called the practice "destructive." Her impression of teams was that they were groups of educators who got together and complained about student behavior or talked negatively about individual students while failing to identify any meaningful solutions to support the learner. She felt teachers commiserated with one another during this time as opposed to leveraging this time for professional collaboration. Peter expanded on this impression saying that teams were about getting together to complain or "moan about [individual students] and let everyone else hear it." It was not simply that teams complained about students that bothered the administration. Administrative concerns about teaming practices were compounded by the fact that teams could not discuss student learning of the standards or academic content as the teams were cross-curricular.

Peter O'Connor wanted teachers to be able to look deeply at their content area and learn how to better instruct for their subject area. He observed that teaming practices had historically prevented that from occurring. Peter recalled:

> Franklin didn't realize how different the goals were from classroom to classroom because they had never had conversations on the collective work…it was a failure to coordinate and communicate anything across the department that was focused on the data that they had and the needs of kids. (Peter O'Connor)

While educators had the opportunity to discuss some individual student learning

challenges within their team, they rarely had the opportunity to discuss curricular or content-based learning or the academic learning gaps or needs of students. Moreover, leaders expressed that this old model meant teachers were not discussing what content mastery of standards or rigor looked like and teachers were not able to align the curriculum vertically. Changing teams to professional learning communities was done to give teachers an opportunity to plan with others within their own content area. Building time for PLCs into the SIG agreement meant that educators could collaborate, learn, and grow with one another. PLCs became an opportunity for teachers to grow their practice and meet student needs operating as a content area team.

Evolution of PLC Implementation

Franklin's administrative team insists that central to the school improvement process was the professional learning community strategy. It was not, according to school leaders, about bringing in a lot of outside professional development. When asked if professional development was enacted during the school improvement period, the answer from leaders was generally "no." Assistant Principal Amy Clark emphasized this point saying "we did everything in house pretty well. We have teachers [working collaboratively], coaches, us [administration]." Peter agreed that the improvement effort was really conducted internally. Peter believed that the professional learning community (PLC) strategy was about teachers working to support one another by sharing content knowledge, data, and strategies. It was hoped that PLCs would provide teachers with the opportunity to grow instructionally and to study student learning data for the purposes of identifying reteaching or intervention needs. In turn, PLCs were to lead to increased student performance.

Administration and teachers discussed how the PLC strategy evolved through the school improvement process. As Franklin began the move from the teaming model to the PLC model of collaboration, it was apparent that PLCs work would need to be guided by school leadership including instructional coaches. Administrators and coaches attended and supported PLCs as teachers moved into more formatted way of discussing student learning. The goal for Year 1 of the improvement process was to ensure that PLCs were examining their Core standards by grade level, solving common instructional problems for the content area, and collaboratively planning lessons. Peter stated that the examination of Core standards was needed during that 1st year of work. Principal Peter O'Connor remembered realizing this need stating "our first year it was like, 'Oh my! We've got teachers who don't even know the Core!'" This meant, according to Peter, that teachers had to dig into the standards documents for their content area. They had to "look at it and have meaningful discussions at that more granular level of what are we really wanting students to know when we say this and what does that look like?" Administrators felt that educators could better plan to instruct in a deeper and more rigorous manner after digging into the Core. Teachers remember the first stages of the process as well. While they did not specifically recall studying the Core standards, they recall using the standards to create a "backwards design" of each unit. One educator explained that this backwards design practice led to a lot more collaborative "lesson planning, and looking at what lessons we were going to teacher to really get through these topics." The deep consideration for what was to be taught and how to teach the content was developing through professional learning communities. Efforts to examine the Core and focus on lesson planning were considered to positively impact teaching and learning at the school.

In Year 2 of PLCs, teachers were to collaboratively design Core-aligned assessments that would be administered throughout the grade level and analyzed within the PLC time. Administrators recalled pushing teachers to move to the next level of collaborative work and to consider designing assessments and evaluating assessment data within their PLC. Teachers recalled this effort. One educator stated that the 2nd year was all about "creating common assessments" and insisted that this has benefited his department.

> We now have this bank of common assessments and…now we modify them…and made them better. We just built them and they kind of sucked at first. They were only probably like 50% good but now they are up to about 70 to 75% good now so we are getting there, and its going in the right direction. (Teacher)

Teachers were getting stronger at building meaningful assessments that checked for student understanding of the Core standards.

A nonnegotiable expressed by administration was the need for data to be used within Professional Learning Communities. Common formative assessment development led to increased conversations in PLCs about student data. It was shared earlier in this chapter that Franklin's student data was like a roller coaster. Sometimes scores went up, sometimes scores went down, and in some years, Franklin completely plummeted. Leaders perceived that before SIG, data conversations were focused on how the data were not representative of the teaching conducted at that school and was then discarded. Before SIG or the improvement process, data provided an end-of-year result that went often unexamined. According to some teachers and administrators, poor test performance was justified away as individuals blamed poor student groups or a bad year with discipline on low performance. Now data had to be examined in PLCs and with instructional coaches to identify gaps in learning, gaps in proficiency, and opportunities

for intervention and enrichment. An exchange between two educators in a focus group recalled that this transition was “scary at first.”

> Teacher: We had District Office people come in and stand there in front with that data, and we all were like, [what should we do?] I think that feeling at first was shocking. Then, after we got more comfortable with that, and I think somebody said, ‘We don't need the District people to stand there. That doesn't help us," we got rid of the District people standing there with the data.
> Teacher: It was our [content] coach and us, and sometimes our principal that would walk in and stand there and look at the data. I just remembered. Coming from another school, thinking that I need to go for 80s, 90s, 100%, and here, all my kids are getting 50s and 60s, and I'm going, "Ugh." It's a failure, but our Math coach said, "Well, in this school, when we push them to 50s and 60s, that's good. That means we've got them. Now we got to keep pushing them.”

This fear seemed to be alleviated when teachers were left under the supervision of their instructional coaches and PLCs without district supervision. Fear also seemed alleviated when teachers realized that they were accountable for student growth or progress but would be supported in using the data to make better instructional decisions for their classroom. One educator remembered that he began to feel safe in sharing and discussing data with the team during one particular data conversation where his students performed poorly in comparison with other teachers in his PLC. He remembered diving into the data and recognizing that he taught a concept incorrectly. He acknowledged his error to the team and planned for reteaching in the classroom. Later, he said “the principal publically thanked me for recognizing my teaching error and for being willing to fix it.” Peter, in this instance, was giving teachers within that PLC the ability to recognize errors and correct them without punishment and without being put down. Another educator remembers that administrators were supportive rather than punitive when teachers discussed student learning data in PLCs. When considering how they were supported when instructional problems were identified in PLCs, the educators stated:

> I think too I've seen they encourage teachers to go visit other teachers' classes, see what they are doing. Plus they met with their groups and talk about, okay this worked for me in teaching this and somebody else says well this didn't . . . How did you get this across. They are encouraged to share and work as a team rather than compete against each other. They're working together for common goal and I think that's been an important part of it. (Teacher)

Administrators made educators feel comfortable sharing successes and struggles in PLCs while remaining solution oriented. They helped teachers who had less than desirable student success on formative exams identify routes to resolving instructional errors.

To ensure that data conversations could happen regularly, an individual was hired using school improvement monies for the specific purposes of analyzing assessment data and generating usable assessment data reports. Peter felt that this new hire "freed the coaches" from struggling through data analysis so that common assessments could enter the conversation in PLCs at a quicker pace, a pace that allowed for more immediate reteaching or intervention. Peter expressed that data conversations simply got better over time. Instead of failing to review the student learning data or learn from those numbers, teachers were now taking their data and "turning in action plans" for how they were going to address learning gaps. No teachers, he felt, would have gotten to this point without feeling that they were in a safe place to learn and grow their practice. Now data were being used to drive decision making within professional learning communities and impacting classroom practice.

While teachers were identifying errors in instruction based on student learning data, they were also identifying student academic gaps. Teachers were finding spots where students needed stronger academic support. Peter and Dana expressed that many students have carried these gaps for years without them being addressed. Now teachers had student academic data that they could use to identify the specific academic support

students needed. Peter truly believed that a large component of the school improvement process was reteaching students that they could be successful academically. Mr. O'Conner went on to explain that students entering the middle school often had years of struggles in some subject areas. He felt they had to "unlearn" the mindset that they could not be successful within those classes. While no individual was specifically charged with increasing academic hope amongst the student population, Peter and Amy expressed that this hope was accomplished as teachers used PLC concepts and data study practices to better support the individual learners. As the school moved to more successful instructional practices geared at individual learning needs, students started to improve academically. Peter explained that instructional quality rose overall while Dana Billings recalled that students knowing their data and their scores and setting goals in classes led to success and increased student pride.

> Kids have different perception of themselves. They are not the west side kid that doesn't have anything or doesn't know anything. They have said "I improved my SRI score by two hundred points since the last test!" . . . and teachers are saying "you can do this." (Dana Billings)

These PLC practices and the focus on student learning needs resulted in students having a different perception of their academic selves.

Year 3 of professional learning community support was not described as radically different from Years 1 and 2. Most teachers considered Year 3 to be a continuation of the previous years' work, making refinements to previous assessments or lesson designs. One teacher expressed that, in Year 3, we were "looking at the student work" more than before. This educator may have been in a different spot than other teachers as the teacher focus group consisted of educators from multiple content or subject areas. Administrators explained that PLCs progressed at differing rates overall as they began with a stronger

focus on work in mathematics and language arts than other subject areas. Several administrative and teacher interviews indicated that the PLC process was not simply about studying the Core or creating assessments so that students got better at the end-of-year test. Not 1 interview participant felt that they were pushed to teach to a test. For teachers, PLC collaboration led to a stronger understanding regarding what elements of their teaching practice needed to be improved, what types of instruction was working, and being able to identify individual student needs. For administration, it was about, as explained by Peter, "frequent professional dialogue" and decreasing professional isolation.

How Administrators Supported PLCs

PLCs were charged with exploring the Core Standards, designing lesson plans aligned with the Core, and creating common formative assessments during the years of improvement. To accomplish this, administrators recalled that they personally, alongside coaches, were present at PLCs to assist teams by guiding the conversation without providing any directives. As administrators wanted teachers to feel safe and comfortable in the PLC environment, they made attempts not to run the meetings but to act as a resource of information for teams and occasionally, they posed content-area-related problems for the team to solve.

Peter provided some examples of how this worked within a mathematics PLC. Peter recalled that every teacher in the mathematics PLC had different homework grading procedures and required different amounts of homework for students. Student grades were impacted by homework differently depending on the teacher. The administration recalls asking teachers to examine the practice. According to Peter, he stated something

to the effect of "let's have a common understanding and belief and let's have some solidarity around what homework should be." The teachers were able to determine who they were and what they believed within the PLC collaborative structure and therefore able to collectively redefine the homework process. Another math department discussion revolved around identifying how intervention classes like math labs would be run. One teacher recalled a discussion about the math labs or math remediation classes, saying they sounded like this:

> What should math labs cover? Should they front load learning so that when students go to their actual math class, they have a preunderstanding of the major vocabulary when it's presented? Should they fill gaps so when a student is identified as struggling with place value, should that be what the math lab focuses on? (Teacher)

Teachers generally appreciated that the administration gave them room to problem solve as a team of content experts without micromanaging. The work completed in the mathematics department provides one look at how teachers were able to redefine their educational practice in PLCs. The PLC work overall seemed a drastic contrast to previous teaming practices and administrative support seemed essential. Administrators felt that their presence, as well as a coaching presence, in PLCs helped to move the process along more seamlessly. They felt they were providing a model for their expectations of collaborative discussions.

Administrative support of PLCs was remembered differently by educators. Some felt the administrative support was vital to their PLCs development, others felt the support hindered teacher growth. In contrast to the dominant opinions expressed in interviews, 2 educators interviewed described their time in PLCs as dominated by administration and possessing little room for teacher discussion. While this was not the

central opinion expressed, it seemed important to recognize that the more positive and functional reports of PLCs were provided by the individuals that also expressed having the most voice in the process. PLC conversations were perceived as successful when they were promoted or celebrated by administration but allowed for teacher-led opportunities to redefine who they were as educators in that community. As school improvement progressed in years, administrative presence in PLCs declined and educators began to lead and drive these instructional conversations on their own.

Overall, teachers felt that PLCs allowed for the types of discussions they needed to have to grow their professional practice and more strongly impact student learning. Teachers and administrators argued that these were also the types of discussions that gave teachers a voice. There were comments that, before SIG, teachers were not united or worked in isolation, and now teachers discuss possessing a united or common vision with their departmental team. Administrators believe that teachers were now working together better as a result of the PLC work. Mr. O'Connor specifically stated, "When I first got here, teachers stayed in their rooms, close their doors, they were not about to step in the hallway." The prior isolated or divided teaching community has been discussed in the before segment of this chapter. Now, staff members and teachers insist PLCs have created a stronger community feel. When asked about the results of PLC implementation, one staff member stated, "We have a family here… They are very emotionally supported of one another, within departments [relationships are] very tight." Many teachers and all of the administrators who were interviewed credited the school's instructional coaching model for supporting the development of these tight relationships between teachers in a PLC.

Instructional Coaching

Increasing instructional coaching at Franklin was the second strategy written into the SIG that was considered an essential element of the school improvement process. Instructional coaches supported PLCs including data studies, and provided individual support to educators to support their professional growth. At the onset of the grant, language arts and mathematics instructional coaches were hired full-time. While coaching had been present in the building prior to SIG, having two full-time coaches at one site was unprecedented. Administrators explained that the district norm was that instructional coaches were divided between several buildings. As such, in the years before the improvement process, teachers rarely had the opportunity to receive coaching or coaching support and feedback. Moreover, coaches had to prioritize what teachers they supported. Coaching before the SIG or improvement process was therefore optional for veteran teachers and a mandate for only those new to the profession. As a nonnegotiable agreement within the SIG that was emphasized by administration, coaching at Franklin during improvement meant that everyone received individualized coaching in the building.

Language arts and mathematics educators beginning in Year 1 and science educators beginning in Year 2 had professional learning community support by their instructional coach. Coaches were viewed by administrators and teachers as knowledgeable content experts who could provide guidance to PLC conversations by assisting in team data analysis processes and through providing resources or instructional ideas when a learning gap appeared in the data. One teacher recalled the data analysis support as essential. He believed that coaches kept them solution oriented when faced

with low student performance. A majority of the educators credited the coaches with helping their teams get along better and get focused on a common goal. One educator stated, when discussing the beginning of coaching support in PLCs, "Our personalities, there were a lot of prickly personalities…She [the coach] . . . had enough credibility because she could come down on us when we were getting too prickly with each other or when we lost focus so that she could bring us all back." The coach was seen as a knowledgeable leader whom teachers allowed to facilitate and guide discussions when the discussions got intense.

Not all teachers appreciated coaching in PLCs or experienced coaching to the same extent within their PLCs. The science department was awarded a full-time coach and therefore PLC support from instructional coaches in Year 2. When performance pay was not awarded to the science department, teachers' monies were leveraged to provide science with a coach. Peter O'Connor explained this move, stating, "I committed to teachers that any money that had been set aside for achievement bonuses that wasn't used would be funneled back in to school to address the area of greatest need. The first year they did not get their bonuses in science so we took that money and hired a science coach." Peter went on to explain that the science teachers appreciated the gesture and worked well with their coach during Years 2 and 3 of the improvement process. Two of the teacher participants and one administrative participant noted that they were only beginning to receive instructional coaching help in their PLC after the SIG or improvement process was officially over. Social studies, as a nontested area, particularly felt left out when considering coaching support for PLC advancement. According to one educator, the social studies department did get some support as they were included in

writing conversations held with the language arts department, but this was not the content-specific support other departments were receiving.

Having coaches on site full-time allowed for the coaches to support school improvement beyond PLCs. Instructional coaches could now regularly visit classrooms, provide individual instructional feedback, support teachers in lesson design, support teachers as they analyzed student learning data, and model for teachers' best practices in instruction. Leaders viewed the coaches as in-house, job-embedded professional development providers. Instructional coaching was an opportunity for teachers' instructional practice to change. When asked how important instructional coaches were to the successes at Franklin, Amy replied, "Immensely important, I can't even overstate that… I know teachers felt a huge amount of support from" the coaches. Amy's beliefs were supported by Peter and Dana who articulated feeling that they had the best district coaches supporting their teachers. Instructional coaches could, according to administration, go in and really help shape or inform practice and generally help teachers change without fear of consequence. Teachers mentioned viewing the coaching process as a rewarding opportunity. When 1 educator recalled her experience with instructional coaching, she stated,

> It's kind of fun, we discuss something that is coming up, she helps me plan the lesson and makes the material, she comes in and teaches for a couple classes. I see what she's done and how she's doing it. Then she usually maybe sticks around for a couple classes afterwards and I continue teaching with her stuff the rest of the day. (Teacher)

While not all teachers may have experienced the level of coaching support as that particular educator, teachers overall did not view coaching as a punishment but rather as a way for them to grow their practice. Teachers felt coaches established "really good"

relationships with all educators and had the content knowledge that made them credible leaders. Coaching relationships with teachers allowed for educators to feel comfortable learning or growing their practice. Working within PLCs and with an instructional coach to increase student success was motivating to many teachers. They felt supported in becoming stronger educators and, in turn, felt more capable of addressing student needs.

Instructional coaching was considered to be essential to the school improving process at Franklin as coaches provided in-house learning opportunities to individual teachers and in-house data analysis and problem solving support for PLCs. Instructional coaches were not focus group participants and therefore, their particular perspective on school improvement efforts cannot be included. However, all administrators interviewed cited that instructional coaching in an outside of PLCs helped instructional practice strengthen at Franklin.

Altering School Schedules and Programmatic Offerings

The third specific strategy outlined in the School Improvement Grant was "ensuring additional classes were offered to students in areas of reading, mathematics, and language development support" while altering extracurricular offerings for students. Altering the schedule and student learning experiences was important overall. Administration felt that this managerial change was not enough on its own to truly impact classroom practice so they began discussions with educators about the concept of protecting instructional minutes as well.

Protecting Instructional Minutes

Tier 1 instruction, or instruction that allows 80% of students to access and learn the standard or concept, was considered generally weak at Franklin Middle School

overall. Assistant Principal Dana Billings explained that the overall goal of the SIG and school improvement process was to improve Tier 1 instruction school-wide. While PLCs and coaching were supporting teachers in strengthening this level of instruction, administrators felt the need to message school-wide that every instructional minute was important and should be protected. Leaders discussed that prior to this conversation, there were three pieces of classroom instruction or school instructive processes that really were detrimental to student progress.

One of the instructional practices leaders wanted to change was the previous emphasis on field trip opportunities. Administrators believed that many field trips were not connected to meaningful learning for students. When asked about student learning experiences, including field trips, in the interview, one educator replied, “Eh, we don't do that. Maybe somehow, having kids have more of that real, out-of-the-school experience would be good, but I don't know how that comes back in when we're trying to protect the instructional time.” This same teacher went on to explain that many of these activities were cut as teachers were taking students out for whole-day experiences that were not often connected with needed student learning. A different educator stated that cutting field trips helped overall because with the previous field trip policy “lot of teachers [would get] really upset because it’s taken their instructional time.” As a substitute for field trips, one teacher elected to “bring stuff into class that’s hands-on and real” allowing for learning to take place meaningfully within the class time while students remained on campus.

The second instructional practice administrators wanted to change school-wide related to the numerous “fluff” activities conducted in classrooms that were not

connected to Core learning or to student learning needs but rather to teachers' personal interests in the project itself. Amy Clark recalled that one particular teacher had students spend the whole day creating a paper-based sound barrier for their classroom wall. While the activity was to demonstrate how dense a sound barrier needed to be, it was interpreted as an endeavor that took an extended amount of student time without pay off. These types of activities were considered unproductive by leaders and therefore one of Peter's "pet peeves." Administration worked hard to emphasize that pet projects were no longer a part of the learning environment at Franklin. However, teachers were welcome to be creative in how they addressed students learning of the Utah Core.

The third move to protect instructional minutes resulted in cutting or altering classes that were not supporting learning. Specific examples provided were teacher's aide and stage crew. It should be noted that there was, according to administration, no format for how teachers' aides were used and there were only a couple performances a year where the setting of a stage would be necessary. When asked about elective classes overall, Peter expressed that:

> There's the bare minimum of elective classes. There always has been and there always will be. When we came in, I guess, the year before, there were just tons of weird elective classes that . . . Just tons. Tons and tons of extra stuff that really was kind of dumping ground…There wasn't any support, there wasn't a reading class, but they were stage crew. We have two assemblies here at Franklin, and there's nothing going on the stage. One play, one multicultural show, one assembly. Whatever. There was just dumping. It was like low expectation for students. Low expectations across the board. (Peter O'Connor)

These classes, they considered, were feeding into the idea of Franklin as a remedial school and so administrators moved to change and reduce elective assignments and student class assignments overall.

Changing Schedules

Changing student elective offerings or assignments and adding in needed courses was, again, the fourth strategy discussed here and one that was outlined in the SIG grant. As explained by Peter, this move was about maximizing instructional time in the building overall, whether it be decreasing "fluff" in the classroom or altering course offerings. Peter felt that you must "view the schedule from the student's perspective" and consider "was this valuable, what was the support that I received? Did my 6 hours at school mean something for me?" After administration tackled these questions from a student's point-of-view, they felt able to alter the schedule and school offerings appropriately.

It was just explained that leaders cut some elective courses to "get rid of the fluff" in student schedules. Leaders had noted that students were spending up to 2 hours a day for a semester's time in courses like the teacher aide period or stage crew that did little to promote student learning or meaningfully enrich students at Franklin. Assistant Principal Dana Billings explained the process of identifying classes to cut. "We took some time to cut all that out, and to make it make more sense. To figure out really, how many electives we needed, minimum, so all kids would have a spot in those electives, and have full schedules." Specific electives were cut completely from the offering list while others were added in.

Instead of asking for students to attend classes that were not academically driven, leaders added a fine arts rotation where students would rotate quarterly through various art experiences. Students remembered their art rotation fondly. All students interviewed expressed enjoying elements of the art rotation and listed music, jazz, ceramics, and dance as some of their options. Many students particularly enjoyed the dance program as

it promoted learning multicultural dances and, in turn, learning more about their personal culture and about other ethnic groups in the building. Moreover, the multicultural dance program led to evening performances that were highly attended by parents and other members of the school community. Art programs were thought to enrich learning and were considered more rigorous in their instruction as teachers had expected standards to follow. The school leaders also adopted Advancement via Individual Determination (AVID) as an elective to promote college and career readiness as well as skill development. Peter explained that the program has served to teach the students "organizational skills . . . but also how to advocated better for themselves" and other skills like problem solving. This coursework was seen as much more beneficial to the student population. All seventh graders were to take AVID for at least half of the year. A Year-2 version of the AVID course was available to eighth graders as an elective.

Administration also added courses available to students who were performing near, at, or above proficiency expectations. Over the school improvement process, honors offerings continued to grow as more and more students were growing academically. Dana described how students were selected for these classes, saying, "We look at their data and we have teacher input" it would end up being "this is how they are performing on [standardized tests]" they are capable of handling an honors class. Numerous math and language arts honors classes were added to the students' schedule, promoting the idea of rigorous instruction for students who were achieving at or near proficiency. Peter explained this move also, stating, "We added a lot more honors classes. We added sections of ELP (extended learning program), of honors math." He went on to explain that these actions were to promote that we were working better and harder at Franklin and

to detract from the remedial school reputation that the school had previously held. Some remediation classes, like math labs, were also offered. Administration believed that the addition of these honors classes helped ensure that all students were able to access work at their performance level. Teachers did not mention during focus group sessions that these honors level classes were added as a component of the school improvement process. One educator stated that she felt there was a lack of offerings at Franklin for advanced learners. The contradicting stories could be related to the fact that scheduling was solely handled by administration so educators might not have been aware of the work that went into the scheduling changes or the outcomes of those changes. Franklin already had intervention or lab classes running for students with more academic support needs. Administration insisted that with the addition of the new honors level courses, Franklin was reaching all learners appropriately. Moreover, administrators believed that these classes promoted the idea of students feeling academically successful. If students were able to take an honors class, they were probably able to view themselves as scholars at Franklin.

Finally, changes in student schedules were made based on a strict analysis of each individuals learning goals and needs. This action was led by administration. One staff member remarked about Dana, we have an assistant principal that "goes through every single cum folder" for all students who enter Franklin. "She tries to be very diligent about making sure students are placed right. She tries really hard to get kids where they're going to succeed depending on their background and where they are coming from." This staff member recognized the hard work being put into meeting all individual learner's needs via the school schedule.

Increasing Programmatic Offerings

In discussing student services, scheduling students personally and individually was something Dana Billings was proud of accomplishing. Amy Clark also mentioned having pride in the new master schedule and the way courses were assigned. Dana's next step in school improvement, following the official SIG and improvement process, was more strongly addressing school counseling services. However, teachers, students, and staff believed that the school was on the right track in meeting student needs social and emotionally due to several programs that were adopted and implemented during the school improvement process. These programs were not required by the grant but were brought about when a need was identified at Franklin. The majority were offered afterschool hours. Programs included an elementary to Franklin transition program, the Ambassador's Club, an enhanced afterschool program, The Colors of Success program, the Horseman's Club, and a student academic recognition program.

Transition Program

The elementary to Franklin transition program began during the 1st year of school improvement and continues on today. The transition program has two parts. First, it offered some "summer learning" or introductory learning to better prepare students for the coursework that they will be taking on at Franklin. Peter described the first segment of the program expressing "we really tried to focus on summer school on incoming sixth graders about to be seventh graders and seventh graders about to be eighth graders. We didn't make it about remedial work. It was about trying to front-load them with things that would help them be successful." Most of the front-loading, Peter explained, was math or science based.

Second, the transition program offered a way for students to get oriented to and learn more about the school before the first day of classes. Teachers wanted to calm any fears that students had regarding what middle school would be like. Amy remembered specific efforts to communicate with students that school safety concerns were being addressed and that students would be safe on campus. Beyond this, students remember being shown their classrooms and lockers. One student explained that the process made him feel less nervous about starting middle school when "they helped us with our lockers and everything." While this might seem like a small school improvement feature, nearly all student participants attended during the transition days. All interviewed students who attended this program felt more ready to transition to the new building.

Ambassadors Club

The transition program was also a way for incoming students to become acquainted with some current students who were considered peer leaders. These peer leaders were members of the Ambassadors Club, an organization that began in the 2nd year of school improvement that promoted student leadership. Selected students were responsible for escorting new students around the building, escorting parents and community visitors around Franklin Middle, voicing the student perspective of school improvement needs, and participating in school events. One educator as well as Amy Clark explained that while the program seemed to lack specific activities for students to support at the onset, the program continues to grow. Student members of the Ambassador's Club also worked to plan school socials or after-school student events.

One interviewed student was a member of the organization and stated that the organization helped "organize socials" and identified needs at the school like developing

a bullying text line. She explained "we made a phone number or a hotline so that if anyone was getting bullied at school they could text it. It's totally anonymous and it would go to the administrators so they would take care of it." Focus group student participants felt like it was a valuable way to spend some afterschool time in the building and would often complete club responsibilities during the afterschool program time frame.

Afterschool Program

Administration felt that all students should have access to enrichment during afterschool hours. Peter expressed that the previous afterschool director was perceived as not committed to the program and had allowed the program to flounder. Peter recalled observing afterschool and noting that it was poorly attended with little structure or programmatic offerings. Overall, the afterschool program was seen as a holding cell for students who could not yet go home. This concept was expanded on by Dana who recalled that Franklin took over managing the afterschool program from external agencies and leveraged teachers and community education supports to create a more solid program. Administrators Peter and Dana remembered explaining to educators that as a part of their new and extended contract under SIG, they would be expected to support students after school. Teachers becoming a part of this afterschool program were part of a reorganization effort to ensure that the program became more meaningful.

The first segment of afterschool became learning based, and students were provided with academic support by their classroom teachers. Teachers had certain days of the week they were to offer specific content-based support to students attending the program. Dana explained that the school leadership would "send letters home to parents

[explaining that] your child needs extra help in math. On Tuesdays and Thursdays there will be teachers available for help." Subject area teachers were available and provided support on different days of the week. Teachers went on to explain that they appreciated being the academic support for students rather than external agents. One educator expressed that the teachers could do a stronger job providing academic support than the previous "college students who, did a good job but . . . didn't really know what kind of student an individual was." Dana touted the success of the academic supports provided by teachers saying, "we did a correlational analysis of students who stayed in the afterschool program. Did they do better [on state exams]? They did." She impressed that the teacher support was increasing student success.

The second part or 2nd hour of the afterschool program required teachers share crafts or personal talents with students. Other club activities and community education activities (i.e., lacrosse, soccer, color guard, etc.) were also available and led by community members at this time. Assistant Principal Dana Billings described that this hour "gave students something fun to look forward to." Amy Clark expanded on this idea saying that the additional hour here provided "social emotional development of students." She went on further to explain that there were more students making positive connections with teachers and adults during the afterschool activities. Students recall that it is this time, during the 2nd hour, that teachers really got to know them at a different level. One student said that the extracurricular activities "helped teachers get to know students better." Teachers had small groups of students at this time with whom they could develop personal relationships. Another student went on to provide examples of activities she appreciated. "They offer different things like bead classes and arts and crafts,

athletics…There's been snowshoeing. There's been some awesome stuff." Staff members felt that parents appreciated the programs because they were free and the students did not have to leave the building.

Not all teachers appreciated having the mandate of supporting afterschool. Peter described that many teachers were upset they were not personally compensated for the time spent. One teachers mentioned that the time did not seem well spent given the small group of students she supported during afterschool time. However, with additional contract hours worked into the SIG grant, and with leaders having the flexibility to use these hours how they saw fit, teachers were required to support the effort. Dana and Peter saw afterschool support as loosely connected with performance pay. The hours that teachers were supporting students in afterschool was paying off for teachers with increased student success and therefore increasing achievement bonuses. Dana explained, "With the grant, you put in the hours during the year and then money comes from performance pay in the end." Overall, the message was that if students got stronger academic support from certified educators and developed stronger personal connections with their classroom teachers, scores and, therefore, performance pay would come.

Colors of Success

Where the transition program and afterschool program were available for any interested students and the Ambassador's Club was available for student leaders, other clubs or programs were adopted at Franklin to ensure that students in need of social or emotional support had an outlet. Teachers credited Assistant Principal Billings for adding the Colors of Success program to Franklin. In Utah, Colors of Success is a gang suppression program for students who were regularly identified as showing indications

that they were involved in gangs. Dana specifically noted that at the beginning of her time at Franklin, several students were trying to indicate gang membership via clothing, tagging practices, and fight participation afterschool. She felt that this particular program would provide a new perspective to these students and possibly a new social group as well.

A staff member described the program as one that usually supports "a group of kids that had issues and pulls them in to talk or work with them." Dana felt that the conversations that program leader had with students decreased gang activity in the building. Dana stated, "I do think that having an adult at school who would have frank conversations with them and their parents about what was going on made students think. 'Now they are paying attention.' It has gotten better and now you don't see anything [gang affiliation signs]. There's nothing." Teachers generally agreed with these statements explaining that the level of gang-affiliated activity in the building decreased during the school improvement process. Colors of Success may have served to decrease gang affiliation in the school by providing an alternative route to socialization and by providing an involved role model for students via the adult sponsor.

Horseman's Club

An offering selected and implemented with specific students in mind was the Horseman's Club. This was an afterschool program designed specifically for students that had been traumatized and were having difficulty socializing with other students and adults in the building. Dana explained that, during Year 2 of the improvement process, a handful of students "were asked [on a climate survey] if there was an adult they knew of that they could trust and all of them said no." Dana and others were distressed that some

students were not connecting with adult role models in the building. A teacher explained that, when you looked at the list of students who responded to the survey indicating no, it was a group of "seventh-grade boys who were going to explode, emotionally, and had crap at home. They were always getting in fights here, underperforming." These particular students were perceived as handling more stress than they could manage at their age. To address this group of students, the school improvement committee was connected to a horse therapy farm.

Student participants were linked with the horse therapy program that allowed for them to participate in horse care and horseback riding afterschool. Administrators, specifically Assistant Principal Billings felt that the Horsemen's Club was truly supporting these students and providing them with friendships, responsibilities, and a connection with an animal. A teacher participant expressed that a year after program participation began, the student club members started "working in the office, their grades are up, they're not getting into fights anymore, their self-esteem is improved…It's been a huge success." Faculty noted the successes of this program as important to the improvement process and very meaningful to the students involved. The horse therapy program was adopted for a small number, approximately 7 students but, according to interview participants, seems to have lessened school behavioral concerns while meeting the social needs of those students.

Success Club

All of the above-mentioned programs or clubs appeared to be, according to interview participants, meeting the academic and social needs of students. Prior to the improvement effort, there was no real way of recognizing student academic successes at

Franklin. Counselors felt a need to recognize students who were academically successful school-wide and to encourage students to become a part of the improvement process. Peter remembers Success Club as one of the first school improvement efforts. He wanted to support the counselors' ideas and he recognized that "it focused on what students were doing right." Peter felt that increasing positive connections between the students and the school was essential and that this club could be a way to do just that.

This new reward or academic incentive program for students was called the Success Club. Any student who achieved the equivalent of a 3.0 GPA made honor roll for the quarter and earned a place in Success Club. Student Success Club member names for each quarter are posted at Franklin's entrance. Members were given weekly rewards for achieving Success Club status. Examples of rewards provided were 5 minutes of extended lunch, pencils, entrance in a drawing for a valued prize (i.e., iPods, bicycles, etc.). Dana recalled that students enjoyed the feeling of recognition so much, many began tutoring their friends to ensure that the next quarter they would also be in Success Club. A staff member participant echoed Dana stating, "There'll be friends like, 'What do you mean, you're not in Success Club? Well, let me show you now to do Success Club,' and they'll go come to me or the counseling center secretary and be like, 'I need to check my grades.'" The students were now noticeably focusing on academics and supporting one another academically.

Students recalled the club and its membership fondly. A student stated that he personally felt Success Club was the "biggest factor" in changing things at Franklin for students "because everyone wanted to be in Success Club so they had to keep their grades up. They were going to get their work done in class and I think they were learning while

they did it. Everyone's score improved." All of the students wanted to be a part of it. Another student interviewed recalled seeing his little brother's Success Club membership card and being proud of him for working hard at school. At present, the school staff and faculty report that Success Club has increased academic dedication to the extent that the school had to raise GPA requirements for recognition as nearly 70% of students were on the list as of the previous quarter.

Success Club appeared to have spurred conversations about school-wide behavioral and academic expectations. School leaders started talking to students about Success Club membership and added in conversations about what it means to be smart at Franklin. A phrase that adopted at Franklin school wide was "not just smart, Franklin smart." Teachers and staff members described this phrase as one that increased school pride. Peter recalled leading quarterly student assemblies in an effort to reinforce Success Club, Franklin Smart, and the academic successes generated by the reward program. During these assemblies, he would show students school-wide data. Student academic progress from previous benchmark or end-of-year measures were celebrated and challenges were issued to students to raise the scores even further. Peter stated that the conversation would look like the following: "Here's how our seventh graders did on math last year. Now you're eighth graders, here are what your scores. Let's try to beat those." We're always trying to do something like that, sharing some form of data. That was one of the big cornerstones, one of the big pieces." Peter discussed these small competitive challenges posed to the students as a way of uniting the student body in "healthy competition" to be their best selves.

One educator explained that the phrase "Franklin Smart" was also used to

promote common language regarding expected behaviors. If you were "Franklin Smart," you were acting in a safe, responsible, and respectful way. Amy remembers having these conversations with students and making statements like "is that Franklin Smart?" when a student was making a choice that may have been considered inappropriate. Peter recalls that the phrase simply became a mantra for students, faculty, administration, and staff as everyone worked to increase student success in the building. Peter credited efforts like Success Club and the phrase "Franklin Smart" for drops in discipline referrals. "Kids were excited each time Success Club lists were posted to see if they were on there." He felt that the more Franklin made academic success both cool and the norm, the more students began to embrace academics overall and were therefore less likely to act out in class.

When administrators were asked specifically what efforts they enacted to develop a more positive school climate, they simply said they did not consider climate really. One administrator described climate as "fluffy" and not rigorous enough of a concept to support meaningful school improvement. What they did consider is how to make students believe in their academic abilities. They believe that this resulted in a safer and calmer school climate overall. Amy and Dana both expressed that "tagging" in the school and neighborhood as well as student behavioral referrals went down throughout the improvement process. Administrators credited these declines to students feeling good about themselves and being in a more positive environment. Peter said, when considering the students, "They're smart. They just needed to have the environment where they can act like any other middle school kid and learn and be in Success Club and be proud of good grades, be proud of themselves for being academically able, not proud of

themselves because they scribbled on the bathroom wall and they slept in class." Peter went on to explain that students want to be good at something. Making them feel good about themselves academically and as learners reduced behavioral problems in the building because the students did not have to be "good at" negative behaviors anymore, they could simply be good at learning.

Addressing School Safety

Success Club and other school improvement actions seemed to help students feel more academically capable. According to school administration, this feeling of success and academic possibility led to decreases in negative student behaviors. While interview participants may have considered that positive academic progress amongst the student body was decreasing unwanted student behaviors, administration also recalled taking on a school reorganization effort to ensure that student safety in the building was addressed.

Teachers and administrators described that Franklin had previously been broken down into seventh and eighth grade specific pods. Seventh-grade Team A or seventh-grade Team B would be in one specific pod (segment of the building) with their math, science, social studies and language arts teachers all located in that particular pod. The same went for eighth graders. Moreover, students only ate lunch with other student's in their grade level administrators viewed this as a problem. They felt that this was creating a divide amongst their student population.

After observing several times students that were in seventh grade be referred to as "sevies," and not being permitted to walk within what were considered eighth-grade pods or eighth-grade hallways, administrators felt it was time for a change. As Dana explained, "That was creating a lot of the tension among kids, was because there was so much turf

war going on. People still call it the eighth-grade hall . . . and if you were a sevvy and walked down it, you could get pummeled, or there was an eighth-grade lunch, and there were eighth grade-pods, and it just became . . . It was really territorial." Administrators wanted to take action to release this tension and divide. They believed that the learning pods and separate lunches were no longer needed at the school now that teachers were moving into departmental work with their PLCs.

With teaming practices replaced by professional learning communities, there was no reason to divide seventh and eighth graders into different areas of the building. Administrators reassigned teachers to new classrooms to create content-based classroom hallways when possible. They then went further and reassigned school lockers. Lockers were now rotated between seventh and eighth graders and so that no grade-specific locker hall existed. Dana Billings described these actions, recalling that she told teachers and students, "We're not going to have seventh graders on one floor and eighth graders on another with their lockers. The eighth graders are going to . . . We're not going to have a seventh-grade lunch and an eighth-grade lunch. There was that sense of community. We tried to build that way, which was successful I think." They hoped that these efforts would ensure that students of both grade levels were intermingling and interacting appropriately in the hallways throughout the day. This appeared to work as students, in interviews, expressed that bullying declined in the building overall. One student stated that "my seventh- and eighth-grade year, I never saw bullying…People there were friendly. They would really help each other." Administrators recalled use of the term "sevvy" slowly declining in the building. Ending the divide in the building seemed to decrease bullying between the two grade levels. Leaders expressed that the result of this

meant less tension amongst students and more of a community between grade levels.

Creating a Tardy Policy

An additional effort at Franklin that unintentionally addressed student safety in the building was the new school tardy policy or procedure. This policy was the first school improvement effort Peter O'Connor recalled implementing. Peter perceived this program as a quick win for his new appointment as teachers regularly had complained that tardiness to class was a problem at Franklin. The new plan asked that teachers were in the hallways between classes. Peter described that "teachers made the commitment to be out at the start of their planning period to supervise the hallways. Administrators were also present during passing periods to support teacher efforts. To promote success, there was a developed flow of incentives for students who were rarely or never tardy and that flow of proper remediation processes for students that were commonly tardy. Part of the remediation including calling parents and informing them of their students delayed presence in class.

While Peter saw this reorganization as a quick win with teachers, students saw this new tardy program as personally beneficial. Many students, in interviews, commented that with teachers in the hallway bullying decreased in the building and that there was less harmful gossip in the hallways overall. A student participant stated that fighting and bullying decreased in the hallways because "they would stand outside of their classrooms in between classrooms. Students would have someone basically watching them. If they wanted to do something not so smart, they would get caught." The new tardy program changed how persistently late students were responded to in the building but also served to increase the relationship between teachers and administrators

and impact perceptions of school safety on behalf of the students.

Changing the Way Administrators Worked

To assist the progress of multiple change efforts at Franklin and to lead by example, administrators changed the way they worked in the building. Some administrative efforts have already been discussed in this chapter. Administrators altered their hiring practices, supported PLCs, revised school schedules and program offerings, worked to communicate academic goals with students, and worked to increase student safety. All of these efforts were conducted by administration alongside instructional coaches, teachers, and staff members. However, some efforts were presented as specific to the administrative role. Administrators took these endeavors on alone. Specifically, administrators recalled providing instructional mentoring to educators, enacting teacher remediation when needed, and communicating with parents and community members as elements of their role in the building.

Administrative Mentoring

Instructional coaching and PLCs, discussed earlier in this chapter, served as opportunities for teachers to alter their instructional practices for the better without fear of administrative consequence. Administrators explained that when a teacher failed to make adequate progress, as assessed by formal and informal classroom evaluations, within these two support systems they elected to personally mentor some educators individually. Administrators Peter, Dana, and Amy each selected a few educators to mentor each year. They divided teachers to mentor amongst themselves based on content area expertize and occasionally based on which leaders' personality best matched with the teacher in need of additional support. This was a large time investment for the school

leader. Assistant Principal Dana Billings explained that, with one particular teacher, mentoring absorbed about 10 hours a week of time spent both in the classroom and in collaborative planning and feedback sessions.

Principal Peter O'Connor described administrative mentoring as a central element of how he needed to spend his time in the building and he therefore adjusted his schedule. Peter would answer emails early in the morning to ensure a maximum amount of time during the day could be spent in classrooms supporting instruction. Peter remembered, "I would show up to work at five o'clock in the morning or four o'clock in the morning, you do email . . . I would try to do it at a time when no one else was around." Peter wanted to prioritize mentoring to impact teaching and learning in the building. In order to realize this priority, he had to be available during the school day. While some educators thrived under administrative mentoring, it was explained by leaders that, for many, this was a last resort before implementing a formal remediation process. For that reason, teachers and leaders felt that many struggling educators who did not make progress needed during mentoring left on their own volition to pursue other careers or to transfer to a less demanding work location.

Evaluation and Remediation

Teachers and administration explained that before SIG, educators were rarely evaluated. Many teachers cited that they were only visited for a few minutes before a final evaluation was handed to them. The full district-aligned educator evaluation was an improvement strategy outlined within the SIG that was to be implemented during the improvement process. Amy Clark explained that the district evaluation system is often not used to fidelity. Peter went on to explain that he received district support in really

examining "what was supposed to be done" in evaluation using the district protocol and felt the process "totally fit the bill." He felt it was underused in the district because evaluating instruction was not a strength of many leaders.

Administrators perceived that if educators at Franklin were to be held to a high instructional standard, administrators would have to be in classrooms more often, for longer periods of time. Administrators would have to use observations to provide teachers with specific areas for growth. Peter explained that enacting evaluation was really looking at Tier 1 instruction and increasing conversations with teachers about areas they could grow their practice. According to administration, all teachers received some level of formal evaluations and instructional mentoring from the school leaders. Those that failed to make progress or commit to the school improvement efforts at Franklin were met with remediation. Remediation was conducted to provide educators with intensified support to improve. If this effort failed, based on classroom data and observations, teachers were formally dismissed.

Administrators' insisted that their first goal in entering remediation with a teacher is to get them better. Peter stated, "We got to work like hell with them, we got to do everything we can to get them better." Dana remembers observing one educator "72 times in the year. I just kept coaching him . . . and working with him on a weekly basis… I spent so much time giving him clear and consistent feedback." Administrators expressed that their overall goal was to keep teachers at Franklin. Working with ineffective educators to make them more effective was a priority. Administrators wanted to ensure that their students were getting the best education possible from teachers who were constantly improving their practice. When the teacher could not improve their

practice, they needed to be dismissed. Otherwise, as Amy reflected, they began to hold back students and the school improvement process.

Leaders estimated that they moved forward with remediation (although not all educators stayed throughout the entire formal remediation process) with 10 to 12 educators during the improvement process. Peter recalled one situation where an educator was rude to students and referred to them as "slime balls" on a regular basis and did not generally "foster the joy of learning." In this situation, he moved forward with the remediation process. Amy discussed remediating another teacher who had little control of the classroom. Amy had made 25 visits to his classroom to provide support when she finally recognized that he was not making any progress. Growth through mentoring might not be a possibility for everyone. Peter noted that many educators who were in remediation at Franklin simply struggled with "building a skill and sustaining it, it's too much work. cognitively maybe. It's ludicrous for us to think that just because somebody gets a 4-year degree they should be guaranteed a job." Peter especially did not feel that it guaranteed them a job working with students at Franklin. One educator articulated appreciating this level of accountability. She felt that her ability to do her job well was loosely linked to how well other teachers were doing in the building. Educators in the building had the ability to impact one another's success rates. This teacher believed that accountability was not only necessary but ensured that all individuals were working with the students' best interest in mind and supporting student growth.

All three administrators expressed that the remediation process was emotionally taxing. Assistant Principal Clark said that "looking in someone's eyes every week, meeting with them, being in their classrooms and trying to help them change, having a

relationship with them and they saying 'you are done' after months and months of investment and paperwork" was "excruciatingly hard." According to Peter, Amy, and Dana, the emotional toll it takes on you is possibly why so few leaders enact the practice. However, all three administrators agreed that getting teachers out of the building that were not capable or committed enough to growing instructionally was one of the best things they did for students and for the school improvement process. Teacher focus group participants insisted that no remediated educator was treated unfairly. Teachers believed that administrative actions were justified. It should be noted that all three school leaders believed that the district supported them once they pursued remediation of an education. This was vital, according to Amy. "You do have to have the district behind you, because if you don't do something right . . . if they're not on board with you all the way and not trusting your process, then it falls apart." Administrators felt that their fidelity to the evaluation and commitment to supporting teachers first helped the district feel more comfortable moving teachers out of the building.

Communicating to Parents and the Greater Community

In addition to the work administrators were conducting to improve teaching at Franklin, administrators also worked to enhance communication with parent and community stakeholders. Administrators specifically enacted this effort in order to redefine how parents and community viewed Franklin. Initial communication to the greater Franklin community was in the form of a letter. When your school falls onto the state's low-performing list, schools are required to send a letter to parents informing them that their school is identified as low-performing. Peter O'Connor expressed viewing this letter as an opportunity to really reach out. Peter used the letter to inform families of the

school's status and as an invitation for families and community members to come in and learn about improvement before school started.

During this informational sessions, Peter shared school-level performance data with attendees and specifically expressed to families that while there were some pockets of success within these data, those pockets were not good enough and Franklin was going to make some changes. Peter remembered being

> brutally honest with were we sat with things. We had an assembly and you could hear a pin drop when I was saying 'here's our present levels of performance and we just have to own that. This is where we are but here's what we know and here's what we believe. The people that are staying here have high beliefs…They have high expectations for your children. They're going to push your children. It's going to look different from here on. (Peter O'Connor)

He hoped to truly communicate that the school was going to become a better place for children to learn. Teachers and staff recall this messaging to parents. They believed that the messages left a strong impression that the school was committed to becoming the strongest school for their students to learn within. There was a clear intent here to change the perception of the school in the eyes of the family and community members. This was not the only time they met and shared data with families and redefined who they were with parents and community members.

Administrators described having several of these data-based conversations with parents and community members. Students were often present as well. Conversations occurred at open houses and during school cultural night events. Administrators and students recounted that the principal, at these meetings, would share data and highlight student growth. Principal O'Connor along with the other school administrators would talk to parents about the improvement strategies being enacted and how those change efforts were influencing that progress. One staff member stated, when considering school events

that parents are invited to, “they do try to have something going on in the auditorium to let parents know how the year is going and progressing.” Parents were becoming more informed about the school and changing their minds about the school as a whole. Assistant Principal Amy Clark remembered one particular informational session held a year or two into the improvement process. She recalled that parents gave a standing ovation to school administration, faculty, and staff when they realized the progress made at Franklin on behalf of the students.

School leaders also increased communication efforts with parents via mail and phone. Newsletters went home and mass phone calls were made with messages regarding upcoming events at Franklin. A staff member expressed appreciation for the efforts of Dana Billings. The staff member recalled that Dana was the administrator that began to translate newsletters and phone calls home into Spanish. She felt this was a meaningful effort with such a large parent population being native Spanish speakers. Students recollected that parents would receive informational newsletters, report cards, and phone calls. A staff member commented that, overall, the three administrators were working “hard to try and make the building more welcoming, much more inviting.” While parents may have been hesitant to become involved due to negative experiences with the previous administration, leaders now were making an effort to shift the school into a positive place for all.

Teachers and staff talked, in interviews, about how Franklin’s reputation began to change in the community. Student enrollment began to rise. Staff members specifically expressed that while they had previously been flooded with parents transferring students out to new charter schools in the area, school enrollment was rising. The school had

become a place that the community had considered a strong learning environment for students. Students were returning and enrollment rose, but communicating within the building and redefining the school in the eyes of parents was not enough. Administration felt they also had to redefine how faculty and staff at their feeder elementary schools perceived Franklin.

A central problem expressed in several interviews was the perception that Franklin was enrolling high numbers of special education students. According to school leaders, Franklin's special education count was way above the national average. In contacting elementary schools that fed into this middle school, administrators got the impression that elementary school principals and teachers were over-referring students to special education because they felt that they would not get the services they needed at Franklin Middle School without having an individualized education plan. A teacher participant explained that, overall, a large percentage of students were coming into Franklin with individualized education plans, approximately "19%" of students. Franklin was exiting students out of these programs at a large rate. Dana Billings explained her feelings, stating,

> I think that . . . our feeder schools had heard so many horror stories about what would happen to kids when they go into middle school that the reputation of Franklin was not good alongside student achievement, so they thought 'if we get our kids in Special Ed, then by law, those teachers will have to be more helpful to them. (Dana Billings)

As Franklin was changing and working to serve all students, the over-referral of students needed to stop.

Administrators conveyed realizing they needed to change and redefine what Franklin was all about with feeder schools to ensure that students were identified

appropriately. Administration recalled reaching out to their feeder elementary schools to coordinate a site visit. Peter explained that they invited the "feeder school teachers to come over and we shared data with them. They watched their former kids. So the more we could get them into the culture of what it really looks like, then they go, 'Oh jeez, it's not near as bad as I thought it would be.'" They prompted visitors to specifically examine the type of work that the students were completing and the types of support the students were receiving to do these rigorous levels of work. Almost immediately, administration felt that elementary school teachers and principals were more comfortable sending their current students on to Franklin. Administrators hoped that this increased level of comfort would lead to more accurate student identification. This accurate identification would help ensure that students were correctly placed when they entered the Franklin environment.

Chapter Conclusions

This chapter presented the major findings uncovered by this study. Data from district and administrative interviews, teacher interviews and focus groups, staff focus groups, and student focus groups revealed perceptions of school improvement strategies and how school improvement strategies were enacted. Aligned with the tradition of qualitative research, multiple samples of quotations from participants are included to demonstrate a clear and accurate representation of the Franklin story.

The SIG award promoted change at Franklin by providing a guide for the school improvement process and financing for the improvement effort. Findings indicate that the SIG award was a significant catalyst for change at Franklin. Moving beyond the SIG award, three primary findings describe the actual work conducted at Franklin to enact

school improvement. First, meaningful efforts were enacted to modify of administrative and faculty assignments. Second, efforts were conducted to alter the nature of educator practice at Franklin. Third, specific actions were taken by administrators to support the change process.

The first finding of this study was that efforts to alter administrative and educator assignments meaningfully impacted school improvement at Franklin. An overwhelming majority of participants felt that getting the right administration in the building to lead change was significant to the schools' ability to improve. Decisions about administrative changes were made by district leaders. These leaders felt they had placed the right individuals for leading change at Franklin but did not consider how the team would work together. The results of administrative placement were positive as school leaders were able to support improvement efforts while developing a positive school community. Educators were provided the option of transferring out of Franklin at the onset of and throughout the school improvement process. If educators lacked commitment to the change at Franklin, they were allowed to opt out. As some educators elected to leave Franklin, administrators were able to hire committed team members that were willing to promote change.

The second finding related to the importance of altering educator practice at Franklin. Before improvement, educators rarely experienced professional collaboration or instructional coaching. Prior to improvement, educators were not working to protect instructional minutes. Moreover, educators were not required to support student afterschool hours. Professional learning communities (PLCs) were implemented to increase professional collaboration in the building. Educator's increased understanding of

the standards, increased ability to assess student learning, and increased instructional capacity were identified as results of this collaboration. Instructional coaching was heightened in the building during the improvement process. Instructional coaching for all teachers was also found to increase instructional capacity in the building. Coaches increased capacity by providing individualized mentoring and by supporting PLC development. Administrative messaging regarding the importance of protecting instructional minutes during the improvement process seemed to resonate with educators, especially as student schedules were modified to ensure this was possible. Administrators, teachers, and staff all noted that the goal of protecting instructional minutes altered teaching and learning for the better. Teaching time was now focused on increasing rigor and providing meaningful learning experiences for students throughout the day rather than in some select classes. Finally, administration insisted that teacher support of the afterschool program was important to school improvement. Teachers supported the academic development of students during afterschool time. Afterschool time also supported the development of stronger teacher-student relationships as the time provided the opportunity for teachers alongside students on enrichment projects.

The majority of the school improvement tasks discussed in the findings were enacted collaboratively by administrators, instructional coaches, teachers, and staff. Finding 3 of this study represents work conducted by administration alone. The third finding of this study represents the specific actions administrators took to promote school improvement. These included administrative mentoring, remediation and evaluation, and communication with the greater community. Administrators felt that their work to mentor educators helped grow teacher practice. Administration prioritized being in classrooms

and providing instructional feedback during the improvement process. In doing so, they recognized the need to not only formally evaluate all teachers but to remediate when needed. While administration remembers the task of remediation as emotionally draining, they felt that the entire cycle of mentoring, evaluation, and remediation ensured that they had the strongest faculty at Franklin. The cycle ensured that all students were receiving high quality teaching and learning experiences. The administration also worked to address student safety in the building. They halted any practices such as locker assignments and lunch assignments that kept seventh-grade and eighth-grade students separated. Changing this structure decreased bullying and student fighting in the building. The administrative team was also found to have increased communication efforts with parents and community members. The team identified that the negative reputation of the school was impacting how parents and their elementary feeder schools felt about sending children to Franklin. To alter the negative perceptions of Franklin, administration held regular communication meetings with parents and elementary school employees to inform them of the improvement process and the level of change being enacted in the building. These communication meetings appeared to result in Franklin gaining a more positive reputation in the greater community.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this case study was to retrospectively explore the school improvement process at a school that had successfully exited state-mandated improvement status. The school site examined here was nationally and locally recognized for their improvement results as assessed by standardized test scores. Franklin entered mandated improvement and was awarded a School Improvement Grant (SIG) just prior to the 2010–2011 school year and exited this process officially in the 2012–2013 school year. Data collection was enacted in 2014. I believed that a better understanding of how administration enacted school improvement, why certain improvement strategies were selected, and how these strategies addressed school climate would contribute to a stronger understanding of both the school improvement process and the role of school leadership and school climate within this process.

This research used qualitative case study methodology. To collect data, I conducted in-depth interviews with school administration and collected supportive data through in-depth district leadership and teacher interviews, as well as staff, student, and teacher focus groups. Documents related to the school improvement process were also collected. Participants in the study included 3 administrators, 2 district leaders, 6 educators, 5 staff members, and 16 students for a total of 32 participants. In all, 30 interviews or focus groups were conducted. The data were coded, analyzed and

organized. A more complete description of the analysis process can be found in Chapter 3. This study explored the following research questions:

1. What aspects of the school climate are addressed during a school's mandated improvement to raise student achievement?
2. What is the role of the leadership team in addressing school climate within a mandated school improvement to raise student achievement?

Ecological Framework

Chapter 2 of this dissertation provides a description of the Ecological Framework, a framework that guided this research and data analysis. Viewing data using an ecological lens was relevant as this study sought to explore the interconnectedness of school climate and school improvement. School climate research insists that the development of the whole-child (academic, social, and emotional) can be realized if the school meaningfully addresses each school climate domain (Astor, Benbenishty, & Estrada, 2009; Cohen et al., 2009; Haynes, Emmons, & Ben-Avie, 1997; McEvoy & Welker, 2000; McPartland et al., 1998; Voight et al., 2013; Zullig et al., 2011). The Ecological Framework aligns with arguments presented in school climate research. Viewing schools and the work within schools using an ecological lens means carefully analyzing how the school as an organization creates an environment that is supportive of the whole-child (Bronfenbrenner, 1994).

Swearer and Doll (2001) discussed the relationship of child development to schools considering the ecological frame. They explained that "the ecological theory presumes that simultaneous with development in language, cognition, social competence and physical integrity, children also accommodate their immediate social and physical

environment" (p. 9). Swearer and Doll can be interpreted as meaning that when or if a child struggles in any of these developmental areas, it can be seen as a reflection of the environment and not the individual child's characteristics. Children are at risk because the environment within schools is ill equipped to respond to the multiple needs of students (Johnson, 1994). The inverse then can also be inferred. Students who are healthy academically, socially, and emotionally were educated in positive learning environments that responded to learners' holistic needs. Climate researchers express that addressing school climate needs will ensure that students have access to high-quality academic experiences and strong social relationships with adults and students in environments that are physically, socially, and emotionally safe (Anderson, 1982; Cohen, 2006; National School Climate Council, 2007). The school climate agenda therefore is not simply seen as one that supports academic success but the whole-child (Cohen, 2007).

Leveraging the ecological framework throughout data analysis meant considering how each piece of school improvement work addressed the academic, social, or emotional needs of students. Analysis resulted in a set of three major themes: (a) modifying leadership and faculty assignments, (b) altering the nature of educator practice in the building, and (c) shifting the manner in which administrators enacted their role. The analysis suggested that the school transformation was possible via successful enactment of the school improvement processes or strategies within the aforementioned three themes. Findings were organized into categories and presented in the three themes of modifying faculty and leadership assignments, altering the nature of educator practice, and shifting the manner in which administrators enacted their role to create the findings narrative presented in Chapter 4.

The previous chapter presented the "story of Franklin" as told by participants; this chapter is an attempt to provide an amalgamated picture of the findings and what the findings may mean in relation to leadership for school improvement and the role of school climate in the improvement process. This final chapter presents the discussion. This discussion takes into consideration research regarding leadership for school improvement and school climate. The intent of this discussion is to present a more holistic understanding of the findings as they related to school leadership, school improvement, and school climate. The implications of this study regarding the possible significance to practice will be explored. Implications for further research will also be presented. A chapter conclusion will close this study.

Leadership for School Improvement

Careful analysis of the interview, focus group, and document data developed a story of the school improvement process at Franklin that was presented in Chapter 4. As discussed above, themes presented in this chapter included (a) modifications of leadership and faculty assignments, (b) altering the nature of educator practice in the building, and (c) shifting the manner in which administrators enacted their role. These three themes tell the story of how Franklin transformed under the support of new leadership. These categories indicated four areas for discussion that predominantly connect to research on school leadership and leadership for school change or turnaround. Franklin's school improvement success can be directly connected to (a) ensuring commitment to the improvement work, (b) enacting instructional leadership efforts, and (c) altering structures to support the "new" school. Fourth and finally, while Franklin leaders did not consider climate relevant to their school improvement efforts, climate

domains did appear to be addressed through the work.

Chapter 4 described a school that had been transformed. The before-and-after picture provided of Franklin depicted a school that had successfully enacted the school improvement process. Success was determined in two ways. First, the school had exited state-mandated improvement as determined by standardized achievement scores. The school had gone from one of the bottom-performing middle schools to one of the top-performing middle schools in the state, as assessed by standardized achievement scores. Second, students, teachers, staff, district leaders, and administration all felt that the school had become a better place to work and learn. Franklin had realized changes that multiple stakeholder groups were proud of. The data on the before-and-after picture provided in Chapter 4 indicated that the school changed.

The SIG grant, or school improvement grant, seemed to provide a resource into that change by outlining school improvement strategies that should be enacted and by providing money into the improvement effort. However, the SIG was simply a catalyst for change at Franklin. Administrators at schools that need to make improvements or district leaders looking to increase the effectiveness of their lowest performing schools can find lessons in Franklin's improvement process that can speak to how to make these changes possible. The work at Franklin can provide some guidance for future school improvement work. In the coming paragraphs, an integrated picture of the improvement effort at Franklin will be presented. This more integrated picture will be provided in the following four themes. The first theme will speak to the importance of ensuring collective commitment to the improvement work. The second theme relates to the significance of instructional leadership. The third theme indicates the importance of restructuring an

organization to match the mission or vision for the new school. Finally, a discussion regarding school climate and the use of school climate within the improvement process will be explored.

Ensuring Commitment to the Work

Commitment of stakeholders to the school improvement work at Franklin had an impact on the school's overall success. A systemic change like school improvement requires that teachers, staff, and administrators work harder, putting time towards planning for and implementing school improvement strategies. Teachers spend more hours collaborating and supporting school programs. Administrators spend longer days in the building. School improvement requires more work as it requires organizational change (Cucchiara, Rooney, & Robertson-Kraft, 2015). Efforts to move the school forward have to be enacted by those working within the building. For some, this effort can be anxiety producing (Thomson, 2003). All teachers and administrators who participated in this study described a higher amount of stress that working in this environment produced. Teachers and administration especially are being asked to question previous practices and to make changes for the better. However, it seemed that those who were committed to the cause took on the effort, stress, and extra work knowingly and willingly.

At Franklin, administrators and teachers had the opportunity to sign-on to the improvement process. Committing formally to the work before it began seemed to influence the development of a critical mass of individuals ready to lead or work for school improvement. A critical mass of dedicated individuals working to support systemic change is necessary (Harris, 2002; Weiner, 2009). Some at Franklin committed

formally to the work while others, including one vice-principal and several educators, elected to transfer out school and out of the improvement effort. As they elected out, administrators and others enacting the work had fewer resisters to respond to during the process. Lacking resisters meant that the school improvement process could be employed with more ease. Resisters can often stall or halt progress of new structures or systems. Some resisters will refuse to implement initiatives, which can create strife within the building. Individuals working alone or in small teams to move the school forward would have little impact (Fullan, 1992). Those that attempt such work in small numbers are often burned out and abandon the cause. School improvement burnout or fatigue was not noted by Franklin employees because they did not regularly face significant resistance to the work. The work was conducted by a critical mass of faculty who committed to the improvement process. The work at Franklin aligned with educational research, which insists that an organization is only ready to change when the faculty has bought in (Orr et al., 2008).

When schools receive sanctions, it is up to the principal as leader to determine how this change-driven public policy is enacted or implemented at their school site (Rorrer & Skrla, 2005). Beyond Franklin's initial commitment process, implementation at Franklin began with school leaders working to establish a school improvement vision with the faculty. The successful school leader generates the vision and energy for change after obtaining buy-in from stakeholders for the change effort. They get educators invested in a change through solid communication and vision setting work (Fullan, 2008; K.A. Leithwood & Poplin, 1992). This vision of the future should also increase stakeholder motivation for change (Adelman & Taylor, 2003; Anderson, 1993; Bryk,

2010; Cox Jr, 2001; Kotter & Schlesinger, 1979). Performance pay may have served to motivate some educators towards the change effort. However, most educators were motivated by the redefined Franklin vision of growth for all students. They interpreted leadership messages about the improvement work as their opportunity to create a really special school that served all learners. Leithwood and Poplin (1992) explained what this motivation to act through vision setting meant:

> The collective action that transforming leadership generates empowers those who participate in the process. There is hope, there is optimism, there is energy. In essence, transforming leadership is a leadership that facilitates the redefinition of a people' mission and vision, renewal of their commitment, and the restructuring of their systems for goal accomplishment. (p. 9)

The overall vision for improvement was centered on the idea of change for a new Franklin. Teachers, staff, and administrators believed that they were supporting an effort to create a school that served all learners. This shared vision for improvement work ensured that teachers were committed to the improvement process and were energized by the possibilities for their new school. Identifying what this new vision would look like in practice meant revisiting the vision as it applied to various initiatives throughout the improvement effort. The relationship between the vision and what it looked like in practice were communicated in multiple ways. Parts of this vision were communicated to the faculty by administration (i.e., specific strategies like coaching and PLCs, protecting instructional minutes, using data, focusing on growth). This clear communication regarding what the process will entail and what teacher roles will be in supporting and implementing the process allowed for individuals to buy-in. Administrative transparency about these school improvement efforts allowed for teachers to commit to a process they fully understood (Muijs & Harris, 2006).

After initial communication, leaders made educators feel they have voice and investment in the process over time. Some work connecting the vision to practice were co-created with the faculty in large faculty meetings (i.e., the new tardy policy) or were created by teachers within professional learning communities (i.e., developing math lab procedures). Including teacher voice in these processes and starting with the teacher-initiated tardy program ensured that educators valued enacting the improvement efforts. Research indicates that empowering teachers by providing them voice in organizational change influences their organizational commitment overall (Bogler & Somech, 2004). Moreover, using professional learning communities as another way to promote teacher voice in the vision setting work meant that components of the vision would be connected to teaching and learning. The vision must drive instructional improvement efforts. Explained by Hemmings (2012), it is not simply about creating the vision but connecting the vision to specific school-wide and classroom goals. These practices aligned with research on developing a shared understanding, rather than a top-down understanding, of the vision for school improvement (Leithwood & Poplin, 1992; Sergiovanni, 1992).

It is important to recognize that while faculty vision development and commitment to the effort was important to change at Franklin, administrators also shared the vision with community, parent, and student stakeholders. As Peter led meetings with these stakeholder groups, he shared with them the vision for the new Franklin and how the school was working to accomplish their new goals. The vision or commitment to school improvement did not live simply in the minds and hearts of the employees but was shared with the greater community. Findings indicate that the work here aligned with research regarding the creation of safe and positive school environments. Astor,

Benbenishty, and Estrada (2009) made clear the importance of the principal working to set the schoolvision and ensuring that all stakeholders are aware of the school's mission and vision.

Initial commitment to the school improvement process and the continual work to establish and share the vision at Franklin resulted in the development of a critical mass of support for the school improvement effort. This critical mass was crucial to the success of school improvement at Franklin.

Enacting Instructional Leadership

School leaders were able to initially gain commitment for the school improvement process. Administrators were then able to continually recommit faculty to the process using the vision of a new Franklin to guide improvement efforts. Leadership placement seems one of the most important opportunities for the school districts looking to reform or alter low-performing schools. Aligned with research on the importance of leadership in the school improvement context (Duke & Salmonowicz, 2010; Leithwood, Harris, & Strauss, 2010; Marks & Printy, 2003), leaders at Franklin were seen as crucial to the school improvement success. Leaders at Franklin went beyond creating a shared commitment and vision for improvement. They enacted instructional leadership practices that increased teacher accountability for improvement efforts and supported teachers in growing their instructional practice.

The vast majority of individuals working in schools are teachers. These educators will have to change their instructional practices in order for the school to realize student achievement gains (Lieberman & Miller, 1999). Having them committed to improvement is one thing; asking them to make changes to practice is quite another. The work at

Franklin aligned with current research regarding instructional leadership. As explained in *A Mission of the Heart*,

> At the end of the day, with high-needs schools, it's really about student achievement and the instruction. If we're not able to be in the classrooms to observe instruction and make sure . . . students are receiving high-quality instruction, then moving the budget is not going to do anything. (Johnson, 2008, p. 3)

Franklin administrators rearranged work schedules and worked longer hours to ensure they had time to observe instruction. Franklin leaders focused their observations on effective instruction for student learning. Instructional leaders observe classrooms with the intent of understanding if and how current teaching practices are positively impacting learning. The purpose of observations is further detailed by Sergiovanni and Starrat (1993) who explained that when principals are observing classrooms, they must "attend to the evidence that all students in the class are learning at a level of developmentally appropriate, deep understanding of the curriculum" (p. 87). Beyond observation, administrators took efforts to offer instructional mentoring to educators. When the principal understands the learning environment that exists within their school, they can develop recommendations for professional growth. Research explains that when an capable instructional leader (i.e., one that can identify areas for instructional growth that will meaningfully impact student success) identifies areas for improvement, they then work to build the talent or human capital of their educators both individually and in school teams (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Klar & Brewer, 2013). This development of an educator or educational team's skills is called "capacity building" (Fullan, 2007). Capacity building through administrative mentoring at Franklin took significant time but seemed to produce meaningful improvements.

Some mentoring at Franklin was focused on how teachers talked to students and promoted high-expectations in their classroom. Chapter 4 provided an example of an educator referred to students as "slime balls." This teacher was mentored and eventually remediated out of the building by administration. Other examples were provided of teachers who received mentoring were those who wasted instructional minutes on non-meaningful learning experiences for students. Franklin administrators believed that this was a demonstration of low-expectations. As instructional leaders, Franklin administrators were able to identify instructionally negative experiences for students and develop mentoring or remediation plans for teachers that responded to these negative experiences. Administrative work at Franklin aligned with concepts in educational research regarding leadership for social justice. Research argues that such leaders transform their schools into places where the driving belief and expectation is that every student will and can learn. Principals with social justice agendas see each student as individually important and therefore celebrate the individuality and personal histories of all of their students (Marshall & Oliva, 2010). Scheurich (1998) found when examining effective urban schools that one of the most powerful factors in school success was acting on a core belief that "all children must be treated with love, appreciation, care and respect- -no exceptions allowed" (p. 462). In these same schools, a policy existed in which no child to be treated with disrespect by administration or educators. This policy allowed for every child to feel safe in their learning environment and therefore learn. With such a tone set within these schools, the students were more likely to overcome personal struggles to achieve personal success.

Mentoring, evaluation, and remediation were enacted to ensure that the strongest

and most dedicated educators were working with Franklin students. Robinson (2011) asserted that "ensuring quality teaching through planning, coordinating, and evaluating teachers and their teaching" (p. 13) has more impact on student achievement than any other leadership duty. The evaluation and mentoring process was strategically planned for and enacted at Franklin. When educators failed to make progress within the mentoring structure, the formal district evaluation procedure and remediation process were leveraged. Franklin administration enacted the district evaluation tool consistently and with fidelity, which increased transparency and trust in the process. Franklin administrators made clear that educators who refused to grow their professional practice or simply could not grow their instructional practice were met with remediation. Educators who may have initially committed to the change effort but lacked the ability to support student achievement and were unwilling or unable to learn how were remediated out of the building. The practice of systematically implementing evaluation and remediation processes may be one of the more important leadership functions but is rarely enacted (Shinkfield & Stufflebeam, 1995). Research offers that lack of implementation may be due to the time required to enact systematic evaluation or to the lack of administrator confidence in their evaluation abilities (Conley, 1991; Peterson & Peterson, 2005). Remediation was emotionally taxing for Franklin leaders. However, accountability was important to the leaders. Where accountability can often be viewed as a dirty word in education, that was not the case here. Accountability paired with support for growth came off as fair. No teachers cited being treated unfairly; they felt very consistently treated. Moreover, numerous teachers were happy that their colleagues were being held to the same standard of performance that they were. They did not feel they

could reach the vision for the new Franklin without the administrators holding all to a similar standard.

Supporting Teachers by Providing Job-Embedded Learning Experiences

The instructional leadership capacity of the Franklin administration was seen outside of the more formal mentoring, evaluation, and remediation process. The instructional leadership skills of the leaders at Franklin were demonstrated in how they selected and implemented professional learning structures for their faculty. These structures also aimed to build the capacity of the faculty. Selecting your capacity building effort should be directly connected to the school needs (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). As Tier 1 or overall instruction was considered a central area for improvement at Franklin, leaders enacted capacity building efforts to address teaching and learning.

It is important to consider that the school leaders did not invest in flashy professional development. They did not purchase prepackaged programs. Instead, the school leaders elected to promote professional learning communities and instructional coaching to support instructional growth. Frattua and Capper (2007) described that capacity building can grow when the leader requires that educators learn from colleagues by operating in a learning community to share resources, instructional knowledge, and strategies. Capacity can also be grown via teacher work with an instructional coach or peer expert (Coggins, Stoddard, & Cutler, 2003; Saphier & West, 2009). The selection of instructional coaching and PLCs as teacher development strategies was directly connected to Franklin's school improvement success. The learning experiences provided to educators were meaningful in that they were job-embedded in nature (Croft, Coggshall, Dolan, & Powers, 2010). Moreover, the interconnection of PLCs and

instructional coaching appeared to provide a more integrated learning system.

PLC is becoming a standard term in our school systems. Educational research has demonstrated the impact of professional learning communities, insisting that PLCs are essential to transforming practices and to building capacity of the educational staff who have a wide array of skills (Adelman & Taylor, 2006; Hattie, 2009). There are some very formal models of PLC work (DuFour & DuFour, 2013) and some less structured models of PLC work (Nelson, Deuel, Slavit, & Kennedy, 2010). At Franklin, there was not uniform implementation of a PLC program or model. There were no formal protocols in use. PLCs at Franklin acted under the supervision and guidance of administrators and coaches. Administrative and instructional coaching support of the PLC work promoted the importance of the collaboration time. Observations of PLCs send a message that the leader is committed to the PLC process (Astor et al., 2009).

Beyond this demonstration of commitment, administrative and coaching support helped teachers develop the skills necessary to operate as a learning community. Administrators and coaches were modeling the types of conversations and the solution-oriented dispositions they wanted educators to perfect. The leader works to establish safety and security in the school's collaborative environment when they support educators in developing collaboration norms and collaboration skills needed for effective teamwork (Orr, Berg, Shore, Meier, 2008). At Franklin, educators were learning how to function as a PLC in real-time at their site. In line with research on job-embedded learning, this work allowed teachers to learn about PLC work, practice applying collaboration principles, and reflect on their collaboration regularly (Croft et al., 2010; Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009; Huffman, Hipp,

Pankake, & Moller, 2014).

As teachers had not operated as a learning community before, guidance was necessary. Where collaborations described in Chapter 4's before picture were focused on individual student deficits, teachers now were collaborating to better support student learning and grow their instructional practice. Moreover, collaboration before was infrequent, lacked conversations about instructional content, and promoted professional isolation. Educational leaders have begun to realize that a central component of their capacity building efforts at a school site requires the deprivatization of teaching (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). PLCs were now a daily teacher effort. Franklin leaders supported the development of PLCs in several ways. While these administrators did not dominate conversations, they did promote the idea that the conversations stay solution or goal oriented. Further, administrators posed problems to teachers during collaboration time but trusted that they could come to solutions as content experts. Finally, administrators openly thanked teachers who discussed errors they had made in teaching with their PLC. They promoted the idea that it was a safe learning space. When leaders model that they themselves are learners in the school community, teachers feel more at ease in collaborating as they trust they would not be singled out for lacking a specific skill (Drago-Severson, 2012).

In collaborations at Franklin, teachers were to explore their Core standards, develop lessons and assessments, share best practices, and analyze data with their peers and instructional coach during PLC time. These practices align with current educational research. Jacobsen and Johnson (2011) found that in successful high needs schools, a central element of improving instruction was the extent to which educators collaborated

and supported one another in designing and mapping curriculum. Through PLCs with instructional coaches, Franklin leaders were providing job-embedded professional learning connected to the day-to-day work of the teacher. Job-embedded professional learning has the intent of increasing teacher practice and supporting student learning. Moreover, high-quality job-embedded professional learning is connected to standards and curriculum while incorporating the context of the school and the student needs in each classroom (Croft, Coggshall, Dolan, & Powers, 2010; Darling-Hammond, 2009; Huffman, Hipp, Pankake, & Moller, 2014). In PLCs at Franklin, teachers had the opportunity to learn a new concept in their professional learning communities or learn a new concept alongside their instructional coaches, implement this new concept, return and reflect on the success of implementation with peers, and then make modifications where needed. As coaches participated in PLCs, they were aware of the strategies or lessons teachers were going to attempt. This awareness allowed the coach to offer more personalized job-embedded support by modeling the new practice for the educator or observing the educator's implementation and providing feedback.

Beyond professional learning communities and instructional coaching, teachers were also provided with job-embedded learning experiences through administrative mentoring and through their technology training. Administrative mentoring was discussed more thoroughly above. Technology training was provided to educators during the 1st year of school improvement and was directly connected to the school's receipt of a technology grant. Teachers were provided with SMART boards, iPods, iPads, and student response "clicker" systems as components of this grant. Teachers were not simply given these learning tools. Teachers were asked to participate in regular training regarding how

to incorporate these new tools into classroom learning experiences. Teachers were able to lean about the technology, prepare lessons with the technology, and utilize the technology. After initial implementation attempts were made, teachers could reflect on their technology use and refine or build their technology skills in later trainings. The continual nature of this training that included reflection, modification, refinement, and additional learning related to technology use connects again to the job-embedded learning principles presented above (Croft et al., 2010; Darling-Hammond, 2009; Huffman et al., 2014).

Chapter 4 provided a picture of Franklin educators who were generally satisfied with their peer collaboration in PLCs, administrative support in PLCs, and their instructional coaching support overall. Teachers in Franklin's "after" picture were reporting a feeling of a united community focused on supporting one another in meeting student needs. This shift aligns with work by Robinson (2011) who explained that adults in schools have a positive relationship when they can be both collegial and collaborative. Well-functioning PLCs build teacher teams that feel collectively responsible in supporting each other and student learning (Hord & Sommers, 2008). PLCs at Franklin lacked a formal model or toolkit. This did not seem to matter. The common goals or purpose paired with leadership support appeared as essential. PLCs provided teachers with the space and time to safely grow their practice with the support of their peers and an instructional coach or administrative mentor. The technology training appeared to provide a similar safe space for educators to practice and grow their technological skills for the classroom. In these spaces, teachers were not criticized for not having answers. They were provided the time to share and learn. They were provided ideas for how to get

better. The result was a community of learners.

Altering Structures to Support the "New" School

Establishing a committed faculty working under a common vision and implementing meaningful instructional leadership practices were important to the improvement effort at Franklin. The moves to establish collective commitment and to increase instructional skills at Franklin were supported by shifts in school structures. The school structures began to reflect the vision of the new Franklin: a school that supported all learners. Structural changes at Franklin included altering hiring practices, changing student schedules, implementing a transition program, and addressing school safety. These structural changes were made by administrators in an effort to improve the school's learning environment. Enacting structural changes is often considered a managerial component of school leadership. Camburn, Spillane, and Sebastian (2010) expressed that the managerial component of school leadership requires that leaders assess and respond to how the building is running, respond to personnel issues, and manage student affairs. In doing so, they are developing and enacting routines that can be relied upon by all stakeholders. Administrators ensure that the school operates smoothly (Greenfield, 1995). School leaders at Franklin possessed both instructional leadership abilities and managerial skills that impacted the school's improvement success.

As discussed in Chapter 4, administrators worked to influence the school positively by recruiting teachers for school improvement and by modifying the interview protocol. The new interview protocol was designed and executed with the intent of helping administrators identify and select teachers that were able to work with a diverse student body. Educational leadership research explains that recruiting and retaining

effective teachers in urban schools is challenging (Berry, 2004; Darling-Hammond & Post, 2000). Given the aging teaching force and teacher attrition rates, the role of the recruiter is heightened (Zeichner, 2003). Leaders with managerial skills identify the best recruitment strategies to increase their applicant pool (Day, 2000). In this case, Franklin marketed the opportunity to be a part of school improvement to prospective teachers. While Hoyle, English, and Steffy (1990) discuss marketing strategies as a means to increase the amount of candidates, the work at Franklin aligned with Kose (2009) who suggested that leaders focus attention on recruiting more diverse educators for diverse urban schools. Importantly, the urban school leader must question whether the candidate being interviewed has been exposed to social justice pedagogy to the extent that he/she could effectively teach and support a diverse community of learners. To understand whether the potential candidate is a good fit, the leader would enact managerial skills during an interview to determine if the candidates have a knowledge base and understanding of the communities and cultures within the school, if they are able to create culturally relevant and meaningful learning opportunities, and if they lack deficit ideologies regarding historically marginalized groups (Zeichner, 2003).

Franklin leaders leveraged their new interview protocol to identify if the prospective teachers had both justice-oriented perspectives and previous positive experiences supporting learning with a diverse student population. Importantly, leaders were interviewing to identify if the candidate had assets based perspectives of their student population. Altering recruitment structures at Franklin ensured that leaders were able to hire individuals who were able to positively impact the learning environment at Franklin.

Other structural changes were made to the school schedule. Administrators added more honors coursework, refined elective class offerings, restructured the afterschool program, implemented an elementary to middle school transition program, and increased club or social opportunities for students. Increasing honors coursework and refining the school elective offerings served to increase student access to rigorous coursework. These practices align with research regarding important leadership moves to increase equity in urban schools. While secondary schools present several structural challenges, one of these being the common practice of keeping students considered behind in remedial classrooms or maintaining a less than rigorous instructional program for all. Research insists that administrators who oversee student and personnel scheduling should work to ensure that all students have equal access to a challenging and relevant curriculum (Louis & Miles, 1990).

Teacher support of the afterschool program allowed for Franklin students to get help with their more challenging coursework by certified educators. While not all educators appreciated spending time supporting afterschool through tutoring, this new structure connected well with afterschool research. One factor that prevents afterschool program success is not providing students with meaningful curricular support. Most afterschool programs are run by noneducators who are not familiar with student learning or curricular needs (Hall, Yohalem, Tolman, & Wilson, 2003). Franklin's work to increase the quality of afterschool via teacher support was linked to increased student success by school administrators. Moreover, students appreciated the time in afterschool that they could establish stronger relationships with teachers. Relationship development was found to be connected to afterschool success, particularly in middle schools (Rhodes,

2004).

Franklin's elementary to middle school transition program was offered to incoming seventh graders during the summer break. The program allowed for elementary school students to learn about middle school life prior to the first day. All students who attended noted that the transition program made them feel better about moving into Franklin's environment. Research indicates the importance of these transition programs. It has been demonstrated that the middle school transition can increase academic and social stress on the learner (Akos, 2002). Transition programs, like Franklins, serve to reduce student anxiety and provide students with opportunities to socialize with future classmates prior to their arrival on the 1st day (Iver, 1990).

Chapter 4 also discussed the number of student clubs or social programs that were added to the Franklin learning environment (ex: Success Club, Horseman's Club, Ambassadors Club, etc.). Research has long indicated the importance of clubs in schools (Barber, Stone, Hunt, & Eccles, 2005; Marsh, 1992). Be they clubs that provide leadership opportunities, clubs that provide a social outlet for students, or student recognition clubs, these programs have all demonstrated the ability to positively impact students and the school environment (R. Brown & Evans, 2002). Students, teachers, and administrators at Franklin believed that these organizations allowed students to grow socially and feel more strongly linked with the Franklin community. These school structures offer students an opportunity to feel more connected to the school while promoting positive student interactions.

Perhaps one of the most important structures at Franklin leaders altered was related to student and school safety. Administrators modified the school layout

(integrating seventh and eighth graders) to prevent grade-level-based bullying. Administrators also implemented a new school-wide tardy program. While the tardy program was not originally intended to address safety, the increased teacher presence in the hallway had such an effect. Research argues that it is essential for leaders to ensure the safe and positive environments necessary for students to learn within if they hope to have a successful school (Jacobsen & Johnson, 2011). Administrators, students, teachers, and staff noted that throughout the school improvement process, behavioral issues in the building declined. The school reportedly felt safer. Research has demonstrated that when students feel safe they are less likely to engage in harmful behaviors (Gottfredson et al., 2005; Haynes et al., 1997; Jia et al., 2009). Students attributed this decline in negative student behaviors specifically to the tardy program. Administrators attributed the decline to the integration of seventh and eighth graders throughout the day. Administrators additionally felt that the meaningful work conducted at the school to better teaching and learning, discussed above, paired with the enactment of Success Club made students feel it was possible to be academically successful. Where there was hope, there was less desire to behave negatively. Research supports the student and administrative assertions that both addressing school structures to increase student safety and creating an environment that is academically supportive will reduce overall problem behaviors in the school (Anderson, 1982; Cotton, 1996b; Haynes, Emmons, & Ben-Avie, 1997; Kuperminc, Leadbeater, Emmons, & Blatt, 1997; Zullig, Huebner, & Patton, 2011). This research connects directly with research presented in Chapter 2 of this study. As safety and teaching and learning are components of school climate, efforts to address safety and teaching and learning have shown positive impacts on the overall climate of the school,

including reductions in student risk-taking behavior (Anderson, 1982; Cohen, 2007; Cohen & Geier, 2010; Zullig et al., 2011).

Modifications to school hiring practices, to the school master schedule, and additions of student programs supported the revitalization of Franklin. Teachers were now committed to improvement and growing instructional practice. The honors coursework and modified instructional offerings reinforced to students and teachers that Franklin was no longer a remedial school. The modification of the afterschool program alongside the addition of the transition program and student clubs or social programs further promoted Franklin's transformation as students were able to feel supported throughout the school year and school day. Leaders had implemented school structures or systems that were supporting the established vision of the new Franklin; a school that served all learners.

School Climate: Addressed but Not Discussed

The intent of this study was to identify how leaders worked within the context of mandated school improvement to meet school improvement needs. Further, the research was to identify how these leaders leveraged school climate within the school improvement process. When the administrators at Franklin were asked how they addressed school climate during in-depth interviews, they uniformly stated, "We did not talk about climate." These leaders interpreted school climate as a more "fluffy" concept that did not align with the rigor of a school improvement process. The climate research reviewed in Chapter 2 had drawn a correlational relationship between school success and school climate (Comer, 1984; Eccles et al., 1993; Freiberg, 1999; Goodenow & Grady, 1993). Leaders here believed that the intense school improvement effort could not be

addressed by climate and did not consider climate as a part of the change at Franklin. However, deep exploration of interview data indicate that leaders did in fact address climate within their change process. Although administrators did not talk about climate, climate change was indicated in interviews and focus group data.

I return here to the concept of school climate that has been broken down by school climate researchers into multiple elements or dimensions. School climate is assessed and discussed using five dimensions: safety, relationships, teaching and learning, institutional and physical environment, and school connectedness (Zullig et al., 2011a, 2010). When reviewing the efforts of Franklin and considering each dimension, one can see that school climate improvements were made throughout the improvement process. Safety refers to the feeling of being socially, emotionally, physically and intellectually safe in your learning environment. As noted in the structural component of this chapter, safety was addressed through the school improvement process. Stakeholder participants noted a decline in the frequency and intensity of negative student behaviors. Students felt safer in the hallways. Administrators attributed safety declines to the increases in student academic confidence related to improvements in teaching and efforts like Success Club. It was argued that as students felt safer academically in the classroom and physically outside of the classroom, they could re-engage in learning.

If all stakeholders are able to form positive associations with members of the school community, the relationship domain of school climate is considered positive (Orpinas & Horne, 2010). For the school to be deemed successful in this particular domain, relationships between (i.e., teacher to teacher) and amongst (i.e., student to teacher) stakeholders should be positive or healthy (Anderson, 1982; Cohen et al., 2009;

Hoy & Tarter, 1996). Relationships at Franklin were improved between multiple stakeholder groups. Parents were invited in to establish a stronger relationship with school leaders and learn about the school improvement effort. Similarly, relationships were also established with local elementary school faculty and administrators. Teacher and student relationships increased as students felt more individually responded to in the classroom. Moreover, teachers and students were able to establish outside-of-class relationships during the afterschool program. Student to student relationships increased due to a safer environment overall and the addition of school clubs. One example provided in Chapter 4 regarding strengthened student relationships related to the academically tutoring students provided to one another to ensure that their peers were in Success Club. Teacher relationships with one another and with administration were strengthened through the professional learning community process.

Teaching and learning, as an element of climate, is considered strong when all student groups are expected to learn at high levels and if classroom lessons are specifically designed to support social, emotional, civic and intellectual development (Cabello & Terrell, 1994; H. Jerome Freiberg, 1999; Mayer et al., 1993; O'Reilly, 1975). At Franklin, increasing honors courses alongside increases in the quality of teaching and learning (as addressed by professional learning communities, instructional coaching, and instructional leadership practices) in the building met this need. The overall school vision of promoting growth for all students ensured that success for all was a focus of the learning environment. As this study took a social-justice-oriented perspective on school climate, analysis and interpretation of school climate considered whether participating stakeholder groups and all demographic populations experienced a positive climate at

Franklin. References regarding supporting all students via teaching and learning may have overshadowed needed discussions regarding race. There were few interview references made to work that supported specific racial or other subgroups in the data collection. Moreover, at the time of this study, the school administration had not offered professional development for faculty and staff that discussed deficit thinking, increased cultural awareness, or provided knowledge of culturally relevant curricular practices. Social justice literature would consider this as a gap in fully addressing teaching and learning as well as overall school climate (Frattura & Capper, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 1992; Ladson-Billings, 1995).

The school climate domain "institutional or physical environment" is considered positive when school spaces, resources, and scheduling are organized to promote a high-quality learning environment (Cohen, 2007; Cohen & Geier, 2010; Cohen et al., 2009; M. L. Marshall, 2004). As explained in Chapter 4, Franklin's physical appearance was considered high-quality. The changes made in the improvement process to ensure that the right teachers were hired and to the master schedule promoted an increase in the quality of the learning environment for students. Finally, school connectedness means students feel linked to the adults in the building and the learning process (Osterman, 2000; Zullig et al., 2010). At Franklin, connectedness appeared to develop through the work of school clubs or afterschool offerings. Students had outlets to demonstrate leadership and had opportunities to develop social skills when needed. Moreover, the administrative assemblies with students where students were challenged to meet academic goals paired with student recognition in Success Club established a sense of school pride amongst the student body.

While administrators did not talk about school climate, school climate appeared throughout the qualitative data. It was important that the findings of this study reflected the voices of the participants and told their story of improvement. Embedded within this story were comments about improved school safety, improved teacher to teacher relationships, improved student and administrative perspectives of teaching, and improved opportunities for student involvement at Franklin. When taking a step back from their story, one can see that their school improvement efforts connected significantly with school climate in each domain. Despite the lack of intent, these leaders did attend to school climate needs throughout the school improvement effort. Moreover, it seems that school improvement efforts without attention to these climate domains would have been less impactful.

Implications

This study highlighted how one school leadership team responded to state-mandated improvement. The school site examined here was nationally and locally recognized for their improvement results as assessed by standardized achievement scores. From the findings and discussion, it appears that ensuring collective commitment to the improvement effort, enacting instructional leadership, aligning school systems or structures to the new school vision, and addressing school climate needs can positively impact the success of a school improvement campaign. School leaders, district leaders, and those involved in leadership preparation programs can learn from this research and should consider the implications presented below.

Implications for Practice

Establishing commitment of administrators and faculty may have been easier at Franklin as individuals signed on to be participants in the school improvement process or were offered transfers out of the building. While Peter, Amy, and Dana all signed up or volunteered to be administrators during the school improvement process, this is not always possible. Unlike Franklin, not all school-level leaders will have the ability to sign on to the improvement process. Some administrators are working in schools now that need systemic change to better serve their students. District leaders should weigh the value of commitment to school improvement when contemplating how to support administrators in their lowest performing schools. There are multiple considerations district leaders can take into account regarding leadership placement and support. First, the district should consider if the correct leader is employed in the building. Is this a leader that is willing to support school improvement and willing to put in the additional hours to do so? Is this a leader that can support change and do they have the ability to motivate teachers to promote the school improvement efforts? If not, district leaders should consider transferring the administrator into a less demanding work environment. They should provide administrators the option of signing on for the more rigorous work in a school improvement environment. Second, districts could assess the personal efficacy of the school leader. All leaders studied here expressed the personal belief that they could impact Franklin for the better. Occasionally, it is a lack of self-efficacy that can prevent a principal or assistant principal from attempting improvement endeavors. In this case, the district leadership should consider how they can support the current administration in building both the confidence and skills to promote school improvement (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008).

When considering the collective commitment of teachers, school leaders should study the efforts Franklin administrators made to develop this commitment. Again, not all schools in need of improvement will have the ability to issue a revised contract to teachers promoting their commitment to improvement. For administrators who are ready and willing to make changes in their building, developing a shared vision for improvement will be important. Leadership actions at Franklin offer lessons in the development of this shared vision in that they developed this vision in multiple ways. As administrators voiced more general components of the effort, they inspired or motivated teachers to dream about what a new Franklin could mean for students. Other elements of the school improvement vision were developed by teachers in the full faculty context or in more departmentally relevant PLCs. Teachers here collaborated alongside administrators to solve school or content area problems and therefore shared ownership of the work. Moreover, when solutions were generated in PLCs they were connected to teaching and learning. Elements of the vision then directly involved teachers making a commitment to change practice.

Following commitment and vision setting work, the enactment of instructional leadership at Franklin was an essential component of the school improvement process. Administrators prioritized spending time in classrooms and mentoring educators. Franklin leaders enacted meaningful evaluation and remediation processes. Administrators prioritized working alongside teachers and coaches in professional learning communities to support instructional growth. Without such a focused effort, teaching and learning would not change. Changing teaching and learning directly connects to changes in student achievement in the building (R. H. Heck, Larsen, &

Marcoulides, 1990; Marks & Printy, 2003).

With the multiple demands placed on administrators leading a school community, let alone leading a mandated improvement effort, many administrators may feel they do not have time for instructional leadership. With a perceived lack of time, administrators grab at outside professional developers to come in and fix teaching (Guskey, 2000, 2002). These external trainers may provide some learning, but they rarely can provide the job-embedded experiences that support change in teacher practice (Croft et al., 2010; Huffman et al., 2014). I recall a quote from Peter at the beginning of this research. He stated "I have as many hours in the day as the President of the United States. How I spend them is what matters." Changing teaching and learning is what matters. Research on instructional leadership provides both an argument for the importance of this practice and some guidance for how leaders make time for enactment (Bambrick-Santoyo, 2012; Goldring, Grissom, Neumerski, Murphy, & Blissett, 2015; McEwan, 2002).

With all due respect to Peter's hard work at Franklin and the time and effort he put into school improvement, Franklin administrators may have had the hours to act as instructional leaders because there were three of them. Moreover, school improvement resources allowed Franklin to hire on three full-time instructional coaches. Where administrators in schools used to function more as managers, they are now asked to enact instructional leadership and support massive organizational changes. Despite these increasing demands, resources into schools overall have not increased. Administrators are asked to do more with less. Many are leading schools on their own. Are we demanding too much from our leaders, especially those operating alone (Lambert, 2002)? The number of instructional leaders at Franklin could have strongly impacted their ability to

enact the efforts they did. It might be suggested that districts consider staffing policies in their struggling schools. Where districts may provide assistant principals or instructional coaches to schools based on enrollment numbers, they should also take into consideration the school needs. If standardized achievement scores indicate that the school needs to make significant improvements in teaching and learning, a more equitable rather than equal manner of leadership placement should be considered.

Importantly, Franklin leaders modified school structures and systems to ensure that both the vision for the new Franklin and the efforts to revitalize teaching and learning in the building could result in meaningful change. The school leader has to be able to assess their environment, and see what is going on in the school that is preventing the school from being a place where all students are expected to achieve at high levels, and address those structural concerns. The new school structures supported the concept of change, and made change possible in the building. Establishing commitment and working to improve teaching and learning would be fruitless without meaningful change in how the school operated. School leaders should consider structural or systems needs when preparing for school improvement. They should analyze whether current practices reflect the desired vision for the building (Murphy, 1991). Leaders can consider if hiring practices, master schedules, and school programmatic offerings reflect the vision for school improvement. If not, teachers and staff may believe that the crux of school reform lies solely on their work in the classroom. Without changing school operations as well as instructional practice, leaders leave organizational change in the hands of teachers alone. More specifically, increasing student safety in the building was essential to making all stakeholders feel the school had actually improved. Climate research argues that leaders

should assess school safety to determine what changes should take place for school operations. Assessing safety can provide leaders with valuable data that could drive safety improvement decisions. At Franklin, leaders assessed safety observationally and noted that certain operational procedures were prohibiting students from feeling safe. Not all leaders will be comfortable or capable of observationally analyzing student safety needs. The use of a climate inventory that assesses safety may be necessary (Furlong et al., 2005; Kosciw, Greytak, Bartkiewicz, Boesen, & Palmer, 2012; Williamson, Feyer, Cairns, & Biancotti, 1997).

Finally, addressing school climate was not considered by administration as a component of the school improvement effort at Franklin. Chapter 4 describes how administrators worked to hire the right teachers, establish commitment to improvement, change teaching and learning, increase school programmatic offerings, and increase communication with students and families. School data indicate that these moves worked to increase student achievement outcomes. When enacting these efforts, leaders did not take into account that they were also addressing school climate. However, when examining the before and after picture of Franklin, a school climate transformation could be identified. I would argue that these moves to address climate within the improvement process were central to the school's overall change.

The disconnect between school improvement and school climate at Franklin is consistent with the research presented in Chapter 2. Research on leadership for school turnaround (or school improvement) often alludes to school climate, but again fails to fully describe school climate or the school climate domains as a component of school turnaround (Finnigan & Stewart, 2009; Jacobson, Brooks, Giles, Johnson, & Ylimaki,

2007; Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008; Orr et al., 2008). Administrators working in the context of school improvement may view the turnaround research as more relevant to their work than the school climate research. As school climate research lives more in the field of educational psychology, school leaders might lack exposure to the importance of school climate. A lack of exposure may require that practicing leaders receive job-embedded professional learning experiences. These learning experiences should provide leaders with a relevant overview of school climate research and also provide leaders with guidance regarding how to assess school climate and attend to school climate needs within their institution.

The lack of exposure to school climate research did not affect school improvement success at Franklin. Lack of exposure may have contributed to the leaders considering climate as "fluffy" rather than an integral part of their school improvement effort. It could be argued that while leaders at Franklin may have had the propensity to embed school climate needs (ex: establishing relationships, ensuring a sense of connectedness, etc.) into their school improvement efforts, not all leaders will be able to do so. Educational psychology conversations are rare in administrative preparation programs. For those working to prepare future administrators, it may be important to address this gap. Climate researchers indicate that school leaders are responsible for assessing or diagnosing school climate (Brand et al., 2003; Cohen, 2007; Fraser et al., 1988; H. Jerome Freiberg, 1999); an additional body of school climate research explains that addressing school climate needs (Boyer, 1983; H. Jerome Freiberg, 1999; Hallinger & Heck, 1996; MacNeil et al., 2009) is a major responsibility of the school administration. When considering the arguments presented by this body of research,

institutions are failing to fully prepare leaders if they overlook school climate within the curricula. Administrative preparation programs should consider how to embed school climate research into their coursework. A program can weave analysis of school climate inventories into coursework on data-driven decision making. A program could also incorporate analysis of school climate domains into coursework regarding social justice leadership. Future leaders could consider what success looks like within each school climate domain (i.e., all stakeholders experience positive relationships with other members of the school community, all stakeholders feel connected to the school, all stakeholders feel socially and physically safe in the building) and how successes here relate to social justice. The fact that Franklin leaders were able to address climate within the improvement process seemed fortunate. This attention seemed to positively impact the success of the improvement effort. However, leadership preparation programs should not count on leaders naturally having these skills. Rather, the preparation programs should meaningfully develop leaders with school climate in mind.

Implications for Research

This study explored how leadership at one school responded to state-mandated improvement. Moreover, the study examined the improvement processes that took place and how these processes attended to school climate. Lessons learned from this research regarding establishing commitment, enacting instructional leadership, and addressing of school climate may support leaders in better responding to their school improvement needs. These same lessons present opportunities for future research in the field. Ensuring commitment to the improvement effort seemed to positively impact Franklin's school improvement process. Schools in need of improvement are plentiful. Some are

Title I schools formally identified by state offices and forced into state-mandated improvement efforts. Others are persistently underperforming but depending on their Title I status and state practices may not be required to enact a formal improvement process. Further, where the majority of state-mandated improvement efforts come with guidelines that require administrative replacement and a formalized teacher commitment to improvement process, some do not. There is room for research comparing schools that enact school improvement models requiring formalized commitments to the improvement effort and those that do not. Research could help identify how the leaders worked to gain commitment to the effort without the formalized commitment process. Moreover, research could help identify success rates of the various models for mandated school improvement. It could identify if schools that required administrative replacement and teacher commitment were more successful enacting change efforts than schools that were not held to this standard.

Instructional leadership efforts enacted by Franklin administrators at Franklin were also meaningful to the school improvement process. Administrators provided mentoring, enacted evaluation and remediation processes, selected professional learning opportunities for teachers, and regularly supported PLCs. Leaders at Franklin prioritized instructional leadership and therefore made time to regularly act as instructional leaders. It was argued that leaders may have had more time to act as instructional leaders at Franklin due to the number of administrators and in the building. Current educational research aligns with the work done at Franklin, stating that leaders should perform all of the aforementioned duties as instructional leaders (Astor et al., 2009; Drago-Severson, 2012; Frattura & Capper, 2007; Goldring et al., 2015; Johnson, 2008; Orr et al., 2008;

Peterson & Peterson, 2005). For the school leader acting alone, this may seem an impossible task. Research indicating which specific instructional leadership activities have the largest impact on teaching and learning may be beneficial. This research could help the school leader prioritize these multiple efforts and determine where to most invest their time.

Finally, the purpose of this research was to explore how administrators at one school successfully responded to a mandated improvement effort. This case study sought to identify if the school addressed school climate within their improvement process. The findings from this study are significant in that they provide a thick description of the school improvement process including how leaders considered school improvement and enacted improvement efforts. Moreover, the interpretation of findings provides some insight into how these efforts addressed or met school climate needs. However, this study represents a deep exploration into one school. As school improvement is performed in several school contexts, a continued look at leadership for school improvement and how these efforts address school climate would be beneficial. Another meaningful next step in research would be to identify a school leadership team who worked strategically to address school climate in their building and considered school climate throughout their improvement process. It would be valuable to compare the leadership actions and school-level results of a climate-focused effort with the actions and results found here.

Conclusion

The purpose of this case study was to retrospectively explore the school improvement process at a school that had successfully exited state-mandated improvement status. Specifically, the study was to identify how leaders attended to

school improvement and school climate within school improvement process. The study described how school leaders met school improvement needs by establishing commitment to the improvement process, enacting instructional leadership, and modifying school structures. The study additionally provided insight as to how these efforts attended to school climate. School leaders here seemed reluctant to discuss school climate. Moreover, they failed to consider school climate relevant to the school improvement process.

School leaders may continue to ignore school climate. There are many demands placed on leaders working to improve schools (Finnigan & Stewart, 2009; K. Leithwood et al., 2010). These demands are intensified by state mandates for school improvement. In 2001, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) called for low-performing schools to increase student academic progress (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). The pressure affiliated with this call is heightened in Title I schools, or schools where a minimum of 35% of students are from low-income families, as these schools receive additional federal funding to meet the needs of students ("Title I, Part A Program," 2014). Persistently low-performing Title I schools that fail to demonstrate student academic progress on standardized exams are labeled as such and can be closed or reconstituted. These educational policies might drive leaders to push concepts like school climate aside for what they consider more meaningful and academically driven school improvement work. The leaders examined here did not perceive climate as a meaningful component of their improvement effort to raise student achievement. However, findings of this study indicate that leaders attended to school climate throughout the improvement process. Stakeholder participants would agree that the school became a better place to work and learn within

overall. They cited stronger stakeholder relationships, a stronger sense of school safety, improved teaching and learning, a more organized school environment, and enhanced school–community connections as evidence of their work. Students particularly experienced a safer learning environment that responded personally to their academic needs. Administrators noted that the intensity of negative or risk-taking behaviors amongst students declined overall. Students were recognized for academic successes and provided social outlets via clubs and afterschool programs. Without recognizing it, school leaders impacted the school climate at Franklin for the better. Findings of this study indicate that Franklin leaders were able to address school climate without referring to school climate or learning about school climate domains. I would argue that their work attending to school climate had an impact on their overall improvement successes. Addressing school climate seemed to be natural or instinctive to Franklin leaders. In turn, the school was beginning to meet the needs of the whole child.

As described in the introduction of this study, the ultimate mission of education is to support the development of students who have a solid sense of self-worth and possess a personal identify and direction (Cohen, 2006; Levine, 2007; Pittman, Irby, Tolman, Yohalem, & Ferber, 2011). The school as a societal institution should serve to promote whole-child development. Regarding the school as a societal social center that works to ensure academic, social, and psychological well-being of students aligns directly with the social-ecological framework. This framework argues that a person's interaction with the environment in which they live has a direct influence on their personal development (Way, 1990). Elements of the microsystem such as the school, church, family, peers, and health services, are the child's reference point for learning about the world (Way, 1990).

As a societal structure that exists in the child's microsystem, schools have direct and regular contact with the child. The school therefore has the ability to shape whole-child development. The work conducted in schools to address the needs of the whole-child aligns with school climate research. The correlations made in the research between school climate and student academic, social, and psychological or emotional well-being, indicate that addressing school climate can assist a school in meeting the needs of the whole-child (Birkett et al., 2009; Cohen, 2007; Cohen & Geier, 2010; Eccles et al., 1993; Eliot et al., 2010; Freiberg, 1999; Goodenow & Grady, 1993; Haynes et al., 1997; Ronald H. Heck, 2000; Jia et al., 2009; Klein et al., 2012; Limbos & Casteel, 2008; MacNeil et al., 2009; Na'ilah Saud et al., 2011; Voight et al., 2013; Wang, 2009; Way et al., 2007).

Unlike Franklin, few school leaders will be able to respond to school climate needs without considerably examining school climate domains and research. Where Franklin leaders seemed to have a natural ability to focus on the school environment, other leaders will lack the dispositions to focus on school climate while simultaneously enacting academic improvement efforts (Elmore, 2000). Moreover, in these high-stakes school improvement contexts, leaders may feel pressure to ignore school climate in order to focus in on academic improvements. Yet many schools struggle to realize academic gains under state-mandated improvement pressure. Maybe these school leaders are focusing on the wrong things. Perhaps these school leaders are not embedding concepts of school climate with other school improvement efforts. Work conducted at Franklin and educational research indicate that responding to both climate needs and student achievement or other school improvement needs can increase school success overall (Elmore, 2000; Fullan, 2001; K. Leithwood et al., 2010; Voight et al., 2013). Educational

leaders need to acknowledge the work conducted by school climate researchers and recognize that individuals do not thrive in negative environments. Teachers and students will not instructionally or academically grow in harmful school climates where individual needs are ignored. Educational institutions must better prepare leaders to analyze and respond to school climate needs (Boyer, 1983; Brand et al., 2003; Cohen, 2007; Fraser et al., 1988; Freiberg, 1999; MacNeil et al., 2009). Without preparation and attention to school climate, we could continue to create leaders solely focused on academics. These leaders might overlook their school environmental needs and therefore fail to truly reform our most low-performing schools. Moreover, these schools will fail to meet the call: the call to address the needs of the whole child, a call that has reverberated through the field of education and the greater public from Horace Mann in 1867 (Rothstein & Jacobsen, 2006) to the US Department of Education in 2010 (The Equity and Excellence Commission, 2010).

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW AND FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

	Stakeholder Group						Climate Domain					
	Administrator	Teachers and Staff	Parents	Students	District		Safety	Relationships	Teaching and	Institutional and Physical Environment		Connectedness
INTERVIEWEE INTRODUCTION												
Hello! Thank you for taking the time to meet with me today. I am here to discuss the school improvement process at Northwest Middle School. I feel that the information you provide can be very valuable to other leaders working in schools that are identified as in need of improvement. All interviews will be audio recorded to ensure that I have the most accurate depiction of the information you provide. If you have any questions during the interview, please don't hesitate to ask.	X	X	X	X	X							
Tell me a little bit about you and your history in education. What led you into the field? What different positions have you had as an educator? [For parents and students- tell me a little bit about how long you have been involved with/ enrolled at this school? What do you like about the school?	X	X	X	X	X							

How many (students/ siblings) do you have that attended or do attend this school?]											
Tell me a little about how you learned the school was identified as in need of improvement. • What was the reaction of the school community to being identified as in need of improvement • Can you explain to me why you believe this school was identified as in need of improvement?	X	X	X	X	X		?	?	?	?	?
Was the school improvement plan in place or did you have a hand in creating it? • Could you explain how it was created? • What were the major goals and activities outlined in the plan?	X	X	X	X	X		?	?	?	?	?
[For parents/ students: can you tell me or explain what the school was working to improve? What do you think the school has been working to improve? How do you know that this is the focus of school improvement?]											
How does it feel to be an administrator (teacher, staff, member, student, district representative and/or parent) involved with a school under mandated improvement pressure? • Did you do anything to prepare yourself for the school change process?	X	X	X	X	X						

In your position, how are you connected with schools identified as in need of improvement? • What kinds of support do you provide schools? (i.e. Resources, Capacity Building/ Technical Assistance)					X						
With regards to your leadership in a school under improvement, what are you most proud of? • What has been accomplished- what has improved about the school during your time here?	X				X		?	?	?	?	?
As an (teacher, student, parent, staff member, district representative) how involved do you feel in the school improvement process? • What improvement efforts were you aware of? How were/ were you asked to help them along?		X	X	X			?	?	?	?	?
CONTEXT											
This section of questions is really about getting a solid understanding of what the school is like now and how this compares with the school at the beginning of the school improvement process.											
Tell me a bit about the context of this school? Community demographics Student and Teacher demographics Number of students served (get this data) • % ELL	X	X	X	X	X						

• % IEP • % Minority • % FRL											
Can you describe your school leadership structure? How are decisions made? How often do leadership teams or other teams meet? What level of shared decision making exists at the school?	X	X			X		?	?	?	?	?
When you began improvement work at the school, how welcoming was the school to parents and community members? • How did the school communicate with parents and community members? • What resources were offered to parents and families?	X	X	X	X	X		?	?	?	?	?
Describe what you like most; value most, about this school. • If you were to describe the school to members of the greater community, what would you be sure to include? What would you specifically want them to know?	X	X	X	X	X		?	?	?	?	?
BEGINNING THE IMPROVEMENT PROCESS											
With the next set of questions, we'd like to better understand how the improvement process was taken on at this site.											
At the beginning of this effort, how would you describe the school?	X	X	X	X	X		?	?	?	?	?

• Physically? • Instructionally? • Openness to parent involvement? • Community partnerships that existed in the beginning? • Student safety?											
What did you identify as problem areas in the school? • What evidence did you have of these problems?	X	X	X	X	X		?	?	?	?	?
What problem did you identify was having the largest impact on student performance? Explain.	X	X			X		?	?	?	?	?
How did you personally assess what needs the school had? • Data? • Classroom Observations? • Conversations with teachers, parents, community members, the district?	X				X		?	?	?	?	?
How did the district support you in identifying and starting the school improvement process? District: [how did you support problem identification and the start of the improvement process?]	X	X			X		?	?	?	?	?
What concern did you decide to attack first? Why? • How did you motivate the faculty and staff or students behind change? • Explain to me how this specific change effort was thought about and enacted?	X	X			X		?	?	?	?	?

• When did you know that this change effort was successful or not? How did you assess the change? • If I walked the halls, how would I see, feel, or hear this change effort?								
What documents or evidence could you provide regarding your beginning improvement efforts? (i.e. School Improvement Plans, Climate Surveys, Parent Feedback Documents, etc.)	X		X	?	?	?	?	?
In thinking about the administrative team during the time of the improvement effort, what specific considerations or thoughts did they have about school improvement? • How did they discuss with you what they considered key to school improvement? • What belief system do you feel guided their work? • Would you say this is typical or unique to administrators? • When you are working with administrators, what do you look for in how they consider school improvement? What would make a leader successful?			X	?	?	?	?	?
CHANGE EFFORT DURING THE IMPROVEMENT PROCESS								
Timeline of Improvement								

If you don't mind. It would be great if we could take some time to discuss the timeline of your school improvement work. From this first action, what came next and so on? What would you say are the major improvement efforts and the timeline that you enacted them? Before we go into too much detail about each effort, can you tell me how the order was determined? Talk me through each effort • Why was it selected? • What evidence, including observations, did you use to determine that this effort was important? • How did you motivate the staff?	X				?	?	?	?	?
How was the leadership team involved in the selection, design, or implementation? • What training or professional development was provided? • How did you monitor or evaluate successes? Were any efforts abandoned due to ineffectiveness? If I went to the school today, how would I see, hear, or feel this change effort?	X	X		X	?	?	?	?	?

The school must have participated in action planning at several points in time. How did these action steps unfold? What was the timeline of implementation for various improvement efforts? First selected, and then? What do you feel is significant about the order of these improvement efforts?	X		X		?	?	?	?	?
When you talked about action planning with the leadership team, what did you advise and why?									
Let's talk about your hiring practices at the school. How many individuals have you hired during the school improvement process? • Was the hiring necessary because individuals voluntarily left or was there pressure for some individuals to leave? • How did you ensure that you hired the right people? What recruitment practices did you enact?	X		X			X	X	X	
Were there educators that stayed on staff that needed support to get stronger? [For teachers and staff- did you receive professional development or instructional support during the improvement process?] o How was this support provided?	X	X	X			?	?	?	

○ What evidence do you have that this support was effective? ○ What professional development was provided to the faculty? ○ How did the administration ensure that professional development was transferred to the classroom?											
How did you allocate resources towards professional development?											
Institutional and Physical Environment											
Admin: Did you, during the school improvement process, make any alterations to the school schedule? [For other stakeholder groups: Were any changes to the school schedule made during the improvement process? Could we describe the current schedule and the changes that have been made, if any?]	X	X		X	X		X	X	X		X	X
• What specific changes did you make? • Why did you make these specific changes? • How did you get the faculty, staff, and greater community on board?											

○ Probe for ways in which the schedule allowed greater access to honors coursework, elective offerings, or intervention. ○ Did you change the ways in which students were identified for intervention? Explain ○ Probe for ways that this process created equity or access or reduced over-identification of minority students • What evidence do you have that supports the idea that these alterations have been successful?					
What were the greatest resource needs of your student population (e.g. textbooks, elective opportunities, extracurricular activities, and additional afterschool support)? • How did you determine these needs? • How did you allocate resources towards these needs?	X	X	X		X

• What needs still exist?														
What do you feel about the building physically? Is this a good place to go to learn?	X	X	X	X	X		X			X				
Teaching and Learning Let's talk about one effort in particular that involved classroom instruction. From the beginning of this effort to now, what is the difference in: • How educators demonstrate high expectations for all student groups? Given your diverse student population is there still a struggle to get teachers to promote high expectations or common disciplinary reactions to all students? o What is your evidence of this? What data have you collected? How do you monitor this data? • What teaching and learning looks like in the classroom? What are common learning experiences in the classroom? Can you given examples of authentic or culturally relevant learning that is occurring? How common are these examples? • [Administration only: How you feel when observing classrooms? Explain	X	X			X			X	X				X	

the difference in classroom environment from the beginning to now? How do you truly feel you got to this point? Where would you like to go from here? • Have there been any school policy changes that impact teaching and learning? o Formalized expectations, evaluation changes, etc.]										
How do students get extra help if they need it? How does the school support students who are struggling?	X	X	X	X			X	X		
With the support/ professional development geared towards instruction, what does instruction look like in this building? [Students: Describe typical learning experiences in the classroom.] • How do students learn how they will use the content in the real-world setting? • How do classroom presentations connect learning to student backgrounds or cultures? • How rigorous is instruction? • What evidence do you have that that students are	X	X		X			X	X		X

learning what they need to learn at this school? How do you know?											
What are your biggest concerns as a teacher regarding planning for an enacting an instructional plan?		X							X		?
With regards to instruction, are you aware of any specific improvement efforts that have been made to improve teaching and learning?			X	X				X	X		X
What does your student [what do classmates] say about their classes?											
What [does your student/ do your classmates say about their teachers?											
What evidence can you provide that students feel they are learning important or valuable information? How do you know?											
What evidence can you provide that teachers believe students can do hard work? How do you know?											
Are you happy with the teachers at this school? Explain?											
If there was one thing you absolutely wanted the people to know about the work being done to support teaching and learning. What is it?	X	X			X			X	X		X

Safety											
Let's talk about one effort in particular that involved how student discipline is addressed. From the beginning of your improvement effort to now, what is the difference in: • The numbers of disciplinary referrals you respond to daily? • How student discipline is responded to? • How were teachers, staff, and parents involved in this improvement effort?	X	X					X	?	?	?	?
How would you currently describe school safety? The presence of bullying in the building? • How do you assess safety and bullying? • What efforts have you taken to address these issues? • Does the school have cliques?	X	X	X	X	X		X	?	?	?	?
Are there currently any student groups that are overrepresented in the disciplinary data? Why? • What are common behavioral infractions? What needs to be done to ensure that all students are equitably treated? How can the school community address these common concerns?	X						X	?	?	?	?
Do students ever fight? Do students get bullied? How often are these instances?		X	X	X			X	?	?	?	?

How are these instances handled? When students get disciplined, is it a fair and consistent reaction to a violation of the rules?										
Have you enacted any policies that have altered the manner in which discipline is responded to?	X	X				X	?	?	?	?
• What are next steps?										
Does the school feel safer than it did before the improvement process began? Explain why you feel this way?	X	X	X	X		X	?	?	?	?
• How safe do you feel the school is now?										
Connectedness										
Have you made any alterations to how school counseling and psychology works?	X					?	?		?	X
Describe these changes?										
What programs does our school offer to students struggling psychologically?	X	X				?	?		?	X
How do you identify students who might need additional help and respond accordingly?										
Does the counseling office offer service learning or civic learning opportunities for students?	X	X		X		?	?		?	X
Explain.										
Field Trips?										
University/ High School Connections?										
Building on the idea of service learning and civic learning, what opportunities are there for students to be involved with the school/ to feel connected to the school?	X	X		X		?	?		?	X
Student leadership?										
Assemblies?										

• Probe for: civic learning, culturally relevant opportunities, school pride • Probe for: selection- how are they selected? How is diversity in selection ensured?											
How does this reward system look now as opposed to the beginning of the improvement process? • What information do parents get about student successes? • How are students recognized for success at school?	X	X	X	X			?	?		?	X
Relationships In this next group of questions, I am interested in finding out how people in the school or school community work together or get along.											
What could you tell me about the parents in your school community?	X	X	X	X	X		?	X			?
What families are most involved? How are they involved in your school? Are their racial, or cultural groups, or social groups underrepresented in your parent involvement?											
What do you feel parents bring to the educational process? How have you worked during the school improvement process to increase or alter parent involvement? • What is done to orient new students or families?	X	X			X			X		?	?

• PTA any beyond? • How do parents get information about school events?											
For Parents and Students: How do you get information from teachers about your student's performance? / How do your parents get information about your school progress? • Do you ever get positive notes or phone calls? OR When thinking about your experiences at the school, what changes have you seen during the improvement process with regard to how parents and community members are involved? What opportunities exist for parents and community members to get involved? • What is done to orient new students or families? • PTA any beyond?			X	X				X		?	?
Do parents like coming to the school? Is there anything you feel the school could do to increase the level of parent or community involvement?	X	X	X	X	X		?	X		?	?
How do teachers collaborate or work together? • Do teachers generally work well together? • What structures or procedures are in place to support this collaboration?	X	X	X	X			?	X	?	?	?

• Was this collaboration or teaming a result of the improvement process?										
[For Students/ Parents: Do you feel that teachers at the school get along with one another? Do you feel comfortable talking to the teachers at the school? What examples can you provide?]										
What conflicts arose as a result of any improvement changes?	X	X		X		?	X		?	
• How did the district respond to these conflicts?										
• How did the administration?										
What community organizations or partnerships have you established during the improvement effort? [For Teachers/ Staff: Are you aware of any community partnerships that emerged as a result of the improvement effort?]	X	X		X			X		?	?
• How did you gain their support?										
• How have these organizations benefited your school?										
• What evidence do you have of the impact these organizations are having on your school environment?										
• Are there any partnerships you are hoping to add in the future?										
How do students work together?	X	X	X	X		?	X		?	

• Has the school worked to increase student to student relationships? • Are there any students who are particularly left out of the overall peer group? • Do you feel that most students have friends in the school? Is school a good place to be?									
Do you feel comfortable talking to the teachers at the school? • Do teachers know you personally? How do you know? How do you know that your teachers like teaching? What happens when you ask teachers for help?			X		?	X	?		?
How do you receive information from the school about events? Do you feel that teachers, students, and parents have strong relationships at the school? What evidence could you provide that would illustrate your response? • How do students and families get information about school events? • To teachers get to know students and parents? • How approachable are teachers to parents and students? • How do students/ parents get extra help or communicate with	X	X			?	X	?		?

teachers when help is needed?											
Do you feel comfortable talking to the teachers at the school? • Do teachers know you personally? How do you know? • How do you know that the teachers like teaching? • What happens when you ask teachers for help? • How do you receive information from the school about events?			X				?	X	?		?
Is the administration approachable? Does the administration support you? [District: How does the administration support their stakeholders] • Can you describe how? • How do you feel/ do you feel the principal gained support for making changes in the school?		X	X	X	X		?	X			?
How does the principal talk with you about what is being worked on or what school goals are?		X	X	X	X		?	X			?
OVERALL IMPROVEMENT PROCESS REFLECTION											
If you took me on a tour of the building, how would I see, hear, and feel the overall results of improvement?	X	X			X		?	?	?	?	?
If you were to select the most valuable change effort the school administration worked to implement, what would it have been?	X	X			X		?	?	?	?	?

• Why did you select this effort? • What data do you have that the effort was successful? • How did the administration enact this change?											
What data can you share with me that best describe the school improvement process at this particular school? • Testing reports • Quarterly reports for the state • Action plans	X			X		?	?	?	?	?
What has gotten better about the school during your time here? What do you hope will get better/ improved upon in the future?		X	X	X		?	?	?	?	?
REFLECTION AND NEXT STEPS											
What efforts have you not yet made that are on the horizon? [For Teachers/ Staff and District: What efforts do you see as next steps for school improvement? What improvements does the school still need to make? What are you hoping the school will work on?] Admin only: Why was this particular effort delayed? Why do you think it will be important in the future for this effort to be enacted? • What advice would you provide the leadership team if they were creating an action plan for improvement efforts in the coming years?	X	X		X						

We have discussed the improvement effort a lot. How supported did you feel in your work by the district? What resources did they provide you? • Probe for..coaching, resources, professional development, finances, policy development or support	X						?	?	?	?	?
In all great efforts, there are failures. In hindsight, what do you feel is the biggest mistake or error you made during the school improvement process? What did you learn from this mistake? [District; What do you feel was the biggest error made during the improvement process/ what was learned by this mistake or misstep?] • If you had a do-over, what would you do differently?	X				X		?	?	?	?	?
What do you feel is the most important message that you would provide to leaders in schools under the pressures of school improvement?	X						?	?	?	?	?
You have dedicated a lot of time to participating in this study, what do you hope the study will provide? How would you like to be presented with findings? Admin Only: Are you interested in presenting findings to the school community? How would	X	X	X	X	X		?	?	?	?	?

What would you describe as overall outcomes of the improvement work conducted at this particular school? Do you feel that these outcomes are sustainable? Why or why not? Has your opinion of the school changed in the last several years? Explain?	X	X	X	X	X		?	?	?	?	?
If you compared the work at this school to other schools in the district under improvement pressures, • What is similar? Explain. • What is different? Explain.	X				X		?	?	?	?	?
Has the district celebrated the work of the administration, faculty or staff at this school? Why and how?	X	X			X			X		?	?
How proud are you to be affiliated with this school? How did this pride or lack of pride develop?	X	X	X	X	X		?	?	?	?	?
Is there anything that you are curious about regarding this research? Are there any questions that I didn't ask that I should have? When you think about the daily goings-on in this building, is there anything you haven't discussed that I should be aware of?	X	X	X	X	X		?	?	?	?	?

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW/FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPATION LOG

Administration	Peter 1: 67 Minutes Peter 2: 68 Minutes Peter 3: 53 Minutes Peter 4: 56 Minutes
	Dana 1: 43 Minutes Dana 2: 56 Minutes Dana 3: 46 Minutes Dana 4: 31 Minutes + school tour (not recorded but memoed about)
	Amy 1: 37 Minutes Amy 2: 42 Minutes Amy 3: 30 Minutes Amy 4: 39 Minutes
Teachers	Focus Group 1 (6 Teachers): 57 Minutes Focus Group 2 (5 Teachers, one absent): 53 Minutes Teacher A: 36 Minutes Teacher B: 40 Minutes Teacher C: 47 Minutes Teacher D: 45 Minutes Teacher E: 37 Minutes Teacher F: scheduled and then out for medical emergency
Students	Student Focus Group 1 (3 Students): 40 Minutes AVID Focus Group A Day 1 (7 Students): 38 Minutes AVID Focus Group A Day 2: 46 Minutes AVID Focus Group B Day 1 (6 Students): 43 Minutes AVID Focus Group B Day 2: 58 Minutes
Staff	Focus Group 1 (5 Staff Members): 48 Minutes Focus Group 2 (5 Staff Members): 45 Minutes Focus Group 3 (4 Staff Members, one absent): 55 Minutes
District	District Leader 1: 50 Minutes District Leader 2: 49 Minutes
Total Interview Info	Administration, 3 Participants, 568 Minutes Teachers, 6 Participants, 315 Minutes Students, 16 Participants, 225 Minutes Staff, 5 Participants, 148 Minutes District, 2 Participants, 99 Minutes 32 Participants, 1355 Minutes (22.6 hours)

APPENDIX C

LIST OF COLLECTED DOCUMENTS AND RESEARCH MEMOS

Provided Documents
Revised teacher interview protocol
Teacher recruitment handout/ flier including transformation teacher competencies
Student note found in the hallway of school during final year of SIG
Student note written to educator during SIG grant
State accountability data for SIG years and years prior
Parent data presentation PowerPoint
School Improvement Plans for the 2010-2011, 2011-2012, and 2012-2013 school years
School Improvement Grant Surveys, administered in the spring of 2011, 2012, and 2013
School district SIG framework proposal
SIG site visit and final evaluation report created by the school district May of 2013
Executive summary of the SIG site visits, finalized in March of 2011
Newspaper articles related to the school's improvement process and results (3)
2013-2014 professional development plans
School fact-sheet provided to parents, students and visitors
Outline of the school improvement work conducted each year, created by school administration
Email reflection from principal regarding preliminary themes from findings
Enrollment Data- before and during improvement effort
Master Schedule- before and during improvement effort
Memo List
Refection's after the principal's second interview
Reflection after AP 2's second interview
Memo after district leader 1's interview
Memo after district leader 2's interview
Reflection on School Tour
Is Climate a Byproduct of School Change?
Leadership Placement
Stages of Change
Annotation Memos: • Allocation of Monies • Administrative Beliefs • Administrative Time Spent in Mentoring • Climate Overlaps with Other Leadership Dimensions • What Should Parent Engagement Look Like? • Sharing Plans with Teachers, Relationship of Fidelity to Transparency • Dealing with Resisters • Accountability as a Positive Concept • Leading by Example • Community Reputation • Leadership Encouragement and Support • When Performance Pay Ends

• Student Leadership and Student Programming
Visuals Created to Identify Themes: • Communication • Before/ After • Leadership and Placement • Climate and Change • Getting the Right People on Board- Mentoring and Building Teacher Skill

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