

SUCCESSFUL TURNAROUND LEADERSHIP: A DELPHI STUDY

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DEDICATION

I dedicate my dissertation to my mother, Linda Hewlett. My mom has always been a source of encouragement, immense love, strength, and selflessness. While growing up I watched her closely and noticed how hard she worked, how respected (by everyone) she was, and what an incredible giving nature she always had. I am grateful for her believing in me, even when I did not deserve it. I will never forget the time she went to Blinn Junior College to ask if I could continue going to school there after they had watched me play for too long. When my mom was elected the first mayor of Wimberley, Texas, she said she was accepting the position to inspire and show her daughters and granddaughters that they were capable of anything. Even today, I watch my mother as she leads her community bible study of hundreds of women. Still, people respect and adore my mother. Thank you, Mama, for the lessons you have taught me through living life as a strong, brilliant, and loving woman who showed me we can do it all, while keeping our lipstick on!

I dedicate my dissertation to my children. Although you have all grown taller and smarter than me, I hope I have taught you the lessons your Grandma and Papa taught me. To my Tyler Reed: My number one son, I want you to know you that you have great things ahead of you. I hope you always remember Jeremiah 29:11, “For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.” Never doubt your talents and your brilliance. I hope this dissertation is evidence that it is never too late to find your greatness. To my sweet Shelby Sue: You have been such a blessing since the minute you were born. You have so many gifts; you love with all your heart, you are generous, you are brilliant, and such a funny sense of

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ABSTRACT

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Leadership strategies for school turnaround and how to prioritize improvement efforts seem to lack a clear pattern for leaders of failing schools. The purpose of this study was to determine successful leadership strategies and methods for school turnaround and how best to prioritize the efforts by surveying a panel of experts through a Delphi study. The study began with 17 experts in the field of turnaround education. Participants self-attested to at least one of the four categories utilized to select the experts: experienced principal in a turnaround school, supported or consulted school turnaround leaders, researched turnaround extensively, and/or participants who had presented on the topic of school turnaround.

Through three iterative rounds of questionnaires, the expert panel determined 11 leadership strategies/methods and 10 priorities for successful school turnaround. Leadership strategies determined as extremely important at a consensus level of at least 70% by the expert panel were frequent teacher observations and timely feedback, leadership clearly defining expectations for all system in the school, implement positive behavior interventions and support (PBIS), principal as instructional leader, building relationships with the staff and students, data driven decision-making, building systems for sustainable change, individuals in the school are committed to a collaborative culture, working as a team, create a new vision with the staff, focus on instructional delivery/instructional framework, and using information from formative and summative assessments to inform practice.

The 10 leadership priorities determined by the expert panel as extremely important at a consensus level of at least 70% by the expert panel were assess current systems to identify improvement areas, define expectations for quality and consistency of classroom instruction, developing the leadership team through training, data-driven instructional practices, provide consistent teacher feedback about their practices, consistency of quality instruction through PLC structures, focus on the adult and student learning, collaboration between the leadership team and the teachers, determine 2-3 priorities/focus per year, and using information from formative and summative assessments to inform practice.

In this study, the findings are presented with implications for practitioners of turnaround. The results of the study may yield rapid school-wide improvement of systems to improve teaching and learning for student success.

KEY WORDS: Turnaround, Turnaround schools, Turnaround leadership, School improvement, Leadership, Delphi study

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Lastly, to all the educators out there who are trying to improve education for the benefit of humanity, keep fighting the good fight! We may never reach perfection with every school, every teacher, every student, but we will persevere with our endless effort to create a system that raises responsible adults to thrive in this world.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Leading schools is a challenging job. The primary role of school leaders is to create high-quality learning environments where children experience success in preparing for their future. Further, Lunenburg (2010) argued that “the instructional leadership of the principal is a critical factor in the success of a school’s improvement initiatives and the overall effectiveness of the school. The primary responsibility of the principal is to promote the learning and success of all students” (p. 1). School administration must meet the expectations of state and federal accountability to create a system in which students thrive academically and emotionally. School leaders are tasked with managing their staff, leading an instructional program, focusing on student growth, engaging families, and tending to the physical building (Duke & Salmonowicz, 2010). The challenge of the job becomes more complicated when the school is failing, and turnaround is imperative. Rapid school improvement is becoming a critical issue due to the increase of failing schools (Reyes & Garcia, 2013).

Turnaround schools are present in every country to improve schools experiencing failure. Fullan (2006) points out “failing schools, schools on probation, schools facing challenging circumstances, schools in special measures, and schools unable to demonstrate adequate yearly progress (AYP) all get the turnaround treatment” (p. 17). Failing schools can impact a student’s future. Research in the area of turnaround is limited in part because of the endless number of reasons a school may be failing. Also, most turnaround leadership studies have been from non-educational settings such as government agencies (Austin, 1998; Bratton & Knobler, 1998), non-profit organizations,

and corporate firms (Bibeault, 1982; Grinyer et al., 1988; Iacocca, 1984; Magee, 2003; Ross & Kami, 1973; Slater, 1999).

Turnaround is defined as “a reform strategy that strives for quick and dramatic transformation of low-performing schools” (Cucchiara, Rooney, & Robertson-Kraft, 2015, p. 259). School turnaround and school improvement both have a goal of increasing student performance by changing how schools and classrooms perform. Herman et al. (2008), who led a panel to write a report for the National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute of Education Sciences shared that school turnaround and school improvement are different in that “school turnaround involves quick, dramatic improvement within three years, while school improvement is often marked by steady, incremental improvements over a longer time” (p. 5). All schools are expected to make gradual improvements, continual improvement, but school turnaround “focuses on the most consistently underperforming schools and involves dramatic, transformative change driven by the prospect of being closed if it fails” (Calkins, Geunther, Belfore, & Lash, 2007, p. 17). Schools “need guidance on what will work quickly to improve student outcomes” (Herman, 2008). Eller and Eller (2019) differentiate turnaround and improvement as “when schools are not meeting the primary goal of helping students to learn and grow, they could be in need of improvement. When there are serious deficiencies in student learning, they could be labeled as failing and in need of turnaround” (p. 2). Schools need to “look beyond slow, incremental change and examine practices that will raise and sustain student achievement within one to three years” (Herman, 2008).

If you ask practitioners for suggestions to improve a failing school, they often do not know where they would begin. After being a principal for 15 years in Boston, Marshall (2008) stated, “the challenge is figuring out which two or three are the highest priority in your school, setting measurable goals, and pursuing them with laser like determination” (p. 16). Dramatic and sustainable school improvement seems to be somewhat of a mystery to educators; however, improvement is possible. I have personally turned around two campuses and would like to be able to share expert advice with other school leaders. Students deserve quality learning environments. The results of this study will offer research outcomes about turnaround schools and their leadership.

In this study, I systematically analyzed data from a panel of expert leaders in the field of education who have had successful experiences with turnaround leadership. The Delphi method was used to offer rounds of surveys to the expert panel. Outcomes of this study was to determine specific practices recommended for expedited school turnaround and how experts prioritize those practices.

Statement of the Problem

According to the National Center for Educational Statistics, there were 132,656 schools in the United States in 2008, and these schools accounted for 62.8 million people (students, faculty, and staff). In 2011 Arne Duncan, U.S. Secretary of Education, reported 82% of U.S. public schools could be failing to meet minimal requirements in educating our students. A large majority of schools are missing the mark academically and headed for failure. Ravitch (2014) observed “as 2014 approached, the majority of public schools in the nation had been declared as failures, including some excellent, highly regarded schools” (p. 11). Many states sought solutions by placing additional

accountability measures on schools, “as the emphasis on high-stakes testing increases, the accompanying school accountability places a tremendous amount of pressure on schools” (Deseni, Knight, & Deseni, 2018, p. 23). To improve the education system in the United States, the “lowest-performing schools increasingly have become a focal point of scrutiny and concern” (De la Torre et al., 2012, p. 1). In fact, “policymakers have called for swift and dramatic action to improve the nation’s 5,000 lowest-performing schools, arguing that the magnitude of their dysfunction requires a robust response” (De la Torre et al., 2012, p. 1). This perception reflects some opinions of the state of the U.S. educational system.

The results of failing schools have detrimental consequences to many stakeholders as Fullan (2006) reported, “there is the direct negative consequence of being in a low-performing school, where conditions are not conducive to achievement” (p. 14). Fullan asserted that not only are children and parents effected by low-performing schools; teachers also suffer similar consequences.

Muhammad and Cruz (2019) wrote, “research shows a general consensus that schools can improve, but how to improve schools remains a topic of much research and heated debate both politically and intellectually” (p. 1). These authors continue that many people believe schools should take a corporate approach to improvement, monitoring data and providing rewards for performance, whereas others contend educators need more support, trust, and an increased level of professional autonomy.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this Delphi study was to describe the consensus of expert school turnaround leaders about leadership strategies for improving a school and prioritizing the implementation of the strategies. A panel of experts in the field of education who specialize in turnaround efforts, either by accomplishing this task themselves or by working in a leadership role that specializes in school turnaround, responded to a series of three surveys. The surveys were coded for themes and prioritized for expedited school turnaround. For the purpose of this study, “*turnaround* refers to the rapid, significant improvement in the academic achievement of persistently low-achieving schools” (Peck & Reitzung, 2014, p.8).

Significance of the Study

School turnaround has been one answer to help failing schools. Young (2014) claimed “there should not be a school with a failing grade for more than a year, maybe two if it has new leadership” (xi). A study of recommended strategies to improve failing schools is imperative so all schools may benefit from research-based strategies. Leithwood et al. (2010) asserted that “turnaround processes are typically restricted to a specific subset of schools...with additional resources” (p. 5). Too many children are attending schools on a daily basis that do not prepare them to meet the minimum standard set by the state. Parents send their children to school, trusting school leaders and teachers to prepare their children for their future. A failing school will not accomplish this goal. School turnaround is a complex challenge. It would be of tremendous value to policymakers, state and district leaders, school principals, teachers, and other community

stakeholders to know which practices and priorities are most effective when it comes to turning a school around.

The literature review reveals case studies of schools in which turnaround was successful. By definition, a school would not be considered a *turnaround* school if the school did not have rapid, significant improvement in the academic achievement (Peck & Reitzung, 2014). The review also provides a variety of recommendations from individual researchers and experts in the field. The literature is absent of a study in which experts in the field of turnaround agree on specific strategies for rapid school improvement or turnaround through a Delphi study. The Delphi study is a technique that will allow for a consensus among individuals who have had a similar experience in turnaround. Due to the differences in reasons schools fail, a one-size-fits-all approach is not appropriate. However, the results of a Delphi study can provide expert suggestions from a panel with a wide range of experiences in turnaround.

Leading a school involves a countless number of initiatives; however, a turnaround leader cannot change everything at once. As a former principal, Marshall (2008) reported, “The principal's number-one priority is zeroing in on the highest-priority activities for bringing all students to high levels of achievement” (p. 1). Where should a leader focus to expedite student achievement? This study provides insight to strategies and priorities experts recommend for school leaders to improve failing schools.

Research Questions

To describe the consensus of school leaders concerning strategies for improving a school and prioritized implementation of the strategies, the study was guided by the following research questions.

1. What leadership strategies are used by expert principals to turn around a school to improve student achievement?
2. How does a principal prioritize leadership actions to turn around a school?

Definition of Terms

To be consistent in the understanding of terms used throughout this study, the following definitions are offered:

Failure. The term *failure* refers to a lack of success by a school or district as stated by state requirements.

Success. The term *success* or *successful* is used in this study to refer to the accomplishment of a desired goal or outcome in the field of education. The term(s) is universally used when referring to districts, schools, and/or students reaching their goals or standard determined by state accountability systems.

Turnaround. The term “*turnaround* refers to the rapid, significant improvement in the academic achievement of persistently low-achieving schools” (Peck & Reitzung, 2014, p. 8). Organizational turnaround is the turning around of failing organizations (Murphy & Meyers, 2009) and “a reform strategy that strives for quick and dramatic transformation of low-performing schools” (Cucchiara, Rooney, & Robertson-Kraft, 2015, p. 259).

Turnaround Leadership. The term *turnaround leadership* “concerns the kind of leadership needed for turning around a persistently low-performing school to one that is performing acceptably as measured by student achievement according to state tests” (Fullan, 2008, p. 1).

Turnaround Schools. The term *turnaround schools* refer to a school involved in reform to improve student achievement rapidly. The school would have been low-performing according to state standards (Leithwood, 2010).

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study was grounded in theories of team dynamics and leadership needed for change. Bruce Tuckman's theory of team development (1965), Bass' transformational leadership theory (1985), and Blanchard and Hersey's situational leadership theory (1996) work together to form the undercurrents of turning a school around. An understanding of these theories can help campus and district turnaround leaders and allow insight and awareness of the reality of their task as they approach the challenge of a turnaround school.

Theory of Team Development. Bruce Wayne Tuckman's (1965) theory of team development explains the natural process a team must go through as they work toward a common goal. The stages of forming, storming, norming, and performing will last different amounts of time depending on the group of individuals, the tasks to accomplish, and the leader. Understanding these phases can help teams move through the necessary stages and reach success more rapidly. The first phase, forming, describes initial steps when members are getting to know one another. The members are excited, positive, and polite. Strong leadership is essential in this stage due to undefined roles on the team. The next phase, storming, describes teams as people begin to argue and disagree with the plan or feel overwhelmed and uncomfortable with the methods of leadership. In this phase, teams begin to fail as leadership is questioned and challenged. The third stage, norming, occurs when problems begin to be resolved and the leader gains respect.

Morale often improves as the team members begin to appreciate their differences.

Progress is made toward the goal. In the final phase of performing, the team experiences success without conflict. The leader is able to delegate and grow leaders.

Transformational Leadership Theory. In the 1980s and 1990s schools were led by instructional leaders (Leithwood, 1992). As expectations and accountability changed, leaders had to evolve into transformational leaders to prepare students for the 21st century and make significant changes to schools (Leithwood, 1992). Bass (1985) explained transformational leaders as those who have the ability to inspire followers to trust, admire, and respect the leader. Bass specifically outlined three methods in which the leader inspires and transforms: (a) Focus on awareness of tasks and their importance, (b) Shift the focus from individual goals to team and organizational goals, and (c) Initiating their higher order needs. Bass explained that charisma is important for transformation, but it cannot be independent of other traits. A charismatic person may not necessarily be a leader. The charismatic transformational leader must stir up passions in followers as well as helping followers identify with the leader (Bass, 1985). Transformational (or charismatic) leaders use inspiration, idealized influence, and the like to create trust and willingness from the follower to perform beyond expected levels (Bass, 1985).

Situational Leadership. Hersey and Blanchard (1996) established the situational leadership theory, in which the style a leader chooses is based on the circumstance. The situational leadership model is based on leaders assessing situations and using the most appropriate leadership style necessary to reach goals. A leader's success is based on understanding one's leadership style and the followers' maturity and readiness. Hersey

and Blanchard (1996) posited that leaders will go through different stages depending on followers' willingness and ability to be successful in tasks required. Four specific styles are described as telling, selling, participating, and delegating (Hersey & Blanchard, 1996). The telling phase involves the leader creating goals and communicating the goals clearly. During the selling phase, the leader must explain the mission of the organization and convince the followers. By the time the participating phase occurs, the leader is prepared to share the decision-making and provide choice. Finally, in the delegating phase the leader provides minimum guidance to their team. The team is trusted to problem-solve and make decisions.

The purpose of this Delphi study was to describe the consensus of expert school leaders regarding strategies for improving a failing school and prioritizing the implementation of the strategies. Bruce Tuckman's theory of team development (1965), Bass' transformational leadership theory (1985), and Blanchard and Hersey's situational leadership theory (1996) work together to support the efforts of a school turnaround leader. When practiced, these theories could help turnaround leaders solve problems in failing schools. As teams form and go through challenges, Tuckman's theory of team development can help the staff understand the natural process of team development. The leader's understanding of Blanchard and Hersey's situational leadership theory will support decision-making when faced with a variety of different challenges. Bass' transformational leadership theory will help a turnaround leader focus on inspiring their staff and specifically on building trust. When combined, a turnaround leader may have the tools necessary to begin the challenge of school turnaround.

Delimitations

This study focusing on school turnaround was delimited by factors relevant to the research questions: strategies for improving a school and prioritizing the implementation of the strategies for the goal of improved student achievement. In this study, I define experts as leaders with successful turnaround experiences as demonstrated one of four ways: through their own school turnaround success, through research efforts about turnaround, as a presenter on the topic of turnaround, and/or consultant work with a principal for the goal of turnaround. Therefore, leaders who have demonstrated turnaround success in other ways will not be included.

Another delimitation of the study is the concept of turnaround. Although researchers have defined turnaround as rapid, quick, dramatic, and transformative (Calkins et al., 2007), some schools have improved over time are considered turnaround schools; however, the change has not been rapid or quick. Only schools that meet the definition previously noted were considered turnaround schools in this study.

In this study, I sought recommendations for school leaders, specifically school principals. This research did not explore school improvement accomplished by other means such as rezoning that resulted in a dramatic change in a school's demographics or removing an entire staff and hiring a new staff.

Another delimitation of the study is its method: the Delphi process. In the 1950s, the RAND corporation created the Delphi technique as defined by its process of surveying a panel of experts in a given field of study. The experts were surveyed in rounds of narrowing questions to gain consensus opinions about the topic of interest.

Expert opinion was the focus of this study rather than interview data or student performance data.

Limitations

Limitations to this study stem from the nature of the Delphi process. As a hybrid or mixed method design, the Delphi “has merit in both qualitative and quantitative research” (Bowles, 2013, p. 1). The Delphi technique can be predisposed to errors in design, data collection and analysis, and the way in which the evidence is interpreted (Goldschmidt, 1975; Linstone & Turoff, 2002). However, the Delphi process has been found to be appropriate (Helmer, 1967), flexible (Hsu & Sanford, 2007), and a widely acceptable (Keeney, Hasson, & McKenna, 2011) procedure for finding and analyzing data for topics with little information.

A limitation of the study may result from the use of opinions gained from experts in the field of turnaround. When responding to the surveys, the experts relied on their individual experiences to answer the questions. Their opinions may not be backed up by evidence; instead, they shared their expert opinions (Kenney et al., 2011). Each participant had different experiences with school turnaround.

A potential limitation may occur due to panelist not completing the study to the final round of questions. Due to the iterative nature, the Delphi study has a higher potential for panelist to complete the process (Keeney et al., 2011); however, attrition could be an issue. Green, Jones, Hughes, and Williams (1999) shared a practice of starting the process with all eligible participants to ensure adequate sample size. The results could be skewed if the study begins with one group of experts and ends with a different group of experts.

The Delphi study might be limited because of the events occurring during the time period. The study was conducted in the 2020-2021 academic year over several months. It was expected that the expert panel was influenced by educational trends in that time frame. Specifically, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, conversation was centered around the idea of education reform due to the necessary change in how students should be educated. Schools had to use other options such as electronic formats to keep students and their families safe.

The participants could have responded differently during the pandemic. Due to quarantine requirements and safety measures in place, students were not attending school in face to face settings as in the past years. The community responded in different ways. Some parents did not understand why children could not be in school, whereas others did not see a way children could return to school safely. These same mixed feelings were compounded with teachers as they considered their personal safety and underlying health conditions. The result was that educators faced different challenges in educating students during the time of this study as compared to previous years.

Due to my own personal experiences in turnaround schools, I may have biases and assumptions interpreting the data. After turning around two schools and working with principals to improve their school for the past 12 years, I acknowledge potential biases during data analysis. I have identified accepted techniques to enhance the legitimization of this study in Chapter III.

Assumptions

The Delphi method of research is an appropriate method “when there is incomplete knowledge about a problem” or when a researcher seeks to gain understanding of a problem and find solutions (Skulmoski, Hartman, & Krahn, 2017, p. 1). After a determination is made regarding the appropriateness of a Delphi study, fundamental assumptions are present. The willingness of the panelists to complete the study, the group behavior of the panelists, and the design and interpretation of the data are assumptions in the study.

Although the panelists were asked to commit to completing all rounds of the Delphi study, some may withdraw. It was assumed the panelists would complete each round with reflective and complete responses because of their commitment and interest in the study’s results based on their own experiences in their work. The participation and expertise of the panelists is foundational to the validity of the study. Therefore, criteria were established in advance as to how experts will be chosen related to turnaround leadership.

The Delphi design of the panel responses was built on assumptions concerning social interactions among group members. Opinions of a group are given more credence than that of a single individual, and by avoiding in-person panels, the group effectiveness might be enhanced. By avoiding social group pressure and interactions among participants, the Delphi study allows for anonymous and independent responses (Linstone & Turoff, 2002). Due to this design, panelists’ responses are assumed to be more straightforward and candid.

Organization of the Study

The first chapter of this study created a foundation and a need to add to the understanding about turning around failing schools. This context prompts a discussion to seek best practices for school leaders when faced with a failing school. The literature presents an inconsistent illustration of strategies used to turn schools around. This introductory chapter asserts the urgency for turnaround methods that when applied appropriately and consistently, may improve student outcomes.

In Chapter II, the Review of the Literature, I began with a brief history of reform and turnaround in the United States. I outlined presidential platforms and initiatives on education from 1953 until 2020. This historical perspective lays a foundation of the attempts to improve the U.S. educational system. Next, I turned to a review of literature on turnaround leaders specifically noting their styles, actions, data, culture, instruction, competencies, and characteristics. I moved from turnaround leaders to case studies and dissertations focused on school turnaround efforts. I analyzed published books about turnaround and included a section regarding teachers' perceptions of turnaround. Leadership decisions made during effective turnaround are noted, and I discussed effective turnaround models. The findings of this literature review support the need for more information focusing on strategies turnaround leaders use.

In Chapter III, I described the history of the Delphi method and detail Delphi as the research design of the study. I continued with the appropriateness of Delphi, selection of participants, instrumentation, and data collection. Data analysis techniques are explained, and strategies to manage the limitations of the study are outlined.

Chapter IV contains the analysis of the data collected and the results of my study. In Chapter V, I summarized the findings and compared the findings to the conceptual framework and the review of the literature. Recommendations for further research and practice are discussed.

CHAPTER II

Review of Literature

Leading schools is a challenging job. School administration must meet the expectations of state and federal accountability coupled with the intense desire to create a system in which students thrive. Principals are tasked with managing their staff, driving an instructional program, focusing on student growth, engaging families, and tending to the physical building (Duke & Salmonowicz, 2010). The challenge of the job becomes more complicated when the school is failing, and turnaround is imperative. Rapid school improvement is becoming a critical issue due to the increase of failing schools (Reyes & Garcia, 2013). Throughout this review, the term *turnaround* will refer to “a reform strategy that strives for quick and dramatic transformation of low-performing schools” (Cucchiara, Rooney, & Robertson-Kraft, 2015, p. 259). The cases reported in the review suggest that principals must chart their own path with each failing school and choose their own model of school improvement. An explanation was not found as to why some school leaders have implemented various plans to improve student achievement without swift or apparent success (Herman, 2008). The purpose of this chapter is to review school turnaround studies and provide recommendations for further research for turnaround schools. The areas addressed in this chapter are: (a) Method of Literature Review Search; (b) History of Reform and Turnaround; (c) The Turnaround Leader; (d) Case Studies of Turnaround Principals; (e) Dissertations Focused on Turnaround; (f) Analysis of Published Books about Turnaround; (g) Teacher Perception in Turnaround Efforts; (h) Decisions in Turnaround Schools; (i) Effectiveness of Turnaround Models; and (j) a Conclusion.

Method of Literature Review Search

For the topic of turnaround schools, leadership in turnaround, and reform, searches were completed on EBSCOhost, ProQuest, Google Scholar, Science Direct, Journal Storage (JSTOR), Educational Leadership, What Works Clearinghouse (WWC), and the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) to find relevant studies. The keywords *turnaround schools*, *turnaround leadership*, *leadership*, *reform*, and *school improvement* were used to study the literature. Studies were limited to those published between the years 2000-2018. Peer review limiter was used, and dissertations were also searched.

History of Educational Reform and School Turnaround

Over the past several decades, educational policy has constantly received attention by the federal government. Since 1954, numerous federal laws have been implemented to reform education, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1

History of Reform in the United States

Date	Reform	Action
1954	U.S. Supreme Court case, Brown v. Board of Education	“Declares the practice of racially segregating public schools unconstitutional.” (ASCD, 2018)
1964	Title VI of the Civil Rights Act	“Prohibits discrimination in schools based on race, color, or national origin.” (ASCD, 2018)

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Date	Reform	Action
1965	Title I of ESEA	“Creates a funding source to assist local schools educating socioeconomically disadvantaged children.” (ASCD, 2018)
1965	The Higher Education Act	Authorizes federal aid for postsecondary students
1972	Title IX of the Educational Amendments Act	“Prohibits public schools from discriminating based on sex.” (ASCD, 2018)
1973	Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act	“Prohibits discrimination based on disability in public schools.” (ASCD, 2018)
1975	The Education for All Handicapped Children Act	“Requires public schools to provide a free, appropriate education to students with disabilities.” (ASCD, 2018)
1980	Cabinet-level U.S. Department of Education	Established by congress
2001	Reauthorized ESEA as NCLB	By President George W. Bush, to usher in standards-based testing reforms and sanctions against schools no meeting AYP goals
2009	The American Reinvestment and Recovery Act	“Earmarks more than \$90 billion for education, including Race to the Top initiative, aimed at spurring K-12 education reform.” (ASCD, 2018)
2009	Common Core State Standards Initiative	Launched by the Council of Chief State Schools and the National Governors Association

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Date	Reform	Action
2015	Reauthorize ESEA as ESSA	By President Obama to “focus on assessing student achievement by multiple measures” (ASCD, 2018)
2017	Congressional Review Act	Required states to assign each school a single summative performance rating
2020	Title IX	Regulation to strengthen protections for survivors of sexual misconduct and fight misconduct in schools

Every president of the United States has created plans to improve the U.S. system of education. Each presidential election has prompted new candidates a platform to reform the previous presidents’ attempts at improving education. From mid-1900 until the time of this study, presidents of the United States have worked to improve the education of children in the country.

Reform by U.S. Presidents. In 1953, during President Dwight Eisenhower’s term, the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare was formed (Wright, 2017), known in 2020 as the Department of Education. The creation of this department was the first step in the nation’s focus on education. In 1958, Eisenhower passed the National Defense Education Act to give schools more money for math and science programs in the United States. During a speech at William and Mary College on May 15, 1953, President Eisenhower stated, “The true purpose of education is to prepare young men and women for effective citizenship in a free form of government.”

When John F. Kennedy took office in 1961, children with disabilities were not being served in many schools (Wright, 2017). President Kennedy had a personal interest

in children with disabilities due to his own sister, Rosemary, who was diagnosed with intellectual disabilities. To urge the government to provide money for research and special education in public schools, President Kennedy formed a panel in 1961. He stated, “Our progress as a nation can be no swifter than our progress in education. The human mind is our fundamental resource.”

Prior to being the President of the United States in 1963, President Lyndon B. Johnson had been a teacher as a young man (Wright, 2017). His experience as a teacher led to a passion for education during his presidency. To continue the work of President Kennedy, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) was signed in 1965 by President Johnson to fund special education centers. The Act also provided grants to schools with low-income students for materials. During his presidency, Johnson also created the Head Start program as a preschool program for children from low-income families. As presidents before him, Eisenhower strived to improve the educational system in the United States. He stated, “We must seek an educational system which grows in excellence as it grows in size.”

President Nixon’s speech to Congress in 1970 began with, “American education is in serious need of reform. A nation justly proud of the dedicated efforts of its millions of teachers and educators must join them in a searching re-examination of our entire approach to learning.” Although President Nixon was not known for his focus on education during his presidency from 1969 to 1974, he signed the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 which included section 504. This Act of 1973 improved civil rights to people with disabilities and was the beginning of 504 plans.

During Gerald Ford's presidency from 1974 to 1977, a focus was placed once more on the rights of children with disabilities. In 1975 the Education of All Handicapped Children Act as signed by President Ford. This act began the idea of free appropriate public education (FAPE) in public schools across America concentrating on inclusion of special education students in classrooms. Prior to 1975 and the implementation of the act, special education students either could not go to school or they were assigned to classes in a remote location apart from the rest of the children.

During Jimmy Carter's presidency from 1977 to 1981, the Department of Education was under great scrutiny. Republicans argued that the Constitution of the United States did not mention education, therefore deeming the department unnecessary. President Carter was an advocate for education and prioritized forming an updated Cabinet-level Department of Education. Prior to Carter's presidency, the department was considered an agency with little influence within the Department of Interior. The department continues to grow in influence with its primary function to coordinate and administer policies in education.

One of the most prominent reports released about education was *A Nation at Risk* published during Ronald Reagan's presidency in 1983. This report pioneered the exploitation of the failings of America's educational system. Armored with statistical data of our country's failing children, the report recommended an increase in emphasis of basic subjects such as reading and mathematics. The report was a call for increased rigor, higher expectations of student performance, and improvement of teacher training programs. The recommendations in this report continue to be the basis of educational reform movements in 2020. President Reagan used the report to challenge conventional

thinking about education in the United States of America delivering more than 50 speeches related to education.

In 1990 President George Bush returned the focus of education in the United States to special education. He signed two major laws into effect for people with disabilities. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) introduced the idea of a least restrictive environment required for students with disabilities. No longer would schools be allowed to place special needs students in separate rooms away from general education students. Also, IDEA gave parents of students with disabilities more of a voice in the educational decisions regarding their special needs children. The second act signed in by President Bush was the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). This act guaranteed equal rights to people with disabilities in school and work in public places (Wright, 2017).

Soon after President Bill Clinton was sworn into office, he signed the Goals 2000: Educate America Act into law. The eight goals included in the law were focused on making improvements in preschool programs, increasing high school graduation numbers, prioritizing school safety, and increasing teacher training (Wright, 2017). President Clinton stated, “We know fundamentally that if we are going to change the way our schools work, we must change the way we invest federal aid in our schools.” President Clinton also proposed accountability procedures to require states and districts to turn around or close schools that were failing.

When George W. Bush was elected president in 2001, he introduced the country to the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001. This law focused on educating students who were living in poverty, minority students, English Language Learners, and

special education students. President George W. Bush stated, “Seven out of 10 fourth graders in our highest poverty schools cannot read a simple children’s book. Millions are trapped in schools where violence is common, and learning is rare.” To determine student proficiency in the states, NCLB used annual assessment data from students. Bush said, “Now is the time to teach all of our children to read and renew the promise of American’s public schools.”

President Barack Obama signed Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in 2015. Although ESSA replaced NCLB, there were similar goals in the two laws. Also, ESSA focused on monitoring the progress of underserved children that included special education students (Wright, 2017). One difference in ESSA was that it increased evaluation measures in making determinations of school progress. Growth measures, attendance, and graduation numbers were part of the way ESSA evaluated how schools were doing. Furthermore, ESSA pioneered a national center for reading focusing on reading issues to include dyslexia. The new law also provided grants to help improve reading instruction. Obama stated, “we will end what has become a race to the bottom in our schools and instead, spur a race to the top by encouraging better standards and assessments.”

Finally, in 2016, President Donald Trump stated, “We need to fix our broken education system!” After reform efforts by every leader in the United States since 1953, citizens continue to hear by U.S. leaders that the system for educating students does not work. “There’s no failed policy more in need of urgent change than our government-run education monopoly” said President Trump (Kamisar, 2016) as evidence of the never-ending reform movement in the United States of America.

Turnaround in Education. The idea of turnaround began in the organizational sciences and business management world and was adapted to education policy and its needs. Although there is a large body of research analyzing turnaround policy in the private sector, there is very little peer-reviewed studies applying turnaround to the practice of education (Boyne, 2006; Leithwood & Strauss, 2008; Mette, 2013; Murphy & Meyers, 2008). In 2010 President Barack Obama stated that for United States to be a successful country, educators must turnaround the lowest performing schools. As of 2013, President Obama had dedicated \$3.5 billion to target the improvement of the nation's lowest performing schools in the form of turnaround grants. Table 2 illustrates the Obama/Duncan approach to school improvement as outlined in the *Blueprint for Reform*. The lowest performing school districts in each state were required to use one of the four models. The mandates in the approaches do not recommend any internal changes, pedagogical changes, or policy changes.

Table 2*Four Models of Improvement*

Model	Requirements
Transformation Model	<p>“Replace the principal, strengthen staffing, implement a research-based instructional program, provide extended learning time, and implement new governance and flexibility.” (U.S. Department of Education, 2010, March, p. 12)</p>
Turnaround Model	<p>“Replace the principal and rehire no more than 50% of the school staff, implement a research-based instructional program, provide extended learning time, and implement new governance structure.” (U.S. Department of Education, 2010, March, p. 12)</p>
Restart Model	<p>“Convert or close and reopen the school under the management of an effective charter operator, charter management organization, or education management organization.” (U.S. Department of Education, 2010, March, p. 12)</p>
School Closure Model	<p>“Close the school and enroll students who attended it in other, higher-performing schools in the district.” (U.S. Department of Education, 2010, March, p. 12)</p>

In 2004, Duke wrote about the term *turnaround principal* as a new concept in education. He shared that a turnaround principal is rare and not every principal has the capacity to turn around a school. He continued by explaining the widespread urgency in education has prompted a need for education policy makers to accentuate a turnaround

specialist. He stressed that specially trained principals are needed to turnaround low-performing schools to meet the goals of our nation.

In 2004, the University of Virginia (UVA) was the first research-based institution to be contracted to utilize the model of turnaround to the field of education. The UVA was tasked with the creation of a Turnaround Specialist certificate. Participants in the UVA Turnaround Specialist Program studied practices in the business sector such as “finance and accounting practices, organizational behavior and communication, and the restructuring and renewal of distressed organizations” (Mette, 2013, p. 317). Mette discussed that although education can learn from the turnaround literature in the business sector, education and business are vastly different types of organizations that both need unique turnaround strategies.

The Turnaround Leader

Leadership Styles. The educational reform movement of the 1990s prompted the need for the principal to work more collaboratively with teachers to achieve change in the system. The role of the principal changed over the years from an administrator and manager to an instructional leader, investing time in teachers (Childs-Bowen, Moller, & Scrivner, 2000). “Instructional leadership has been identified as a critical, if not primary, task of school leaders” (Vogel, 2018, p. 1). Robinson, Lloyd, and Rowe (2008) examined school leadership in 34 studies in a meta-analysis. The researchers determined “the leadership dimension that is most strongly associated with positive student outcomes is that of promoting and participating in teacher learning and development” (p. 667). The leadership styles exhibited by effective principals to improve student achievement has gained attention by researchers in the field of education (Blair, 2017; Olsen, 2015).

Researchers have identified specific leadership styles or traits, common to successful turnaround leaders. Although individual researchers tend to name the styles slightly differently, clear themes are evident in each study.

In 2013, Olsen studied 28 turnaround schools in southern California. She focused on nine principals and received feedback from 15 teachers. According to Olsen (2013), “turnaround principals exhibit cluster leadership competencies in four domains: Driving for Results, Problem Solving, Influencing for Results, and Showing Confidence to Lead” (p. 278). The two leadership styles most prevalent in school turnaround studied were Driving for Results and Problem Solving. An important finding was competencies must be executed simultaneously for effective turnaround. The experienced turnaround leader must know the appropriate times to implement these critical leadership traits for turnaround success. With only 2% of the school leaders in her study able to successfully turnaround their schools, Olsen declared that school turnaround is a daunting task for any school leader.

Robinson, Lloyd, and Rowe (2008) used a meta-analysis approach of 27 published studies to examine the various types of leadership and the effect on students’ academic and non-academic outcomes. The first study, which included 22 of the 27 studies, indicated “the average effect of instructional leadership on student outcomes was three to four times that of transformational leadership” (Robinson et al., 2008, p. 635). The second analysis, derived from 12 of the studies, “revealed five sets of leadership practices or dimensions as determining goals and expectations; strategic resourcing; planning, coordinating, and evaluating teaching and the curriculum; promoting and participating in teacher learning and development; and ensuring an orderly and

supportive environment” (Robinson et al., 2008 p. 635). The strongest leadership practice the authors suggested was for leaders to focus all their relationships and work on promoting and improving teaching and learning.

The differences in types of schools are parallel to the differences in principals who lead the schools. Due to the vast nature of failure in schools, combined with the differences in effective leadership styles, school principals need to simultaneously practice leadership behaviors congruent to their background and natural style to address the complex issues in failing schools (Urick, 2014). The effective turnaround leader must determine which style is most appropriate for themselves and their particular schools.

A Different Kind of Leader. The turnaround principal is described by many authors as a very different kind of leader. Authors Papa and English (2011) noted turnaround leaders “are skeptical about everything except the perfectibility and goodness of humanity” (p. 15). The authors commented that school leaders are not in their positions for the money, but it is a *calling* and the effort needed is “Herculean” (Papa & English, 2011, p. 16). Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski (2002) described turnaround leaders as resilient due to the understanding that they will be changed in the process of turning a school around by experiencing some defeat in the process.

In 2016, Ma conducted a qualitative case study to explore the perceptions of principals, teachers, and parents about the characteristics of turnaround leaders. She believed turnaround principals had a unique skill set that worked to create successful turnarounds. She concluded her study stating, “we will continue to be surprised and astonished by these amazing leaders who have heeded the call to serve our underserved student populations” (Ma, 2016, p. 126).

In 2010, Duke and Salmonowicz examined decisions made by a principal in her first turnaround school. The authors learned that “she consistently avoided the path of least resistance” (Duke & Salmonowicz, 2010, p. 56) choosing to challenge the status quo of the campus when practices did not support student learning. The principal shared that she knew she was to “shake things up” (Duke & Salmonowicz, 2010, p. 56), confront ineffective faculty members, and remove unsuccessful programs.

In a study focusing on African-American female turnaround principals in 2016, Aldaco described the women as having a “fiery passion and relentless commitment” (p. 170) while they worked to turnaround their schools. In a review of empirical studies of turnaround leaders, Meyers and Hitt (2016) shared that these principals “included a belief that positive change can and must happen, a strong moral mission, a willingness to disrupt complacency, determination, courage, competitiveness, a sense of urgency, effective communication, relationship building, and adaptability” (p. 496).

Leadership Actions for Turnaround. The turnaround leader possesses specific leadership styles, but the daily practices, priorities, and decisions made during turnaround is critical to understanding the effective turnaround leader. The turnaround leader must quickly determine the direction of the school and how it will get there (VanGronigen & Meyers, 2017). Three common priority areas discussed in the literature are data, culture, and a focus on growing the instructional capacity of teachers on campus.

Actions Focused on Data. Depending on the school context and the leadership style, a focus on data as a leadership action may be slightly different in each study. In 2013, Olsen used an integrative survey approach to investigate how to turn around 28 schools in southern California, focusing on the efforts of nine principals. The results

included data-driven action plans where staff members were expected to reflect on their data and determine changes for improvement. In the descriptive study by VanGronigen and Meyers (2017), 194 schools and their planning cycles were analyzed for priorities. Among the data collected, data use as a leadership action was the second highest priority among turnaround principals. Brown and Green (2014) conducted a quantitative study with 172 principals who had turned around campuses and had reached the Blue Ribbon national award status. Their findings included the important leadership action of monitoring students' learning through data to plan for individual instruction. Lastly, in the case study by Corrales (2017), the newly appointed superintendent of a failing district tied a newly created teacher evaluation system to student performance for teacher contract renewals. The teachers began to closely monitor student data to ensure their own employment.

Actions Focused on Culture. The unwritten way a campus conducts business forms its culture and culture might answer some questions about a school's success or failure. In the exploratory single-site case study by Duke and Salmonowicz (2010), the key decisions from a turnaround principal included creating a culture of teacher accountability. The principal implemented student benchmarks every four weeks until the state standardized tests were taken. This leadership action combined a focus on data and culture as priority moves in her first year of turnaround. In the same study the principal discontinued the use of an ineffective instructional program and replaced it with an effective reading program. The decision to change the instructional models revealed the focus on the instructional culture the principal was creating.

In a case study by Finnigan and Stewart (2009), principal leadership in 10 low-performing schools in Chicago was studied to explore leadership practices. Schools that moved off the probation status in a short period of time focused on articulation of the vision, developed a collective commitment to goals, and established structures and norms. The culture of clear expectations was a priority to the leaders and staff in all the 10 schools examined in the 2-year study.

One leadership team implemented a culture of continuous improvement. Inspired by the book “Good to Great” by Jim Collins (2001), the school leadership team compared their school’s reality with research-based strategies to change their culture. The team created a “culture of embracing growth opportunities” (p. 1) to steadily improve as they worked toward success (Janney, Morris, & Stubbs, 2005).

Actions Focused on Instruction. Focusing on teaching and learning is a common denominator in successful schools (Chapman & Harris, 2004). Teachers require targeted professional development to learn the most effective and efficient instructional practices. Principals need to dedicate time and resources to continuously improve instructional practices used by teachers. The consistent and continual emphasis toward improving teaching and learning is necessary to improve schools. Prioritizing instruction overall, combined with a focus on data was the results of a study by VanGronigen and Meyers (2017). Consistent results in Brown and Green’s (2014) study revealed a high priority of improving the quality of professional development for teachers. This outcome came from a study of 172 principals who led improvement efforts with the goal of earning the national Blue Ribbon status in 2014. Additionally, results from Corrales’ (2017) case study supported the importance of increasing teacher capacity to improve schools.

In *Creative Schools*, Ken Robinson (2015) wrote, “more than class size, social class, the physical environment, and other factors, the heart of educational improvement is inspiring students to learn, which is what great teachers do” (p. 100). Principals focused on improving schools must keep teacher professional development a high priority.

Principal Competencies and Characteristics for Turnaround

Selecting the best school leader for a struggling school is imperative. Researchers have determined essential attributes are unique to turnaround principals compared to other school leaders (Neil, 2012). Blair (2001) reported that due to the emphasis on student performance, a principal’s impact needs to be researched. To establish a practical model of principal competencies, Hitt, Woodruff, Meyers, and Zhu (2018) conducted a study to identify common traits from 19 turnaround principals. Out of 200 principals attempting positive school change, these 19 principals encompassed the 10% who were able to increase student achievement expeditiously. Through interview data, seven areas were identified that captured the specific traits and skills of these successful turnaround school leaders. These areas encompassed building capacity, inspiring and motivating the staff, and focusing on student learning. The study suggested that schools needed strong leaders who focused more on creating environments that are conducive to success and less about convincing teachers that their plans will work. Hitt et al. (2018) stressed the urgency needed when identifying the correct leaders for failing schools.

In a similar study determining essential attributes of a turnaround principal, Neil (2012) presented a qualitative case study from a high-poverty elementary school in Florida. His study revealed attributes necessary for turnaround leadership including

“vision, data-driven decision making, flexibility, high exposure, trust, compassion, distributive leadership, visibility, optimism, culture, family atmosphere, and support” (Neil, 2012, p. 116-117). In 2016, Ma shared a qualitative multicase study determining the characteristics and qualities of principals who turned around low performing schools. Her results revealed a skill set that makes turnaround principals successful. The characteristics include co-parenting position; care about teachers, students, and parents; a belief in teachers knowing how to grow; and feedback from teachers (Ma, 2016).

In 2015, Olsen was convinced of the unique characteristics of a turnaround principal, she determined turnaround principals could be distinguished from other school leaders even before they were placed in a turnaround school. Through her research, she learned that turnaround principals did not allow barriers to stand in their way of attaining success proving their strong desire to get results. In her study, the leaders had traits of breaking existing norms, motivating others, confidence in leading, motivating the staff, silencing the critics, and optimizing the culture. Olsen (2015) boldly stated, “Turnaround principals are the hope for today’s failing schools” (p. 272).

Case Studies of Turnaround Principals

Principals who have been tasked with turning schools around are faced with multiple challenges that cause stress or tensions for the school environment. Reitzug and Hewitt (2017) conducted a qualitative case study to examine the routines and stresses of a principal in a turnaround school. The terms *stresses* and *tensions* were not named by the participants of the study, rather the researchers determined these terms were appropriate as evidenced from the data. Reitzug and Hewitt (2017) stated, “Analysis indicated leadership influences that were seemingly at odds with each other-practices that had both

a positive dimension and a negative dimension” (p. 501). O’Kane and Cunningham (2014) determined that turnaround leadership is “more about their ability to purposefully navigate and balance apparently conflicting activities with these tensions” (p. 963) than particular skill sets. Reitzug and Hewitt (2017) focused on one principal who had been successful in multiple turnaround efforts.

Reitzug and Hewitt (2017) conducted 21 interviews of the principal’s colleagues, studied the principal at school, reviewed artifacts from her leadership, and interviewed her three times. Four tensions were revealed in the schools she led: (a) mission and personal connections; (b) establish high expectations, trust, and respect; (c) principal presence in the building; and (d) complacency disruption and continuity (Reitzug & Hewitt, 2017). The authors concluded that the tensions are necessary, and it is imperative for principals leading school change to upset the complacent nature of the staff in the building and constantly work to maintain authentic relationships with the staff. O’Kane and Cunningham (2014) studied tensions in the business sector with similar results. The researchers focused on four companies and their case studies to analyze the tensions revealed during the turnaround process. Leadership change, assertiveness, and strategic orientation were the areas in which they focused their study. O’Kane and Cunningham (2014) believed that more research is needed to further study the tensions in a turnaround process that leaders face.

Duke and Salmonowicz (2010) conducted an exploratory study by examining one principal, a turnaround specialist, during her first year in a low-performing school. The authors focused on the decisions the principal made in her three priority areas (a) instructional program, (b) teacher accountability, and (c) reading program. Decisions

were, at times, a matter of choosing to act or not act. Also, when the principal made decisions without considering alternate solutions, the researchers did not include these examples in their study. The principal was interviewed monthly to collect data as she was faced with decisions. This method was selected to avoid concerns of remembering the details of events. Although difficult to prove, the authors determined that principals often fail due to poor decision making. The authors explained “good decisions are backed up by thorough knowledge, experience, and reflection” (Duke & Salmonowicz, 2010, p. 57). Furthermore, Duke and Salmonowicz (2010) recommended that principal preparation programs include classes to strengthen decision-making skills and guide principals in understanding the consequences of their decisions. No recommendations were made as to how a principal might assess their own decision-making skills.

Turnaround leaders are often asked to improve schools with little to no guidelines. School districts employ successful principals and task them with the tremendous challenge of improving a failing school. Reyes and Garcia (2013) conducted a 4-year exploratory, qualitative case study to learn from the leadership practices of one principal in a high poverty school. The authors explored how policy and practice affected high-poverty English learners in schools that were failing. To learn about the turnaround process, the authors interviewed and observed the principal and the teachers. State and school archival data were used to find improvement trends. The principal focused on school culture and increasing student achievement in order to improve the school. Assessing the teaching staff two months prior to starting his position, the principal noted details about the negative climate and culture, the lack of parental involvement, and the physical condition of the campus. The principal began a bilingual program and required

communication between the school and homes to be in English and Spanish. Reyes and Garcia (2013) concluded that by removing ineffective staff, improving the existing staff, and connecting with the families, the result was a high-performing school.

Dissertations Focused on Turnaround

To obtain a full understanding of current literature and studies focusing on the topic of turnaround, I analyzed 14 dissertations. Using Google scholar and EBSCOhost search engines, I used the terms *turnaround leadership* and *turnaround schools* to find dissertations related to my topic. After reading the abstract of all the dissertations listed, I selected dissertations that were (a) K-12 related, (b) turnaround models, (c) case studies of successful turnarounds, and (d) focused on principal leadership in a turnaround. Table 3 displays a summary of the dissertations meeting these criteria.

Table 3

Summary of Dissertations

Author	Date	Title	Findings
Blair	2001	Principals' Leadership Styles, School Ratings, and Principals' Time Spent on Instructional Leadership and Management Tasks in Texas	Significant correlations were found "between the amount of time a principal spends on instructional leadership and management tasks" and their school rating.
Brown & Green	2014	Practices Used by Nationally Blue Ribbon Award Winning Principals to Improve Student Achievement in High-Poverty Schools	Identified 7 effective strategies to turnaround low performing schools in high-poverty areas. (a) Leadership, (b) Collaboration, (c) Professional Development, (d) School Organization, (e) Data Analysis, (f) Student Interventions, and (g) Curriculum Alignment.

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Author	Date	Title	Findings
Britz	2007	The First 90 Days of the New Middle School Principal in a Turnaround School: A Case Study	The 10 principals identified six main leadership theories and strategies that were vital for the first 90 days: visibility, “building relationships, transformational leadership, structural frame leadership theories, political frame leadership theories, and flexibility.”
Deweese	2016	The Impact of Turnaround Practices on School Turnaround Reform Efforts	District leaders, turnaround leaders and teachers all reported the data teams process, team support, and the use of data as the most helpful elements in turnaround.
Faison	2014	What Makes a Successful School Turnaround? The Story of Three Schools	The areas of importance included: Leadership, “Data and Accountability, Data and Instruction, Professional Development, and Parental and Community Involvement.”
Hardy	2016	A Study of Two Turnaround Schools: Where Are They Now?	The study had four major findings: (a) Successful turnaround is attributed to data analysis used to lead instruction based on individual needs, (b) A change in school climate and routines, (c) Buy-in by school leaders, teachers, parents, and students, and (d) Political factors impacted the turnaround.
Hickey	2010	Leadership Practices and Processes in Turnaround Schools: A Phenomenological Multi-Case Study	Ten major themes emerged from the study: “(1) Listening, (2) Caring, (3) Making reading and writing as priorities, (4) Building relationships, (5) making data-driven decisions, (6) Providing breakfast, lunch, and a snack, (7) Providing after school programs, (8) Analyzing test scores, (9) Having moral standards, and (10) Believing they are called to do the work.”

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Author	Date	Title	Findings
Litfin	2007	The Successful Leadership Strategies of New Principals in Turnaround Middle School Settings: The First 90 Days	“Principals who (a) focused in the areas of building relationships, helping teachers and other stakeholders to work together and build coalitions; (b) worked to gain early credibility with all stakeholders and score early wins; and (c) maintained a clear vision were generally successful during their transition periods.”
Ma	2016	The Impact of Authentic Leadership on School Effectiveness: A Case Study of the Characteristics of Educational Leaders in Turnaround Schools	Turnaround leaders assume a co-parenting position, genuinely care about teachers, students and parents, believe in and know how to grow teachers, solicit feedback from teachers on a regular basis, make team building a priority, share similar turnaround practices as business turnaround leaders.
Neil	2012	A Turn From the Worst: Leadership Influences on the Successful Turnaround of a High-Poverty School	13 Common themes emerged from the study: (a) Vision, (b) Data-driven decision making, (c) Flexibility, (d) High expectations, (e) Trust, (f) Compassion, (g) Distributed Leadership, (h) Visibility, (i) Optimism, (j) Culture, (k) Family atmosphere, (l) Communication, and (m) Support.
Olsen	2013	Leadership for Turnaround Schools	The key findings were (a) Even the most struggling school can be turned around, (b) Principals can turn around a school on their first try, (c) Turnaround principals exhibit cluster leadership competencies, (d) Principals of turnaround share a common repertoire of basic leadership practices, and (e) Turnaround is grounded in thematic components.

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Author	Date	Title	Findings
Robertson	2018	Professional Turnaround for School Principals: Perceptions from Principals Who Have Experienced the Phenomenon	Findings included understanding the complex nature of the role of school principal, acknowledging the need to change, and pursuing a supportive supervisory relationship.
Tietjen	2014	Effective Leadership Practices Exercised by Elementary Principals in Turnaround Schools	“Principals have a dramatic effect on the transformation of the learning environment, and the intensity that each principal applied to the decision-making process focused on student achievement.”
Willis	2014	Turnaround Leadership: Examining the Practices of Successful Turnaround High School Principals	Three themes emerged: (a) Possessing the Stamina and Critical Pensiveness to Lead a Turnaround School, (b) Holding High Expectations for All, and (c) School Culture and Climate—Game Changers for Turnaround Schools.

From this analysis, I observed the varied approaches to school turnaround by each author. Although the results were similar, I did not find two studies with common or exact conclusions or recommendations. If a school leader searched for specific strategies to turn a school around, they might find only vague or general suggestions in these dissertations.

Analysis of Published Books about Turnaround

To understand the content and context of turnaround leadership in the United States for school leaders, I conducted a content analysis of popular books for educational leaders. Using Amazon’s analytics, I searched for books about turnaround leadership in the educational context. I used the search terms *turnaround leadership* and *turnaround schools*. I searched Amazon and used the Google search engine with the same terms to see if any other books were found. I located 388 books for turnaround leadership, but

this number included books focused on corporate turnaround, so I searched turnaround schools and found 205 matches. I sorted these results by reviewing the title of each book, the author (and their credentials), and a synopsis of each. The criteria I focused on while searching for books included finding authors of leaders in education who wrote about defining turnaround in schools, describing what it takes to turn a school around, describing how to create and sustain turnaround, and providing stories of successful turnaround. From this selection process, I chose 10 books to review for this analysis.

Next, I compared the books by date, author credentials, number of chapters, and chapter titles. For the date, I used the year of publication. For author credentials, I reviewed their biographies and used codes for their positions and experience with turnaround. For number of chapters, I counted the chapters. For the chapter titles, I reviewed each chapter title and contents. I used descriptive coding in first cycle coding (Saldana, 2016) to represent each chapter. I refined these codes through three iterations. My dissertation chair verified my coding scheme with minor changes. After the data were collected and coded, I used content analysis to compare the books. Content analysis is a research strategy utilized to evaluate text in an objective manner.

As shown in Table 4, results of coding the chapters and titles show that the most common topics covered in these titles were trust, data, capacity, reasons for failure, change, and district support. The least frequent topics were self-guided audit, culture, the science of teaching and learning, mysteries of turnaround, activist leadership, and understanding yourself as a leader. I thought it was odd that more of the books did not focus on culture and leadership. In my experiences of school turnaround over the past 11 years, culture and leadership have been key components of school turnaround. School

culture can be viewed in multiple ways. During school turnaround, I have learned to create a well-defined instructional culture, and a culture with a growth mind-set for teachers, students, and parents. It was interesting that I did not find a book focused on the culture of a turnaround school.

Table 4

Themes of Chapter Contents in School Turnaround Books

Most Common Topics	Less Frequent Topics
Trust	Self-Guided Audit
Data	Culture
Capacity	Science of Teaching and Learning
Reasons for Failure	Mysteries of Turnaround
Change	Activist Leadership
District Support	Understanding Yourself as a Leader

An analysis of the authors of these titles and their credentials is shown in Table 5. Authors' credentials and experiences are likely related to the contents of the books. As Table 5 reveals, most of the authors have extensive experience in working in schools as a teacher, administrator, and consultant. Many have presented and authored numerous books about turnaround. And many of the authors have been recipients of prestigious educational awards for their work in education. Also, Table 5 also includes the range of publications and the title of each book used in this analysis.

Table 5*Titles and Authors of Select School Turnaround Books*

Date	Title	Author(s)	Credentials
2006	Turnaround Leadership	Michael Fullan	Professor at Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto. Recognized as an international authority on educational reform
2008	Turnaround Schools: Creating Cultures of Universal Achievement	Jeff King & Damen Lopez	King – Principal, educational consultant, author; Lopez - San Diego Remarkable Leader in Education Award and the Alumnus of Point Loma award Established the No Excuses University and authored 2 books
2010	Leading School Turnaround: How Successful Leaders Transform Low-Performing Schools	Kenneth Leithwood, Alma Harris, & Tiiu Strauss	Leithwood – Professor of Educational Leadership at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education; Harris – Director of the London Centre for Leadership in Learning at the Institute of Education; Strauss – Project director working with Leithwood in the Department of Theory and Policy Studies at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
2010	Turning Your School Around: A Self-Guided Audit for School Improvement	Robert D. Barr & Debra L. Yates	Barr – Educator, speaker, author, and senior analyst with Boise State University Center for School Improvement; Yates – Professional Development facilitator for Indiana State Department of Education and public school consultant
2011	Turnaround Principals for Underperforming Schools	Rosemary Papa & Fenwick W. English	Papa – Holds the Del and Jewel Lewis Endowed Chair in Learning Centered Leadership and Professor, Educational Leadership in the College of Education at Northern Arizona University since 2007, Author of 8 books; English – The R. Wendell Eaves Distinguished Professor of Educational Leadership at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Former superintendent and principal

(continued)

Date	Title	Author(s)	Credentials
2014	The One-Year School Turnaround: Overcoming School Improvement Barriers Using Common Sense Solutions	James Young	President and CEO of Turnaround Solutions Incorporated and Turnaround Solutions Publishing. Accomplished school principal and educational consultant
2015	Leadership for Low-Performing Schools: A Step-by-Step Guide to the School Turnaround Process	Daniel Duke	Leading scholar of educational leadership, extensive writing on school improvement, educational change, and school safety; Working to prepare school turnaround leaders and studying the school turnaround process
2018	Turning Around Turnaround Schools: What to Do When Conventional Wisdom and Best Practice Aren't Enough	Frank Desensi, Robert Knight, & Joe Desensi	F. Desensi – Founder of Educational Directions, LLC, school consultants, former teacher, administrator, curriculum specialist, Kentucky Distinguished Educator; Knight – Director of Literacy for Educational Directions, 40 Years as public school teacher, literacy and leadership specialist, principal, and change agent; J. Desensi – President of Educational Directions. Worked with Fortune 500 companies, federal and local government, and school districts
2019	Time for Change: 4 Essential Skills for Transformational School and District Leaders	Anthony Muhammad & Luis F. Cruz	Muhammad – Educational Consultant, 20 year practitioner, teacher, assistant principal, principal, speaker, researcher, author; Cruz – Former teacher and administrator of all school levels, educational consultant, presenter, author, awarded teacher of the year, administrator of the year, Golden Bell Award, Hispanic Border Leadership Institute's fellowship for doctoral studies

(continued)

Date	Title	Author(s)	Credentials
2019	Flip this School: How to Lead the Turnaround Process	John F. Eller & Sheila A. Eller	J. Eller – Former principal, director of a principal’s training center, assistant superintendent for curriculum, learning and staff development, specializing in school turnaround, dealing with difficult people, building professional learning communities, author; S. Eller – Former principal, university professor, teacher, speaker, author

From this analysis, I concluded that books covering the topic of turnaround have a variety of recommendations for school turnaround. This conclusion aligns with the literature. In a similar way, authors of articles and books make multiple suggestions for turnaround with truly little similarities. Due to the differences in school leaders and the different situations faced with turnaround, all the books reviewed offer insight to school turnaround that may be beneficial in a specific context. School leaders facing a turnaround situation have the challenge of determining the best approach to their unique turnaround given the variety of suggestions.

My review of books focused only on titles that used the word *turnaround* and only included 10 books selected using the criteria. In this review, I did not include other titles that might be relevant. It is possible that another researcher might analyze different components and draw different conclusions.

Teacher Perception in Turnaround Efforts

Some researchers have studied turnaround by asking teachers for their thoughts about the process. Cucchiara, Rooney, and Robertson-Kraft (2015) used quantitative and qualitative data to study the experiences of teachers working in a school during the initial phases of the turnaround process. In 2010, the authors interviewed 86 teachers who had

been selected by principals in 13 turnaround schools. The teachers' perceptions were based on the level of clarity and consistency of the decisions and expectations of their principal and how much support the principal provided. The teachers responded to these factors as positive, negative, or mixed. Every teacher reported positive feelings about their work during the turnaround process because they felt empowered and challenged by their principal. A strong correlation between teacher perception of working conditions and support for the turnaround effort was noted. Cucchiara et al. (2015) concluded that schools require strong and supportive leadership to develop an organized and consistent staff. These leaders were able to create a positive environment during a stressful turnaround process.

Turnaround Plans

Due to the urgency of improving an underperforming school, leaders should consult research about the topic. Barr and Yates (2010) asserted, "research has begun to provide new and effective tools for school transformation" (p. 4). School principals monitored by the Department of Education are required to create a School Improvement Plan (SIP) to document their priorities and goals. Long-term and short cycle plans present different advantages and disadvantages. VanGronigen and Meyers (2017) conducted a descriptive study by analyzing data in short-cycle SIPs from 194 schools from 2011 to 2016. The researchers discovered that student achievement, the use of data, and a focus on instruction made up 50% of the urgent areas to address. These goals had a 92% alignment with the literature on school turnaround leadership. An important finding was that principals often change their priorities throughout the year. The use of a short-cycle plan was more appropriate than a yearly plan due to the changing goals throughout

the year. The yearly plan limited principals in their ability to make changes as they worked to adapt to the changing conditions of the school. In addition, short-term plans gave schools increased confidence and helped gain momentum in reaching goals.

VanGronigen and Meyers (2017) concluded that utilizing a short-term plan enabled principal to identify and accomplish a few priorities at a time during a school year.

Effectiveness of Turnaround Models

Player and Katz (2016) conducted a quasi-experimental study to compare schools with a designated turnaround program to traditional schools with similar demographics and performance but without a designated turnaround program. During a 2-year time period, the authors collected data from five Cincinnati public schools that participated in the School Turnaround Specialist Program (STSP) using state examinations and average daily attendance. The program provided quality training for the staff, worked to create action plans, taught administrators how to motivate their staff, and assessed school progress throughout the year. Throughout the 2-year study, the monitoring process was repeated and refined frequently. From the first year of implementation, the STSP schools began to show improvement and the comparison schools were not showing gains. At the end of Year 1, the STSP schools had closed the gap and were outperforming the comparison schools. Player and Katz (2016) continued to study these five schools for an additional 2 years to determine if the success continued. After 4 years, the STSP schools had outperformed the comparison schools, sustaining success. The authors stated that these results were some of the first in realizing the potential of school turnaround efforts. It was noted that because there is not a universal definition of school turnaround, success is relative.

Also interested in monitoring progress, Barr and Yates (2010) created a self-guided audit for school improvement. Their book, *Turning Your School Around: A Self-Guided Audit for School Improvement* begins with the science of teaching and learning. The book provides an overview of the audit and then explains nine different school improvement audits for the reader, depending on the needs of the school system. Forms for schools to implement during the turnaround process are provided in the book.

Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to examine the research of turnaround practices. This literature review investigates the traits and skills that principals need to effectively implement school change. The three case studies from Reitzug and Hewitt (2017), Duke and Salmonowicz (2010), and Reyes and Garcia (2013) confirmed that principals need to navigate their own course with each struggling campus due to the various needs. Also, campus principals must prioritize concerns and determine their own path to success. One of the more significant findings to emerge from this literature review is that when schools implement a turnaround model, improvements are greater than schools without a turnaround model (Player & Katz, 2016).

Overall, this review of literature suggests that highly qualified principals are needed to rapidly improve failing campuses and by utilizing a turnaround model, the likelihood of success increases (Player & Katz, 2016). However, principals of failing schools require urgency and need to know the most effective plan of action. Specifically, how does a principal turn a school around to improve student achievement and how does a principal prioritize school turnaround efforts?

CHAPTER III

Method

The purpose of this Delphi study was to determine the most effective approaches to improve a failing school as perceived by expert leaders in education. Using a Delphi method design, individuals acknowledged as experts in the area of leadership in turnaround schools were invited to participate in this study through a collaborative and dynamic process. Accordingly, the details of this chapter describe the history of Delphi, research design, appropriateness of Delphi, selection of participants, instruments, data collection, data analysis, and legitimation.

History of Delphi

Researchers Norman Dalkey and Olaf Helmer (1963) developed the Delphi method with the support of the Rand Corporation in the 1950s. The Delphi technique or method was initially formed at the beginning of the Cold War to predict the effect of technology on warfare. Traditional methods of research were attempted, but shortcomings quickly became apparent. To improve on the deficiencies discovered in the traditional methods, the Delphi method was developed. The most prominent study using this technique was by Dalkey and Helmer in 1963 to calculate the course of various scientific breakthroughs (Jones & Hunter, 1995). Multiple studies were conducted in a similar way and were used by the Department of Defense, businesses, and agencies to predict trends for the future (Green, 2014). Due to the use of both quantitative and qualitative research, the Delphi method is considered a hybrid method of research (Franklin & Hart, 2007).

Research Design

To increase the likelihood of rapid and sustained school improvement, this research study focused on determining the most effective actions implemented by a school leader to turn around and improve a failing school. The goal of this Delphi study was to collect information to answer the questions stated in Chapter I that related to leadership in school turnaround:

1. What leadership strategies are used by expert principals to turn around a school to improve student achievement?
2. How does a principal prioritize leadership actions to turn around a school?

The Delphi method of research enables the gathering of expert opinion from a panel in vast geographic locations to make an informed decision and find solutions to a complex problem. To conduct my study, I used an online Delphi, also known as eDelphi. Due to the nature of the online survey, participants in the study were free from peer pressure commonly felt in a physical group. The researcher mediated the communication and interactions among participants, so the responses are anonymous.

A survey method was used in the three rounds of inquiry, reaching consensus. McKenna (1994) defined the Delphi technique as “a multi-staged survey which attempts to achieve consensus on an important issue” (p. 1222). An initial questionnaire was sent to participants focusing on the identified problem of school turnaround. Each participant answered the questions independently. The researcher compiled the responses and returned them to the participants, allowing them to reconsider, respond, and agree or disagree. The same group received a second questionnaire with the summarized feedback. The expert panel reviewed the summarized feedback and independently rated

priority ideas included in the questionnaire. In each round, the researcher provided a summary of the previous round's data and panelists reviewed the data for accuracy and as a basis for decisions in the next round. As part of the Delphi technique, a number of rounds were used to send out questionnaires to expert panelist members (Keeney et al., 2011). Rounds were considered complete when the panelists reached consensus. This iterative process allowed participants an opportunity to be reflective and evaluative of contributions from other experts without undue pressure and negativity of face-to-face panel discussions. The issue of group dynamics is lessened through the use of the electronic nature of the technique.

Appropriateness of Delphi

During the spring of 2020, the world experienced a pandemic. Government agencies across the globe began implementing quarantine requirements for citizens to contain the virus. Communities were shut down and students were not allowed to attend school. The world of education had to accelerate the implementation of online learning for students in every nation, forcing educators to be innovative on demand due to quarantine restrictions. As a result of the instant change of communication, the use of technology became a requirement for many people. At the time of this study, the world was just beginning to ease the quarantine rules and was trying to allow people out in the world once again. Time will determine if the virus is contained or if the world will need additional quarantine rules to keep people safe and alive.

The use of the Delphi method, an electronic format of creating groups for the purpose of gaining consensus from an expert panel, is appropriate in the world today.

Also, this technique allowed participants from various locations an opportunity to participate without the constraints of travel.

The review of the literature clearly indicated inconsistencies in recommendations for leadership in failing schools. Each study revealed a different set of suggestions and solutions for school improvement and commonalities were difficult to find. The Delphi method is appropriate in situations where there is no clear answer to a problem. My experience in two turnaround schools is consistent with the different methods required to turnaround campuses. Each failing campus has its own set of challenges that need unique solutions to make improvements. I believe the leader must implement recommended methods, priorities, and strategies to make rapid improvement and turn a school towards success with the urgency needed for student success.

Selection of Participants

The selection of the expert panel began in June of 2020 when I started to compile a list of experts who had experience in turnaround situations. Cantrill, Sibbald, and Buetow (1996) defined an expert as “any individual with relevant knowledge and experience of a particular topic” (p. 4). According to the literature, there is not an exact method of determining the participants in a Delphi study (Hsu & Sanford, 2007). The list was created as I became aware of potential candidates who had related backgrounds and experiences that may be adept at contributing to this study. Specifically, I became aware of candidates through educational organizations such as Texas Elementary Principals and Supervisors Association (TEPSA), Raise Your Hand Texas (RYHT), educational journals such as Educational Leadership, experiences at Harvard summer educational institutes, and social media such as Twitter and LinkedIn. Participants were chosen based on their

past and present experience related to school turnaround. I looked for candidates to participate in the study who met at least one of the following criteria: (a) have led one or more successful turnarounds, (b) supported principals/campuses in turnaround through region centers or consultants, (c) have presented speeches or sessions on turnaround schools, and/or (d) have conducted extensive research and written articles and/or books about turnaround practices. Green et al. (1999) called the selection of experts the linchpin of the Delphi method and stated that “the expert status of the respondents is often presented as the guarantee of the validity of the results” (p. 200). Rather than using a random sample that attempts to be representative of the target population, Keeney et al. (2011) advised inviting participants selected according to criteria that target the expertise needed to answer the research questions. The challenge for a Delphi study is to justify the selection of respondents as *experts* (Goldschmidt, 1975; Murry & Hammons, 1995).

The number of panelists varies by studies. In 1997 Ludwig stated, “the majority of Delphi studies have used between 15 and 20 respondents” (p. 2). When the panel size is too small, the results may not be an accurate representation of opinions and if the panel is too large, the researcher may spend too much time encouraging respondents to reply creating undue setbacks to the study. Powell (2003) recognized the quality of the panel is more relevant than the quantity of its members. For this study, I invited selected candidates until I recruited 24 experts for the panel.

A key feature to the Delphi study is the anonymity of the individual responses (Helmer et al., 1975). By having confidentiality with responses, panelists will not know who is making the recommendations. The advantage of this method of keeping responses anonymous allows for leveled feedback as participants are not intimidated by status or

group pressure that may be evident during traditional meetings (Dalkey, 1972). The issue of confidentiality is also supported by the geographic distribution of the panel and by the use of an electronic format for responding to the questionnaire. Therefore, participants on the panel had the opportunity to respond freely without pressure of social norms, customs, or culture within the profession (Hsu & Sandford, 2007).

For recruiting, I contacted potential participants asking if they were willing to participate in the Delphi study and asked about their eligibility, meeting the criteria I had set as seen in Appendix A. Initial contact was through email and social media sites. I assumed the potential candidates had an interest in the study due to their previous experience in turnarounds, indicating an interest in rapid school turnaround.

Instrumentation

The Delphi study began with the first round of questions that were broad and open-ended to generate ideas (Kenney et al., 2011). The questions (see Appendix B) were designed to elicit effective strategies to improve a school rapidly, implement school turnaround, and sustain success. Through the open-ended questions, the expert panelist had an opportunity to give responses in accordance with their experience and expertise. In the questions, I accounted for information gained from the literature review related to turnaround leadership in schools. Responses to these questions in Round 1 began the Delphi process to determine effective turnaround leadership practices for school leaders.

The design of the Delphi study asks the expert panel to respond to carefully designed questions (Linstone & Turoff, 2002). The responses to the first round of questions are used to form the next round of the study (Linstone & Turoff, 2002). After the first round of broad, open-ended questions, I examined the feedback to determine

themes among the expert responses. These themes were provided to the panelist in the following round (Kenney et al., 2011). This format continued to narrow the expert's opinions and views. I asked the panelist to reflect on the compiled responses and rate or prioritize the responses according to their own background and experiences (Murry & Hammons, 1995).

The software used for the Delphi study rounds was the Qualtrics platform. Qualtrics is used by 75% of Fortune 500 companies with approximately 2 million users in over 100 countries. The Qualtrics platform provides researchers feedback from experts and the ability to analyze their comments. The responses were downloaded to a password protected computer using Excel software. There were two levels of security to protect the confidential data from the surveys. One password was required to login to the computer and another password was required to login to Qualtrics.

Data Collection

After this study was approved by the Sam Houston State University (SHSU) proposal committee and the SHSU Institutional Review Board, the Delphi process began. The expert panel was contacted to request participation in the study (Appendix A). This contact was conducted through an emailed letter requesting their contributions in the form of a response to the open-ended questions in Round 1. Upon receiving a response from the panelist, I sent each panelist the first questionnaire (see Appendix B) through a secure Qualtrics platform. The panelist responses completed the first round of inquiry and data collection (e.g., Brooks, 1979; Helmer, 1967; Linstone & Turoff, 2002). The purpose of Round 1 was to gather data on the best practices the experts believe expedites school improvement, creating a turnaround. Open-ended questions were used to allow

participants the freedom to expand on their responses. At the completion of Round 1 individual responses were reviewed to develop a comprehensive list of successful school reform recommendations. This list was coded to identify emerging themes through the consensus of the panel.

Similar to Round 1, the Round 2 questionnaire was sent to the expert panel members after the process of coding was completed. The list of recommendations compiled in Round 1 was provided to the experts along with a rating scale to identify the best practices of school transformation. Experts were also able to provide revisions to the list. An open-ended question was provided for additional responses. The Round 2 results was used to identify emerging themes through the consensus of the panel.

Keeney et al. (2011) evaluated two types of measures researchers use to determine if consensus has been established, statistical analysis and percentage levels. Statistical analyses generally include median, mode, and central tendency. Before beginning a Delphi study, Keeney et al. (2011) suggested the researcher should set a high consensus level. Keeney et al. (2011) also stated that percentage levels are decided by focusing on the specific research topic. For example, when studying topics that are life threatening, a consensus of 100% is necessary compared to studies that are non-life threatening. These studies may only need a minimal consensus level of 51% (Keeney et al., 2011). Although researchers have criticized the Delphi technique, it has become recognized as a methodological approach (Keeney et al., 2011). After a review of the literature, I established a consensus level of 70%. In 2009, Vernon stated that a consensus level of 70% or higher was commonly used in Delphi studies.

In Round 3, participants were given a summary of the list of recommendations generated in Round 2. Similar to Round 2, in Round 3, participants were asked to rate the list of recommendations. An open-ended question was provided for additional responses. I did not need to conduct additional rounds as consensus, or saturation, was achieved and no additional recommendations were generated.

Data Analysis

Keeney et al. (2011) confirmed that “there is no standard approach used to analyze data from Delphi rounds” (p. 65). Data gathered from this Delphi study was analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively. The qualitative analysis consisted of coding the open-ended questions in Round 1 that generated feedback from participants regarding their lived experiences. The rating scale data were analyzed quantitatively beginning in Round 2.

After the panelists responded to the first round of open-ended questions, I engaged in the coding process. The panelists’ responses were analyzed and assigned summative statements to the data. These summative statements, or codes, are most often a word or short phrase capturing the response (Saldana, 2016). When codes were applied to the responses from all panelists, the researcher began to look for patterns in the codes, meaning that similar data appear more than twice. The patterns are a way in which researchers determine signs of consistent human behavior. The patterns also confirm peoples’ “routines, rituals, rules, roles, and relationships” (Saldana, 2016, p. 6).

For coding, I used In Vivo coding in the first cycle as a way to use the panelists’ own language. Using the specific words and phrases from the expert panelists is

preferred to capture the essence of the responses. I recognized individual methods of coding may overlap and simultaneous coding may be a preferred method.

During the open-ended responses, the panelists recalled their experiences of turnaround. The affective methods of coding, such as emotion coding, was appropriate for this study due to the investigation of the human experience. The process of emotion coding names experiences, motives for human action and reaction, and labels the feelings of the participants (Saldana, 2016).

I engaged in exploratory coding to determine the most appropriate method to gain a rich perspective on the data. Coding methods were developed during the first cycle to customize the needs and goals of this study. I recognized the need for flexibility of coding styles due to the nature of the responses.

In Round 2 of the Delphi process, expert panelists responded to a rating scale developed as a result of coding from Round 1. The data obtained from Round 2 and subsequent rounds was analyzed by using descriptive statistics to draw conclusions about the data that reached consensus, as defined by a set consensus level of 70%. Round 2 begins the quantitative analysis of the data.

The number of rounds was determined during the study. A minimum of two rounds is required by the Delphi method and a minimum of three if Round 1 is open-ended (Thangaratnam & Redman, 2005). Beyond three rounds, Walker and Selfe (1996) make a point that respondents may become fatigued and possible attrition may occur. I made the determination based on the data and a recommended consensus level from the literature review. When the expert panelist recognized a strategy/method and priority of turnaround as *Extremely Important at 70%*, I identified these items as consensus. A

qualitative and quantitative analysis of the final round occurred to conclude data collection.

Legitimation

Creswell and Creswell (2018) state validation of results happen throughout the process of research. Steps taken to verify accuracy and credibility are required in a research study. The following methods were used to assist in establishing legitimation: peer examination, awareness of my role as the researcher, and the use of an audit trail.

Peer Examination. An experienced researcher can increase the study's legitimation (Onwuegbuzie & Johnson, 2006). Throughout this study, I asked for guidance with the instruments, collection of data, processes, and analysis (Onwuegbuzie & Johnson, 2006). The assistance of the experienced researcher added to the credibility of the data analysis.

The process of peer examination joins the researcher with an experienced researcher to collaborate about the research progression. Guidance of the experienced researcher assisted in interpretations of the data, relationships, and conclusions (Onwuegbuzie & Johnson, 2006). This method of peer examination increased credibility by providing the assistance of an experienced researcher in the analysis of data. I collaborated with my dissertation chair, Dr. Julie Combs, to making decisions throughout the study. Dr. Combs has experience as a school principal and has had numerous publications since 2003.

Role of the Researcher. It is essential to recognize researcher bias. As a successful turnaround principal of two schools, I have been interested in learning what the experts believe are the most beneficial steps in rapid school improvement, or

turnaround. At the beginning of my literature review, I read multiple articles with different opinions of priorities and strategies led me to search for the opinion of experts. My potential biases about turnaround steps, priorities, and strategies could be a limitation of this study. To decrease my biases, I journaled my thoughts (Moustakas, 1994) throughout the research study.

Audit Trail. An audit trail provided a running record of the study (Merriam, 2009). A detailed record of the thoughts and decisions of the researcher is described as the audit trail by Merriam (2009). I kept a journal during the research process of my notes, comments, and decisions during the study. The reflective nature of journaling documented the process of research and recommendations.

Summary

In this chapter, I presented the Delphi method in general and how I implemented the method for my research study. This research study attempted to determine how to turnaround a school to improve student achievement, how to prioritize turnaround efforts, and find what strategies are recommended by experts for rapid school improvement, or turnaround. An explanation of the history of Delphi, research design, appropriateness of Delphi, selection of participants, instrumentation, data collection, data analysis, and legitimization are included. When the study was approved, the Delphi process began.

CHAPTER IV

Presentation and Analysis of Data

Introduction

The purpose of this Delphi study was to describe the consensus of school leaders about strategies for improving a school and prioritizing the implementation of the strategies. A panel of experts in the field of education who specialize in turnaround efforts, either by accomplishing this task themselves or by working in a leadership role that specializes in school turnaround, responded to a series of three questionnaires. The Round 1 Questionnaire responses were coded for themes and priorities for expedited school turnaround to answer the research questions. Two research questions were explored in this study: (a) What leadership strategies are used by expert principals to turn around a school to improve student achievement? (b) How does a principal prioritize leadership actions to turn around a school? This chapter details the processes used to gather the data and the results of the study.

Demographics of Expert Panel

A consideration when selecting experts is not the number of experts on a panel, but the variety of experts in the panel, according to Turoff (2006). To gain the most beneficial responses, four categories were utilized to select the experts: individuals with experience as a principal in a turnaround school, individuals who have supported or consulted school turnaround leaders, individuals who have researched turnaround extensively, and/or participants who have presented at conferences on the topic of school turnaround. Table 6 shows the number of panelists and their experiences in school turnaround. In this open-ended question on the Round 1 Questionnaire, several of the

participants reported multiple roles related to their experiences in education. Some respondents reported a specific role such as principal or assistant principal. Others reported their position as a “school leader.” A smaller number of participants were unclear as to their role in school turnaround.

Table 6

Previous Roles of Expert Panelists

Role	Number
Support Position	11
Principal	8
Assistant Principal	4
Researcher	1
School Leader	1
Speaker	0

The literature of the Delphi method of study recommends an initial invitation to all eligible participants (Brooks, 1979; Green et al., 1999). To locate expert panelists, email requests were sent to groups of educational leaders such as Raise Your Hand Texas (RYHT), The Principal’s Network (TPN) through Harvard University, and district and cohort colleagues. In addition to these groups, internet searches of regional leaders in turnaround work, authors of turnaround literature, and LinkedIn were used to contact potential turnaround leaders. From this request, a total of 38 turnaround experts were identified. All potential candidates were emailed with the four qualifiers to be considered an expert in this study and invited to participate in the study. From the total identified and contacted, 20 responded and agreed to participate in the study. Four candidates did not qualify for the study and were removed from the expert panel and 14 did not respond.

From the 20 participants who agreed to participate, 17 responded to Round 1. In their responses to their experiences in school turnaround, most of the participants had been (or are presently) a school leader. Specifically, panelists reported their role as a school leader as (a) “principal,” (b) “assistant principal,” (c) “I led a high school,” (d) “I served as a school leader,” and (e) “I currently work in a turnaround district as a district administrator.” The next largest group was in the supportive role of turnaround. Responses representing a supportive role were as follows: (a) “I currently oversee instruction and school leadership for the secondary schools, five of the 16 schools are officially designated as underperforming based on our state’s accountability system,” (b) “I worked as a central office leader to support principals,” (c) “I supported over 60 schools and many of them were in turnaround mode,” (d) “school improvement specialist,” (e) “I support schools and the administrators responsible for campuses in the turnaround process,” (f) “support multiple school turnarounds beginning in 2012-2020,” (g) “provided technical assistance to multiple turnaround schools,” and (h) “district coordinator for school improvement.” Six of the participants had various experiences in turnaround to include school leadership (teacher, assistant principal, and principal) and district supportive roles in their career. Of the participants in Round 1, 13 were women (81.25%) and three were men (18.75%) with one nonresponse for this question. The mean average years of experience for the 17 participants in education was 29.75 years with a standard deviation of 10.73; the range was 16 to 44 years, and the mode was 43 years.

Summary of Procedures

On December 14, 2020, approval from the Sam Houston State University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) was granted for this study of Successful Turnaround Leadership (see Appendix J). Initial requests for an expert panel began using email. The letter sent included the focus of the study and a brief description of the Delphi method. The questionnaires were created in the Qualtrics platform to ensure secure, confidential access. On December 30, 2020, a letter explaining the study and requesting participation of the experts was sent via email with a link to the Round 1 questionnaire (see Appendix A). By January 4, 2021, only four responses had been received. A reminder email was sent on January 4, 2021 (see Appendix C) to request completion of the questionnaire. By January 11, 2021, 17 responses had been recorded in Qualtrics. A process of coding was completed for Round 1 and the second questionnaire was created.

On January 16, 2021, the panel was sent an email requesting their participation in Round 2 with a link to the questionnaire (see Appendix D). By January 20, 2021 nine questionnaires had been completed. A reminder letter was emailed to the participants on January 20, 2021 (see Appendix F). By January 22, 2021, 16 responses had been recorded. The data were analyzed, and the Round 3 questionnaire was created.

On January 30, 2021, Round 3 of the Delphi study was emailed to the expert panel requesting their participation (see Appendix G). By February 3, 2021, seven questionnaires had been received. A reminder letter was sent on February 3, 2021 to encourage participation by the panel (see Appendix I). By February 7, 2021, 14 questionnaires had been submitted by the panel, completing the rounds of Delphi.

Delphi Rounds

For my study of successful turnaround leadership, three Delphi rounds were completed by an expert panel of turnaround leaders. The Delphi rounds were completed online with the experts located in various geographic locations. The questionnaires were sent using a secure link through the Qualtrics platform. The three rounds were completed between December 30, 2020 and February 7, 2021 with a total of 17 expert panelists participating in the study in Round 1, 16 participants in Round 2, and 14 participants in Round 3 of the study. The goal was for the panelists to reach a consensus of at least 70% on statements related to turnaround strategies and priorities.

Delphi Round 1. On December 30, 2020, a letter (see Appendix A) was emailed to 20 potential expert turnaround leaders to complete Round 1 Questionnaire through a secure link in the Qualtrics platform. The Round 1 Questionnaire consisted of four open-ended questions and a fifth question asking for any additional information participants wanted to add to their responses (see Appendix B). The goal of the first questionnaire was to gather as much information from the expert panel as possible about recommended strategies and priorities of successful turnaround. The first question asked about their experiences in turnaround to ensure expert status in completion of the survey. The second question asked the panel what strategies they have used to turn a school around. The third question asked their opinion of the top priorities in school turnaround and the fourth question asked how they prioritize turnaround efforts.

To elicit information about the turnaround leaders' experiences, five additional questions were asked, and a final question asked the panelists to select their gender. The questions about experience asked about their years of experience in education, if they

were a principal, how many years they have been involved in turnaround, and what programs they have used to support turnaround efforts.

On January 11, 2021, Round 1 was closed with a total of 17 expert turnaround leaders responding to the questionnaire. The results of the questionnaire were downloaded and analyzed to develop the second round of questions for the study.

Round 1 Data Analysis. In Round 1, 17 expert panelists provided responses to the questionnaire. The first five questions allowed expert panelists an opportunity to brainstorm strategies and priorities of turnaround as a successful turnaround leader. The questions were created to elicit a “high quantity of ideas” (Delbecq et al., 1975, p. 34) so the expert group could rank the ideas in subsequent rounds to reach 70% consensus.

To analyze the data further, I coded the responses into several common themes, following Keeney et al.’s (2011) recommendation for collapsing the themes into major categories. Table 7 represents the 20 categories identified for the second question on the questionnaire: What strategies/methods have you used to turn a school around? An elaboration of the category meaning is derived from participants’ responses. These strategies were used to develop the Round 2 questionnaire.

Table 7

Thematic Categories from Question 2, Open-ended Responses

Category	Elaboration of category meaning
Building relationships with staff and students	The campus should focus on strong relationships among the staff and students
Building systems for sustainable change	Build systems that foster high levels of learning for adults and young people that drive sustainable change

(continued)

Category	Elaboration of category meaning
Create a new vision with the staff	Develop a vision where the staff will believe that “failure is not an option”
Data driven decision-making	Present current campus data with the entire staff and then using data to identify trends in student achievement, and the climate of the school
Define school culture and steps to improve culture	Creating a positive and supportive culture is critical for the work ahead
Frequent teacher observations and timely feedback	Campus administration spends much of their time in classrooms and providing immediate feedback to the teachers for instructional improvement
Focus on instructional delivery, instructional framework	The instructional framework is implemented in all classrooms. A focus on quality instruction was critical
Implementing instructional coaching	Provide lesson modeling for teachers in need of support
Individuals in the school are committed to a collaborative culture, working as a team	Building collaborative planning teams, sharing ideas, really looking at student work outcomes, misconceptions, essential learning which must take place in each grade level for focus and success
Leadership clearly defining expectations for all systems in the school	A targeted improvement plan developed with action steps and a timeline for attaining the goals in the action steps
Professional development focused on needs	All faculty meetings, professional development, and PLCs have a structured agenda to be intentional
Root cause analysis with the staff	Work through the process to determine the root of the problem, the why
Selection of campus principal based on specific characteristics, i.e., leadership style, personality traits	The principal must be an instructional leader who knows instruction and curriculum
School-wide system of intervention	Prescribed, intentional intervention time
Teachers and students setting goals	Collaboratively set a common goal such as approaches 75%, Meets 40%, and Masters 15%

(continued)

Category	Elaboration of category meaning
Teachers create assessments prior to instruction/backwards design	Plan with the end in mind, celebrate quick wins, prepare for the long end game. Backwards planning so that teachers created the assessments prior to providing instruction
Teachers taking ownership and being accountable	Teams identify norms/agreements and hold each other accountable
Teaching growth mindset as a belief system	Intentional instruction of growth mindset to the staff and students as a path to improving outcomes through the belief system
The principal having honest conversations with staff about performance	Crucial, yet collegial, conversations with staff about performance and campus culture
Using information from formative and summative assessments to inform practice	The data from the frequent assessments provide informed decisions about instructional adjustments

Table 8 represents the 15 categories identified from Question 3 on the questionnaire: What are the top priorities in school turnaround? An elaboration of the category meaning is derived from participants' responses. These categories were used to develop the Round 2 Questionnaire.

Table 8

Thematic Categories from Question 3, Open-ended Responses

Category	Elaboration of category meaning
Assess current systems to identify improvement areas	Clarify and assess systems to determine needs
Build relationships with the staff	The campus should focus on strong relationships among the staff and students
Collaboration between the leadership team and the teachers	Create a strong partnership between leadership and instructional staff

(continued)

Category	Elaboration of category meaning
Data-driven instructional practices	Use research-based instructional strategies to increase probability of success
Define expectations for quality and consistency of classroom instruction	A targeted improvement plan developed with action steps and a timeline for attaining the goals in the action steps
Determine 2-3 priorities/focus per year	Focus on 2-3 goals per year for intentional work in turnaround
Developing the leadership team through training	Develop leadership skills of principal and leadership team through professional development and coaching
Engage staff in a root cause analysis	Work through the process to determine the root of the problem/the why
Provide consistent teacher feedback about their practices	Campus administration spends the majority of their time in classrooms and providing immediate feedback to the teachers for instructional improvement
Selecting/placing teachers based on prior performance	Choosing the best teachers for turnaround schools
Target professional development based on needs	All faculty meetings, professional development, and PLCs have a structured agenda to be intentional
Teachers taking ownership and held accountable	Teams identify norms/agreements and hold each other accountable
Teaching a growth mindset as a belief system	Intentional instruction of growth mindset to the staff and students as a path to improving outcomes through the belief system
The staff defines their desired culture/climate and strategies to meet their goals	Determine desired campus outcomes and steps to meet the goals
Using information from formative and summative assessments to inform practice	The data from the frequent assessments provide informed decisions about instructional adjustments

Delphi Round 2. On January 16, 2021, a letter (see Appendix D) was sent via email to participants asking for their participation in Round 2 questionnaire. By January 19, 2021, nine surveys had been completed by the expert panel. On January 20, 2021, a reminder letter (see Appendix F) was sent by email to the participants. By January 22, 2021, an additional seven questionnaires had been completed by the expert panel. The questionnaire was closed on January 22, 2021 for data analysis.

Round 2 Data Analysis. The purpose of the Round 2 Questionnaire was to seek 70% consensus level from the expert panel. From the process of coding the results of Round 1 Questionnaire, 20 strategies and methods for successful school turnaround and 15 leadership priorities were listed in the Round 2 Questionnaire for the expert panel to rank. The expert panel ranked the statements in categories as follows: (a) *Extremely Important*, (b) *Fairly Important*, (c) *Not Very Important*, or (d) *Not At All Important*. Table 9 shows the strategies and methods that reached a consensus level of at least 70% of the *Extremely Important* rating. Two strategies/methods reached a consensus level of 100% in Round 2. The strategy/method of *frequent teacher observations and timely feedback* and *leadership clearly defining expectations for all systems in the school* were rated *Extremely Important* by all members of the expert panel. Also, two of the 20 strategies/methods had a consensus level of 93%.

Table 9

Strategies and Methods that Met 70% Consensus Level in Round 2

Strategy/Method	Consensus Level
Frequent teacher observations and timely feedback	100%
Leadership clearly defining expectations for all systems in the school	100%
Building relationships with the staff and students	93%
Data driven decision-making	93%
Building systems for sustainable change	81%
Individuals in the school are committed to a collaborative culture, working as a team	81%
Create a new vision with the staff	75%
Focus on instructional delivery/instructional framework	75%
Using information from formative and summative assessments to inform practice	75%

Nine statements reaching the 70% consensus level were retained as strategies and methods according to the experts, and those 11 statements that did not meet the 70% threshold were posed in Round 3. The goal was to reach a consensus level of 70% among panel members to answer the research questions and determine effective leadership strategies and methods of turnaround.

Consensus was not reached for 11 of the strategies and methods suggested by the expert panel in Round 1 and posed in Round 2. These 11 strategies and methods were included in Round 3 Questionnaire. Interestingly, the strategy of *selection of campus principal based on specific characteristics, i.e., leadership styles, personality traits* had a consensus level of 43% as an effective turnaround strategy/method for leaders to implement for rapid school improvement. The literature review revealed multiple studies of the importance of the leadership in a turnaround school (Blair, 2017; Olsen, 2015).

Also, Hitt et al. (2018) stressed the urgency needed when identifying the correct leaders for failing schools.

Table 10 reveals the eight priorities that reached a consensus level of at least 70% of the *Extremely Important* rating by the expert panel in Round 2 Questionnaire. None of the priorities received 100% consensus level in Round 2; however, three of the priorities had a consensus level of 93% for the *Extremely Important* rating by the expert panel.

Table 10

Priorities that Met 70% Consensus Level in Round 2

Priority	Consensus Level
Assess current systems to identify improvement areas	93%
Define expectations for quality and consistency of classroom instruction	93%
Developing the leadership team through training	93%
Data-driven instructional practices	87%
Provide consistent teacher feedback about their practices	87%
Collaboration between the leadership team and the teachers	81%
Determine 2-3 priorities/focus per year	81%

In addition to the 20 strategies/methods listed for the expert panel to rank, the expert panel members were asked if they believed there were any strategies/methods not listed. The panelist added six additional strategies/methods during Round 2 as follows:

- Equity focused leadership in strategic planning and implementation of all system, processes, strategies”
- “District support”
- “Principal as the instructional leader”
- “Development of teacher leaders, PLCs, and instructional leadership team”
- “Implementation of a clear, coherent curriculum”

“Communicating goals to school community to create buy-in”

These six additional strategies were then posed to the panel in the Round 3 Questionnaire.

In addition to the 15 priorities listed for the expert panel to rank, the expert panel was asked if they believed there were any priorities not listed. The panelist added five additional priorities during Round 2 as follows:

- “Equity minded”
- “The leader is intentional about implementing change”
- “Consistency of quality instruction among teachers of same content through PLC structures”
- “Focus on adult and student learning”
- “Establish strong systems and routines for a safe school that is reliable and facilitates high levels of learning for all”

These five additional priorities were then used in Round 3 for the panelists to rank.

Studies in the literature review focus on the principal and their characteristics in turnaround schools in part because of the impact the principal can have on student achievement (Blair, 2001). In Round 2, the expert panel was asked to list five attributes of effective turnaround leaders. The panelists listed 79 attributes of effective turnaround leaders. Of the 79 attributes, 15 were repeated by the panelists. The 15 repeated attributes are shown in Table 11.

Table 11*Attributes of Turnaround Leaders provided by the Expert Panel*

Attributes of Turnaround Leaders	Frequency
Focused	7
Collaborative	4
Courageous	3
Dedicated	3
Knowledgeable	3
Committed	2
Compassionate	2
Consistent	2
Flexible	2
Goal-oriented	2
Influencer	2
Passionate	2
Persistent	2
Reflective	2
Visionary	2

The final question in Round 2 asked the expert panel to consider the work experiences of effective turnaround leaders. They responded to the question: What previous work or job-related experiences do you believe are necessary to be an effective turnaround leader? The responses from the expert panel are shown in Table 12.

Table 12*Work Experiences Necessary for an Effective Turnaround Leader*

Experience	Frequency
Prior success	6
Successful classroom teacher	4
Depth of curriculum and instruction	3
Coaching teachers	2
Leadership	2
Prior turnaround experience	1
Identify quick wins	1
Clear communicator	1
Belief in teachers and students	1
Equity minded	1
Assessment	1
Understand change process	1
Successful Assistant Principal	1
Diverse populations	1
Multiple districts	1
Multiple instructional frameworks	1
Low performing schools	1
Strong mentor	1
Understands the community	1
Passion	1
Hard worker	1
Strategic thinker	1

It is interesting to note the most frequent experience the panel believed was necessary to successfully turn a school around was *prior success* in multiple roles and experiences followed by success as a classroom teacher.

Delphi Round 3. On January 30, 2021, a letter was sent to the panel requesting their participation in Round 3 (see Appendix G) with a link to the Round 3 Questionnaire (see Appendix H). By February 3, 2021, seven questionnaires had been received. A reminder letter was sent on February 3, 2021 to increase participation of the panel (see Appendix I). By February 7, 2021, 14 questionnaires had been submitted by the panel, completing the rounds of the study by gaining consensus.

Round 3 Data Analysis. The purpose of the Round 3 Questionnaire was to seek consensus about strategies and priorities related to school turnaround. From an analysis of the results of Round 2 Questionnaire, nine strategies/methods met the consensus level of at least 70%. The remaining 11 strategies/methods were listed in Round 3 and the panelist were asked to determine whether each of these were (a) *Extremely Important*, (b) *Fairly Important*, (c) *Not Very Important*, or (d) *Not At All Important*. Of the 11 strategies listed and for the opportunity to rate them a second time, none of the 11 strategies reached a consensus of at least 70% of the *Extremely Important* rating. Two of the strategies/methods were close at 69.23%. These strategies/methods were: (1) Teachers create assessments prior to instruction/backwards design, and (2) Teachers taking ownership and being accountable.

In Round 2, the panel was asked to add other strategies/methods for school turnaround not listed. The panel responded with an additional five strategies/methods. These strategies/methods were listed in Round 3 and the panelists were asked to categorize them by (a) *Extremely Important*, (b) *Fairly Important*, (c) *Not Very Important*, or (d) *Not At All Important*. Of the five strategies listed, two were rated at 100% consensus level by the panel as *Extremely Important*. The two were: (1) Principal

as instructional leader, and (2) Implement Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support (PBIS).

From an analysis of the results of Round 2 Questionnaire, eight priorities had met the consensus level of at least 70%. The remaining seven priorities were listed in Round 3, for a second opportunity to rate the priorities, and the panelist were asked to determine whether each of these were (a) *Extremely Important*, (b) *Fairly Important*, (c) *Not Very Important*, or (d) *Not At All Important*. Of the seven priorities listed, the expert panel did not rate any of them at a consensus level of 70% or higher. One priority was close to the consensus level at 69.23%, which was Teachers taking ownership and held accountable.

In Round 2, the panel was asked to add other priorities for school turnaround not listed. The panel responded with an additional five priorities. These priorities were listed in Round 3 and the panelists were asked to categorize them by (a) *Extremely Important*, (b) *Fairly Important*, (c) *Not Very Important*, or (d) *Not At All Important*. Of the five strategies listed, two were rated at 84.62% consensus level by the panel as *Extremely Important*. The two were: (1) Consistency of quality instruction through PLC structures, and (2) Focus on the adult and student learning.

To collect data from the expert panel members, Round 3 asked about the type of school setting their turnaround experience had taken place. Table 13 shows the data from the panelist's experiences in turnaround.

Table 13*Setting of Turnaround Experience by Expert Panel*

Type of School Setting	Number	Percentage
Public School	12	70.59%
Charter School	4	23.53%
Private School	1	5.88%

Research Questions and Findings

The study began on December 30, 2020 and concluded on February 7, 2021. I utilized the Delphi method to answer the research questions in my study to determine effective strategies and methods to turn a school around and the ways to prioritize the strategies and methods. Finding answers to the research questions involved (a) reviewing the literature and theoretical framework, (b) developing questionnaires as instruments to accommodate the Delphi method, and (c) analyzing the results from each of the three rounds. The findings of this study were based on the results of the expert panel's responses to three rounds of questionnaires to determine the most effective strategies/methods for school turnaround and to understand how they prioritize their efforts for rapid school improvement.

Research Question 1. What leadership strategies are used by expert principals to turn around a school to improve student achievement? The major findings in this study were 11 strategies and methods that were extremely important to the expert panel to successfully turn a school around as shown in Table 14. Four of the strategies were rated as *Extremely Important* by 100% of the expert panel. Two of the four of the top strategies/methods are specific to the actions of the turnaround leader creating systems.

Leadership clearly defining expectations for all systems in the school and *Implement Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support (PBIS)* are both school-wide systems leaders implement to set clear expectations. As an example of *Leadership clearly defining expectations for all systems in the school*, the leader may write out, specifically, the procedures for high quality instruction. Instead of expecting all staff members to have the same understanding, a leader defining expectations for all systems may collaborate with the staff to clearly define this expectation. The other two top strategies/methods rated at 100% (*Frequent teacher observations and timely feedback* and *Principal as instructional leader*) both indicate the need for the turnaround leader to focus on the instructional practices of the teachers, providing frequent observations and feedback as the instructional leader of the campus.

Table 14*11 Strategies and Methods that Met 70% Consensus Level in Round 3*

Strategy/Method	Consensus Level
Frequent teacher observations and timely feedback	100%
Leadership clearly defining expectations for all systems in the school	100%
Implement Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support (PBIS)	100%
Principal as instructional leader	100%
Building relationships with the staff and students	93%
Data driven decision-making	93%
Building systems for sustainable change	81%
Individuals in the school are committed to a collaborative culture, working as a team	81%
Create a new vision with the staff	75%
Focus on instructional delivery/instructional framework	75%
Using information from formative and summative assessments to inform practice	75%

Research Question 2. How does a principal prioritize leadership actions to turn around a school? Ten priorities were identified at the consensus level by the panel as shown in Table 15. The top priorities the expert panel rated at 93% were: *Assess current systems to identify improvement areas*, *Define expectations for quality and consistency of classroom instruction*, and *Developing the leadership team through training*. Similar to the highest rated strategies/methods from Research Question 1, systems appear as a top priority to turn a school around. Two out of these three top rated priorities, *Assess current systems to identify improvement areas* and *Define expectations for quality and consistency of classroom instruction*, both signify the importance of the turnaround leader

being clear with the systems of the school in all areas, including instructional expectations as a system for consistency.

Table 15

10 Priorities that Met 70% Consensus Level in Round 3

Priority	Consensus Level
Assess current systems to identify improvement areas	93%
Define expectations for quality and consistency of classroom instruction	93%
Developing the leadership team through training	93%
Data-driven instructional practices	87%
Provide consistent teacher feedback about their practices	87%
Consistency of quality instruction through PLC structures	85%
Focus on the adult and student learning	85%
Collaboration between the leadership team and the teachers	81%
Determine 2-3 priorities/focus per year	81%
Using information from formative and summative assessments to inform practice	75%

Additional Findings. The experts shared specific characteristics of an effective turnaround principal as *focused, collaborative, courageous, dedicated, and knowledgeable*. Other findings were that *prior success, experience as a successful classroom teacher, and depth of curriculum and instruction* were most frequent work experiences the panel shared as necessary to be an effective turnaround leader.

Summary

In this chapter, I detailed the procedures, analysis, and results of the three rounds of Delphi to answer the two research questions: (a) What leadership strategies are used by expert principals to turn around a school to improve student achievement? (b) How does

a principal prioritize leadership actions to turn around a school? The expert panelists identified 11 leadership strategies they believed to be extremely important in turning around a school. These same panelists identified 10 leadership priorities for school turnaround. Chapter V provides a summary and discussion of the findings and a comparison of the findings to the theoretical framework and review of literature. I also address the strategies I used to ensure legitimation. Last, recommendations for further research and practice are discussed in Chapter V.

CHAPTER V

Discussion, Implications, and Recommendations

Overview

The purpose of this Delphi study was to explore the consensus of school leaders about strategies for improving a school and prioritizing the implementation of the strategies for school turnaround. Using the Delphi method, which was an iterative process of questionnaires, panel members determined to be experts in the field of educational turnaround were invited to identify strategies and/or methods to turn a school around and then to prioritize the efforts for rapid improvement. A total of three Delphi rounds were completed by the panel of experts, with several statements gaining consensus among the group. This chapter presents a review of the findings, a discussion of the findings as they relate to the review of the literature, theoretical framework, legitimization, recommendations for future research, recommendations for practice, limitations, and a conclusion of the study.

Review of Findings

The following research questions were explored in this study: (a) What leadership strategies are used by expert principals to turn around a school to improve student achievement? and (b) How does a principal prioritize leadership actions to turn around a school? Three rounds of questionnaires through the Delphi process provided an answer to these questions.

To gather responses from all the experts serving on the panel, five open-ended questions were asked in Round 1. The goal of the five questions was to learn about the experiences of the panel members, to ask specifically about strategies/methods they have

used for school turnaround, to ask what they believe are the priorities when turning a school around, to understand how they prioritize school turnaround efforts, and to add anything else about school turnaround they wanted to include.

After coding the responses to Round 1, the expert panel was asked in Round 2 to rank 20 strategies and methods into categories of *Extremely Important*, *Fairly Important*, *Not Very Important*, and *Not at All Important*. From this ranking in Round 2, nine strategies and methods emerged at a consensus level of 70% or greater. In Round 2, the panel members were asked to add strategies they believed were missing. The same process was repeated for priorities for school turnaround; 15 themes were present. The panelists were asked to rank these into categories of *Extremely Important*, *Fairly Important*, *Not Very Important*, and *Not at All Important*. From this ranking in Round 2, the expert panel agreed on eight priorities at a consensus level of 70% or higher. The panel members were asked to add priorities they believed were missing.

In Round 3, five additional strategies and methods and five additional priorities were presented to the panelists because of the additional information provided in Round 2. Similar to the other statements, panelists ranked these strategies and priorities into categories of *Extremely Important*, *Fairly Important*, *Not Very Important*, and *Not at All Important*. The expert panel agreed on two additional strategies and two additional priorities in Round 3.

Leadership Strategies. The results of the three rounds of questionnaires revealed a total of 11 leadership strategies and methods recommended by the expert panel to turn a school around. Table 14, previously presented in Chapter IV, shows the list of strategies

and methods rated as *Extremely Important* and agreed upon by the panel at a consensus level of at least 70%.

A leadership strategy/method the expert panel rated as *Extremely Important* in the three rounds of questionnaires was *Frequent teacher observations and timely feedback*. As principals determine the way in which they spend their time to be as effective as possible, spending time in the classroom was a highly recommended strategy. In 2008, Marshall shared his experience as a principal and a system he felt was effective. He was “trying hard to get into five classrooms a day, and it kept me [him] in touch with instruction, stimulated hundreds of substantive discussions about teaching and learning each year” (Marshall, 2008, p. 22). Hall (2015), an award-winning former middle school principal shared, “Delivery of feedback should be an ongoing, regular process. The more frequent and consistent the feedback, the more it (and the ensuing discussion of it) becomes part of the standard operating procedure for schools” (p. 19).

In Table 14, *Implement Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support (PBIS)* as a strategy met 100% consensus level by the expert panel to increase the likelihood of school turnaround. The PBIS is “a proactive approach that schools use to improve school safety and promote positive behavior. The focus of PBIS is prevention, not punishment” (Lee, 2021, p. 1). Schools that implement PBIS generally create three levels of support with clear expectations for students and staff at each level or tier.

As shown in Table 14, the strategy, *Leadership clearly defining expectations for all systems in the school*, met 100% consensus by the expert panel. Systems thinking in education are “interactions amongst teachers, learners, administrators, digital content and learning goals. Systems thinking then uses that data to derive a useful construct, a system,

that creates efficiency and utility for all” (Cauthen, 2017, p. 1). Leaders of turnaround have learned the importance of setting clear expectations. Marshall (2008) explained “without learning goals and operational procedures in place, a principal will spend countless hours clarifying, reminding, and backfilling, which is not a good use of time” (p. 18).

When answering the research questions, (a) What leadership strategies are used by expert principals to turn around a school to improve student achievement? and (b) How does a principal prioritize leadership actions to turn around a school, the expert panel selected *Using information from formative and summative assessments to inform practice* at a 75% consensus rate for both strategies/methods and priorities of turnaround. In general, the purpose of an assessment is to “determine whether or not students have learned the identified essential learning outcomes” (Bailey & Jakicic, 2012, p. 13). The difference between the two types of assessments is “formative assessments are assessments *for* learning and summative assessments are assessments *of* learning” (Stiggins, Arter, Chappuis, & Chappuis, 2004, p. 14). The expert panel selected this approach based on their experiences in turnaround, and there is “compelling research that these are the assessments that can truly improve student achievement” (Bailey & Jakicic, 2012, p. 18).

As shown in Table 14, four of these strategies had unanimous consensus at 100%. It is interesting to compare the four areas. All the expert panelists selected *Extremely Important* for these strategies and methods as the best approaches to turning a school around. Two of the strategies/methods focus on systems. *Implement Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support (PBIS)* is a system of school-wide safety protocols and

promotes positive behavior of students. *Leadership clearly defining expectations for all systems in the school* is also a system determined *Extremely Important* by the expert panel at the 100% level. These results indicate the necessity of the turnaround leader to create effective systems for the staff and the students to turn a school around successfully.

Leadership Priorities. In the results of leadership priorities determined by the expert panel, *systems* is once again rated at the top of the list. The experts rated *Assess current systems to identify improvement areas* at 93%. In my experience of failing schools, I often encounter schools without clear systems. Generally, the schools have determined where to begin the process of improvement. When clear systems are in place such as data-driven decision making, evidence of improvement areas are visible. The experts agreed that identifying improvement areas was critical to rapid improvement.

Also interesting was the lowest rated strategy/method from Round 2 was *selection of campus principal based on specific characteristics, i.e., leadership styles, personality traits* at 43% consensus of the *Extremely Important* rating. Studies located in the review of literature showed examples in which the principal was a key component of the turnaround. In 2013, Olsen studied 28 turnaround schools in southern California and determined only 2% of the principals she studied were successful and “exhibited cluster leadership competencies in four domains: Driving for Results, Problem Solving, Influencing for Results, and Showing Confidence to Lead” (p. 278). In a recently published study by Superville (2021), she reported “years of research show that principals can significantly impact student achievement” (para 1). Her research showed:

Replacing a below-average principal with someone in the above-average category—for, example, a principal in the bottom 25th percentile on effectiveness with one in the 75th percentile or above—can add the equivalent of 2.9 more months of learning in math and 2.7 more months of learning in reading during a single school year. (Superville, 2021, para 2).

To determine the most effective way to prioritize turnaround efforts, the panel came to consensus on a total of 10 leadership priorities for expedited school improvement. Table 15, previously presented in Chapter IV, lists the priorities and the rate of consensus by the expert panel.

A surprising result of the panel was their rating of the importance of teachers to the turnaround process. The panel rated *Selecting/placing teachers based on prior performance as Extremely Important* at 14.29%. Also, this priority was the only one rated as *Not at All Important* at 7.14%. In a report from the National Bureau of Economic Research focusing on the economic value of higher teacher quality, Hanushek (2010) claimed, “high quality teachers are the most important asset of schools” (p. 1). Hanushek (2010) further proposed that teacher quality was “the key element defining a school’s impact on student achievement” (p. 2). Studies show effective teachers can increase student success compared to a less effective teacher. Specifically, “replacing a teacher in the lowest 25th percentile with one in the 75th percentile can add the equivalent of 3.7 months of learning in math and 3.8 months of learning in reading” (Superville, 2021, para 3). An abundance of literature points to the teacher as a key element in school success, however in the context of this study of turnaround practices, the expert panel

rated the selection of teachers based on prior performance in a turnaround school a lower priority compared to other statements.

Discussion of Findings as Related to the Review of Literature

The review of the literature contained in Chapter II lacked specific strategies for school leaders to turn a school around. Each study, article, and book written about school turnaround recommended slightly different strategies for principals in need. In 2008, the United States Department of Education published a practice guide to support school turnaround. In the literature Herman et al. (2008) stated, “unfortunately, the research base on effective strategies for quickly turning around low-performing schools is sparse. The panel did not find any empirical studies that reached the rigor necessary to determine that specific turnaround practices produce significantly better academic outcomes” (p. 4). Research determining effective strategies and methods for rapid school improvement to “improve student achievement is most pressing for low-performing schools that serve disadvantaged students” (Herman et al., 2008, p. 4).

A Different Kind of Leader. In the section of the literature review in Chapter II, “A Different Kind of Leader,” Meyers and Hitt (2016) shared their review of empirical studies of turnaround leaders. In their research, they determined turnaround principals have determination, courage, relationship building, and competitiveness (Meyers & Hitt, 2016). These attributes are similar to the attributes of a turnaround leader determined by the expert panel in this Delphi study. Specifically, the words *focused*, *collaborative*, *courageous*, and *dedicated* were the top attributes used most frequently by the panel. These adjectives describe the qualities a turnaround leader should possess to have the confidence to embark and persevere through the challenging work of turnaround.

Teacher Feedback. One strategy receiving 100% consensus by the expert panel in this study was *Frequent teacher observations and timely feedback*. In Brown and Green's (2014) study, they revealed a high priority of improving the quality of professional development for teachers. These similar results of focusing on the teacher and their growth have appeared as effective strategies to improve schools effectively. In 2001, Blair revealed a significant correlation between the time a principal focuses on instructional leadership and student performance. Robinson et al. (2008) identified the strongest leadership practice was for leaders to focus all of their relationships and work on promoting and improving teaching and learning. The literature and the expert panel agree with the importance of the turnaround leader investing their time in teachers and their performance.

A Focus on Data. The researchers, from the literature review, and the expert panel agreed with the strategy of data driven decision making as important to school turnaround. This strategy, with 93% agreement level by the panel, reflects the findings by VanGronigen and Meyers (2017), who noted the turnaround leader must quickly determine the direction of the school and how it will get there. In their study, data use as a leadership action was the second highest priority among turnaround principals of the three top priorities identified (VanGronigen & Meyers, 2017). Olsen (2013) included data driven action plans created by staff members to reflect on data and determine plans for improvement. Likewise, Corrales (2017) studied improvement and noted teachers increasingly focused on data as a way to increase student performance and make improvements to their evaluation by the superintendent.

Instructional Leadership. A strategy/method receiving 100% consensus by the expert panel was *Principal as instructional leader*. As shared in the literature review, “instructional leadership has been identified as a critical, if not primary, task of school leaders” (Vogel, 2018, p. 1). As the role of the school leader evolves, research supports the expert opinion of the principal as the instructional leader as a top strategy to rapid school improvement. Robinson et al. (2008) also reported “the leadership dimension that is most strongly associated with positive student outcomes is that of promoting and participating in teacher learning and development” (p. 667).

School Culture. A strategy the experts rated at 81% was *Individuals in the school are committed to a collaborative culture, working as a team*. The review of literature shared research studies in which leaders focused on the culture of their campuses. Duke and Salmonowicz (2010) reported the key decisions made by a turnaround principal included creating a culture of teacher accountability. In a case study of leaders from 10 schools, Finnigan and Stewart (2009) reported leaders prioritized creating a culture of clear expectations and continuous improvement. The culture of a campus is an important component of school turnaround as evidenced by the expert panel and the supporting literature.

Discussion of Findings as Related to the Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study was grounded in theories of team dynamics and leadership needed for change. Bruce Tuckman’s (1965) theory of team development, Bass’ (1985) transformational leadership theory, and Blanchard and Hersey’s (1969) situational leadership theory frame the understanding about the efforts of a school turnaround leader.

A leadership strategy identified at 81% consensus level by the expert panel, *Individuals in the school are committed to a collaborative culture, working as a team* when implemented, should rely on the theory of team development. As the hard work begins, sharing the stages of team development and the natural process a team must go through as members work toward a common goal can support the team. An understanding of Tuckman's (1965) stages of forming, storming, norming, and performing will help members realize their team is not unique to the challenges they face. Through the process, the team should be stronger when they reach the performing stage. Related to Tuckman's theory, one of the experts stated, "The work is so intense and requires a dedicated team. Teachers will tire of the process and it is up to administration to keep them going and feeling valued during the work."

Turnaround schools might require a leader who exhibits Bass' (1985) transformational leadership theory and Blanchard and Hersey's (1969) situational leadership theory. The job of the turnaround leader is one in which the leader needs to inspire a challenged staff and has an awareness of the various situations in which they must respond as an effective leader for the team. Related to the transformational and situational leadership theories, one expert on the panel stated, "Although school turnaround strategies can be narrowed down to key levers, district conditions, and school based strategies/systems, none of this can be effectively implemented without strong turnaround leadership competencies both at the district and school level."

Legitimation

To ensure the accuracy and legitimation of my study, I prudently analyzed and interpreted the data. Legitimation is “the difficulty in obtaining findings and/or making inferences that are credible, trustworthy, dependable, transferable and/or confirmable” (Onwuegbuzie & Johnson, 2006, p. 52). Additionally, I followed the methods of peer examination, awareness of my role as the researcher, and the use of an audit trail, as explained in this section.

Peer Examination. The peer examination method involves inviting an experienced researcher to the process to collaborate about the research development. Increasing the study’s legitimation, I asked for guidance with the Delphi questionnaires, collection of data, processes, and analysis (Onwuegbuzie & Johnson, 2006). Support and advice of my dissertation chair, Dr. Julie Combs, helped make decisions throughout the study. As an experienced school principal and as a researcher familiar with the Delphi, Dr. Combs added value to my study.

Role of the Researcher. Beginning my first turnaround campus in 2009, I was aware of my bias in this study. As shown in the literature review, especially the case studies, the work of turnaround is act of passion and persistence. After turning one school around from failure to sustained success, I was asked to repeat the turnaround process at another campus in 2017. I was determined to increase the turnaround from five years to under three. With this goal, I began reading articles and books to find the best methods for rapid improvement. With each article and each book, I found a different set of directions and advice. These experiences of searching for answers to turnaround led me to this study.

During this study, I journaled my thoughts (Moustakas, 1994) to remain aware of my biases. Writing seemed to provide the space for reflection about the process and responses the expert members were sharing. This experience of journaling through the rounds of Delphi has allowed me to be aware and open to the experts' experiences as authentic and valid. I can reflect on the multiple reasons schools struggle and the vast ways improvement is accomplished by being open to the experts' experiences.

Audit Trail. Keeping a running record of the study provided an audit trail (Merriam, 2009) during the study. This record detailed my thoughts and decisions as a researcher during the study. I kept a journal of my notes, comments, and decisions made while completing the process of Delphi. This reflective process of journaling documented my research and helped me accurately describe steps and decisions during each round of Delphi, as described in Chapter IV.

Recommendations for Future Research

In this Delphi study to describe specific turnaround strategies, methods, and priorities, the expert panel agreed on 11 strategies/methods and 10 priorities. These results can be utilized by future researchers and practitioners looking for ways to improve schools with urgency. Numerous additional studies are needed to continue the exploration of expedited methods of turning a school around for student success. The suggested studies are as follows:

1. A study of the teachers involved in turnaround situations would give insight to the work and emotions of the teacher during the process. As two of the top priorities state: *Focus on the adult and student learning* and *Provide consistent teacher feedback about their practices*, teachers experience

challenges in the turnaround school. One of the experts in the study stated, “Administrators need to stay in the classrooms to ensure high-quality rigorous instruction is taking place and then grow or let go of teachers that are not meeting expectations.” A study of teachers during turnaround could help turnaround leaders understand the teachers’ perspectives during the turnaround process.

2. Case studies of schools going through the turnaround process would offer additional insight to the work of turnaround and the systems they create. Learning more about how schools assess their systems would give turnaround leaders insight to the strategy, *Assess current systems to identify improvement areas*, which received 100% agreement as an important strategy by the panel. Because each school has specific and unique needs, additional case studies could fill gaps in the literature to further understand the challenges and the methods used to improve schools rapidly.
3. In addition to the previous suggestion, case studies of successful and unsuccessful turnaround schools would provide a comparison of the types of work conducted and the strategies that were effective. Because schools differ greatly, additional case studies would provide turnaround leaders additional evidence of how leaders created success in different scenarios. The results of case studies could provide practitioners evidence of what might work in a context like their own.
4. A study of turnaround schools and their experiences with and without district support would guide district leadership during a campus turnaround. In the

review of literature in Table 4, themes are presented from books focused on turnaround. District support is listed as one of the most common topics presented in these books. Although it is common to find books with the topic of district support during turnaround, research determining the specific type of support would benefit school leaders. Also, in Round 3 questionnaire, the panelists rated *District must support turnaround schools* at 57.14% of the *Extremely Important* rating and an additional 42.86% of the *Fairly Important* rating. Overall, 100% of the panel members agreed that providing district support to turnaround campuses is important.

In the results of the questionnaires, the expert panel rated *Selecting/placing teachers based on prior performance* as *Extremely Important* at 14.29%. Although this strategy was recommended in Round 1 questionnaire, by comparison, this strategy was rated much lower than other strategies. Case studies in which teachers were selected specifically for turnaround campuses and based on their prior experiences would provide school leaders insight to the value of teacher experience related to school turnaround.

Recommendations for Practice

The findings in this study could be beneficial to several stakeholders in education. Specifically, principal preparation programs, educational consultants, district leadership, campus principals, and teachers may find value in this study. The following list describes how each of these stakeholders could benefit from the results of this study:

1. As universities prepare leaders for the job of principal, the strategies and methods shown in Table 14 should be considered. Due to the large number of failing schools, potential principals need the knowledge and

skills to improve schools in an expedient manner. Weaving these strategies into the curriculum of a principal preparation program could offer training to future school leaders.

2. Educational consultants and leadership coaches could use the results of this study to support campus leaders as they face the challenges of school turnaround. Specifically, as shown in Table 14, *Frequent teacher observations and timely feedback* and *Principal as instructional leader* were both rated by 100% of the expert panel members as *Extremely Important* for successful school turnaround. A consultant or leadership coach could rely on the data from this study to encourage a focus on instructional leadership and teacher observations and feedback as a place to begin rapid improvement.
3. As shown in Table 14, district leaders could use the responses by the expert panel of successful strategies and methods as guidance for principals who face the tasks of helping failing schools. The 10 priorities, as shown in Table 15, can provide district personnel focus to help school leaders to determine a starting place for school improvement. As an example, the district could support the principal by offering to assess the systems of the campus to identify improvement areas. This priority of *Assess current systems to identify improvement areas* was rated at 93% consensus by the panel members as a priority of school turnaround. District support in assessing systems could support school leaders in determining their needs.

4. Campus principals should consider and implement the recommendations this study offers, as shown in Tables 14 and 15, for expedited school improvement. The benefit of using strategies offered by experts in the field of turnaround leadership can provide guidance and comfort to principals embarking on the difficult journey of turnaround. Instead of relying simply on instinct, the turnaround principal has a list of suggested strategies/methods and priorities from which to choose.
5. Teachers can benefit from the results of this study by gaining perspective and understanding of the changes leadership begins to implement to expedite school improvement. The recommended strategies, as shown in Table 14, can offer guidance to teachers and teacher leaders who support the principal in the turnaround efforts.

Limitations

The Delphi study relies on the experiences and opinions of an expert panel. The 11 strategies and methods and 10 priorities recommended by the panel represents a consensus of the panel's experiences. Their opinions may not be backed up by evidence; instead, they shared their expert opinions (Kenney et al., 2011), which can be of value when addressing contemporary issues. The participants in this Delphi study were warranted experts by their own reflections of their work experiences. Their prior practices provided rich background for the study in making determinations of the most effective strategies/methods and priorities for school leaders of turnaround. The expert panelists had experiences in public, private, charter schools, and positions of district support. Although most of the panel members worked in Texas, approximately one-third

of the panel worked across the United States in their turnaround experiences. Another study with a different group of experts could yield different results based on differing experiences in school turnaround.

A potential limitation of this study is due to the attrition of a few of the participants. Round 1 had 17 participants; Round 2 had 16 participants, and Round 3 had 14 participants. Although these numbers do not represent a large amount of attrition, the results may have been different if all participants completed all rounds of the study. The COVID-19 pandemic was occurring during the time of data collection. Although I anticipated a potential limitation due to the pandemic occurring during this study, no evidence of this limitation was found in the comments from the expert panel in the three rounds of the study. It is possible that the pandemic was related to a slight decline in participation as the rounds progressed or provided a different context for their responses. Because of this limitation, another study should be conducted in the future when there is not a pandemic.

An additional limitation is related to me as the researcher of this study. Due to my own personal experiences in turnaround schools, I had biases and assumptions interpreting the data. After turning around two schools and working with principals to improve their school for the past 11 years, I acknowledged my potential biases during data analysis with techniques described in a previous section of this study.

Conclusion

The work of turnaround, as a method of rapid school improvement, is a worthy endeavor. Many principals chart their own course and rely on instinct to improve their schools. School leaders “need guidance on what will work quickly to improve student

outcomes” (Herman et al., 2008, p. 4). As my study came to an end, experts who had experienced the work of turnaround offered these words of advice: “not every principal has the ability to turnaround a school in need,” and “it takes persistence,” and “make the plan and work the plan-there will be hills and valleys-stay the course-the work is hard-but well worth it for the future of our kids, staff, and schools!”

Practitioners on the other side of turnaround share a common bond of the work involved and understand the work is not for everyone. Papa and English (2011) commented that school turnaround is a *calling* and the effort needed is “Herculean.” Case studies describe principals in the work of turnaround as having a “fiery passion and relentless commitment” (Aldaco, 2016, p. 170) of the work. Duke and Salmonowicz shared a case study of a principal who “consistently avoided the path of least resistance” (p. 56) to get the job accomplished.

The purpose of this Delphi study was to describe the consensus of expert school turnaround leaders about strategies for improving a school and prioritizing the implementation of the strategies. Using the Delphi method, the expert panel was able to come to consensus with recommendations for practice. The results were 11 leadership strategies and methods for school turnaround and 10 leadership priorities for school leaders. Combined, these results offer direction to school leaders facing the challenging task of improving a school in the quickest manner possible. As I look into the eyes of children and realize the deep desire to create schools in which they thrive, these recommendations can support the work of a turnaround leader.

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APPENDIX A

Invitational Letter

Hello,

My name is Letty Roman and I am a student in the Department of Educational Leadership at Sam Houston State University (SHSU). I am conducting a study under the direction of Dr. Julie Combs to determine strategies and priorities of successful turnaround practices. I am asking you to complete a survey. The results will be reported in a dissertation that I will complete as a requirement of my graduate program.

The following survey includes questions that ask you to describe successful turnaround strategies. You will also be asked to describe your opinions about the priorities of the strategies. The survey also includes questions about your years of experience, sex, and occupation. It will take about 20 minutes of your time to complete the survey.

To qualify for this study, you must be over the age of 18 and meet one of the following criteria:

1. Have led one or more successful turnarounds in education.
2. Have supported principals and/or campuses in turnaround through region centers or as a consultant.
3. Have presented speeches or sessions on turnaround schools.
4. Have conducted extensive research and published articles and/or books about turnaround in education.

Your survey responses will be kept confidential to the extent of the technology being used. Qualtrics collects IP addresses for respondents to surveys they host; however, the ability to connect your survey responses to your IP address has been disabled for this survey. That means that I will not be able to identify your responses. You should, however, keep in mind that answers to specific questions may make you more easily identifiable. The security and privacy policy for Qualtrics can be viewed at <https://www.qualtrics.com/security-statement/>.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you decide to participate, your responses will be kept confidential - that is, recorded in such a way that prevents inadvertent or inappropriate disclosure of your identifiable information. If you have any questions regarding this survey, please contact me at 832-605-5913. If you have any questions regarding your rights as a human subject and participant in this study, or to report research-related problems, you may call Sharla Miles, administrator for the Institutional Review Board at SHSU for information, at (936) 294-4875, or irb@shsu.edu.

Letty Roman

I Agree - Click here to continue

APPENDIX B

Delphi Round 1 Questionnaire

1. What are your experiences in school turnaround?
2. What strategies have you used to turn a school around?
3. In your opinion, what is the top priority in school turnaround?
4. How do you prioritize turnaround efforts?
5. Is there anything else you believe is important to share about school turnaround?

Demographic Questions

1. How many years of experience do you have in education, including this year?
2. What is your role in education?
3. If you are a principal, how many years have you been a principal?
4. If you have participated in school turnaround, how many schools have you been involved in this process and in what capacity?
5. Have you participated in a training or program that supported your ability to turn a school around? If yes, what training or program?
6. If you have turned a school around, did you implement a specific program? If yes, what is the program?
7. Please select your gender, optional.
 - a. Male
 - b. Female

APPENDIX C

Reminder Letter, Round 1

January 4, 2021

Hello,

Due to the nature of Qualtrics, I am unable to see who has completed the survey. If you have already completed the survey, I sincerely thank you.

If you have not, I would appreciate you completing the survey at your earliest convenience. [Here is the link for your convenience.](#)

Thank you again for supporting me in my research study.

Letty Roman

APPENDIX D**Invitation to Complete Round 2**

January 16, 2021

Expert Panelist,

Thank you for supporting my research of successful turnaround leadership for my dissertation study. I have analyzed the results of the first survey and prepared a second survey.

This second survey will ask you to rank strategies and priorities of successful turnaround leadership. The strategies and priorities are from the information you provided in the Round 1.

I am incredibly grateful for your participation in my study. I know as a leader in education you have a busy schedule. I believe the results of this study will benefit school leaders as they work to improve schools rapidly.

Please [click here](#) to complete Round 2.

Thank you,

Letty Roman

APPENDIX E

Delphi Round 2 Questionnaire

1. Did you participate in the last survey in Round 1?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
2. Listed on the left are 20 strategies/methods you suggested as an expert panel when turning around a school. Please drag the strategies into one of 4 boxes. Evaluate each strategy as to its importance in turning around a school. Place every strategy in one box.

(The choices were: Extremely Important, Fairly Important, Not Very Important, Not At All Important)
 - Building systems for sustainable change
 - Using information from formative and summative assessments to inform practice
 - Frequent teacher observations and timely feedback
 - Implement instructional coaching
 - Data driven decision-making
 - Create a new vision with the staff
 - Define school culture and steps to improve culture
 - Professional Development focused on needs
 - Focus on instructional delivery/instructional framework
 - School-wide system of intervention

- Selection of campus principal based on specific characteristics, i.e.
leadership styles, personality traits
 - Teaching growth mindset as a belief system
 - Building relationships with staff and students
 - Individuals in the school are committed to a collaborative culture, working
as a team
 - Teachers taking ownership and being accountable
 - Leadership clearly defining expectations for all systems in the school
 - Teachers and students setting goals
 - Root cause analysis with the staff
 - Teachers create assessments prior to instruction/backwards design
 - The principal having honest conversations about staff performance
3. Please reflect on the list of 20 strategies for school turnaround. Is there a strategy you believe is missing? If yes, please describe.
4. Listed on the left are 15 priorities the expert panel listed as first steps in school turnaround. Please drag the priorities into one of 4 boxes. Evaluate each priority as to its importance in turning around a school for rapid improvement. Place every priority in one box.

(The choices were: Extremely Important, Fairly Important, Not Very Important, Not At All Important)

- Developing the leadership team through training
- Collaboration between the leadership team and the teachers

- The staff defines their desired culture/climate and strategizes to meet their goals
 - Data-driven instructional practices
 - Teaching Growth Mindset as a belief system
 - Teachers taking ownership and held accountable
 - Build relationships with the staff
 - Determine 2-3 priorities/focus per year
 - Provide consistent teacher feedback about their practices
 - Define expectations for quality and consistency of classroom instruction
 - Target professional development based on needs
 - Engage staff in a root cause analysis
 - Selecting/placing teachers based on prior performance
 - Using information from formative and summative assessments to inform practice
 - Assess current systems to identify improvement areas
5. Please reflect on the list of 15 priorities for school turnaround. Is there a priority statement you believe is missing? If yes, please describe.
 6. As a member of this expert panel, please consider the attributes of effective turnaround leaders. List 5 adjectives you would use to describe an effective turnaround leader.
 7. As a member of this expert panel, please consider the work experiences of effective turnaround leaders. What previous work or job-related experiences do you believe are necessary to be an effective turnaround leader

APPENDIX F

Reminder Letter, Round 2

January 20, 2021

Expert Panelist,

Thank you for agreeing to complete the rounds of surveys as a participant in my study,
Successful Turnaround Leadership: A Delphi Study.

As I mentioned before, I am unable to see who has completed the survey and who has not. If you have already completed Round 2, I am very grateful to have your expert opinion and input.

If you have not completed Round 2, I would appreciate you completing it by the end of the week if possible.

Thank you again for supporting my research. Please [click here](#) to complete the survey.

Letty Roman

APPENDIX G

Invitation to Complete Round 3

January 30, 2021

Dear Expert Panel Member,

Today marks one month since I sent the first questionnaire to you. I am happy to share that today I am sending the final questionnaire to complete the Delphi rounds.

I am so grateful that you have spent time sharing your valuable experiences and thoughts as responses to my questionnaires. I feel honored to have your support on the virtual panel of experts.

Thank you, once again, for taking time to complete the questionnaires.

Please click [here](#) for the final survey.

Letty Roman

APPENDIX H

Delphi Round 3 Questionnaire

1. Did you participate in Round 1 questionnaire?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
2. Did you participate in Round 2 questionnaire?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
3. In Round 2 the expert panel agreed on the following strategies/methods to successfully turn a school around:
 - Building systems for sustainable change
 - Using information from formative and summative assessments to inform practice
 - Frequent teacher observations and timely feedback
 - Data-driven decision-making
 - Create a new vision with the staff
 - Focus on instructional delivery/instructional framework
 - Building relationships with staff and students
 - Individuals in the school are committed to a collaborative culture, working as a team
 - Leadership clearly defining expectations for all system in the school
4. Listed below are the strategies/methods from Round 1 not selected as Extremely important in Round 2 questionnaire at a consensus level of 70%. Do you

believe any of these should be categorized as Extremely important when a leader is turning around a school?

Please respond below.

(The choices were: Extremely Important, Fairly Important, Not Very Important, or Not At All Important)

- Implement instructional coaching
- Define school culture and steps to improve culture
- Professional development focused on needs
- School-wide system of intervention
- Selection of campus principal based on specific characteristics, i.e., leadership styles, personality traits
- Teaching growth mindset as a belief system
- Teachers taking ownership and being accountable
- Teachers and students setting goals
- Root cause analysis with the staff
- Teachers create assessments prior to instruction/backwards design
- The principal having honest conversations about staff performance

5. As the expert panel, you were asked to list anything else you believed was important to turnaround. Listed below are the statements given. Please categorize these statements as to their importance when a leader is turning around a school.

(The choices were: Extremely Important, Fairly Important, Not Very Important, or Not At All Important)

- Equity focused leadership in strategic planning and implementation of all system, processes and strategies
 - District must support turnaround schools
 - Principal as instructional leader
 - Implement PBIS
 - Implement PBIS
 - Communicating with school community about goals, create buy in
6. In Round 2 the expert panel agreed on the following priorities to successfully turn a school around for rapid improvement:
- Developing the leadership team through training
 - Collaboration between the leadership team and the teachers
 - Data-driven instructional practices
 - Determine 2-3 priorities/focus per year
 - Provide consistent teacher feedback about their practices
 - Define expectations for quality and consistency of classroom instruction
 - Using information from formative and summative assessments to inform practice
 - Assess current systems to identify improvement areas
7. Listed below are the priorities from Round 1 not selected as Extremely important in Round 2 questionnaire at a consensus level of 70%. Do you believe any of these should be categorized as Extremely important for successful turnaround?

Please respond below.

(The choices were: Extremely Important, Fairly Important, Not Very Important, or Not At All Important)

- The staff defines their desired culture/climate and strategizes to meet their goals
- Teaching growth mindset as a belief system
- Teachers taking ownership and held accountable
- Build relationships with the staff
- Target professional development based on needs
- Engage staff in a root cause analysis
- Selecting/placing teachers based on prior performance

8. As the expert panel, you were asked to list anything else you believed was an important priority of turnaround. Listed below are the statements given. Please categorize these statements as to their importance when a leader is turning a school around.

(The choices were: Extremely Important, Fairly Important, Not Very Important, or Not At All Important)

- The leader is equity minded
- The leader is intentional about change management
- Consistency of quality instruction through PLC structures
- Focus on the adult and student learning
- Establish strong systems and routines for a safe school that is reliable and facilitates high levels of learning for all

9. Is there anything else you would like to share about successful turnaround leadership?
10. Where have you participated in school turnaround, past and present (Country/State)?
11. What type of school setting(s) have you worked in turnaround? Please check all that apply to you.
 - a. Public Schools (please add the level - Elementary, Middle, Secondary, District Support)
 - b. Private Schools (please add the level - Elementary, Middle, Secondary, District Support)
 - c. Other (please explain)

Thank you for your participation in my study. Your expert input will help determine strategies and priorities for turnaround leaders.

APPENDIX I

Reminder Letter, Round 3

February 3, 2021

Dear Expert Panelist,

As my study comes to an end, I am requesting one last time for you to complete Round 3 questionnaire. Approximately half of the panel has responded, so I am hoping you will complete the questionnaire if you have not already. Please [click here](#) to complete the final survey.

I am so appreciative for your patience of my numerous emails throughout this process. My goal in the Delphi study was to reach a consensus from the expert panelist to learn about the most effective strategies to turn a school around and prioritize the efforts for rapid improvement.

Thank you for the work you have done in the past and the work you continue to do to strengthen our schools. Our youth depends on professionals, like you, to create better schools. I wish you continued success and to never give up the good fight of school improvement.

Grateful to you,

Letty Roman

APPENDIX J

IRB Approval Letter

IRB #: IRB-2020-328

Title: Successful Turnaround Leadership: A Delphi Study

Creation Date: 10-25-2020

End Date:

Status: **Approved**

Principal Investigator: Letitia Roman

Review Board: SHSU IRB

Sponsor:

Study History

Submission Type	Initial	Review Type	Exempt	Decision	Exempt
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Key Study Contacts

Member	Julie Combs	Role	Co-Principal Investigator	Contact	jpc002@shsu.edu
Member	Letitia Roman	Role	Principal Investigator	Contact	lhr001@shsu.edu
Member	Letitia Roman	Role	Primary Contact	Contact	lhr001@shsu.edu

VITA

Letitia Hewlett Roman

Educational History

Doctor of Education (Ed.D) in Educational Leadership with Superintendent Certification,
Sam Houston State University, Huntsville, TX.

Master of Education (M.Ed) Educational Leadership, Sam Houston State University,
Huntsville, TX.

Bachelor of Science (B.S.) Curriculum and Instruction, Texas A&M University, College
Station, TX.

Professional Experience

Wildwood Elementary School, Principal

Magnolia Elementary School, Principal

Cedric C. Smith Elementary School, Principal

Educational Leadership Consultant

Presentations

Roman, L. (2020, July). *Reflect, Recharge, Refocus*. Keynote Speaker and Session
Presenter, Principal's Summit, Region 7.

Roman, L. (2020). *Better Together*. Conference Presenter, SIBME.

Roman, L. (2020, February). *A Practical Guide to Creating a High Performing School:
Tools You Can Use Now*. Session presented at the annual Raise Your Hand Texas
Symposium in Austin, TX

Roman, L., & Rivera, D. (2019, July). SIBME Missions and Micro-PD. SIBME Webinar
Series.

Roman, L. (2019, February). *A Practical Guide to Creating a High Performing School:
Tools You Can Use Now*. Session presented at the annual Raise Your Hand Texas
Symposium in Austin, TX.

Roman, L., & Rivera, D. (2019, June). *A Practical Guide to Creating a High-Performing
School: Tools You Can Use Now*. Workshop presented at the annual conference of

the Texas Elementary Principals and Supervisors Association (TEPSA) in Austin, TX.

Roman, L., & Rivera, D. (2018, June). *A Practical Guide to Creating a High-Performing School: Tools You Can Use Now*. Workshop presented at the annual conference of the Texas Elementary Principals and Supervisors Association (TEPSA) in Austin, TX.

Awards

Regional Alumni Director, Raise Your Hand Texas
Raise Your Hand Texas Scholarship Recipient to the Harvard Graduate School of Education Leadership Program – Harvard University
Facilitation of Harvard Graduate School of Education Institutes
The Principal's Center (TPC) at Harvard, Facilitator