A CASE STUDY OF ESSENTIAL COMPONENTS OF SCHOOL SUCCESS IN A
TURNAROUND SCHOOL

By

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A DISSERTATION PRESENTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF
THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA

2016
To my sister and best friend, Melissa. You were always a role model for me as we grew up, now I strive to be half the person you were as I remind your children of the love you had for them. I miss you more and more each day.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AMO  Annual Measureable Objectives
ARRA American Recovery and Reinvestment Act
AYP  Adequate Yearly Progress
DA   Differentiated Accountability
ELL  English Language Learners
ESE  Exceptional Student Education
ESEA Elementary and Secondary Act
FCAT Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test
FSA  Florida Standards Assessment
NCLB No Child Left Behind
SIG  School Improvement Grant
SINI Schools in Need of Improvement
SPAR School Public Accountability Reports
TOP  Turnaround Option Plan
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>The shared beliefs about student learning (Florida School Leaders, 2013).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)</td>
<td>A federal law that addresses federal funds supporting school improvement in public education. Current statutes concentrate on the four principles: stronger accountability for results, increased flexibility and local control, expanded options for parents, and an emphasis on teaching methods that have been proven to improve learning (Florida Department of Education, 2013, para. 70).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essential Supports</td>
<td>The framework for school success completed by the University of Chicago Urban Education Institute as the “5Essentials for School Success: Effective Leadership, Collaborative Teachers, Involved Families, Supportive Environments, and Ambitious Instruction” (Bryk et al., 2010, p. 82).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Framework</td>
<td>Essential components that are needed for success. According to the work of Bryk et al., (2010, p. 82) the five essential components are school leadership, professional capacity, instructional guidance, learning climate, and parent-school community ties.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional guidance</td>
<td>Instruction that is aligned to state standards and is planned to meet the needs of the students with effective pacing (Bryk et al., 2010, p.82).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning climate</td>
<td>Describes the environment that affects the leadership, teachers, and students of the school based on the relationships between principal and teachers and teachers and students (Florida Department of Education, 2013). A positive learning environment is safe for students, has well-established procedures, and sets high expectations for the students (Bryk et al., 2010, p. 82).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Child Left Behind</td>
<td>“The federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 aims to bring all students up to proficiency level on state tests by the 2013-2014 school year, and to hold states and schools more accountable for results (NCLB, 2001).”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent-school community ties</td>
<td>The relationships built to support the student learning between the school members (leadership team and teachers) and the parents (Bryk et al., 2010, p. 82).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Professional capacity</strong></td>
<td>The ability of the leader to recruit and retain high quality teachers that work to improve student achievement (Bryk et al., 2010, p. 82).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Qualitative Research</strong></td>
<td>An inquiry process of understanding that explores a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes works, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting by testing objective theories or examining the relationships between variables (Creswell, 2014, p. 247).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>School Based Leadership Team (SBLT)</strong></td>
<td>A school-level team that is responsible for developing, monitoring, and implementing a school improvement plan. The SBLT are trainers and coaches for the school staff to support them with school and district initiatives (Florida School Leaders, 2013).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Turnaround School</strong></td>
<td>A school that is considered to be “underperforming” and the majority of the members are aware that the school needs improvement. The status of turnaround can be designed by the federal, state, or district as a school in trouble and needs help to get back on track (Baeza, 2010, p. 26).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A CASE STUDY OF ESSENTIAL COMPONENTS OF SCHOOL SUCCESS IN A TURNAROUND SCHOOL

By

Jodi Lynn Cronin

December 2016

Chair: Linda B. Eldridge
Major: Educational Leadership

School reform and turnaround efforts have been in the public eye since the signing of the Elementary and Secondary Act (ESEA) into law by President Lyndon Baines Johnson in 1965. Research has been focused on the School Improvement Grant, as well as the essential components that improve performance of schools. This qualitative case examines one elementary turnaround school in Florida that was awarded the School Improvement Grant in the early summer of 2014 after implementing a District-Managed Turnaround Plan. The case study revealed strategies connected to each of three themes as follows: (1) effective leader: vision, culture, and management; (2) staff influence on instruction: staff commitment, professional development, collaborative teachers, and ambitious instruction; and (3) external factors: parental involvement, community engagement, and safe and supportive environment. The themes collected from this study offer additional research on the turnaround efforts and the essential components that were implemented in one school and may offer a framework for schools and districts that are working to improve low-performing schools.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Overview of Topic

Using statistics produced by the U.S. Department of Education, Kutash, Nico, Gorin, Rahmatullah, and Tallant, (2010) asserted that five percent of the schools in the United States are responsible for chronically failing 2.5 million students. This indicates that there is more to be done in improving the U.S education system despite the numerous reforms undertaken. In 1983, Secretary of Education T. H. Bell created the Commission of Excellence in Education that produced the report, *A Nation at Risk*. The findings in the report indicated that America’s education system was inferior and systemic changes were needed (National Commission of Excellence in Education [NCEE], 1983, p. 13). *A Nation at Risk* provided recommendations for school improvement that included extended learning time, improving teacher quality, examining content, and improving assessment methods for the students (NCEE, 1983, p. 29-30). Following the report, various laws were enacted to improve student achievement.

In, 2001, No Child Left Behind (NCLB) mandated schools and districts to be accountable for student achievement (US DOE, 2002). In 2009, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) was passed, allocated $3 billion for funding improvements in schools through the School Improvement Grants (SIGs) (US DOE, 2009). This was followed by an update to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) in March 2010, referred to as *A Blueprint for Reform*, by the Obama administration. The blueprint aimed at turning around low-performing schools in the United States (US DOE, 2010). President Obama administration again addressed education by reauthorizing ESEA with Public Law No: 114-95 on December 10, 2015 as
The Every Child Achieves Act of 2015 (US Government, 2015). Legislation created the updates to hold all students accountable to high educational standards and prepare all students for college and career (US Government, 2015, para. 8).

According to Cindy Johnson (2011), approximately one million teenagers are dropping out of school every year in the United States (para. 1). This high number of school dropouts creates a future crisis for America’s workforce. Johnson (2011) stated that the impact of dropping out of high school is a lifelong decision and the following statistics are various reasons American educators should intervene:

- The unemployment rate for people without a high school diploma is nearly twice that of the general population;
- Over a lifetime, a high school dropout will earn $200,000 less than a high school graduate and almost $1 million less than a college graduate;
- Dropouts are more likely to commit crimes, abuse drugs and alcohol, become teenage parents, live in poverty and commit suicide; and
- Dropouts cost federal and state governments hundreds of billions of dollars in lost earnings, welfare and medical costs, and incarcerations (Johnson, 2011, para, 2).

According to statistics by Florida Department of Education (Table 1-1), high school graduation rates have increased by 6.5 percent from 2010-11 to 2014-15. The graduation rate in 2014-15 was 82.7 percent in the state, which signifies a great accomplishment. However, there are still 17.3 percent or 15,079 high school students who are not graduating. Fifty years ago, a student without a high school diploma could secure employment such as working in factories, switchboard operators, or typists. As
technology changes, so do the employment needs. A high school diploma is becoming the minimum requirement in the competitive workforce that exists today with approximately 78 percent of the available jobs requiring education beyond high school (Achieve, 2012, p. 2.). According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the average yearly salary for an individual without a high school diploma is less than $8,996 compared to those of his/her counterpart with a high school diploma (2015, p. 2).

All students attending American schools at both elementary and secondary level should have access to a free, quality education. However, students attending low performing schools are usually from the underprivileged and minority families (Peske, and Haycock, 2006, p. 2). Students in most of these schools are graduating while still unprepared with the necessary skills and knowledge to be successful in the work force (Sheehy, 2012). To address this issue, the Partnership for 21st Century Learning (P21) developed a unified, collective vision for learning known as the Framework for the 21st Century Learning to assist practitioners integrate skills into the teaching or core academic subjects. This framework describes the skills, knowledge and expertise students must acquire to succeed in work and life; it is a blend of content knowledge, specific skills expertise and literacies (Partnerships for 21st Century Learning, 2015, p. 1).

Various reform efforts have been undertaken to improve our educational system over the past fifteen years, including No Child Left Behind, Race to the Top (RTTT) and School Improvement Grants (SIGs) under section 1003 (g) of the ESEA act of 1965. More recently the Every Child Achieves Act of 2015 was added as a reauthorization to

**Conceptual Underpinnings**

Educators have researched the dynamics of turning around low-performing schools. Research in the subject has clearly intensified in the past decade, largely because of state and federal accountability initiatives and the prospect of serious consequences for schools that continue to exhibit low academic performance (Duke, 2006, p. 729). Essential components of turnaround schools identified in studies can be categorized into outside influences such as community and family involvement and inside influences that include the leader, teacher, and curriculum of the school (Brinson, Kowal, & Hassel, 2008, p. 17). Leadership has been identified as the most important essential component (Wallace Foundation, 2011). This is because a school leader can impact a school by:

1) Shaping a vision of academic success for all students;
2) Creating a climate that enhances education;
3) Cultivating leadership in others;
4) Improving existing instructions; and
5) Managing people, data and processes to foster school improvement (Wallace Foundation, 2011, p. 4).

Although improving a school requires many actions, the overall theme is to change what was previously implemented (Wallace Foundation, 2010, p. 15). The components of a successful school are the same in a high-performing school or a turnaround school; however, the focus on which priorities to address first and struggles may differ (Wallace Foundation, 2010).
According to Florida Department of Education (2016a) school reform consists of six main themes: leadership, family and community involvement, flexibility, alignment of curriculum, increased learning time, and supportive and safe schools (p. 4). Research conducted by the Consortium on Chicago School Research (CCSR) at the University of Chicago Urban Education Institute identified five essentials for school success. These are effective leadership, collaborative teachers, involved families, supportive environments, and ambitious instruction (CCSR, 2011). In addition, the study established that “schools strong on at least three of the 5Essentials were 10 times more likely to make substantial gains in reading and math” (CCSR, 2011, para. 1). This indicates that all the five essentials are interrelated and are equally important. Hence school leadership, though identified as the most essential component, should not be prioritized at the expense of the other essentials.

**Statement of the Problem**

The purpose of this single case study was to expand on the research completed by Rebecca Donaldson (2012) as a dissertation study on the essential supports in a turnaround school by exploring the phenomenon of school turnaround efforts and the specific strategies used to improve school performance in one turnaround school. The single case study intended to provide insight on the turnaround efforts by conducting an inquiry of educational actions that were implemented within a three-year period in the turnaround school under study. Frameworks with fundamental components that make up successful schools exist, but there is limited research on what to implement in turnaround schools. According to Peck and Reitzug (2014), “it is simply too early in the turnaround reform trend for definitive, empirical, peer-reviewed studies to have emerged” (p.10).
In Florida, schools that are identified as focus or priority and are consistently underperforming are required to implement a Turnaround Option Plan (TOP) from five options. These include district-managed turnaround, closure, charter, external operator, or hybrid with areas of assurance included under each mode according to section 1008.33, Florida Statutes (F.S), and Rule 6A-1.099811, Florida Administrative Code (F.A.C.) (Florida DOE, 2014). All the five turnaround option plans include domains that mirror the research from CCSR with specific narratives on how the school and district will address the areas of supportive environment, family and community involvement, effective leadership, public and collaborative teaching, and ambitious instruction and learning (Bryk et al., 2010, p. 46; Florida CIMS, 2015).

Arcadia Elementary School is located in Florida with a population of 716 students of which 97.21% are economically needy who are provided with free or reduced lunch (Collier County Data Warehouse, 2016). The name Arcadia Elementary is a pseudonym for the study school. Arcadia was first identified as a turnaround school by Florida Department of Education in 2012 after receiving three consecutive school grades of D. In 2013, the school was the second lowest in terms of academic performance in the district with a grade of an F. In 2014, the school’s grade increased to a C, which was also achieved in 2015 and 2016 as indicated by Florida School Accountability reports. The school was able to maintain a grade of a C despite the major changes to the Florida accountability system that included assessments, updated standards in math and English language arts, and school grade calculations.

By using a single school for the case study, the researcher aimed to describe a specific set of strategies that can be connected to the five essential components of
school success through “an in-depth understanding of a case” (Creswell, 2007, p.78). The results from this case study may serve as a guide for district and school leadership teams that are seeking to improve student achievement in the school settings within a constricted span of time.

**Research Question**

The research question was to determine what essential strategies were implemented over a three-year period for the academic turnaround of Arcadia Elementary School in Florida as perceived by school leadership and teachers. To understand the essential strategies, the study examined the following focus areas:

1. What strategies of school leadership had the most supportive impact on the successful turnaround of the school as perceived by staff?
2. Which instructional strategies were implemented that staff perceived contributed most toward the successful turnaround?
3. What strategies were implemented, supported by external factors, which were perceived as contributing to the establishment of a positive learning environment that assisted in improvement to student achievement?

**Limitations and Assumptions**

This case study analyzed one elementary school awarded the School Improvement Grant (SIG) in 2014. Limitations for this study were the use of one school as the focus for the research and use of historical data as a technique to limit bias.

**Limitations**

There were various limitations to this study. First, the study used a single school as the case study. Although the case study was compared to the research conducted by Rebecca Donaldson (2014), the demographics of the school as well as state
accountability requirements are not identical. Future studies that are conducted on multiple schools or research on one component such as school leadership across various schools may offer an in-depth understanding of the elements needed for all schools to be successful.

Another limitation was the use of data previously completed open-ended surveys, focus groups, and the 5Essentials survey possibly posed a threat to the study as data collection was based on the leadership team and teachers that were employees of Arcadia Elementary during the collection year. Absences of participants due to staff retention further limited the study as comparison groups were not exactly the same and there was a lack of random selection (Babbie, 2010, p. 242). The focus groups considered in this study involved participants selected by the principal and it is not known whether the principal’s opinions impacted on the sampling of teachers.

Assumptions

An assumption made by the researcher was that a single case study in Florida would provide an adequate understanding of the components and strategies of the implementation in a turnaround school. Arcadia Elementary School was selected as the case study because of convenience as the school is located in the researcher’s area of residence. The researcher was also involved in providing district support to the school from 2012 to 2016 but not in the day-to-day operations. In addition, the school had a successful turnaround having improved its grade from an F to a C and was awarded the School Improvement Grant (SIG).

Significance of the Study

Understanding the components that contribute to a successful school can be instrumental in transforming turnaround schools (Kutash et al., 2010, p .2). “Turnaround
is a dramatic and comprehensive intervention in a low-performing school that: a) produces significant gains in achievement within two years; and b) readies the school for the longer process of transformation into a high-performance organization” (Kutash et al., 2010, p. 4). Daniel Duke (2004) compared turnaround principals’ needs to a roadmap which is different from one-size-fits-all recipes: “Recipes prescribe steps that must be followed to achieve a desired result; roadmaps, on the other hand, indicate the starting point, the final destination, and various routes to get there” (p. 14). This study examined the components of one elementary school in Florida that was awarded the SIG grant as part of the cohort 3 in 2014. The results from this study will provide information that may be used in the development of a framework for use in turnaround schools. In addition, the study may provide information to the district and school leadership regarding the essential components that may be used to improve student achievement, teacher performance, and school culture.

**Summary**

The *Nation at Risk* report was a wake-up call for the U.S. government to institute educational reform. As a result, a number of laws have been passed to improve school performance including the No Child Left Behind, Race to the Top (RTTT) and School Improvement Grants (SIGs) and more recently the Every Child Achieves Act of 2015. These legislative have aimed mostly at improving low-performing schools. There are four turnaround models that schools may use to improve their performance; turnarounds, restart, transformation, or school closure (Kutash et al., 2010, p. 4). Florida added a fifth turnaround model which is a hybrid option that can be used when implementing a Turnaround Option Plan (TOP) but is not recognized as a turnaround
model under the School Improvement Grants (FLDOE, 2013, p. 7). All the turnaround options include components that are based on the essentials identified by the Consortium on Chicago School Research (CCSR) including developing principals as leaders, creating community and parental relationships, and improving instruction quality (Wallace Foundation, 2010, p. iv & v). In 2014, 12.87 percent of the schools in Florida were identified as a low performing under Section 1008.33, Florida Statutes for Differentiated Accountability (Florida CIMS, 2015). One hundred and forty-one of these schools were classified as a priority school and an additional 326 as focus schools (Florida CIMS, 2015). In 2014-2015 the Florida statewide assessment and accountability model was changed and schools were given a “hold harmless” period in which new schools would not be identified as priority under Florida’s Differentiated Accountability. This study examined the components implemented by one school awarded the SIG grant to determine what essential strategies contributed to successful turnaround.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th># Cohort</th>
<th># Graduates</th>
<th>% Graduates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2010-11</td>
<td>95,705</td>
<td>72,945</td>
<td>76.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011-12</td>
<td>91,057</td>
<td>72,345</td>
<td>79.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012-13</td>
<td>90,202</td>
<td>72,612</td>
<td>80.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013-14</td>
<td>87,344</td>
<td>71,349</td>
<td>81.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014-15</td>
<td>87,146</td>
<td>72,067</td>
<td>82.7%</td>
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Florida Department of Education, 2016
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category I: (A’s, B’s, C’s, and Ungraded Schools with at Least 80% AYP Criteria Met)</th>
<th>Category II: (Schools with Less than 80% AYP Criteria Met, and All D’s and F’s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>SINI-Prevent</strong></td>
<td>Focus planning on missed elements of AYP.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SINI-Correct</strong></td>
<td>Focus reorganization on missed elements of AYP.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SINI-Intervene</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Florida Department of Education, 2008
Table 1-3. Florida’s Differentiated Accountability Categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Accountability Criteria</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prevent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Grade of a C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Former F school with a current school grade of A or B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus- Year 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Grade of a D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus-Year 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 School Grades of D; Planning Year for TOP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus- Year 3</td>
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<tr>
<td>3 or More Consecutive Grades of D, or an F followed by two Ds; Implementing TOP</td>
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<td>Priority- Year 1</td>
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<td>School Grade of F; Planning Year for TOP</td>
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<td>School Grade of F; Implementing TOP</td>
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Florida CIMS, 2015
Elementary and Secondary Act

President Lyndon Baines Johnson signed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) into law in 1965 as an attempt to provide a full education opportunity to all K-12 students. The central goal of the legislation was and still remains improving educational equity for students who come from low-income families through provision of federal funds to school districts that serve students (Kutash et al., 2010, p. 4). The funds are meant to ensure that all students in these school districts receive quality education, improving educational opportunities and outcomes for poor students, and ensure all their needs are met. The U.S. Department of Education (2010) directs local education agencies or consortiums that are awarded federal funding to support grant recipients with school reform that:

(1) employs proven strategies and proven methods for student learning, teaching, and school management that are based on scientifically based research and effective practices and have been replicated successfully in schools;

(2) integrates a comprehensive design for effective school functioning, including instruction, assessment, classroom management, professional development, parental involvement, and school management, that aligns the school's curriculum, technology, and professional development into a comprehensive school reform plan for school wide change designed to enable all students to meet challenging State content and student academic achievement standards and addresses needs identified through a school needs assessment;

(3) provides high quality and continuous teacher and staff professional development;

(4) includes measurable goals for student academic achievement and benchmarks for meeting such goals;
(5) is supported by teachers, principals, administrators, school personnel staff, and other professional staff;

(6) provides support for teachers, principals, administrators, and other school staff;

(7) provides for the meaningful involvement of parents and the local community in planning, implementing, and evaluating school improvement activities consistent with section 1118;

(8) uses high quality external technical support and assistance from an entity that has experience and expertise in schoolwide reform and improvement, which may include an institution of higher education;

(9) includes a plan for the annual evaluation of the implementation of school reforms and the student results achieved;

(10) identifies other resources, including Federal, State, local, and private resources, that shall be used to coordinate services that will support and sustain the comprehensive school reform effort; and

(11)(A) has been found, through scientifically based research to significantly improve the academic achievement of students participating in such program as compared to students in schools who have not participated in such program; or

(B) has been found to have strong evidence that such program will significantly improve the academic achievement of participating children (para. 22).

According to Katash et al. (2010), the above funding and monitoring criteria set by the U.S. Department of Education is a way of ensuring that the spending of federal funds is supporting school improvement (p. 4).

**A Nation at Risk**

On April 26, 1983, President Ronald Reagan held a press conference at which he presented a 26-page report, *A Nation at Risk*. The report was prepared by The National Commission of Excellence in Education (NCEE) and took eighteen months to complete. The lead sentence, “Our Nation is at Risk” created alarm in the public eye towards public education (p. 5). The NCEE report also created distress by indicating America’s education system was inferior and systemic changes were needed (p. 13).
The report stated that American “society and its educational institutions seem(ed) to have lost sight of the basic purposes of schooling, and of the high expectations and disciplined effort needed to attain them” (NCEE, 1983, p. 9).

A Nation at Risk made suggestions for school improvement based on certain findings of the educational pedagogy that included content, expectations, time and teaching (NCEE, 1983, p. 21). The NCCE report gave examples of each of the aspects as described below:

- **Content:** The curriculum in secondary schools was diluted creating a “cafeteria-style curriculum in which the appetizers and desserts can easily be mistaken for the main courses” (NCEE, 1983, p. 18). Most students were taking a general track of courses rather than programs that would prepare the students for career and college paths.

- **Expectations:** The students were not gaining the needed knowledge, abilities, and skills to be successful at the next level of education. “The amount of homework for high school seniors has decreased (two-thirds of the students reported to take less than one hour a night in doing homework), and grades have risen while the average student achievement had been declining” (NCEE, 1983, p. 18).

- **Time:** Student choice on electives and the number of math and science courses has created unprepared students as they are spending less time on rigorous class work and homework. Class time can be limited by ineffective teachers with poor classroom management or by the time spent in school compared with other countries.
• Teaching: Teachers are leaving college ill equipped without the educational coursework and training needed. In addition, the average teacher salary after 12 years of teaching was merely $17,000 a year forcing many teachers to get a part-time job (NCEE, 1983, p. 24).

No Child Left Behind

In January 2002, President George Bush administration reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) (U.S. Department of Education, 2002, p.1). A Nation at Risk report stated, “too many of our neediest children are being left behind” creating an unfair educational experience (U.S Department of Education, 2003, p. 3). As a result, NCLB was enacted which introduced additional measures for monitoring schools and state educational systems. These measures included;

• Annual testing of reading and mathematics for students in the third grade through grade eight, testing of science at least once while students are in elementary, middle, and high school, and a sample of students in grade four and grade eight was required to participate in the National Assessment of Education Progress for comparative assessment results (p. 25-26).

• Improving the proficiency of all students by the 2013-14 school year. States developed criteria for school success that included narrowing the achievement gaps across the demographic subgroups (p. 26).

• Beginning in the 2002-03 school year, each state was required to distribute annual report cards on student achievement data for schools and the districts, as
well as graduation rates and the percentage of students who were not tested (p. 33-34).

- Teachers in core academic areas had to be “highly qualified” in each subject they taught by the 2005-06 school year (p. 29).

- Additional funds of $1.02 billion were set-aside in 2004 for a competition reading grant to support students in grades K-3 (p. 16).

- Federal changes that modified the Title I funding formula to support the most fragile schools (p.15-16).

**Race to the Top and School Improvement Grants**

President Obama signed into law the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA), also known as the “federal stimulus” act on February 2009. The legislation was designed to spur America’s economic growth, save existing jobs and create new ones, as well as provide funding towards addressing long-neglected challenges. It included measures to enhance the independence on energy, modernize the nation’s infrastructure, provide tax relief, improve affordable healthcare, expand educational opportunities and protect individuals with greatest need (U.S. Department of Education, 2009b, p. 4). As part of the act, the Race to the Top (RTTT) initiative was created to offer financial incentives to encourage improvement in student performance. Under RTTT, $4.35 billion was allocated for competitive grants to improve education in four areas: (1) enhancing standards and assessments, (2) improving collection and use of data, (3) increasing teacher effectiveness and achieving equity in teacher distribution, and (4) turning around low-achieving schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2009a, p. 2).
School Improvement Grants (SIGs) authorized under section 1003(g) of Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) were created when ESEA was reauthorized by the No Child Left Behind Act in 2002 to support the low-performing schools (USDOE, 2002). The funds initially awarded for elementary and secondary education under SIG was $500 million. This was increased to $3 billion in 2010 when the Obama administration created an updated blueprint for the Elementary and Secondary Act (ESEA). Schools identified as persistently low performing in the state and entitled to receive Title I monies were eligible to apply for the SIG (U.S. Department of Education, 2011b).

Similarities and differences occur between Race to the Top and the School Improvement Grants. Federal requirements unique to RTTT include the requirement on a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the school board, superintendent, and union prior to submitting an application while a SIG application can be submitted prior to the MOU being signed (FL DOE, 2013, p. i). The RTTT is a statewide grant that all districts can financially benefit from based on their poverty levels. SIG funds are set aside “to raise substantially the achievement of students in [the] lowest-performing schools” (FL DOE, 2013, p. i). Further identification of the most critical schools is categorized by Tier I and Tier II status and as follows:

- A Tier I school is a Title I school in improvement, corrective action, or restructuring and identified by the state educational agency as a “persistently lowest-achieving school.”
A Tier II school is a secondary school that is eligible for, but does not receive, Title I funds and is identified by the state educational agency as a “persistently lowest-achieving school.” (U.S. Department of Education, 2013b, p. i).

Schools that are awarded a SIG must establish and monitor annual goals for student achievement, submit documentation on assurances, and select a rigorous intervention model to implement to improve the school (U.S. Department of Education, 2013b, p. 19). The U.S. Department of Education (2009a) set aside funds through the SIG for the lowest five percent of schools across the nation. Schools apply through a grant process and implement one of four school turnaround options:

- Turnaround Model: Replace the principal and rehire no more than 50 percent of the staff and grant the school operational flexibility (U.S. Department of Education, 2009a, p. 10). Executing a turnaround model presents substantial costs to a district since compensation is provided for new teachers and administrators while still paying for the release of current tenured teachers and administrators. While turnaround options have a large potential of impacting change, they generate resistance because more than half of staff will have to be replaced (Kutash et al., 2010, p. 4).

- Transformation Model: Implement the following four components (1) replace the principal and increase teacher effectiveness; (2) implement instructional reform through professional development and evaluations; (3) increase learning time; and (4) provide operational flexibility (U.S. Department of Education, 2009a, p. 10; Manwaring, 2011, para. 4).
Transformation models provide the least potential for sparking change; however, they also have the least financial impact on the school and district (Manwaring, 2011, para. 31).

- Restart Model: Convert the low-performing school into a charter school or other education management model (U.S. Department of Education, 2009a, p. 10). The restart model was noted to have the greatest potential in providing rapid change as an external party will bring in new staff, fresh culture, and tested techniques to improve the school (Kutash et al., 2010, p. 24). The financial costs under this model could include capital spending on buildings improvement and even the possibility of donating supplies and property to the new operator (p. 23).

- Closure/Consolidate Model: Close the school and transfer the students who were attending the low-performing school to a high-performing school (U.S. Department of Education, 2009a, p.10). Kutash et al., (2010) established that using the closure model could make the community feel like the district has given up on the school. However, the school district should treat schools like a portfolio in which they can move and manage resources to improve its overall performance (p. 24). For a successful closure model, there needs to be an effective school to transfer the students. Using the closure model can incur costs such as buying out teachers who are not rehired, increase in costs of transporting students to their new school, and providing security to the former school. However,
school closures have the lowest cost in the long run compared to other turnaround options (p.24).

Miller and Brown (2015) studied four schools that had successful turnarounds and asserted that the turnaround options have enhanced learning among students (para. 5). A study by the Council of the Great City Schools (2015) on urban schools receiving SIG funds found that 70 percent of these schools showed an increase in the number of students proficient in math and reading (p. 9). In addition, the schools had a significant reduction in the percentage of students who performed below the basic level. One of the factors that determined the success or failure of these SIG schools in improving performance was how well they executed the turnaround strategies (Council of the Great City Schools, 2015, p.39). Therefore further research is needed to determine what essential supports are fundamental while implementing turnaround options.

**Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015**

U.S. Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, met with the U.S. Congress on January 12, 2015, to convince members to replace the NCLB with a reauthorization of the ESEA. Duncan complimented the efforts of President Johnson, a former teacher, as a visionary of the future of education. Secretary Duncan stated in his press conference the following:

“I believe every single child is entitled to an education that sets her up for success in careers, college, and life.

I believe education cannot and should not be boiled down just to reading and math. I believe the arts and history, foreign languages, financial literacy, physical education, and after school enrichment are as important as advanced math and science classes. Those are essentials, not luxuries.

I believe that all students must be held to high expectations for learning, no
matter their zip code, race or ethnicity, disability, or whether they are still learning English.

I believe that states should always choose those standards, as they always have, and that those standards should align clearly and honestly with what young people will need to know for success in school, in college, and in life” (U.S. Department of Education, 2015, para. 42-45).

Every Child Achieves Act of 2015, which was passed and signed into law in December 2015, reauthorized and facilitated the making of amends to ESEA of 1965. The bill facilitated addressing of issues with regard to requirements in terms of testing and accountability, evaluation of teachers, grants, and fiscal accountability. In addition, the bill restored the responsibility of developing accountability systems to the states. This has allowed the inclusion of other measures for determining the performance of students and schools other than reading and math tests that were prioritized under the federal accountability system of NCLB (U.S Congress, 2015, p. 26).

**Florida and School Reform**

Following concerns that No Child Left Behind put constrains on the efforts of states to enact reform, the U.S. Department of Education has allowed states to apply for waivers from certain provisions in the federal education law. This allows the states to continue with their approved plans for improving the quality of instruction and student learning up to 2016 (USDOE, 2013b, p. 7). Florida applied for a waiver in 2012 in order to use the state accountability measures in its 2008 model to fulfill the federal accountability requirements towards improving low-performing schools. In 2014 and 2015, Florida was granted an extension by the U.S. Department of Education to continue with the current waiver (FL DOE, 2015, p. 3).

Florida created tiered intervention categories based on school grades and Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) to identify schools with the greatest needs. Schools
were placed into categories of Prevent, Correct, or Intervene under Category I or II (Table 1-2). Florida’s application outlined how the four required components would be addressed: accountability, differentiation, interventions for schools, and schools in restructuring (FL DOE, 2008, p.5). Florida’s 2008 model for differentiated accountability system aimed the achieve following goals:

1. Leverage current processes used in accountability reporting and school improvement.
2. Merge aspects of both Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) and Florida’s school grading system.
3. Feature one or more indicators that weigh longitudinal subgroup performance in determining areas for targeted intervention.
4. Ensure compliance with federal requirements for reporting AYP.
5. Maintain continuity with the current calculation of AYP and School in Need of Improvement (SINI) status (as approved in Florida’s Accountability Workbook)
6. Apply a blended approach to restructuring.
7. Add a longitudinal performance measure for AYP components to provide additional flexibility in focusing reforms/interventions and/or applying corrective action (FL DOE, 2008, p.5).

In 2011-2012, the differentiated accountability (DA) guidelines were changed according to Florida Administrative Rule 6A-1.099811 Section 1008.34, F.S. Schools under DA would be categorized as a Prevent, Focus, or Priority school (Florida Department of State, 2014). Prevent schools are those schools which have been given
a grade of a C by Florida Department of Education Accountability standards, Focus schools are those that are have been ranked with a grade of a D, and Priority schools are those that have scored a grade of an F. When a school receives an F for the first time or after scoring three consecutive grades of a D, the school must select a turnaround option and submit a Turnaround Option Plan Phase 1 (TOP-1) to the Florida Department of Education. If there is no progress by the following school year, the TOP-1 will be merged into a Turnaround Option Plan Phase 2 (TOP-2) and the plan will be implemented (Florida CIMS, 2014, p.5).

A study conducted by Boehme (2014) revealed that school reform in Florida has been mainly focused on increasing the rigor of required tests. The state holds the districts, schools and teachers accountable for the results of the tests and as such it has established serious consequences for attainment of low scores (p.14). However, the study indicated that despite these measures, the state has not made significant improvement in the nation’s educational ranking. In addition, there exist wide differences in performance between students from immigrant and social economic backgrounds (Boehme, 2014, p.18). However, Miller and Brown (2015) posited that it is possible to improve school achievement and bridge differences in student performance by incorporating evidence-based practices in turnaround strategies (para. 38). Therefore, the study will provide pertinent information about practices that may be implemented while undertaking reforms in Florida through studying strategies employed by a school that had a successful turnaround.
School Turnaround

The characteristics of an effective school are not a mystery. They have a coherent instructional program that is well aligned to the established standards. They have a community of adults committed to working together to develop the skills and knowledge of all children. In addition, they have a well figured out plan on how to find the time to perform this work and acquire the skills to do it well (Boudett & City; 2013, para. 14; Boudett, City, & Murnane, 2006, p. 2).

Understanding the components that may contribute to successful turnaround of a school can be instrumental in transforming low-performing schools. A study conducted by Villavicencio and Grayman (2012) showed that effective turnaround schools shared three essential conditions that improved student performance. These conditions include aligning goals with needs, creation of a positive work environment and addressing the discipline and safety of students (p.2). These conditions provide a foundation for implementing strategies that improve learning and teaching. According to the Villavicencio and Grayman (2012), the aligning of goals and needs facilitated selection and implementation of strategies that are appropriate towards improving learning (p. 16). The common strategies identified in the study include professional development of teachers, creation of learning communities, use of data to inform instruction and targeting of student sub-populations in the school. On the other hand, creation of a positive work environment enhanced the success of the strategies while addressing the discipline and safety of students allowed the teaching staffs to concentrate more on learning and teaching. These three conditions depend on effective leadership and cooperation with staff members (Villavicencio & Grayman, 2012, p.16). A study
conducted by Miller and Brown (2015) on turnaround schools that have successfully managed to improve the performance of students established that school turnaround is possible provided a concerted strategy that incorporate evidence-based practices is followed (para. 34).

The International School Effectiveness Research Project (ISERP) conducted research in schools across nine countries (Australia, Canada, Hong Kong, Republic of Ireland, Netherlands, Norway, Taiwan, United Kingdom, and the USA) to determine traits of effective schools (Reynolds, Teddlie, Stringfield, & Creemers 2002, p. 16). The findings indicated that:

- Raising performance in low-socioeconomic schools is a challenge, but schools led by strong leaders with effective teachers can make a difference (Reynolds et al., 2002, p. 24).

- Effective schools are more challenging to establish in the United States compared to other countries. Factors that undermine making changes to schools in the United States include homogeneous teaching styles and concentration on the principal as the key component of school success (p. 21).

- Schools with different demographics such as a high and low-socioeconomic population may require different tactics to improve school performance (p. 20).

A study conducted by International School Effectiveness Research Project identified six common dimensions among effective schools. These include instructional style, expectations for students, principal leadership, school goals, staff relationships,
and the daily experience of typical students (McEwan, 2009, p. 10; Reynolds et al., 2002, p. 9).

**Turnaround Frameworks**

Extant literature on ways of improving schools and the components that enhance learning of students have mainly revolved on the five essentials identified by the Consortium on Chicago School Research (CCSR) at the University of Chicago. CCSR developed the 5Essentials in a study that reviewed twenty-two elementary public schools. Data collected to measure progress was based on the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills from 1990 to 1996, as well as student attendance rates. Variables were taken primarily from surveys administered to principals (CCSR, 1997a), students, and teachers from 1991 to 1996 (CCSR, 1997b). The framework of the essential supports for school improvement was developed by John Easton and Tony Byrk and aimed to provide a grounded theory of school organization with practical improvement activities (Bryk et al., 2010, p. 44). “The processes of systemic school improvement are multistranded- there is no single silver bullet that yields major improvements in student outcomes. Rather, sustained attention is required towards a system of concerns that we have termed the essential supports for school improvement” (Bryk et al., 2010, p. 67).

**Leadership**

Managers and employees who work as task-oriented individuals are important for the success of a business, but so is a leader (Yukl, 2006, p. 18). Extant literature on school turnaround has focused predominantly on the actions and characteristics of school leaders. Core leadership practices that have been identified include setting of
direction, developing people, redesigning the organization and managing the
instructional program (Leithwood & Strauss, 2009, p. 27-28; Kowal & Ableidinger, 2011,
p.1-2; Wallace Foundation, 2013, p. 6).

**Directional Setting**

Leaders are responsible for identifying and setting goals, and articulating their
vision to the staff. Effective turnaround leaders intentionally and strategically set school-
wide goals that lead to creation of common vision among the staff (McEwan, 2009, p.
54; Stronge, Richard, Catano, 2008, p. 4-5; Wallace Foundation, 2013, p. 7). In their
study, Leithwood and Strauss (2008, p.7) found that leaders who were successful made
the setting of goals a shared activity through maintaining significant participation of the
staff in making decisions on the goals pursued by the school. Leaders also promote
effective communication channels to facilitate conduit of the high expectations they
create from top to bottom and ensure consensus on the goals (Leithwood & Strauss,
2009, p.28).

**Developing People**

Effective turnaround leaders enhance the development of their staff by
empowering them in making of key decisions. This may take the form of providing
individualized support to teachers’ concerns with regard to the student improvement and
instructions (Leithwood & Strauss, 2008, p.7). Leaders also serve as role models from
which staff can learn from on the meaning of being professional. Turnaround leaders
assist teachers in assuming greater ownership towards their development through
learning from their colleagues and seeking professional development from resources
outside the school in order to become more effective (Leithwood & Strauss, 2009, p. 2;
Salmonowicz, 2009, p. 22). This enhances commitment of the staff to the school, meaningful participation, and more accountability towards implementation of new practices meant for improvement of the performance of students in the turnaround schools.

**Redesigning the Organization**

Redesigning entails modification of the school culture and climate, and the structures that support them. The culture and climate in a school significantly influences the success of the students thus, it should be changed when turning around a school (Leithwood & Strauss, 2009, p.28). Leaders are responsible for establishing committees, teams and working groups to allow for redesigning and encourage it. Additionally, they are responsible for making changes to existing structures to allow for accommodation of the different approaches undertaken (Leithwood & Strauss, 2008, p.8).

**Managing the Instructional Program**

School leaders are tasked with making staffing decisions while undertaking turnaround initiative (Leithwood & Strauss, 2008, p. 8). This entails hiring of teachers with skills that are necessary for improving the performance of students. They are also responsible for the management of turnaround practices implemented in their schools. These practices aim at towards raising the achievement of students (Leithwood & Strauss, 2009, p. 27). Successful leaders should be informed of the recent developments about ways of improving the skills in student and the essential resources to use. These are then communicated to the teachers to allow connections with the wider school community (Leithwood & Strauss, 2009, p.28).
Increased Time

Data gathered during the preparation of *A Nation at Risk* report indicated that students in other countries spend an average of eight hours a day at school and 200 days in a year. However, students in the United States typically spend six hours at school with 180 days in a school year (NCEE, 1983, p. 21). This implies that U.S. students have less instructional time compared to other students around the world. Research has shown that the amount of time that students are engaged in learning positively correlates with the amount of learning that can take place (Archer & Hughes, 2011, p. 6). Thus, time is one of the resources that should be closely considered in educational reform (Salmonowicz, 2009, p. 20). However, there are a variety of classroom time components that should be considered as well while undertaking reforms. These include allocated time, instructional time, engaged time, and academic learning time. Allocated time is the amount of time a teacher designates for a subject. In many schools, the allocated time is set by the administration as what is expected in instruction, but this is not always monitored (Archer & Hughes, 2011, p. 5). Instructional time is the actual amount of time a teacher has to teach the lesson after management issues are taken care of such as passing out papers and organizing materials. On the other hand, engaged time is the amount of time a student is engaged in the learning process. Academic learning time is the final product of how much time a student is cognitively engaged in the learning (Johns, Beverly, Crowley, Guetzloe, & Eleanor, 2008, p. 1). Studies have found that as much as 50 percent of a school day is spent on non-instructional tasks in both general education and special education settings (Hocutt, 1996, p. 79; NYSED, 2013, p. 9). This has a negative impact on the actual academic
learning time and consequently reduces the rate of learning. Archer and Hughes (2011) posited, “the combination of quantity and quality of instruction is the key to student success” (p. 5).

Bausell (2011) found that an increase in the school day was positively correlated with an increase in reading comprehension, mathematics, and verbal skills (p.6). Students in turnaround schools require additional time to address the gap in their learning. Thus, most of these schools extend the school day and sometimes the calendar year to meet these needs (Kim, 2012, p.18). However, the extended learning in some instances is merely an additional time for ineffective teaching and poor classroom management rather than provision of quality education.

**Literacy Focus**

According to Thernstorm and Thernstorm (2010), literacy is the gatekeeper to becoming a successive and productive part of society (p. 2). Students that do not have the basic math and literacy skills by eighth grades cannot obtain them in high school (Thernstorm & Thernstorm, 2004, p. 22). According to Brozo and Fisher (2010), literacy instruction starts with professional development to ensure teachers have the essential tools to teach literacy through current theories (para. 1). In secondary schools, the majority of the teachers were not trained in reading instruction, but rather as content area experts of science, math, and social studies (Brozo & Fisher, 2010, para. 1). Therefore, they lack the essential tools in teaching literacy, which can negatively impact on the literacy of their students.

A study by Duke, Tucker, Salmonowicz, and Levy (2007) problems facing turnaround schools in Virginia established that students had low reading literacy (p. 9).
Salmonowicz (2009) also found a similar situation in a high school in Chicago whereby 60 percent of the students had a reading literacy of or below that of a sixth grade student (p. 22). The majority of students in schools that are undergoing turnaround have difficulties with reading (Salmonowicz, 2009, p. 21). For this reason, schools should focus on addressing literacy more comprehensively, hence, professional development, staffing, course scheduling and resource allocation for turning around schools should be based on a literacy program (Salmonowicz, 2009, p. 22). Addressing the issue of literacy requires leaders to assess and acknowledge it in order to provide the needed resources. The multiple case study conducted by Faison (2014) established that schools which had improved literacy had principals that supported a balanced literacy approach and endorsed guided reading as an imperative part of the literacy instruction (p. 122).

**Curriculum Coherence**

Bryk et al. (2010) stated that instruction in the classroom is based upon the technical core and dynamics of the “teacher engaging students in subject matter” as well as the amount of time available for student learning and the effectiveness of the additional academic and social supports for learning (p. 48). “Gaps in the curriculum, poor pacing of instruction and idiosyncratic expectations for student performance within and across grade level, and incoherence between the regular and the supplemental instructional program can all weaken students' overall learning” (p. 51). Some schools rely on district support to provide a coherent curriculum that is aligned to state standards. Characteristics of an effective curriculum include sequencing of the standards to ensure students are taught the intended curriculum through a systemic
process that includes planning, monitoring, and evaluating (Duke, 2015, p. 45; Duke, 2006, p. 730-731).

Coherent curriculum is one of “the most crucial elements of a quality education” (Schmoker, 2011, p.70). “Effective standards-based instruction requires teachers to continuously check students’ understanding in their learning journey toward mastery of the standard. Learn how to intentionally and systematically build monitoring into their lessons; build a toolbox filled with monitoring techniques, tools, and resources; and learn to determine if students are merely exhibiting compliant behavior or are cognitively engaged and actively learning the content” (Toth & Marzano, 2015, p. 19-20). “For new standards to be a healthy challenge and not a threatening one for students, teachers must intentionally scaffold [or provide adequate academic support] lessons using student-centric strategies with more frequency and in greater depth” (Marzano & Toth, 2014, p.10).

Support to schools was described by Byrk et al. (2010) as baking of a cake whereby each essential component is like an ingredient. “Should a core ingredient be absent, it is just not a cake. By the same token, if there is material weaknesses in any core organizational support, school improvement would not happen” (p.203).

**School Climate**

**Safety**

According to American Institute of Research (2016), safety in schools is one of the components of school climate (para. 3). It involves protection of students from harassment, bullying, violence and substance use. Components that make up the safety of supportive environments include a safe environment inside and outside of the school
as a basic need and one that creates school as a safe haven. Steinberg, Allensworth, and Johnson (2011) asserted that it is the “quality of relationship between staff and students and between staff and parents that most strongly defines safe schools” (p. 1). A safe environment allows for the creation of a positive school climate, which is one of the fundamentals of a successful instructional program. Steinberg et al., (2011) states, “on average, students in Chicago who attend schools that enroll high-achieving students report feeling safer at school than students in schools serving students with lower academic skills (p. 27).

Schools with unsafe physical environments have been linked to high truancy and behavior rates among students, which contribute to lower scores on standardized assessments (Kumar, O’Malley & Johnston, 2008, p. 480). A safe and supportive environment also extends to the staff members. Research from Maxwell, Huggins, and Scheurich (2010) state that school transformation may be delayed until the school climate is supportive and safe for all individuals (p. 162).

**High Expectations for Learning**

In successful schools, the classes are academically challenging and engaging for the students (Roderick, Easton, & Sebring, 2009, p. 10). “Once teachers can admit that children are not the problem but that instructional strategies are, then learning is going to happen for every child” (Datnow, Park, &., 2007, p. 26). Thus, a shared vision based on rigorous teaching is a critical component of improving schools (Wagner et al., 2005, p. 33). A curriculum that is not rigorous and not aligned to the standards as well as poor instruction could impede school improvement efforts (Leithwood & Strauss, 2009, p. 28). McEwan (2008) defined high-quality instruction as “research-based instruction that
is delivered by highly effective teachers” (p. 10). Research has established that schools that have been successful in turnaround efforts have a principal that spends a large amount of time in classrooms observing instruction, providing specific and timely feedback to the teachers, and supporting professional development initiatives (Lane, Unger, & Rhim, 2013, p. 10).

The quality of instruction should support student learning and there is need for administration to monitor the quality of instruction through techniques such as classroom walkthroughs. Walkthroughs are five-minute visits by principals to learning classes for informal supervision of teachers and observation of classroom activities (Protheroe, 2009, p. 30). A walk-through facilitates examination of five elements. These include assessing whether students appear to be engaged in the work; whether the curriculum is relevant and rigorous; whether the instructional practices are student centered or teacher centered; whether there is evidence in the room that indicate what has been previously taught or may be in taught in the future; and whether there are any safety or health issues (Downey, Steffy, English, Frase, & Poston, 2004, p. 21). Cervone and Martinez-Miller (2007) describes classroom observations as a tool that drives a “cycle of continuous improvement by focusing on the effects of instruction” (p.1). During classroom walkthroughs administrators can gain knowledge on what is working or is not working. This information assists in improving the quality of instruction. Ginsberg and Murphy (2002) state there are five benefits that accrue from walkthroughs. First, principals become more familiar with the curriculum, pacing guides, and daily instructional practices. The second benefit is that administrators are able to gauge the climate of the school by inspecting what is expected. Third, it allows
classroom instruction to become teamwork as teachers and administrators together examine student learning and engagement. The other benefit that results from walkthroughs is that it enables administrators to become instructional leaders of the school. Lastly, it creates the impression among students that both administrators and teachers are working towards a common goal enhancing their learning (p. 1). Effective classroom walkthroughs focus on what will be the key elements to target and establishing them in time in order to provide feedback (Blatt, Linsley, & Smith, 2005, para. 11; Hopkins, 2005; p. 3).

Finally, it is important to involve, if possible, the participation of stakeholders while measuring the progress of students and the school on a regular basis in order to allow for modifications that may be needed and sharing of results (Sustaining Reading First, 2009, p. 5; Public Impact, 2008, p. 19). Progress monitoring includes both formative and summative assessments that assist in determining the specific needs for each student such as interventions and enrichments, as well as provide information for modifying instructional strategies that are utilized by the teacher (Lane, Unger, & Rhim, 2013, p. 5). Principals use their problem-solving skills with intellectual stimulation to provide staff members with data that assist in individualizing a student’s work based on the needs of that particular student (Leithwood & Strauss, 2009, p. 29). At the same time, data cannot be refuted and as such provide information that assist in determining whether instruction is effective (McEwan, 2008, p. 177).

Professional Capacity of the Staff

Maintaining Skilled Quality Teachers

Papa and English (2011) asserted, “the key to turning around a low-performing school is to focus on instruction” (p.13). A study by Public Impact (2008) found
“individual teachers have the largest single school effect on student performance” (p. 3). Teachers need opportunities to plan and discuss instruction with their colleagues in order to improve instruction (McEwan, 2008, p. 19). Thus, a school should provide an environment which allows teachers to learn from each other and develop their skills. Such an environment enhances the commitment of staff to the school, which facilitates retention of skilled quality teachers.

**Professional Development**

Effective schools also focus on building shared leadership and professional development that builds the capacity of the staff. “Effective professional development enables educators to develop the knowledge and skills they need to address students’ learning challenges…. Professional development is not effective unless it causes teachers to improve their instruction…” (Mizell, 2010, p. 9). According to Klugman, Gordon, Sebring, and Sporte (2015), effective schools nurture commitment of the staff members to the school through providing professional development (p. 6). This promotes growth of both individuals and whole team, and enhances the staff to work together towards improving the school. In addition, an increase in relevant professional development that empowers teachers with the knowledge and tools helps teachers to become engaged teachers and positively impact on student achievement (Stacy, 2013, para. 3).

Gulamhussein (2013) identified five principles of effective professional development:
• The duration of professional development must be significant and ongoing to allow time for teachers to learn a new strategy and grapple with the implementation problem (p. 14);
• There must be support for a teacher during the implementation stage that addresses the specific challenges of changing classroom practice (p. 15);
• Teachers’ initial exposure to a concept should not be passive, but rather should engage teachers through varied approaches so they can participate actively in making sense of a new practice (p. 16);
• Modeling has been found to be a highly effective way of introducing a new concept and helps teachers understand a new practice (p. 17); and
• The content presented to teacher should not be generic, but instead grounded in the teacher’s discipline (for middle school and high school teachers) or grade-level (for elementary school teachers) (p. 17).

Professional development facilitated through trainings that are provided only once is ineffective and has little or no effect on student achievement (Gulamhussein, 2013, p. 14). “Educators who do not experience effective professional development do not improve their skills, and student learning suffers” (Mizell, 2010, p. 6). Professional development facilitates improvement in the quality of instruction, which is identified as one of the essential components for successful turnaround of a low-performing school (Bryk et al., 2010, p. 54). Instructional leaders must coordinate the professional learning opportunities within their schools to meet the needs of teachers and the goals of the school (Strong, Richard, & Catano, 2008, p. 51).
Establishing a Collaborative Professional Community

In a collaborative teaching environment, teachers learn from each other and become more skilled in their practice. A collaborative professional community enhances the loyalty and commitment of teachers to the school and the students they support (Byrk et al., 2010, p. 54). Professional conversations, targeted coaching, and professional development identified to be effective aspects that impact on students’ performance in schools that are making progress (Lane et al., 2013, p. 10).

Noddings (2014) asserts that emphasis should be placed on improving underperforming teachers through professional development rather than dismissing them in order to enhance stability (p. 18). Studies have shown that teachers participating in Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) are provided with an opportunity to experience powerful professional development while learning from their colleagues, which may encourage them to stay in the profession (DuFour & Mattos, 2013, p. 37; Little, 2006, p. 3). Teachers and administrators can build their professional capacity to effectively perform their duties by sharing their ideas and allowing their counterparts to come and observe as they teach since each teacher has particular strengths and areas that need growth (Reed, 2015, para. 30).

Leadership from the district office can also provide support through learning communities. According to Kim (2012), turnaround schools that report to a district lead have an advocate that supports the academic and non-academic efforts of the school thus, assists in turning around a school (p. 14). A district lead refers to an independent organization in contract with a district to turn around low-performing schools. The districts lead “facilitates the vertical articulation of academics and alignment of
wraparound supports” (Kim, 2012, p. 15). Four core areas in which a district lead can support the capacity of the schools include:

- **Accountability**: The district lead is accountable for the achievement of students for a three-to-five year span through providing support to the school and district;
- **Authority**: Authority for decision making on school needs that include staffing, time, money, and programs;
- **Comprehensive Services**: Align internal and external services to support the academic and non-academic needs of the school; and,
- **School Presence**: Develop and maintain a consistent and intense relationship with each turnaround school (Kim, 2012, p. 1).

Teachers in a district that provides support for PLC are able to grow their skills through professional development. This encourages them to stay in the profession, which facilitates the retention of staff in a turnaround school. Teachers are more likely to stay in a school that enhances their professional development.

**Parent and Community Involvement**

**Parent Participation**

Strong relationships are built with the families and community in order to support the success of the school (Klugman, Gordon, Sebring, & Sporte, 2015, p. 6). Principals and teachers are the two main stakeholders involved while improving schools. However, the district staff, parents, students, and community members are important stakeholders who should also be involved (Klugman et al., 2015, p. 57). Involving parents enhances the building of strong relationships between school staff members and parents, which may help to create a supportive environment (Bryket al., 2010, p. 59). Past studies conducted to investigate the importance of parental involvement and community support
in a child’s education have indicated that schools which involve these stakeholders are able to develop high quality programs that enhance the achievement of students (Wallace Foundation, 2010, p. 42). Parental involvement as one way of creating supportive learning environment is one of the variables that is examined under this study.

**Community Involvement**

According to Ramsey (2006), there are three strategies to involve the community: become visible beyond the school, build the home-school partnership, and give the public what it wants (p. 46). The leader who gets the most support from the community will have the greatest success in the school (p. 49). Research has shown that schools that involve the community outperform those, which do not in terms of academic performance, and graduation rates as well as improved scores in the state administered math and reading tests (Blank, Jacobson & Melaville, 2012, p. 3; Adams, 2010, p. 5). Undertaking efforts to engage parents and community members is thus essential and one of the fundamental factors that contribute to school success and transformation (Duke, 2006, p. 731). Fullan (2005) expanded community involvement to include community outreach, teachers’ involvements, parent’s involvements, and community partnerships (p. 177).

**Summary**

Education in the U.S. has undergone major reforms in recent years. President Lyndon Baines Johnson initiated the reform in 1965 by signing into law of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) as a federal attempt to provide all students with education opportunity. ESEA was reauthorized in 2002 as the No Child
Left Behind Act (NCLB) with an aim to eradicate unfairness in education. It was reauthorized again in 2015 as Every Child Achieves Act. In addition, the federal government has provided funding to low performing schools through programs such as Race to the Top (RTTT) and School Improvement Grants (SIGs) in order to improve performance. There are four options that may be used to turn around low-performing schools, which are receiving SIG funds. These options include turnaround model, transformation model, restart model and closure model. The State of Florida has added a hybrid option as the fifth alternative. Research has indicated the majority of the schools that have undertaken turnaround efforts have been successful at improving both the student and school performance (Miller & Brown, 2015, p. 7). The success of the school depends on the way these schools implement essential strategies (Council of the Great City Schools, 2015, p. 39).

Components of effective schools are used to provide the foundation but the strategies that are implemented and monitored assist in “develop(ing) the talents of all (students) to their fullest” (NCEE, 1983, p. 13). The research conducted by the University of Chicago provided a framework for essential components of successful schools. These components are based on a 15-year study conducted in Chicago Public Schools and include leadership, increased professional capacity, instructional guidance, a safe learning climate, and strong parent-school-community ties (Bryk et al., 2010, p. 82). The study found that schools that were strong in three or more of the components “were ten times more likely to improve than schools with weak supports” (Bryk et al., 2010, p.25). However, there is limited research that has examined essential components that are critical towards successful turnaround of low-performing schools.
CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

Introduction

In 2013, Arcadia Elementary was among the lowest performing schools in their district based on student performance as indicated by Florida School Grade Accountability points. The school had poor performance since 2010. In 2012, the principal was replaced and the school implemented a district-managed turnaround plan per requirements of Florida Differentiated Accountability Florida Statute section 1008.33 and Rule 6A- 1.099811, Florida Administrative Code (F.A.C.) (FL DOE, 2014). Arcadia Elementary is a school that comprises a Kindergarten through fifth grade with around 716 students. Of these students, about 97.21 percent are identified as economically needy, by free and reduced lunch status, and 86.73 percent of the students come from homes in which English is not the primary language (Collier County Data Warehouse, 2016). Approximately 33% of the teachers in the school left each year for the period between 2010 and 2013, with the majority transferring to other schools within the district (FL DOE SPAR Reports, 2015).

The new principal who took over the school during its turnaround emphasized on building school culture, retaining teachers, and improving student performance as the priorities for the school. The school was awarded the School Improvement Grant 1003g to support the turnaround efforts. During the 2013-2014 school year, Arcadia Elementary improved the school grade from an F to a C. In addition, the retention of staff improved significantly with only two staff members leaving at the end of school year for relocations out of the state.
According to Bryk et al., (2010), improving schools has been the focus of many studies in education but research on successful schools and the structures they have in place to improving and sustaining growth may be more useful in providing information to support schools (p. 44). Past studies has provided frameworks on how to improve school using components such as leadership, vision, culture, teacher quality, and parental involvement (Bryk et al., 2010, p. 82). The next step is to understand which components can yield the most academic improvement when implemented together and the strategies that may be employed to support these components have been understudied.

This study was conducted through a qualitative in-depth instrumental case study that involved both school and district staff members. The methodology section describes the collection of data and its analysis. In addition, the role of the researcher and the trustworthiness of the study are examined.

The purpose of this study is to expand on the research completed by Rebecca Donaldson (2012) as a dissertation study on the essential supports in a turnaround school. Specifically, this single-case study explored the phenomenon of school turnaround efforts and the specific strategies used to improve school performance by conducting an inquiry of educational actions that were implemented within a three-year period in one turnaround school.

Research Question

The following is the research question for the study; which essential strategies were implemented over a three-year period for the academic turnaround of Arcadia Elementary School in Florida as perceived by school leadership and teachers? To understand the essential strategies, the study examined the following focus areas:
1. What strategies of school leadership had the most supportive impact on the successful turnaround of the school as perceived by staff?

2. Which instructional strategies were implemented that staff perceived contributed most toward the successful turnaround?

3. What strategies were implemented, supported by external factors, which were perceived as contributing to the establishment of a positive learning environment that assisted in improvement to student achievement?

**Design for the Study**

This study used a qualitative data methods approach through a single instrumental case approach as the method of choice. The purpose of this case study was to explore the phenomenon of school turnaround efforts, and the specific strategies used to improve school performance by conducting an inquiry of educational actions within the real-world context (Yin, 2009, p. 16). Using the instrumental case study approach, data was reviewed which may help to describe the phenomenon that occurred at one school. Yin (2003), states, “You would use the case study method because you deliberately wanted to cover contextual conditions-believing that they might be highly pertinent to your phenomenon of study” (p.13). Throughout the study, qualitative data was analyzed to explain the connections associated to the five essential components of school success through a narrative use of focus groups and open-ended surveys.

This case study mirrors a similar dissertation completed by Rebecca Jane Donaldson in 2012 in which one elementary school in central California made an improvement in student achievement. Donaldson’s (2012) study was based upon a
qualitative in-depth instrumental case study to identify the essential supports of a turnaround framework and how those were implemented. This case study also looked at one turnaround school that improved student achievement and the essential components that were connected to the success at Arcadia Elementary in Florida.

**Participants**

The case study is one school located in Southwest Florida. The study school, Arcadia Elementary, was awarded the School Improvement Grant (SIG) in the summer of 2014. In 2013-2014, Arcadia Elementary School implemented a Turnaround Option Plan following low performance as indicated by school grades of a D in 2010-2011, a D in 2011-2012, and an F in 2012-2013. As a result of turnaround efforts, Arcadia improved its grade to a C in 2013-2014 and maintained this grade in 2014-2015 (Collier County Data Warehouse, 2016).

Arcadia Elementary is located in a large school district that serves fifty schools and over 46,000 students. The school district’s average for students identified as economically needy and thus eligible to receive free or reduced lunch is 63.10 percent with Arcadia Elementary at 92.21 percent. The school district reports 51.44 percent of students in the district come from homes in which English is not their primary language with Arcadia Elementary at 85.23 (Collier County’s Data Warehouse, 2016).

During the 2011-12 school year, Arcadia Elementary received 427 points on the Florida Accountability report to earn a grade of D (Florida Department of Education: SPAR Reports, 2015). In this school, 34 percent of the students scored a level three or higher on the reading Florida Comprehension Assessment Test (FCAT) and 39 percent of the students scored a level three of higher on the mathematics assessment; however,
on the science assessment only 20 percent scored a level three of higher (Florida Department of Education: SPAR Reports, 2015).

Data Collection Instruments

Data was analyzed using a phenomenological research approach proposed by Creswell (2009) in order to understand the essential components of one turnaround school that facilitated improvements in the student performance (p. 113). Common themes related to improving student achievement were examined as well as how the themes were perceived by stakeholders following a history of educational reform. Qualitative research has been conducted on school turnaround efforts; however, the theories identified in extant literature review were not considered during the initial research phases in order to allow the natural phenomenon to emerge from focus groups and surveys and thus avoid bias.

Demographics and student achievement data were collected from Florida School Public Accountability Records (SPAR) reports. Additionally, data were collected from archived surveys that were completed for the School Improvement Grant application process, Turnaround Option Plans, and 5Essentials survey.

This study used qualitative data from previously conducted focus groups and surveys to describe the essential components that helped one priority school in Florida improve the school grade from an F to C. Qualitative data was the preferred research method as there was a need to explain the human and social environments that were in place that contributed to increase of the school’s accountability score from an F to a C. Three data source were considered; (a) the School Improvement Grant Survey, (b) the School Improvement Grant Focus Groups, and (c) the 5Essentials survey results. The
data collected from the SIG survey, focus groups, and 5Essentials survey were then coded to identify and study trends and patterns. A data collection timeline that shows when the studies that gathered the data used in this study were conducted is presented in Table 3-1.

Focus Groups

Data was collected from focus groups conducted by two district administrators on February 26, 2014, prior to applying for the SIG grant was reviewed and compared to focus groups conducted by state members of the Regional V Differentiated Accountability team in the spring of 2015. In all the focus groups, a purpose was set and read to the participants prior to conduct of the studies. The purpose of the focus groups was to gather information on thoughts and suggestions for increasing students’ achievement. In addition, three norms that were previously established by the session leaders were followed. These norms included please practice CPR: Courtesy, Professionalism, and Respect; tame your technology during the discussion portion; and all comments, both oral and written, with the exception of any comments which identifies specific staff members by name, was noted. In addition, focus groups conducted in the spring of 2015 by the Bureau of School Improvement with the district leadership team, school leadership team, and teachers were analyzed to identify narrative discussions and trends.

The Focus groups completed as part of the School Improvement Grant included teachers from each grade level in the school as well as academic coaches. The school principal selected members that were representative of the school population to be involved in the focus group. Participants from the district were invited to participate in the focus group based on their involvement with Arcadia Elementary and the School
Improvement Grant. Members of Region IV’s Differentiated Accountability team from the Bureau of School Improvement facilitated the focus groups that were conducted as part of the evaluation. To protect the identity of the participants, the responses were coded as Teacher 1, Teacher 2…, Administrator 1, Administrator 2…, District 1, District 2…, and so on. The numbers in the coding do not represent the grade level or ranking of any of the participants, but rather the seating order in the focus groups to help with gathering of responses.

**School improvement grant focus group 1.** This focus group was conducted in February 2014 in order to gather information for use by the district in making decision on whether to allow Arcadia Elementary to apply for the School Improvement Grant. Two district administrators facilitated this focus group that included school-based leadership members and teachers at Arcadia Elementary.

**School improvement grant school focus group 2.** The Region IV Differentiated Accountability Team facilitated the school focus group with three school-based administrators, five academic coaches, and seven teachers in March 2015. The results from the focus group were provided to the Bureau of School Improvement for use in evaluating the progress of the school in the first year following the award of SIG.

**School improvement grant district focus group.** The Region IV Differentiated Accountability Team facilitated the district focus group with seven district employees in March 2015. The results from the focus group were provided to the Bureau of School Improvement for use in evaluating the progress of the school in the first year following the award of SIG.
School Improvement Grant Survey

Survey data from the School Improvement Grant Survey conducted in April of 2014 and May of 2015 (Tables 4-1 through Tables 4-7) were examined using the same questions in order to identify any trends from the narratives that were provided in the open-ended responses. The 2014 spring survey was completed by 90.7 percent of teachers and administrators in Arcadia Elementary that for the 2015 survey had a 100 percent completion rate.

School improvement grant survey 1. This survey was conducted by the district’s Federal Grants Department through Survey Monkey in order to gather information for use in the School Improvement Grant Application. This survey was conducted in April of 2014 by two district-based leadership members and was completed by school-based administrators and teachers.

School improvement grant survey 2. This survey was conducted by the district’s Continuous Improvement Department through Survey Monkey in order gather information for use in School Improvement Grant evaluation. The survey was conducted in May 2015 and was completed by the school-based leadership members and teachers.

5Essentials Survey

The results from the 5Essentials survey were used to provide information on which components were considered to be strong at Arcadia Elementary. The five components include effective leadership, ambitious instruction, collaborative teaching, supportive environments, and family involvement. The 5Essentials survey was developed following more than 20 years of research by the University of Chicago
Consortium on Chicago School Research on what makes schools successful (Harms, 2013, para. 3). The 5Essentials survey has been refined continuously for over two decades to ensure accurate measurement and reflection of continuously changing practices. Annual evaluations of the survey measures for data quality, reliability and item fit, and consistency is done for every survey administered to schools in Chicago since 1994 (University of Chicago, 2013, para. 5). The framework for successful turnaround of schools that was developed in this research provides a benchmark against which the essential components employed in Arcadia Elementary can be evaluated.

Arcadia Elementary administered the 5Essentials survey in the spring of 2015 from May 4 to May 29. Teachers and school-based administrators were sent an email with a unique log in to the survey. Students in grades four and five were given an opportunity to complete the survey during their related art rotation to the technology lab. The survey was completed by 83.6 percent of the teachers, 100 percent of the school based administrators, and 68.9 percent of the students in grades four and five in the spring of 2014. The parents’ portion of the survey was attempted, but only 10 percent of the parents completed the survey due to limited English proficiency and a response rate of 20 percent was needed in order produce reliable results. As such, parents were offered the opportunity to complete the survey during parent drop up and pick up times, during conferences, and parent events. An afterschool parent event was planned at the end of the survey in an attempt to reach the 20 percent response rate, but the event was canceled due to bad weather. Results from the survey were compiled by the University of Chicago and shared with the school and district in July of 2015. The survey
also compared Arcadia Elementary’s scores with scores from other Florida schools that completed the survey to assess the school performance relative to others.

Data from the 5Essentials survey was returned with a measure score, essential score, and 5Essentials score in which each score provided details about the performance of the school as relative to the benchmark scores. The measure scores were calculated through combining multiple questions to gain an analysis and then compared to the benchmark. Every twenty points on the 1-99 scale was one standard deviation wide. The essential scores were also based on a 1-99 scale, but were established using the average of all the measure scores for the particular essential component (effective leadership, collaborative teachers, involved families, supportive environment, and ambitious instruction). Finally, the overall 5Essentials score was calculated as the sum of the school’s performance on each individual essential component. Each essential component that had a score of strong (light green) or very strong (dark green) counted as +1; neutral (yellow or gray) counted as 0; and weak (orange) or very weak (dark red) was counted as -1. All the scores were calculated based on the results of the survey and the school was then given a 5Essentials score and improvement label based upon the following criteria:

- Well Organized (+3, +4, +5) Dark Green
- Organized (+1 or +2) Light Green
- Moderately Organized (0) Yellow
- Partially Organized (-1 or -2) Orange
- Not yet Organized (-3, -4, or -5) Red
The Chicago Public Schools average in 2011 based on the survey of 700 large, small, public, charter, and other types of schools was used as the benchmark for the survey results. The benchmark data was compared to that of Arcadia Elementary. The benchmark scores were used to generate meaning for the scores based upon the following criteria:

- “Very strong”: at least 1.5 standard deviations above the benchmark.
- “Strong”: between 0.5 and 1.5 standard deviations above the benchmark.
- “Neutral”: above -0.5 standard deviations and below 0.5 standard deviations above the benchmark.
- “Weak”: 0.5 to 1.5 standard deviations below the benchmark.
- “Very weak”: at least 1.5 standard deviations below the benchmark.

**Data Analysis**

The single case study examined the turnaround efforts that were made over a three-year period in Arcadia Elementary. Data analysis was performed to reveal the essential supports that helped the school to achieve a successful turnaround. The analysis aimed at developing a framework for school turnaround using the grounded theory method. This involved collection of data, which was then reviewed in order to extract codes, or repeated themes. These codes were then grouped into categories to allow for the development of a framework. In this case study, historical and research data was collected and reviewed prior to starting the study to ensure that quality and adequate data was available to support the study. The grounded theory method was used to identify the components that were in place to provide a framework for turnaround schools as “…one that is inductively derived from the study of the
phenomenon it represents. That is, it is discovered, developed, and provisionally verified through systematic data collection and analysis of data pertaining to that phenomenon" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 23). All the data responses were reviewed separately to provide information that would assist in gaining an understanding of the school's turnaround progress. Major themes were then established and coding was performed to determine what components were used to enhance students' achievement.

The essential components employed by the school were described through qualitative data collected from focus groups and open-ended surveys (Bryk, et al., 2010, p. 82). The researcher analyzed themes or patterns identified from the qualitative data to provide information for development of a framework for turnaround schools. Data from the Florida School Public Accountability Records (SPAR) reports and the results from the 5Essentials survey was considered first in order establish the essential components that related to the case study. “The ultimate goal of the case study is to uncover patterns, determine meaning, construct conclusion and build theory” (Patton & Appelbaum, 2003, p. 67). Eisenhardt (1989) stated, “analyzing data is the heart of building theory from case studies, but it is both the most difficult and the least codified part of the process” (p. 539). All data collected was first analyzed through open coding, which entailed reading through the data and labeling concepts as well as developing categories on the basis of their dimensions and properties (Creswell, 2007, p. 184). Then axial coding was done through putting together the open codes in order to make the connections or relationships between the categories that emerged from the data. Finally selective coding was done, which entailed figuring out the core variables that
encompass all the data (Creswell, 2007), in order to identify patterns that may be used in forming a framework for school success in a turnaround school and how it could be implemented in an elementary school setting (p. 184).

In addition, analysis of the focus group notes was completed to determine how school improvement was undertaken in Arcadia Elementary by identifying reoccurring “words, concepts, themes, phrases, characters, or sentences in order to quantify them” (Fink, 2009, p. 89). The analyses from the various groups were then compared. Explanations of the participants’ perceptions on how Arcadia Elementary was able to improve its performance were obtained through categorical aggregation of open, axial, and selective coding. To protect the confidentiality of the participants, pseudonyms for the school and participants were used.

**Role of the Researcher**

Creswell (2012) stated that “through qualitative research, we develop results that help to answer questions, and as we accumulate these results, we gain a deeper understanding of the problems” (p.4). Qualitative research was the most appropriate methodology for this study since it was impossible to fully understand the specific strategies and perceptions regarding the essential components that contribute to successful turnaround of low-performing schools through quantitative data.

The role of the researcher in this single school case study was to analyze the qualitative data from focus groups and surveys, and report the findings and recommendations. The researcher was part of the team that provided district support to the school during their transformation. However, the researcher used data gathered by third party researchers to support Arcadia’s School Improvement Grant application and
 turnaround to ensure the data used in the study was not biased and was free from the researcher’s influence. Merriam (2009) asserted that “rather than trying to eliminate these biased ‘subjectivities,’ it is important to identify and monitor them as to how they may be shaping the collection and interpretation of data” (p. 15). As such, the researcher kept in mind the personal bias that may have existed in the study and therefore avoided using data collected by the district support team to the school of which the researcher was one of the team members. “Subjectivity guides everything from the choice of the topic that one studies, to formulating hypotheses, to selecting methodologies, and interpreting data” (Ratner, 2002, p.1).

To control possible bias, historical data from surveys and focus groups were used to establish a random variable (Ryan, 2013). In addition, the researcher followed the procedure of data analysis used by Donaldson (2012) to increase the reliability of the case study. The researcher attempted to obtain approval from The University of Florida’s Institutional Review Board to conduct the study but was notified that approval was not needed since the data was historical and public (Appendix A).

Trustworthiness

The credibility of qualitative research is dependent on the researcher as the since data collected is based on “the interpretations of reality [and] are accessed directly through their observations and interview” (Merriam, 2009, p. 214). The researcher strived to stay objective and used a coding process in analyzing data from the focus groups and surveys to reveal common themes that were present in Arcadia Elementary.

The reliability of the focus groups was established by using the same open-ended surveys in April 2014 and May 2015 to compare what strategies were the most
urgent throughout the 5 essentials (effective leadership, collaborative teachers, involved families, supportive environment, and ambitious instruction) from University of Chicago’s research (Bryk, et al., 2010, p. 82). Comparing the same survey as a pre-survey and a post-survey improved the reliability within this data tool.

To establish validity, data collected from the surveys were analyzed and coded independently using open, axial, and selective coding. Convergent validity was established through pattern matching whereby results obtained from the case study were compared with those from published research. The findings from the case study were compared to common themes provided by the 5Essentials for school success research, that is, effective leadership, collaborative teachers, involved families, supportive environment, and ambitious instruction (Bryk, et al., 2010, p. 82). Internal validity was confirmed with additional members reviewing the surveys to determine if common themes were identified from the data. Mirroring the study from Rebecca Donaldson’s 2012 dissertation created external validity. In addition, providing detailed descriptions of the data collection process allowed for transferability. Construct validity was established by collecting data from three sources. Use of multiple sources of data allowed triangulation and thus crosschecking. Content validity was improved by involving participants who are knowledgeable in the subject area to develop questions aligned to research based strategies of the 5Essentials. Foxcroft, Paterson, le Roux & Herbst (2004, p. 49) state that using a panel of experts to review the survey specifications and the selection of items the content validity of a survey can be improved.
External validity of the case was improved through the “thick description: of the
time, place, context and culture that will allow transferability to occur” (Mertens, 2005, p.256). In this case study, the qualitative research was mirrored using the research from the dissertation work of Donaldson (2012) in which one elementary school in central California increased student achievement. Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated that transferability as “the burden of proof lies less with the original investigator than with the person seeking to make an application elsewhere” (p. 298). The researcher in this case study provided adequate descriptions in the implementation timeline on Table 3-1, the open-ended questions in Tables 4-1 through Tables 4-7, and detailed responses taken from open-ended responses to allow for other researchers to transfer it to other study settings (Merriam, 2009, p. 225). The researcher provides a detailed description of the components that were followed in the Arcadia Elementary and link them to the framework developed by the 5Essentials survey on school improvement to enhance transferability to schools implementing a turnaround.

Summary

This chapter detailed the explanation to the methodology that was employed in this case study. A qualitative single case study design was used in this study to uncover the specific strategies and components that were used to improve the performance of one school located in Southwest Florida. The school was selected as it had successfully implemented a turnaround option plan. In addition, the majority of the students in the school are identified as economically needy and come from schools in which English is not the primary language. Historical data on educational reform in the school was gathered and reviewed. The data included the demographics and student
achievement data from Florida School Public Accountability Records (SPAR) reports, data from School Improvement Grant focus groups and archived surveys that were completed for the School Improvement Grant application process, Turnaround Option Plans, and 5Essentials survey.

Data was analyzed using the grounded theory method in order to construct a framework for turnaround schools through open, axial, and selective coding to identify themes, develop them into categories and make connections between them. Connections were also made to the five essentials components of school success developed by the University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research. Internal validity was established by pattern matching data collected with results from 5Essentials research. External validity was achieved by following the methods employed in previous research by Donaldson (2012) and the University of Chicago on essential supports of school success. Reliability was established through use of data collected from focus groups and surveys that involved participants in similar positions.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case Study Item</th>
<th>Date of Completion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Florida school grade D</td>
<td>Summer 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arcadia Elementary’s principal was replaced</td>
<td>Summer 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turnaround Option Plan (TOP) required for Arcadia Elementary</td>
<td>August 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida school grade F</td>
<td>Summer 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Group 1 completed as part of the School Improvement Grant (SIG) application by two district leaders</td>
<td>February 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arcadia Elementary was awarded a SIG grant as part of Cohort 3</td>
<td>Spring 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida school grade C and Arcadia Elementary was released from implementation of a TOP</td>
<td>Summer 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SIG open-ended survey completed as part of the grant application</td>
<td>April 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SIG open-ended survey completed to align support to Arcadia Elementary after year 1 of the SIG grant</td>
<td>May 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5Essentials Survey administered to staff and students in grade 4-5</td>
<td>May 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida school grade C</td>
<td>Summer 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Instructional Staff</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newly Higher Instructional Staff</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of School-Based Administrators</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newly Hired School-Based Administrators</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of Teachers with Advanced Degree</td>
<td>36.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Florida Department of Education: SPAR Reports (2015)
CHAPTER 4
RESULTS

Summary

The results from the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test in 2012-2013 indicated that Arcadia Elementary had a grade of an F and which forced it to implement a Turnaround Plan (Florida Department of Education: SPAR Reports, 2015). The district and the school considered all turnaround options and opted for a District-Managed Turnaround Plan, which was implemented during 2012-2013 and 2013-2014 school year. In the spring of 2014, Arcadia Elementary was awarded the School Improvement Grant. The school increased its grade from an F to a C after two years of implementing a Turnaround Plan.

The purpose of this study was to provide a description of the essential components that employed in one turnaround school. The data analyzed was collected over one year from Arcadia Elementary from March 2014 to June 2015. Teachers and administrators based at the school were involved in a focus groups facilitated by two district administrators in groups ranging from four to seven prior to application of the School Improvement Grant. In addition, all teachers completed the School Improvement Grant survey conducted by the district’s Federal Grants department for data that was used on the SIG application. Initial data collected from focus groups and surveys identified common themes based on the research from the 5Essentials for school success; Effective Leadership, Collaborative Teachers, Involved Families, Supportive Environment, and Ambitious Instruction.

In April 2014 and May 2015, 54 staff members completed the SIG Stakeholder Surveys. Table 4-1 shows the demographics breakdowns of the participants. Data
collected from focus groups were coded based on the following criteria: (a) Effective Leadership; (b) Collaborative Teachers; (c) Involved Families; (d) Supportive Environment; and (e) Ambitious Instruction (Bryk et al., 2010, p. 46). The initial focus groups conducted prior to implementation of the SIG Grant yielded data enabled classification of strengths and weaknesses of each essential component.

This chapter reviews the data collected from the 2014 and 2015 School Improvement Grant surveys and focus groups, as well as the results from the 5Essentials survey carried out by The University of Chicago and Florida’s Bureau of School Improvement. The themes that were identified from the review of data are presented with components linked to the success of these themes.

Research Questions

The study aimed to uncover the essential strategies that were implemented over a three-year period for the academic turnaround of Arcadia Elementary School in Florida as perceived by school leadership and teachers. To understand the essential strategies, the study examined the following focus areas:

1. What strategies of school leadership had the most supportive impact on the successful turnaround of the school as perceived by staff?
2. Which instructional strategies were implemented that staff perceived contributed most toward the successful turnaround?
3. What strategies were implemented, supported by external factors, which were perceived as contributing to the establishment of a positive learning environment that assisted in improvement to student achievement?
Focus Area One

What strategies of school leadership had the most supportive impact on the successful turnaround of the school as perceived by staff?

Providing Strong Leadership

The analysis of the responses from April 2014 and May 2015 surveys revealed that the question under leadership that increased most in the number of respondents was “sets high expectations for all students and teachers” with an increase from 3.85 percent in April 2014 to 24.53 percent in May 2015. In the focus groups conducted during the spring of 2015, the principal was described as one who has a vision of continuous improvement. District 2 stated, “sustainability is a recurring conversation I have with her [the principal] as she reflects”. District 1 responded “she [the principal] puts herself in the hands of the teachers and empowers the teachers so that we can all learn together. We are a team”. Furthermore, District 6 posited that, “it is clear that she is instructional leader in the building, empowering others to carry out that vision and sharing the responsibility. She has the ultimate say in the end, but trusts that her staff will carry out the vision”.

The school leadership was responsible for setting the vision. Once the vision was established, it was communicated and shared by all. Administrator 1 observed “the focus on our goals helps to direct the teachers to know where we are going…. [We created] a narrow list to focus on what we are working on. It is concise, so the teachers know what the school goals and barriers are. Every week in our leadership meetings we have a coaching update portion, so alignment can happen across the school for teacher support. We always realign our focus based on coaching, leadership meetings,
modeling, and evaluation”. Teacher 8 stated that the principal has “transparency, determination, and passion”. It was discovered the vision “empowering students for lifelong success” was present in all staff members.

The open-ended responses from the surveys and focus groups also revealed that the staff identified the principal as part of the leadership team and part of the school-based administration rather than one person who runs the school. Teacher 1 indicated that “the administration is positive and this helps with staff retention. Just keep doing what we are doing”. One administrator described the school as a “system of shared leadership where we empower others. This is a culture. We are developing leaders. It is safe to be a leader and try. [There is] great collaboration across the academic coaches, leadership, and teachers. The academic coaches model the positive environments and leadership skills” (Administrator 1). In addition, another administrator stated that “the strengths of our leadership allow us to run a successful school. You also have to have the right teachers in the right place [sic]. We all have our various strengths” (Admin 3).

Teachers were asked about what leadership qualities they would expect in a principal leading a school similar to their school during the focus groups conducted in the spring of 2014. Their responses mostly revolved around “the principal should be proactive rather than reactive” and should “treat all staff members the same, not having a popularity feeling [sic], and all teachers should feel that their principal knows them”. Specific areas to Arcadia Elementary in which the teachers stated were areas that needed improvement included; (1) Principals need to be present in the classroom without the sense of being observed or assessed; (2) Principal need to interact with
students at “street level”, increase more time for interaction to make those connections, need to interact with students beyond those who have discipline issues, and the need to get to know all of our students; (3) Improve teacher retention; (4) More meetings in order to allow for more interactions needed to make those connections and allow teacher to voice, express opinions, and share ideas; (5) More opportunities for principals to be with teachers without the hierarchical context; and (6) There is need to increase the communication and ensure it is timely.

The 5Essentials survey scored strongly in the four areas under effective leadership. When compared to results from other Florida schools that completed the survey, the following was observed; (1) program coherence had a measure score (mScore) of 75 compared to the other Florida schools of 46; (2) teacher-principal trust had a mScore of 50 compared to the Florida average of 53; (3) teacher influence had a mScore of 45 compared to the Florida average of 41; and (4) instructional leadership had a mScore of 75 compared to the Florida average of 55.

Data collected from the 5Essentials survey indicated Arcadia Elementary had a score +1(very strong) in effective leader. A score of very strong is considered to be organized for improvement and that teachers consider the principal to be one of the strengths at Arcadia Elementary. This score indicated, “principals and teachers implement a shared vision for success” (5Essentials, 2015, p. 3).

Culture Building

“Building a positive community and school climate is a crucial but often overlooked step in school improvement” (Kessler & Snodgrass, 2014, p. 5). Many Americans do not feel valued in their workplace and the lack of appreciation is noted as
one of the main reasons that employees leave their jobs (Robbins, 2000, p. 62). A school in which the staff is happy creates low turnover rates, as compared to schools where the morale is less than appealing (Noddings, 2014, p. 18). Schools that make their staff feel appreciated have lower teacher turnover (White, 2014, p. 30) and higher student achievement (Ronfeldt, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2013, p. 2).

“If classroom teachers play a leading role in establishing relationships that help students demonstrates their personal bests, principals play a lead in establishing relationships among adults within the school” (Westerberg, 2016, para. 1). The school leadership is responsible for building a positive school culture and climate that supports all stakeholders (Leithwood & Strauss, 2008, p.7). In April 2014, the leadership quality that was identified as the most urgent for addressing the special needs of students by 57.69 percent of the respondents was, “builds relationships and trust among administrators, teachers; students and parents support increased achievement”. In May 2015, the number of participants who indicated the need for this leadership quality decreased to 26.42 percent. The open-ended responses collected for the School Improvement Grant survey and focus groups, teachers, district employees described the leadership of the principal as one who “puts herself in the hands of the teachers and empowers the teachers so that we can all learn together. We are a team” (District 1). Another district employee asserted that, “It is clear that she is instructional leader in the building, empowering others to carry out that vision and sharing the responsibility. She has the ultimate say in the end, but trusts that her staff will carry out the vision” (District 6). In addition, teachers felt respected by the principal with 73 percent of the teachers responding as “to a great extent”, 16 percent agreed “some”, 9 percent agreed “a little”,

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and 2 percent agree “not at all”. This contributed to reduced rate of teachers’ turnover. SPAR Reports (2015) indicated that the school was able to retain staff with only two staff members leaving the school at the end of the year for relocations out of state.

The new principal was able to create an environment in which teachers felt supported and appreciated and empowered as leaders (Kessler & Snodgrass, 2014, p. 63). According to Strasser (2014), high morale of the teachers results from empowerment (p. 13). Teacher 5 stated during the focus groups that, “[the] faculty is empowered and involved”. Coach 2 described how the school has been able to produce and sustain student gains with a shared leadership model.

**Instructional Leadership**

- The questions that scored highest under the leadership components in the focus groups were related to instructional leadership and included;
  - *Press teachers to implement what they have learned in professional development* with 61 percent of the teachers responding as “strongly agree”, 34 percent as “agree”, 0 percent as “disagree”, and 5 percent as “strongly disagree”.
  - *Communicates a clear vision for our school* with 61 percent of the teachers responding as “strongly agree”, 32 percent as “agree”, 2 percent as “disagree”, and 5 percent as “strongly disagree”.
  - *Makes clear to the staff the leadership’s expectations for meeting instructional goals* with 57 percent of the teachers responding as “strongly agree”, 36 percent as “agree”, 2 percent as “disagree”, and 5 percent as “strongly disagree”.
Data collected from the 5Essentials survey indicated that “effective leadership” was one of the two areas that scored as strong by Arcadia Elementary as “principals and teachers implement a shared vision for success” (5Essentials Report, 2015, p.1).

**Summary of Findings for Focus Area One**

The data collected from Arcadia Elementary revealed that having an effective leader was one of the factors that contributed to their success. Teachers, academic coaches, and fellow administrators communicated that the principal’s clear vision on student success, their values towards appreciating others, creating a positive learning environment, and the management skills the principals possessed by the principal are all qualities that describe an effective leader.

Establishing, modeling and communicating high expectations to both students and the staff towards meeting goals were the major themes identified on how a leader is able to create a vision for school. Once the vision was established, it was communicated and shared by all. In addition, the principal was able to create a culture that enhanced staff retention and students’ attendance. Staff turnover rate decreased from approximately 30 percent to less than five percent after the new principal took over the school.

Lastly, the management skills that the principal had as an expert of data, an instructional leader, and a learner created a continuous improvement model in which the leader strived to meet or exceed the next goal. The principal at Arcadia Elementary used data to determine staffing updates and curriculum decisions. As an instructional leader, the principal empowered teachers and developed leaders.
Focus Area Two

Which instructional strategies were implemented that staff perceived contributed most toward the successful turnaround?

Enhancing Collaboration among Teachers

Data from April 2014 and May 2015 surveys indicated that the concern relating to the quality of teaching increased slightly by two respondents for each of the following questions; “teachers feel shared responsibility for the success of all students” and “teachers regularly engage in a reflective dialogue to deepen shared language and understanding of instructional practices”. In May 2015, there was a decrease of 8.51 percent (four respondents) that chose “teachers are provided adequate time and space to plan and integrate instruction together” as the primary concern of teacher quality.

Focus groups conducted in the spring of 2014 revealed that teachers collaboratively plan as a team and there was some time available for working with other educators from other schools. However, professional development was not always delivered to meet their needs. Comments linked to professional development included, lessen the number of PDs or add PDs that are specific to the needs of our students, present mixed PD by content and knowledge, and more vertical articulation with teachers from other grade levels.

In addition, two teachers stated they would like more flexibility in how they teach and plan with regard to grouping students for interventions and the amount of time provided for planning. “I need time to sit and think how I can make these lessons work for my kids”. Data and open-ended responses indicated this as an area that the school had significantly during the 2014-2015 school year. Teacher 1 responded that,
“everyone is buddied up to plan a subject together. Then on another day we review the plans as a team and make the tweaks that are needed. The coaches assist us to ensure we are covering the new standards. The school is very pleasant to work at and welcoming. We feel comfortable asking our colleagues for help. The school helps to build our leadership skills and this makes it positive” (Teacher 1).

Creating an environment in which teachers feel they can be collaborative takes trust. District 2 stated in the spring 2015 focus groups, “there is not the pushback [sic] from the staff to have the coaches present in the classrooms” [as noted in other district schools]. The school was still building the unconditional trust within administration, academic coaches, and teachers, but a strong foundation had been established. Administrator 2 indicated, “once we see something in the classroom, we use these people to highlight a particular area and this has built a collaborative structure within the teams. The teachers [then] reflect. We have helped with gradual release with the teachers in instructional rounds to help them focus on engagement” (Admin 2).

Data collected from the 5Essentials survey indicated that, “collaborative teachers” was one of the two areas that Arcadia Elementary scored neutral (an average score) as “teachers collaborate to promote professional growth” (5Essentials Report, 2015, p.1). A score of neutral is considered to be moderately organized. Teacher 3 described the staff in the school as one in which “everyone works together and goes above and beyond what is expected of them”.
Establishing Ambitious Instruction

A study conducted on 800 high schools in the United States revealed that learning improved when students were active learners and authentically engaged in the work that was relevant to their lives (Newmann & Wehlage, 1995, p. 13). Specific findings found that “an average student who attended a ‘high authentic instruction’ school would learn approximately 78 percent more mathematics between grades 8 and 10 than his/her counterpart in a ‘low authentic instruction’ school” (Newmann & Wehlage, 1995, p. 25).

In the survey of April 2015, the aspect that was identified to be most important in addressing the quality of instruction was “instructional programs are aligned to the Florida Standards” with an increase from zero in April 2014 to 7.54 percent in May 2015. The question on whether there was a concern with “classroom activities, assignments, and experiences are designed to meet learning objectives and student learning styles” increased from 14 percent in April 2014 to 15.09 percent in May 2015. Worthy of noting in Table 4-6 is that the question “students are engaged in interactive, intellectually challenging work and feel responsible for their learning” scored the highest as a concern in both years with 62.31 percent (31 respondents) in April 2014 and 56.60 percent (30 respondents) in May 2015.

Focus groups conducted in the spring of 2014, as part of the SIG application, provided narrative data on the strengths and weaknesses of ambitious instruction. Teacher 2 explained that the district-created curriculum maps and pacing guides were helpful and they appreciated the flextime at the end of the year to review skills. However, the time expectations were not realistic. The data from the focus group
highlighted that understanding the students’ background was necessary since most
teachers “are lacking the background knowledge”. This would help teacher to effectively
meet students’ needs. Teachers stated that they needed more time with their students
to build the “real life connections to content- practical usage” and to conduct “hands on
experimental types of lessons”. Teacher 10 indicated that it was important to
“understand the student population and the barriers teachers overcome to teach
students”. Teacher 2 stated, “I have found that it is important to relate to their real world
experiences. These students may not have many [experiences] but they definitely have
some however pleasant or unpleasant [sic]”. In Arcadia Elementary, external vendors
were brought as experts to guide teachers in teaching students by understanding their
cultures and collaborative structures. In addition, the school reached out to the district
office for content area support and technology training.

Data collected from the 5Essentials survey indicated that Arcadia Elementary
scored very strong in “ambitious instruction” was scored as indicated by students in
grades four and five as “classes are challenging and engaging” (5Essentials Report,
2015, p.1). A score of very strong is considered to be organized for improvement. This
was illustrated by increase in the school grades from an F to a C. When asked what
helped their students to learn, Coach 1 responded that “modeling good lesson planning.
We have been pouring time into our intervention and enrichment times to make it
rigorous and fun, so the students can learn”. Administrator 3 responded that, “we have
been very thoughtful with our master schedule to ensure that math, reading, and
science were not being taught at the same time across the school. This has allows [sic]
the academic coach to be in different grade levels for the same subject”.

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As part of the School Improvement Grant, an emphasis was placed on Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics (STEM). Coach 1 stated that, “[the] science field trips with STEM [works] to build a pipeline for STEM careers. The students are being shown different careers in STEM… [We are] empowering students for lifelong success. We are showing the students a local route to be successful. High school is too late for these students”. The extended summer at Arcadia Elementary created extended learning opportunities for the

**Increased Capacity through Professional Development**

Creating an effective professional development requires a clear focus that meets the needs of teachers and is relevant to these needs (Hunzicker, 2010, p. 4). Professional development implemented at Arcadia Elementary was deliberate. Coach 3 stated that “weekly planning helps us to review our school goals…and professional developments are set up. We do a lot of surveys and questionnaires with the teachers to get feedback. There is a gradual and differentiated process for the professional development for the teachers”. Coach 2 stated in the May 2015 focus group that, “[We have] a bunch of interweaving things put together such as working with teams or individual teachers to ensure that follow-through happens. Teachers need things at different times. When the teachers are more collaborative this allows more of a buy-in and makes the connections [sic], as they are able to dig deeper into the content during the planning time rather than spend the time to write the plans”. District 2 opined that, “it is important that the coaches are on site to support their teachers. It’s a key component of their success”. The support from the academic coaches and leadership team was evident in the surveys and focus groups with teachers indicating that they felt
the collaborative planning sessions were helpful. Administrator 3 stated that, “we are so fortunate as we have a lot of academic coaches. [There is] more sharing of best practices. You don’t know what you don’t know [sic].”

**Summary of Findings for Focus Area Two**

Analysis of the data from surveys and focus groups revealed that student improvement at Arcadia Elementary was achieved through the staff commitment, professional development teachers received, collaborative teaching opportunities, and high quality instruction. The efforts of the principal and the change in school culture helped to enhance commitment of the staff towards supporting the success of Arcadia Elementary. Administrators, academic coaches, and teachers in the focus groups shared the common value and commitment for student success.

Academic coaches provided professional development that was relevant to the needs of the school. Teachers stated in the focus groups that this was an area they appreciated as the trainings provided them with knowledge that was applicable to their work. The professional development provided helped the teachers build closer relationships with the students through learning about their culture and background.

The theme of collaborating together teaching was built in the School Improvement Grant as well as master schedule with common planning time. This allowed teachers the opportunity to collaborate with their colleagues by providing them with common planning time. In 2013-2014, the first year the school was implementing their Turnaround Plan, teachers struggled with collaborative planning sessions in which they met with others to plan their lessons and review data. In the 2014-2015 school year, Florida released updated standards with an increased rigor for math and English
Language Arts, as well as an update to the state assessment. As such, teachers felt the need to reach out to the academic coaches for support on understanding the intent of the new standards and sharing the best practices for teaching these updated rigorous standards.

Creating an environment that provided quality instruction to all students was essential as students in low-performing schools typically need more than one year’s growth each year to close the achievement gap between them and their peers in high-performing schools (West, 2012, p.1). Data from Arcadia Elementary indicated that the staff was continuously improving student instruction to ensure that they attain the high expectations set in the school.

**Focus Area Three**

*What strategies were implemented, supported by external factors, which were perceived as contributing to the establishment of a positive learning environment that assisted in improvement to student achievement?*

**Parental and Community Involvement**

Focus groups conducted in the spring of 2014 revealed that parental and community engagement at Arcadia Elementary was an area of weakness. One teacher stated that, “we cannot afford to say the parents can’t do it – we need more time with them”. Another teacher added that, “as a teacher, I am very pleased with my students’ parents and their willingness to support their education. However, due to their lack of education and English language, many of the parents cannot support them the way they would love to. Our students need extra support from school, such more hands-on activities and real life experience …At Arcadia, we believe students' early education
experience set the tone for lifelong success”. Teacher 5 asserted that “having an administrator in place and parental liaison staff member has increased parent involvement. When community members come in to present at [our school] they are amazed at the parental involvement. We are getting our parents here; we are reaching out to the parents. We share the commitment and have increased the events... [to] help the parents to build their capacity”.

Analyzing the data from the 2014 and 2015 surveys (Table 4-6) showed a decrease of 8.19 percent (four respondents) that stated the most urgent concern on addressing parental and community support was “parents and community members feel valued and view the school's success as a shared responsibility”. An increase of 11.54 percent (six respondents) stated that the most urgent concern was “school employees understand the needs and values of the parents and community served by the school”.

Data collected from the 5Essentials survey indicated that “involved families” was one of the two areas that scored as neutral (an average score) by Arcadia Elementary as “the entire staff builds strong external relationships” (5Essentials Report, 2015, p.3). A score of neutral is considered to be moderately organized for improvement. However, the parent survey had a limited amount of responses completed since 85.48 percent of the students at Arcadia Elementary come from homes in which English is not the first language and the 5Essentials parent survey was only available in English to the parents.
Supportive Environments

The focus group conducted in April 2014 identified three areas under supportive environment that increased as areas of concern. "Non-essential interruptions (e.g., tardies, announcements, student misconduct) are not tolerated during instructional time" increased by 11.54, “students feel safe and supported to engage in academic inquiry” increased from 13.46 percent to 23.08 percent while “students feel welcomed and safe on school grounds and traveling to the school" increased from 1.92 percent to 11.54 percent. Two areas that improved from the April 2014 to May 2015 based on the surveys included the following questions:

- Multi-tiered system of supports is employed school wide to coordinate available resources. This decreased as a concern from 14.23 percent in April 2014 to 1.92 percent in May 2015, and,
- School site is a stimulating and nurturing environment focused on learning: This decreased as a concern from 28.85 percent in April 2014 to 9.62 percent in May 2015.

Results from the focus groups revealed that the school's strength was centered on a friendly atmosphere for parents, students, and teachers. Three specific needs were identified as areas that need improvement in order to enhance learning environment at Arcadia Elementary. These included teachers need counseling regarding behavior and social skills; social services need to be active in the school to provide for basic needs; and the school needs more support staff such as tutors, assistants, translators, additional counselor, and behavioral specialist to support their needs.
Data gathered from the 5Essentials survey indicated, “collaborative teachers” was one of the two areas that Arcadia Elementary scored very strong as “the school is safe, demanding, and supportive” (5Essentials Report, 2015, p.1). A score of very strong is considered to be organized for improvement. Open-ended responses from the spring 2015 focus groups revealed that the school has established a supportive environment for teachers. Administrator 2 stated that, “the structures and positive environment we have in place have helped to make the teachers come up with new ideas on their own. They are coming up with ideas on their own. The other things we are doing has [sic] given the teachers the opportunity to collaborate with other teachers. Some of the teachers have even discovered they want to move to a different grade level. The teachers see the coaches always learning”. Administrator 1 added that, “It’s the way of work here. The teachers come up with ideas on their own and we have modeled some of the things they did on their own to make it school wide [sic]”.

**Summary of Findings for Focus Area Three**

The positive learning climate that was created at Arcadia Elementary was evident in the parental involvement, community engagement, and the safe and supportive environment for both students and teachers. Data from the focus groups indicated that efforts were made to increase parent involvement and community engagement; however, this component demonstrated the largest increases from the April 2014 to the May 2015 in the School Improvement Grant surveys, with an increase of 39.5 percent. As part of the School Improvement Grant, a parent involvement liaison was hired and parent academies were conducted to increase parental involvement.
The safe and supportive environment component of the climate mirrors many of the same issues identified under culture building by the principal. Resources that are provided to support student learning assist with the learning process by ensuring teachers are able to teach and are not concerned about how and where they are going to find the resources. An optional summer program was created as part of the School Improvement Grant and was attended by 53 percent of the students on a regular basis. Data from the 5Essentials survey found the students at Arcadia Elementary felt safe at school and do not feel bullied by their peers. The American Institute for Research (2015) established that students who feel safe at school have improved attendance as compared to students who feel bullied (2015, p. 2).

**Summary**

Data was collected on the five components that make up the 5Essentials for school success; Effective Leadership, Collaborative Teachers, Involved Families, Supportive Environment, and Ambitious Instruction. Tables 4-2 through Tables 4-7 provide data gathered from April 2014 to May 2015 from the same questions that were identified as the greatest need or urgency within each of the components. In each component, the percentage of the current strengths of the school increased. School leadership increased from 87.76 percent in April of 2014 to 94.45 percent in May of 2015 while Parent/Community Engagement increased from 42 percent in April of 2014 to 81.45 percent in May of 2015. Also, Safe and Supportive Environment increased from 79.59 percent in April of 2014 to 98.15 percent in May of 2015 while Collaborative Teaching increased from 77.55 percent in April of 2014 to 92.59 percent in May of 2015. Lastly, Ambitious Instruction increased from 87.76 percent in April of 2014 to 94.45
percent in May of 2015. The largest increases were made on the component of Parent and Community Engagement with an increase of 39.5 percent.
Table 4-1. Demographics Data from SIG Stakeholder Surveys

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Your Primary Role at Arcadia Elementary</th>
<th>April 2014</th>
<th>May 2015</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Administrator</td>
<td>3.70% (2)</td>
<td>5.56% (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary Teacher (K-2)</td>
<td>33.33% (18)</td>
<td>35.19% (19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate Teacher (Grades 3-5)</td>
<td>25.93% (14)</td>
<td>25.93% (14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Instructional</td>
<td>37.04% (20)</td>
<td>33.33% (18)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4-2. Leadership Data from SIG Stakeholder Surveys

Please help us identify the leadership quality that you believe is MOST URGENT to addressing the special needs of students at your school.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality</th>
<th>April 2014</th>
<th>May 2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Creates a clear vision of excellent instruction and ensure the SIP is aligned to support it</td>
<td>5.77% (3)</td>
<td>11.32% (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Builds relationships and trust among administrators, teachers; students and parents support increased achievement</td>
<td>57.69% (30)</td>
<td>26.42% (14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demands respect for the vision and values of the school</td>
<td>3.85% (2)</td>
<td>1.89% (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrates tenacity and focus on the school's goals</td>
<td>3.85% (2)</td>
<td>1.89% (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understands and practices the continuous improvement process</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
<td>3.77% (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Makes the SIP an essential driver for school improvement</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
<td>1.89% (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understands the science of learning and demonstrates it for teachers</td>
<td>3.85% (2)</td>
<td>7.55% (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serves as the instructional leader by providing meaningful and timely feedback to teachers</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
<td>3.77% (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sets high expectations for all students and teachers</td>
<td>3.85% (2)</td>
<td>24.53% (13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practices distributed leadership by building leadership in all staff and provides them opportunities to lead</td>
<td>1.92% (1)</td>
<td>3.77% (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holds all teachers and staff accountable for daily fidelity to the vision</td>
<td>11.52% (6)</td>
<td>5.66% (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engages all stakeholders in problem solving around barriers to student achievement</td>
<td>5.77% (3)</td>
<td>7.55% (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manages resources efficiently for sustainable improvement</td>
<td>1.92% (1)</td>
<td>0.00% (0)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4-3. Collaborative Teachers from SIG Stakeholder Surveys

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>April 2014</th>
<th>May 2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Please help us identify the quality of teaching that you believe is MOST URGENT to addressing the special needs of students at your school.</td>
<td>11.76% (6)</td>
<td>15.36% (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers feel shared responsibility for the success of all students</td>
<td>23.53% (12)</td>
<td>23.08% (12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers feel safe to share practices and areas of expertise with leadership and peers and to learn from trial and error</td>
<td>9.80% (5)</td>
<td>11.54% (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers are encouraged and supported to work together on common goals with clear objectives</td>
<td>41.18% (21)</td>
<td>32.67% (17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers are provided adequate time and space to plan and integrate instruction together</td>
<td>5.88% (3)</td>
<td>9.62% (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers regularly engage in a reflective dialogue to deepen shared language and understanding of instructional practices</td>
<td>5.88% (3)</td>
<td>3.84% (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers are given regular feedback and coaching from knowledgeable others</td>
<td>1.96% (1)</td>
<td>3.84% (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers seek to grow as professionals for the good of the school</td>
<td>1.96% (1)</td>
<td>3.84% (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description</td>
<td>April 2014</td>
<td>May 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Please help us identify the quality of parental and community engagement that you believe is MOST URGENT to addressing the special needs of students at your school.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School site is a warm and welcoming place for parents/community</td>
<td>15.38% (8)</td>
<td>11.54% (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School’s vision, mission and goals are clearly communicated</td>
<td>3.85% (2)</td>
<td>1.92% (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School employees understand the needs and values of the parents and community served by the school</td>
<td>11.54% (6)</td>
<td>23.08% (12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust between parents/community and school staff is intentionally fostered by leadership</td>
<td>13.46% (7)</td>
<td>17.31% (9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range of accessible opportunities for parents and community members to be involved in the school's continuous improvement occur frequently and are well publicized</td>
<td>13.46% (7)</td>
<td>9.62% (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constructive feedback from stakeholders is encouraged and considered in decision making</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
<td>1.92% (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents and community members feel valued and view the school's success as a shared responsibility</td>
<td>42.31% (22)</td>
<td>34.62% (18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issue</td>
<td>April 2014 (%)</td>
<td>May 2015 (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students feel welcomed and safe on school grounds and traveling to the school</td>
<td>1.92% (1)</td>
<td>11.54% (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students feel safe and supported to engage in academic inquiry</td>
<td>13.46% (7)</td>
<td>23.08% (12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students trust teachers and administrators</td>
<td>11.54% (6)</td>
<td>17.31% (9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School site is a stimulating and nurturing environment focused on learning</td>
<td>28.85% (15)</td>
<td>9.62% (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-tiered system of supports is employed school wide to coordinate available resources</td>
<td>19.23% (10)</td>
<td>1.92% (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-essential interruptions (e.g., tardies, announcements, student misconduct) are not tolerated during instructional time</td>
<td>25% (13)</td>
<td>36.54% (19)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4-6. Ambitious Instruction from SIG Stakeholder Surveys

Please help us identify the quality of instruction that you believe is MOST URGENT to addressing the special needs of students at your school.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality of Instruction</th>
<th>April 2014</th>
<th>May 2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Instructional programs are aligned to the Florida Standards</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
<td>7.54% (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curricula are organized and well-paced within and coordinated across grade levels</td>
<td>4% (2)</td>
<td>9.43% (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific, measurable, standards-aligned daily objectives are understood by the teacher and the student</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
<td>3.77% (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom activities, assignments, and experiences are designed to meet learning objectives and student learning styles</td>
<td>28.00% (14)</td>
<td>15.09% (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students are engaged in interactive, intellectually challenging work and feel responsible for their learning</td>
<td>62% (31)</td>
<td>56.60% (30)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily objectives are assessed routinely and data is used to inform and differentiate further instruction</td>
<td>6% (3)</td>
<td>7.55% (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area</td>
<td>April 2014</td>
<td>May 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>School Leadership</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greatest current strength</td>
<td>44.90% (22)</td>
<td>59.26% (32)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adequate</td>
<td>42.86% (21)</td>
<td>35.19% (19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needs improvement</td>
<td>10.20% (5)</td>
<td>1.85% (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greatest current weaknesses</td>
<td>2.04% (1)</td>
<td>3.70% (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parent/Community Engagement</strong></td>
<td>100% (11)</td>
<td>100% (11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greatest current strength</td>
<td>2% (1)</td>
<td>18.52% (10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adequate</td>
<td>22% (11)</td>
<td>62.96% (34)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needs improvement</td>
<td>50% (25)</td>
<td>18.52% (10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greatest current weaknesses</td>
<td>26% (13)</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Safe and Supportive Environment</strong></td>
<td>100% (11)</td>
<td>100% (11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greatest current strength</td>
<td>22.45% (11)</td>
<td>61.11% (33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adequate</td>
<td>57.14% (28)</td>
<td>37.04% (20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needs improvement</td>
<td>16.33% (8)</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greatest current weaknesses</td>
<td>4.08% (2)</td>
<td>1.85% (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Collaborative Teaching</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greatest current strength</td>
<td>12.24% (6)</td>
<td>53.70% (29)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adequate</td>
<td>65.31% (32)</td>
<td>38.89% (21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needs improvement</td>
<td>16.33% (8)</td>
<td>3.70% (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greatest current weaknesses</td>
<td>6.12% (3)</td>
<td>3.70% (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ambitious Instruction</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greatest current strength</td>
<td>18.37% (9)</td>
<td>66.67% (36)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adequate</td>
<td>69.39% (34)</td>
<td>27.78% (15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needs improvement</td>
<td>12.24% (6)</td>
<td>5.56% (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greatest current weaknesses</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
<td>0.00% (0)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 5
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the phenomenon of school turnaround efforts and the specific strategies used to improve school performance by conducting an inquiry of educational actions that were implemented within a three-year period in one turnaround school. To understand the essential strategies, the study examined the following focus areas:

1. What strategies of school leadership had the most supportive impact on the successful turnaround of the school as perceived by staff?

2. Which instructional strategies were implemented that staff perceived contributed most toward the successful turnaround?

3. What strategies were implemented, supported by external factors, which were perceived as contributing to the establishment of a positive learning environment that assisted in improvement to student achievement?

Finally, considerations for future study will be given.

Research found that schools that had one or more of the Essential components scored as strong are four or five times more likely to yield improvements in reading and mathematics as compared to schools that scored in the bottom quartile in the same indicators (University of Chicago, 2013). Schools that scored strong on effective leadership are seven times likely to improve in mathematics and schools with strong parental involvement are ten times likely to improve in mathematics (Bryk et al., 2010, p. 25).
Schools implementing a turnaround usually strive to improve student performance using various programs. However, school improvement should be viewed as a cake recipe with the 5Essentials as the essential ingredients while trying to establish a foundation for success (Byrk et al., 2010, p. 203). In this way, schools are able to understand their strengths and challenges and thus make informed modifications to their systems, similar to the way a pastry chef may make tweaks to the recipe to come up a winning cake (Byrk et al., 2010, p. 203).

**Summary of Findings**

A complete literature review was completed to gain an insight of school reform that has occurred over the past decade, as well as current efforts used to support turnaround schools. No specific strategy or component was identified in extant literature that yields a complete turnaround for a low-performing school. The findings of this case study may provide useful information to low-performing schools that seek to improve the performance of their students.

**Theme One: Strong Leadership**

The first research question sought to establish the role of leadership in successful turnaround of the school. Three key themes of strong leadership were identified from the analysis of data from focus groups and surveys. These include vision, values, and management with subcategories under each area.

Leaders are responsible for establishing a clear vision for the school, which helps the staff to focus on learning and allow for regular monitoring of performance. A vision should encompass short-term and long-term goals for students, staff, and the school. Improving a low-performing school can be a difficult and daunting task. However,
establishing a clear vision enables all stakeholders to work towards a common goal, which goes a long way at improving school performance. In April 2014 survey, 21.14 percent of the respondents indicated that creating and communicating a clear vision was the most urgent concern for improvement. However, the concern decreased to 18.87 percent in the May 2015 survey (Table 4-2). In addition, 93 percent of the staff reported that the school leadership communicated a clear vision for the school in the 5Essentials survey.

Values facilitate the establishment of a positive learning environment. Kerns (2003) contended that “values exert influence over our attitudes, and attitudes influence our behavior” (para. 3). The building of a positive culture requires creation of relationships that are based on mutual respect and trust, valuing the staff, appreciating them, providing a role model, and monitoring the desired skills. These are the soft skills that effective leaders possess which assist in retention of staff. In April 2014 survey, building “relationships and trust among administrators, teachers, students, and parents to support an increased achievement” was identified as the most urgent concern for improvement by 54.69 percent of the respondents. The response by participants to this question decreased to 26.42 percent in the May 2015 survey (Table 4-2).

Management is the core of principal’s work that allows a school to run effectively. Effective leaders are instructional leaders and surround themselves with others who complement their skills. During the spring 2015 focus groups, a participant described the leadership at Arcadia Elementary as a “system of shared leadership where we empower others. This is a culture that we are developing leaders… [There is] great collaboration across the academic coaches, leadership, and teachers” (Administrator 1).
An effective leader is not limited by the skills included in the framework illustrated in Figure 5-1, but rather these are the essential skills portrayed by the principal of the turnaround school examined in this study. Teachers, academic coaches, and school-based administrators communicated that the principal’s clear vision on student success, her values towards appreciating others, creating a positive learning environment, and the management skills she possessed are qualities that define the principal as an effective leader.

![Figure 5-1](image-url) Components of an effective leaders’ role in a case study of one turnaround school.

**Theme Two: Staff Influence**

When Arcadia Elementary first implemented a Turnaround Plan in 2013-2014, staff retention was low and the implementation of a common professional development was a challenge when teachers did not remain in the school. According to SPAR reports, staff turnover decreased to two teachers in 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 school years. Retention of staff members allowed the school to focus more on improving
instructional quality and teachers’ commitment. Through retaining staff members, it is possible to build on professional development for the following year rather than realigning and reteaching the same concept every year. In April 2014 survey, the question of “teachers are provided adequate time and space to plan and integrate instruction together” was identified as the most urgent concern for collaborative teachers by 41.18 percent of the respondents but decreased to 32.67 percent in the May 2015 survey (Table 4-3). The focus groups revealed that teachers developed a common language for high quality instruction and through trust they held one another accountable. In the April 2014 survey, two questions that described students’ engagement in rigorous work in order meet their needs was identified as the most urgent concern for ambitious instruction by 90 percent of the respondents. However, the responses to these questions decreased to 71.69 percent in the May 2015 survey (Table 4-6). The 5Essentials survey established that 98 percent of the staff strongly agreed or agreed that there was a consistency in curriculum, instruction, and learning materials among teachers in the same grade at their school.

Professional development, collaborative teachers, and ambitious instruction were the common themes identified in the focus groups as the driving force that influenced instruction in the turnaround school (Figure 5-2). The 5Essentials survey found that 98 percent of the staff strongly agreed or agreed that the professional development at their school was sustained and coherently focused as opposed to being short-term and unrelated.
Theme Three: Positive Learning Climate

The third theme identified in the data from Arcadia Elementary was creation of a climate that supports learning. The 5Essentials survey and focus groups established that supportive learning climate was more than just a safe and supportive classroom. It includes as well the perceptions of safety by students when they are travelling to and from school. The 5Essentials survey established that positive learning climate was indicated as a concern by 22 percent of the students who felt that did not feel safe while traveling between their homes and school. Five percent of the students reported feeling unsafe in the hallways and one percent in their classes. Comparison of data from April 2014 and 2015 surveys indicated that “students feel welcomed and safe on school
grounds and traveling to the school” increased from 1.92 percent in 2014 to 11.54 percent in 2015 (Table 4-5).

Student learning was identified to be a collaborative effort that includes parental involvement and support that from the community. In the April 2014 survey, the question on whether “parents and community members feel valued and view the school’s success as a shared responsibility” was identified as the most urgent concern for increasing parental involvement by 42.31 percent of the respondents but decreased to 34.62 percent in the May 2015 survey (Table 4-4). Figure 5-3, shows the basic components identified from the case study that contributed to creation of positive learning climate.

Figure 5-3. Components of an effective school climate in a case study of one turnaround school.

Discussion

Theme One: Strong Leadership

Results from the study showed that one of the factors that contributed to successful turnaround was effective leadership. The school leadership in Arcadia
Elementary was able to create a vision, develop values, and portrayed the necessary managerial skills.

Vision. The new principal in Arcadia Elementary established a vision that set high expectations for both student and teachers and which contributed to continuous improvement of school. The principal ensured the vision was communicated and shared by all staff members. Communication on measures to achieve the vision was done on a weekly basis through holding physical meetings with the staff. In addition, the principal provided instructional leadership, empowered others, and shared responsibility. This aligns with the assertions made by Leithwood and Strauss (2009, p. 29) and Stronge, Richard, and Catano (2008, p.5) that leaders are responsible for identifying and setting goals, and articulating their vision to the staff. Kowal and Ableidinger (2011) contended that effective leaders made the setting of goals a shared activity through involving staff in the making of decisions on goals (p. 10). The principal in Arcadia elementary set the vision for the school and established high expectations for all students and teachers, which were also inspected for fidelity. Through focus groups, it was revealed that teachers ranked school leadership as their strongest component. This aligns with the assertion made by Leithwood et al. (2004) that “leadership is second only to classroom instruction among all school-related factors that contribute to what students learn at school” (p.5). Qualities of an effective leader include ability to establish and maintain relationships and trust among other administrators, teachers, students, and parents.

The principal at Arcadia was successful in retaining teachers in the school compared to years prior to the turnaround program. This was made possible through building relationships and trust with teachers, students, parents and school-based
administrators. According to Owens and Valesky (2011), retention, teamwork, and trust are all built by leaders. A leader must have a clear vision as the road map for the future (p. 2). “Effective educational leaders … strive for a vision of the school as one that seeks to be engaged in a never-ending process of change and development, a ‘race without a finish line’, rather than… the mythical silver bullet” (Owens & Valesky, 2011, p. 2).

**Values.** The principal was able to create a positive school culture that increased retention of the staff in the school. Low staff turnover enhanced professional development of the teachers by reducing the need to reteach the same concepts to new staff. When teachers leave a school, they take their professional development with them and the school is forced to reteach the same concepts to the new inexperienced teachers. In addition, the principal created an environment that provided support and empowered teachers as leaders. The principal trusted teachers that they would carry achieve the established vision. Creation of an environment of trust allowed for establishment of a collaborative environment in which teachers would readily ask for support. A leader who creates a safe and positive culture can support teacher leaders as they build their capacity by developing their strengths while highlighting their weaknesses. Appreciating and respecting teachers goes a long way in establishing trust.

**Management.** Leadership qualities possessed by the principal that were highlighted in the focus groups to have enhanced school turnaround were equal treatment and close relationship with the staff. As such, the principal was able to attend classes without teachers feeling being observed or assessed as well as interact more
closely with teachers. The principal also allowed teachers to voice their opinions and
share their ideas. This was made possible through increased communication. In
education, both supervisory roles are essential and most of times, the principal wears
both hats. An effective leader holds the staff accountable in meeting the high
expectations established for all students, creates a positive work environment,
encourages collaboration, and has a “clear academic focus that encompasses the
vision, mission, and goals” (McEwan, 2009, p. 10).

**Theme Two: Staff Influence**

**Staff commitment.** The focus groups revealed that the staff at Arcadia
Elementary was committed and collaborative. This mainly resulted from the efforts of
the principal and improved school culture in Arcadia Elementary. The common value
and commitment to student success became shared among district administrators,
asserted that leaders that are able to gain trust from families and staff members are
respected and supported (para. 2). In addition, teachers work harder for a person they
trust and are willing to take on extra work while parents trust the decisions that are
made for their child (Bryk & Schnedier, 2003, para. 22). Research has established that
schools with high relational trust are more likely to demonstrate improvements in
student learning. On the other hand, schools with low levels of trust have a low chance

**Professional development.** Prior to implementation of the School Improvement
Grant, teachers found it difficult to plan collaboratively with their colleagues due to lack
of trust and time. Time as a barrier was addressed when Arcadia Elementary was
awarded the grant as multiple opportunities were embedded in building the instructional quality. The grant allowed for a pre-extension for the staff for seven days, full days for the staff to take part in professional development, and outsourcing of vendors who provided trainings on culture awareness, collaborative structures, and STEM. School members highlighted creating opportunities for staff development that was differentiated to meet the needs of individual teachers as one of the strengths that contributed to successful turnaround. Coach 2 stated that, “the PDs [professional development opportunities] allow the teachers to rise to the occasion and get PD that is relevant to them”.

**Collaborative teachers.** Prior to the 2014-2015 school year, 30 percent of the staff at Arcadia Elementary would be new to the school and thus building trust and procedures was a challenging task. The leadership team at Arcadia Elementary modeled the culture and distributed leadership to assist in creating a community of trust throughout the school. The focus groups and surveys revealed that teachers were involved in decision making whenever possible and given leadership positions. In addition, the Arcadia Elementary provided teachers with time to collaboratively plan and integrate instruction as a team as well as work with other educators from other schools towards improving the quality of teaching. Coaches in the school assisted teachers to cover the new standards and build their leadership skills. One teacher stated that “every teacher has had some sort of leadership” (Teacher 3). Teacher 4 stated that “we have a sense of openness. If a teacher needs help or wants to invite someone into their classroom, we are never afraid to ask.” Once the trust was established, collaborative planning became non-negotiable with the leadership team supporting and attending the
sessions. Research has shown that creating opportunities for teachers to share the best practices of what is working and reach out to their colleagues when things are not working contribute significantly to student growth (Louis & Wahlstrom, 2011, p. 54; Mizell, 2010, p. 11).

Coach 3 described collaborative planning sessions in Arcadia Elementary, stating that, “we are able to help the teachers with things based on their needs that we saw in observations or in data. During the side-by-side coaching one reading coach can model the lesson and the other reading coach can point out things to the teacher such as, did you see what she just did? This helps with the teachers with reflection. It isn’t always modeling the skills of the lessons, but sometimes it includes the process of planning and the thinking”

**Ambitious instruction.** Ambitious instruction ensures all students are provided a high quality education. Ambitious instruction, which scored as very strong in Arcadia Elementary, entails providing challenging and engaging coursework to all students, as well as high quality student discussions. Data from the 5Essentials survey showed that Arcadia Elementary scored highest on this element. Teachers in the school enhanced teaching through understanding the students’ background in order to better meet their needs. The school brought in experts to train the staff on teaching students by understanding their cultures and collaborative cultures. In addition, the school involved the district office for support in content area and technology training. According to Teacher 2, the district-created curriculum maps and pacing guides were helpful.

Bernshausen and Cunningham (2001) asserted that inexperienced teachers are limited by time hence lack opportunity to develop their teaching tools and instructional
practices (p. 10). Research established that 40 percent of teachers new to the profession do not make it past their fourth year of teaching, with more than half leaving the profession with the first three years. In addition, there is concern regarding teachers who move from school to school and from district to district (Ingersoll, Merrill, & Stuckey, 2014, p. 10). In Arcadia Elementary, teachers were provided with professional development to build on their strengths and overcome their weaknesses. This provided a supportive environment that assisted with retention of teachers and significantly reduced the rate of turnover.

Theme two focused on the quality of instruction and alignment to state standards. The 5Essentials survey, the School Improvement Grant application process, and the Florida School Improvement Plan process contributed towards focusing on the essential components of school improvement. Arcadia Elementary’s SIG Grant focused on improving the quality of instruction to meet all the students’ needs.

**Theme Three: Positive Learning Climate**

**Parental involvement and community engagement.** The positive learning climate that was created at Arcadia Elementary was enhanced through involvement of parents and community. In this school, efforts were made to increase parent involvement and community engagement. As part of the School Improvement Grant, a parent involvement liaison was hired and parent academies were conducted to increase the parental involvement. According to Faison (2014), a school must first empower parents with the necessary skills before involving them in efforts to improve the school (p. 11). Creating a supportive learning environment extends to the students’ home life. As shown on Table 4-7, the April 2014 survey prior to receiving the SIG Grant, 76
percent of the staff scored parent and community engagement as their weakest area. In May of 2015, only 18.52 percent of the staff scored this as their greatest weaknesses. In the May 2015 SIG focus group survey teachers stated family and community as a strength to meet the needs of the students. Teachers indicated that family and community is a factor that is necessary towards meeting the needs of the students. Teachers highlighted family and community as their greatest attribute.

Relationships between families and the school provided an opportunity for extending the school day as well as creation of a support system. Studies from the Harvard Family Research Project indicated that, “family involvement helps children get ready to enter school, promotes their school success, and prepares youth for college” (2006, p. 1). If families understand the importance of education, then they make education a priority in the family (Leithwoodet al., 2004, p. 48).

**Safe and supportive environment.** Students were asked five questions on the 5Essentials survey on how they felt regarding safety both in and around the school and while travelling to and from home. This particular measure scored as weak and below the benchmark on the two questions that pertained to security around the school and traveling between home and school. The three questions that related to safety inside the school scored above the benchmark standard. Students must feel safe and supportive in their learning environment in order to trust their peers and their teachers (Burdick-Will, 2013, p. 2).

The same concept applies to the staff. Teacher 5 stated during the spring 2015 focus groups that “understanding of the demands on the teachers and students and doing their best make teachers feel appreciated”. Appreciation does not have to come
in the form of tangible awards. A study conducted by White (2014) focused on effective employee recognition that is not personalized, generic, or completed as a public show in which some people do not thrive on. Employees want to feel valued, appreciated, and respected. When teachers are unhappy in their jobs they tend to take more sick and personal time leave. Gallup Daily tracking survey conducted between January 3, 2013 and September 30, 2014 surveyed teachers regarding absences and engagement. The findings indicated that only 30 percent of U.S. teachers are engaged in their work and teachers that are not engaged in their work have twice as many absences compared to engaged teachers (Hasting & Agrawal, 2015, para. 1). Improving the retention of staff was one of the areas focused by Arcadia Elementary in order to keep and enhance its professional development efforts. Data collected from the focus groups prior to receiving the SIG grant revealed the teachers’ turnover was approximately 20 teachers (33 percent) each year. However, during the 2014-2015 school year and the 2015-2016 staff turnover was only one teacher each year.

According to Villavicencio and Grayman (2012), supporting teachers includes creating positive work conditions, developing relationships, establishing trust, providing the necessary tools and training to complete their job (p.19). Teacher 7 stated what she wants in a leader who supports her as a teacher, “a principal who is honest and truly cares about their staff respecting people for who they are and their quality of work, not their personal feelings”. Responding to the same question teacher 3 stated that the principal should be “fair, driven, and willing to listen to teachers and staff members’ concerns”.
The findings revealed that the principal at Arcadia Elementary deliberately planned appreciating employees through individualized weekly recognitions, sharing in special memories such as birthdays with cards and business donated gift certificates, and just celebrating them in unique ways. During the focus groups, teachers highlighted to have received umbrellas on the first rainy day of the year while the leadership sang and danced, enjoying ice cream from the “Good Humor” girls after car duty one afternoon, and had a regular visit from their community partners who pass out coffee and treats to the teachers. Teacher 6 stated that “the dedication of the staff [shows their commitment] in which the students are aware of [the teachers] and [this] fosters their desire to be there”. The commitment to the school was because of the culture that had been built to support the teachers.

Implications for Practice

The findings from this case study suggest the principal is an essential part of the turnaround process that create a positive learning environment that is based upon the vision and the goals of the school for improved performance. The vision created should encompass both long term and short-term goals for students, staff and school in improving the performance. The principal may achieve this through setting high expectations for both students and teachers, empowering others to carry out that vision, and sharing responsibility. Positive learning culture and supportive environment is also achieved through encouraging collaboration among teachers, parents, students and other stakeholders. In addition, there should be a focus on retention of teachers in order to build on the capacity of the staff in the school. This may be achieved through taking more responsibility for professional development of staff. Coaches and external
vendors should be involved in training of the teachers. Teachers should be also given more time for collaboration with other educators within and outside their schools as part of professional development. The study indicated the quality of instruction may be improved through understanding the background of the students and increasing parental engagement. Florida students in grades four through six are required to have 900 hours of instruction each school year (Hull, 2011, para. 8) leaving an additional 7,860 hours outside the school day in which parents can extend learning opportunities and become an advocate for their child.

Research gained from the case study implies a well-rounded school managed by an instructional leader is beneficial to improving schools. Low-performing schools that seek to improve student achievement should create and communicate a vision based on high student and staff expectations. Instruction should be aligned to the rigor and intent of the standards with leaders monitoring the instructional content and quality. Finally, extending the educational opportunities beyond the classroom with parental and community engagement enhances continuation of learning beyond the school day.

Limitations

The primary limitation to this research was focus on only one school that increased its grade from an F to a C. Limited trend data from the 5Essentials survey and a change in school grading criteria created a secondary limitation with regard to the limited data set for this study. Another limitation was the monetary award of the School Improvement Grant. The grant created opportunities to fund additional personnel and programs, as well as professional development and performance awards that may not have been possible without the extra funding.
Ensuring common themes that were identified had sufficient and relevant strategies to support the theme, as a turnaround effort was another limitation. The 5Essentials survey does offer a parental component to the survey; however, sufficient responses were not collected and the data was not released. Creating a 360-degree evaluation on the school improvement efforts would have included in-depth data from all stakeholder groups including parents and community members.

**Recommendations for Further Research**

This single case study was conducted on one turnaround school that made improvements as measured by Florida’s School Grades. Future research on turnaround schools and the components that are in place may help to provide a deep understanding on the common themes. Continued research with similar studies and in-depth studies are recommendations for future studies and are listed below for consideration:

1. Studies on turnaround schools may include trend survey data using the 5Essentials. Illinois Public Schools administered the 5Essentials survey to all public schools to compare multiple schools with similar demographics and factors.

2. Further research on essential components for school success that examines multiple schools throughout the period of the School Improvement Grant and compare these results to other schools that are not receiving the grant.

3. Future research to determine if specific strategies that involve families and the community support student learning.
4. Similar research completed in a variety of school districts across the United States to allow results to be generalized for school improvement.

5. The instructional practices that schools that have successfully dropped the turnaround status use to increase and sustain student achievement.

The studies mentioned above may provide further information that could support schools with a variety of demographics, as well as leadership programs that develop principals as turnaround leaders.
Table 5-1. 5Essentials Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Arcadia Elementary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ambitious Instruction</td>
<td>Very Strong 87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Instruction</td>
<td>Very Strong 99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math Instruction</td>
<td>Very Strong 99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Press</td>
<td>Very Strong 92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of Student Discussion</td>
<td>Neutral 56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective Leaders</td>
<td>Strong 63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Coherence</td>
<td>Strong 75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher-Principal Trust</td>
<td>Neutral 50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Influence</td>
<td>Neutral 45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional Leadership</td>
<td>Strong 75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative Teachers</td>
<td>Neutral 49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collective Responsibility</td>
<td>Neutral 46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality Professional Development</td>
<td>Strong 71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Commitment</td>
<td>Weak 38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher-Teacher Trust</td>
<td>Neutral 40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involved Families</td>
<td>Neutral 50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher-Parent Trust</td>
<td>Weak 25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Involvement in School</td>
<td>Weak 35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Influence on Decision Making in Schools</td>
<td>Very Strong 89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive Environment</td>
<td>Strong 70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer Support for Academic Work</td>
<td>Low Response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Personalism</td>
<td>Very Strong 97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety</td>
<td>Weak 29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student-Teacher Trust</td>
<td>Very Strong 85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

UChicago Impact: 5Essentials Reports (2015)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number of Students Enrolled in October 2013</th>
<th>Number of Students Enrolled in October 2012</th>
<th>Number of Students Enrolled in October 2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or African America</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic/Latino</td>
<td>274</td>
<td>292</td>
<td>292</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian or Alaska Native</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two or More Races</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disabled</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economically Disadvantaged</td>
<td>344</td>
<td>365</td>
<td>353</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELL</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>268</td>
<td>231</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>353</td>
<td>360</td>
<td>363</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>373</td>
<td>403</td>
<td>383</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: An asterisk (*) indicates a subgroup population with less than ten. A blank cell indicates no students in the subgroup.
Florida Department of Education: SPAR Reports (2014)
Table 5-3. Comparative School Grade Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School Grade</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Grade Points</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>454</td>
<td>385</td>
<td>427</td>
<td>415</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science Proficiency</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading Proficiency</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Making Reading Gains</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math Proficiency</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Making Math Gains</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Florida Department of Education: School Grade Reports (2015)
*New standards and assessments were implemented during the 2014-2015 school year.
May 21, 2015

TO: Jodi Cronin  
567 98th Avenue N.  
Naples, FL 34108

FROM: Ira S. Fischler, PhD; Chair  
University of Florida  
Institutional Review Board 02

SUBJECT: Exemption of Protocol #2015-U-0655  
5C-Change Turnaround Strategy Implementation

SPONSOR: None

Your protocol submission has been reviewed by the Board. The Board has determined that your protocol is exempt based on the category listed below:

45 CFR 46.101(b)(4) Research involving the collection or study of existing data, documents, records, pathological specimens, or diagnostic specimens, if these sources are publicly available or if the information is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that subjects cannot be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects.

Should the nature of your study change or if you need to revise this protocol in any manner, please contact this office before implementing the changes.
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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Jodi Cronin was born in Michigan, but moved to Florida prior to her first birthday. She attended Estero High School in Southwest Florida, before attending the University of Central Florida, to pursue a Bachelor of Science degree in elementary education. Jodi received her master’s degree in curriculum and instruction from Florida Gulf Coast University in 2009. Jodi has nine years teaching experience and four years experience as a technology specialist and data trainer. Jodi is currently a Coordinator of School Improvement in Collier County Public Schools in Naples, Florida in which she supports fragile schools that have been identified as low performing by Florida accountability school grades. In addition, Jodi supports the district Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) and Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) programs, summer school programs, and district accreditation.

Jodi is grateful to have a supportive family that encouraged her throughout her doctoral coursework and dissertation.