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Making Meaning of a Whole School Transformation Model: A Policy Ethnography of a Schools of Hope Legislation Implementation

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Making Meaning of a Whole School Transformation Model:
A Policy Ethnography of a Schools of Hope Legislation Implementation

by

Adam Charles Rea

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in
Educational Leadership
Department of Educational Leadership, Counseling, Adult, Career, and Higher Education
College of Education
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DEDICATION

To God our Creator I very humbly pray: Give me the wisdom to see what is right and the strength to do it.

To my mother: Words cannot express how much I appreciate the love you have always shown me. You dedicated your life to my sister and me. You made amazing snicker doodles and could sling a football in your day. Thank you for all the help with all the papers over the years.

To my two sisters: I love you very much. I wish nothing but health and happiness for you and your families.

To my father, a man who always made me feel loved without ever saying the words: You were the son of an orphan who grew up very poor in rural Western Michigan, the oldest of six. You served your country and traveled the globe before settling back home to raise a family. There was never any doubt about who I would call when I won the geography bee in seventh grade. Thank you for all that you have done for me. I strive every day to make you proud. This dissertation is for you.
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ABSTRACT

Cheryl High School (CHS) is a geographically large county in Florida that received funding through the state of Florida's "Schools of Hope" grant. The grant’s parameters called on Carter County Schools (CCS) to partner with an external consultant and a research university to help improve teacher and school administrative capacity. The district chose Scientific Pedagogy Services (SPS) and to continue their existing relationship with Tampa Bay State University (TBS). The consultant’s mission was to improve school performance through a unique form of professional development. TBS was charged with developing an on-site program that funded staff efforts to obtain advanced degrees in education. This year-long policy ethnographic study utilized 14 months of observations and teacher interviews along with an analysis of pertinent documents. By utilizing the single case of Cheryl High and ethnographically studying the grant implementation efforts, this study sought to answer questions about how the Schools of Hope grant was enacted and how the staff made meaning of the process. The study’s findings indicate that many stakeholders believed the implementation effort had several positive effects, but that most also believed the timeline was too rapid and limited its capacity for success. CCS, TBS, and CHS believed in the need for quality leadership, but inexperience and personnel struggles affected the project’s capacity to turnaround CHS. The grant’s authors employed varied incentives for improving pedagogical
skill and staff retention, but many found the enticements to be insufficiently communicated and insubstantial.
CHAPTER ONE

In this chapter I introduce the historical context for this study’s creation and provide background on the Schools of Hope program in Florida. I detail Carter County's concerns with Cheryl High School's academic performance and their turnaround vision. I detail the study's two research questions and provide information about important terminology, before concluding with information about my personal background as related to this work.

INTRODUCTION

“Did you hear? We’re a “C”!!” came the shout from teachers in the library on a summer afternoon in 2018. The elation among the educators in the room was palpable. The cheer came from a cohort of master’s students who were Cheryl High School (CHS) staff members, a secondary school located in the northwestern quadrant of Carter County, Florida. According to state law, an overall scholastic score of less than a “C” could have resulted in significant consequences, up to and including school closure. School year 2017-2018 needed to earn a “C” grade or higher, as the previous years had been “Ds.”

The crisis had temporarily abated in Summer 2018, but the concerns over professionally developing the staff’s capacity remained, as Carter County Schools (CCS) leadership remained committed to improving the school’s standardized test scores. CCS believed that a turnaround intervention funded by a “Schools of Hope” grant could improve
the several recent years of poor student outcomes. Staff capacity improvements were key to their goal, a CCS belief that has a long-standing tradition in American public schools.

**Historical Context**

The value placed by CHS and CCS on professional development is common across both American and international education (Spring, 2014). Many educational theorists have considered ways to improve educator practice, believing that teacher quality to be a prime indicator of potential student success. Those educators’ foci have changed over generations, but the goal to continually the staff performance has remained in the educational community’s collective mind. “As consensus among researchers indicates, the quality of teaching [that] students experience is highly correlated with their academic success” (Wei, Darling-Hammond, & Adamson, 2010, p. ii).

Significant challenges exist in the effort to improve American schools (Mellom, Straubhaar, Balderas, Ariail, & Portes, 2018). Academic literature documenting school improvement struggles has been widespread during the past several years (Earley & Porritt, 2014; Harper & de Jong, 2009; Schueler, 2019; Tanner, 2013), despite recent government policy interventions that changed the educational system in significant ways (Heissel & Ladd, 2016). Major federal government improvement efforts like No Child Left Behind (2001) and Race to The Top (2009) have altered American schools, but the belief that many teachers are unprepared to serve their students remains. Harper and de Jong (2009), for example, found that rather than improving the practice of teachers that serve Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CLD) students, “NCLB has accelerated the dissolution of... teacher expertise in Florida” (p. 144).
The importance of staff quality on student achievement is well documented, but the quality of various policies and ideas remain in debate (Murphy & Bleiberg, 2019; Strieker, Logan & Kuhel, 2012; Wei et al., 2010). State governments have been committed to turning around failing schools and have targeted capacity building as a method for doing so (Meyers & Smylie, 2017; Murphy & Bleiberg, 2019). Florida’s 2017 “Schools of Hope” initiative demonstrated the state government’s commitment to “turning around” failing schools ($140 million), and CCS’s successful application indicated that the state believed in the school’s improvement plan.

Local Context

Carter county is geographically large and located in Florida. The two largest county employers are a grocery store chain and the school system, which employs around 13,000 people (Central Florida Development Council, 2018). Carter County has a mixed history of segregated schools and recent demographic changes and has experienced some struggles in meeting the state’s academic requirements.

Carter County School District has a diverse student population with a current student population of 102,500. The District’s racial and ethnic student body reflects 41.7 percent white, 20.4 percent black, 32.8 percent Hispanic, 1.6 percent Asian, 0.4 percent Indian, 0.1 percent Pacific Islanders and 3 percent two or more races. There are more than 10,000 students whose primary language is other than English. (Carter County Public Schools, 2017, p. 4)

CCS has fewer Hispanic students than some neighboring districts, but that population has been growing. The district has had some recent educational successes but also some setbacks. Those setbacks include struggles with student achievement data, including at CHS.
Schools of Hope in Florida

House Bill 7069 contained a commitment to create a $140 million “Schools of Hope” program as part of a larger bill. State legislators believed that it represented a solution for failing public schools, but the program was originally designed to provide incentives for specialized charter school operators to work in low-income areas, whose neighborhood schools had been struggling. A draft update included an opportunity for traditional public schools to receive state aid for spending on improving academic performance (Gurney & Clark, 2017). Districts that received Schools of Hope funding had some leeway in determining how to enact “improvement,” but had to offer specific plans in their grant applications. Some schools were shut down and replaced with charter schools, while others contracted with consulting agencies, like Scientific Pedagogy Services (SPS). These agencies have occasionally taken over school management in certain turnaround situations (Ziebarth, 2017), but CCS opted for a different approach. Instead of shutting CHS down or assigning management to a third-party, CCS decided to apply “Schools of Hope” funding to partner with an external consultant and a four-year research university simultaneously. Their goal was to achieve both short-term score gains and to build long-term staff capacity.

Schools of Hope in Carter

CCS’s successful application garnered $4.4 million dollars on behalf of CHS. CCS utilized some of that funding to build their staff’s capacity through a partnership with Tampa Bay State University (TBS). “Through TBS’s involvement, educators at CHS will build capacity for sustaining improvement and innovation as the grant provides reimbursements for tuition and fees for CHS staff to pursue advanced degrees and graduate certificates in education at TBS” (TBS, 2018). CHS was one of just 20 state schools selected to receive
Schools of Hope funding and applied nearly $500,000 dollars to tuition reimbursement for advanced degrees in education. Just under 30 CHS staff members utilized the opportunity at first, 20 specializing in Educational Leadership. CCS’s grant application outlined the overall parameters, outlining three central aspects: the development of the cohort of master’s students; the partnership with SPS; and the addition of wraparound service personnel, including a social worker and college career readiness counselor. The wraparound services focused on funding for personnel additions but also included parameters about long-term culture changes at CHS.

**Applying for the Grant**

The district began the grant application process by conducting a needs test. They used quantitative and qualitative data including classroom observations and surveys, sent to teachers, students and the community. The final grant proposal was sent to the Florida Department of Education on behalf of CHS in December 2017. The district found that:

- student performance on the FSA [Florida Standards Assessment] was again low as evidenced by being on the DA list for 2017. While both [sic] Geometry and Algebra percent proficiency went up from 2016 to 2017 scores, the highest percent proficient (Geometry) was still just 24. Biology percent proficient on the other hand went down from 2016 to 2017 by six percentage points to 42%. The 9th grade FSA percent proficient went down by 4 points to 31% and 10th grade went up by only one point to 31%. Looking at subgroup data presented in the top two needs assessment it is clear that there is tremendous achievement gap for both ELL and SWD students that must be addressed in both ELA and math. The data indicates a need for professional development to provide insight to the standards and rigorous instruction and to revisit
MTSS to ensure the process is followed with fidelity and integrity. (Carter County Schools, 2017, p 2)

The grant application’s first item contained the needs test’s results. Consistent with literature that details turnaround schools as lacking high levels of family engagement, the parental response rate was low (Murphy & Bleiberg, 2019). Although 2152 students were enrolled during the needs-test survey, only 177 parents responded. All but two of the 122 teachers and 1121 students also completed the questionnaire (Carter County Schools, 2017). Qualitative data included classroom observations and walkthroughs. The observations:

Revealed [the existence of] teacher-centered approaches to learning that lack academically demanding activities and authentic engagement; most lessons lack higher order thinking activities/discussions. Therefore, students lack exposure to content that allows them to build knowledge and skill at the higher levels of rigor. (Carter County Schools, 2017, p. 2)

CCS also used quantitative data on their grant application, drawn largely from state-based standardized tests.

Student Performance on the [Florida Standards Assessment] FSA shows recurring low performance as evidenced by being on the DA List for 2017… there is tremendous achievement gap for both ELL and SWD students that must be addressed in both ELA and Math. The data indicates a need for professional development... to ensure [the entire] process is followed with fidelity and integrity. (Carter County Schools, 2017, p. 2)

The district believed that the widespread use of lower-order thinking and recall-based questioning was having a negative effect on the school's results. Students, CCS argued,
needed greater exposure rigorous material that connected to state standards. The staff, while efficacious in their work, had not demonstrated the ability to successfully do so.

School policy made it possible for teachers to plan collaboratively, but the data generated from the needs test indicated that this effort was not producing desired results.

Observations of classroom instruction do not always include higher order thinking activities/discussions. The school's master schedule is developed with collaborative planning in mind. Each subject area department has a common planning period. For example, all science teachers have 1st period planning, all social studies teachers have 2nd period planning, and so forth... The plan is to incorporate higher level thinking skills within the collaborative planning times... [teachers] are [currently] using strategies that are not fully aligned to the cognitive taxonomy of the standards. (Carter County Schools, 2017, p. 3)

CCS asserted that a greater commitment to collaborative planning, student-centered learning, and continuous professional development focused on teacher-preparedness would serve as solutions.

To this end, CCS employed a variety of leadership personnel to draft the grant application.

A large group of staff representative of areas across the school district and the school participated in the formulation of this plan: Superintendent of Schools, Associate Superintendent and Chief Academic Officer, Associate Superintendent for Human Resources, Turnaround Lead and Regional Assistant Superintendent, Executive Principal for School Improvement, Senior Director of Federal Programs, Senior Director of Curriculum, Director of Grants Management, Principal and leadership team of the school. (Carter County Schools, 2017, p. 4)
I learned through observation and conversation that the Senior Director of Federal Programs was the primary grant writer. Similar to descriptions of turnaround processes in recent literature, little drafting input was sought from the teachers charged with implementing the program, nor from the students whose future academic success would indicate the grant’s effectiveness (Murphy & Bleiberg, 2019).

CCS leadership believed that CHS’s scholastic performance could improve by concentrating on six areas of professional development. The Schools of Hope grant application detailed how they planned to do so. Those six areas called on the school to:

- provide wrap-around services that develop family and community partnerships…
- increase parental involvement and engagement in the child’s education… establish clearly defined and measurable high academic and character standards… identify a knowledge-rich curriculum that the school will use to focus on developing a student’s background knowledge… provide professional development that focuses on academic rigor, direct instruction, and creating high academic standards and character standards…[and finally] identify, recruit, retain, and reward instructional personnel.

(Carter County Schools, 2017, p. 5)

These six goals formed the backbone of the grant application. To achieve these goals, CCS decided to partner with Scientific Pedagogy Services (SPS), a consulting company committed to Marzano-based instruction. “It is our intention to not just improve Cheryl High, but for the school to become an exemplar of rigorous teaching, learning, and instructional leadership for the entire district. For this reason, we have asked SPS to be our partner in developing Cheryl…” (Carter County Schools, 2017, p. 18). CCS believed that SPS would be able to help implement strategies that would “identify critical standards, create standards-aligned
performance tasks, and connect them to lessons” (Carter County Schools, 2017, p. 8). The district listed several strategies that augmented the grant’s funding. All dealt with attendance and discipline issues and the final two outlined alternative academic options that leadership believed could better serve their students.

However, CCS leadership believed that more was necessary to achieve the whole-school transformation outlined in the Schools of Hope grant. They decided to work with Tampa Bay State University (TBS) to help obtain and retain quality staff and build future leadership capacity. CCS utilized the grant’s financing to offer advanced degrees to a group of CHS to improve staff capacity. This program was made free for staff members through tuition reimbursement. TBS and SPS later agreed to work in partnership to create a holistic whole-school transformation approach.

TBS project staff will work with instructors to incorporate course content addressing turn around instruction and leadership in the Cheryl secondary school setting. While there are some foundational concepts and skills associated with all courses collaborative efforts will be made to enhance program curricula to reflect efforts to work with students that are often 2-3 years behind in content areas; in addition, with [an] enrollment of at least 15 students, classes will be delivered at Cheryl High School and enhanced to focus on leadership competencies and cases around turnaround leadership and instruction. Courses will integrate best practices and current research on turnaround schools. To the extent practicable, coursework will also additionally integrate SPS initiatives. The TBS project staff will work with SPS to create action research and practical experiences that are supported by advanced graduate students.

(School Board of Carter County & Tampa Bay State University, 2018, p. 6)
The grant application called on CCS to “Explain the strategies the school will implement to provide professional development that focuses on academic rigor, direct instruction, and creating high academic standards and character standards” (Carter County Schools, 2017, p. 11). District leadership therefore identified a “partner organization, Scientific Pedagogy Services (SPS) [to]… work with Cheryl… to provide supports.” (Carter County Schools, 2017, p. 11). To do so required substantial funding, outlined below in figures 1 and 2.

Figure 1. Grant Funding Breakdown Part 1
Figure 2. Grant Funding Breakdown Part 2

The grant’s language forced CCS leadership, SPS and TBS to plan and implement their program using the allocated funding in just 14 months. CCS leadership paid careful attention to state laws about turnaround funding and coordinated with the university's desire to develop a cohort model for the master's classes. “The College of Education at Tampa Bay State
University will offer support and commitment to facilitate the offering of master's degrees for three cohorts of Carter County teachers as part of the TOP3 initiative. Teachers will be provided with tuition reimbursement and textbooks as part of this participation” (Carter County Schools, 2017, p. 13). CCS was not allowed to pay TBS directly, so instead reimbursed the master’s cohorts for their books and tuition payments. Specific language informed the state how various other funds were to be spent.

TOP3 funds are to be used to support the on-site customized professional learning provided by SPS, subs as needed for teachers to participate during the school year and stipends for teachers to participate during the summer. Additionally, TOP3 funds will be used to provide tuition reimbursement for teachers to obtain a Master's Degree as part of collaboration with local university. (Carter County Schools, 2017, p. 16) TBS called on Dr. Wilhelm Schwarz, a leader in the College of Education, to serve as their primary representative. Dr. Schwarz first met with CCS and SPS staff on February 14, 2018, to discuss the grant implementation’s parameters. His meetings with district leadership, university program coordinators and SPS staff continued throughout February. There he learned about CCS’s vision for turnaround CHS.

**Carter County’s Vision for Turnaround**

Under the district leadership’s direction and new temporary “mentor” principal Ernie Jose, CHS worked with SPS’s “Standards tracker” program to develop a “Schools for Rigor” model. Mr. Jose was joined by a new principal who spent school year 2017-2018 as a “shadow.” Mr. Jose then returned to retirement and the new principal was subsequently charged with CHS’s turnaround program, in conjunction with TBS and SPS, in his first full year as a school’s leader.
CHS’s leadership team planned to connect teacher practice to the rigors of Florida educational standards by learning and applying pedagogical strategies from SPS. The contract with SPS enabled the “purchase [of the] standards tracker license, arrange professional learning/training, provide planning/coaching/monitoring… for teachers… [and empower] department chairs to serve as liaisons with administration… as necessary” (Florida Department of Education, 2017, p. 11). Teachers were to be required to submit their lesson plans via a digital forum at “least one week in advance,” while incorporating “incremental checks for implementation of SPS framework” (Florida Department of Education, 2017, p. 11). CCS expected all staff members to employ SPS’s strategies during the grant implementation process and beyond.

SPS designed a framework to both develop teachers and monitor their progress. CCS’s “turnaround” plan expressed confidence that “SPS’s professional development series will ensure that every teacher can quickly learn and use effective strategies that have… [a] positive effect on student learning” (Florida Department of Education, 2017, p. 12). SPS’s program, according to Cheryl High’s “turnaround” program, endeavored to “establish a common language for teaching and learning; and… [allow teachers] to acquire strategies that will be immediately and effectively implemented in classrooms” (Florida Department of Education, 2017, p. 13). This, they believed, would lead to improved teaching practice and student outcomes.

CCS leadership argued that contextually guided actions were necessary to develop staff capacity. District leadership charged CHS administration with developing and sharing information about collective values and educator fidelity to state standards, something they believed had been lacking. For example, the school was expected to have a “vision day”
where staff was to be exposed to “clear vision of what rigor is” while receiving a “first glimpse into the instructional shifts required by the standards” (Florida Department of Education, 2017, p. 14). This “rigor” would directly connect the staff to SPS’s vision of quality instruction.

CCS and SPS expected CHS’s staff to encourage student learning “ownership” through specific targets and success criteria.

SPS’s centered their professional development efforts centered on making teaching more “student-centered.” To help promulgate SPS’s vision, CHS planned to use specific resources to train departmental “coaches” as mentors and provide opportunities for external learning. These various initiatives would help reform Cheryl High’s culture, which relates to other turnaround efforts connected to improving student achievement (Meyers & Hambrick Hitt, 2017). CCS leadership believed that these initiatives would improve student engagement while connecting the county’s educators to the community.

A literature review has revealed no studies about similar PD or turnaround initiatives. Therefore, SPS’s work with TBS at CHS presented a unique opportunity to study how a novel turnaround program was implemented, giving rise to this study’s research questions.

Research Questions

I asked the following research questions about the grant implementation effort at CHS:

1. How was the “School of Hope” grant implemented at Cheryl High?
2. What did the grant participants perceive to be the impact of the Schools of Hope grant?

I believe that I obtained a robust and thorough understanding of these questions by conducting a policy ethnography of a single case study, Cheryl High, through qualitative data collection methods. I studied ways in which the grant’s parameters were enacted on site, analyzed
related documents and interviewed 12 staff members that pursued their master’s degrees through TBS. See Table 1 for the congruence between the research questions and data collection methods.

**Table 1.** Research Guide

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RESEARCH QUESTIONS</th>
<th>RESEARCH METHODS/DATA COLLECTION</th>
<th>TIME FRAME</th>
<th>RESEARCH GUIDES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How was the “School of Hope” grant implemented at Cheryl High?</td>
<td>Ethnographic observations with notetaking triangulated with document analysis and semi structured interview data.</td>
<td>Ethnographic observations and notetaking from June 2018 through July 2019.</td>
<td>Emerson, Fretz &amp; Shaw (2011), Delamont (2016) and Hatch (2002) form the foundational guide for drafting, organizing and utilizing an ethnographic field-journal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do the grant participants perceive to be the impact of the Schools of Hope grant?</td>
<td>Interview data, triangulated with ethnographic observation.</td>
<td>Interviews from early-mid June to early-mid July 2019.</td>
<td>Charmaz (2002) and Kvale (1996) help provide focus for creating interview questions and conducting the 12 initial and follow-up semi-structured interviews.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Answering these questions provided insight into a unique turnaround initiative. Turnarounds, or “turnaround schools” are common interventions by states or school districts that typically involve significant professional development and substantial funding (Mette & Scribner, 2014). They usually are efforts to achieve student gains on standardized assessments in short timeframes and occur throughout the country, but this type of turnaround model had not previously been employed. Therefore, an ethnographic study of this single case had the potential to add insight to the literature. The program lasted 14 months and answering the research questions generated large quantities of qualitative data related to both PD and turnaround schools, so understanding important terms is vital for the reader.
Definition of Terms

*Action Research/Inquiry-based PD* - Action research or inquiry-based PD involves a direct connection to a teacher's daily practice. “Simply stated, action research can be defined as systematic, intentional study by teachers of their own classroom practice” (Krell & Dana, 2012, p. 828). Action research typically involves a “cyclical process” of asking critical questions, gathering information related to those questions, analyzing the findings and then making appropriate changes whenever possible.

*Coaching Cycle* - Coaching cycles are forms of PD that involve a step-by-step process aimed at improving professional practice. A variety of different models exist, but typically a coaching cycle involves some type of initial planning session, implementation and observation, and then a post-conference designed to analyze the content that has been delivered and look for areas of improvement. The cycle then continues based on the needs of the staff and the students (Veenman & Denessen, 2001).

*Cohorts* - Cohorts are groups of students that progress through plans of study at exactly or nearly the same pace. They typically take classes and do projects at the same time and usually have significant quantities of collaborative learning. Cohort models have been shown to increase camaraderie amongst students, improve the effectiveness of group activities and ownership of learning (Greenlee & Karanxha, 2010; Swayze & Jakeman, 2014).

*FELE* - The Florida Educational Leadership Exam is a mandatory examination developed by the Florida Department of Education for all would-be assistant principals.

The purpose of the Florida Teacher Certification Examinations (FTCE) is to ensure that all teacher candidates demonstrate the necessary content and pedagogical knowledge necessary to instruct students in Florida. The purpose of the Florida Educational
Leadership Examination (FELE) is to ensure that all school administrator candidates demonstrate the knowledge and skills necessary to effectively lead in Florida’s schools. (Pearson Education Inc., n.d)

Successful passage of the FELE is a mandatory part of the Master’s in Educational Leadership degree sought by 20 members of the Cheryl High School cohort.

Job-Embedded PD - Unlike “traditional” PD, job-embedded PD “occurs in the context of the job setting and is related to what people learn and share about their experiences, reflecting on specific work incidents to uncover new or understandings or changes in beliefs or practices” (Zepeda, 2015, p. 3). PD of this nature is designed to coincide with daily practice, rather than through meetings outside of the classroom.

Policy Ethnography - Policy ethnographies study the real-world applications of and results from policy implementations. (Beach, Bagley, & da Silva, 2018). Researchers have found that “fieldwork… shows that ethnography, and more specifically direct observation, is particularly suited to uncovering the structural features of the new wave of public policies sweeping through advanced societies” (Dubois, 2009, p. 1). Policy ethnographies detail the experiences of the people navigating the pursuit of new government or business initiatives and directives. They provide a unique insight into how the grant stakeholders manage their successes and struggles.

Schools of Hope - $140 million dollars of an education bill signed into law in May of 2017, the “School of Hope” initiative provides competitive grant money for districts to “turnaround” failing schools. Acceptance of that money commits the district and its schools to a variety of parameters and an expectation of significant short-term improvement. Carter County Schools
applied for and received $4.3 million over two years for Cheryl High, including $1.3 million spent on SPS professional development and $457,500 paid for TBS tuition reimbursement. 

*Traditional Professional Development (PD)* - “Traditional” PD has typically involved department-wide or school-wide sessions designed to imbue some new skill or strategy. Even though there is a great variety, it typically involves some form of “master” teacher or instructor who will train the teachers outside of the classroom in a variety of classroom management or instructional delivery models. As is most often the case, teachers are expected to learn lessons in these sessions and then apply those new skills to their classrooms at a later date. Follow-up training sessions vary but are usually minimal.

**SPS** - Scientific Pedagogy Services is a private company based in southeastern Florida. Their mission is to help schools improve scores on standardized metrics and their methods are philosophically based on Marzano’s (2007) concepts about quality teaching. A significant aspect of SPS’s philosophy centers on creating professional teams, where teams of teachers work together to improve their practice. Their emphasis “extends” to the classroom, as they encourage teachers to organize their students into teams. These teams of students are gradually expected to take command of their own learning and ownership of the educational process (SPS, 2018).

**Turnaround Schools** - A “turnaround” school has, in theory, experienced several years of “poor” school grades and is need of “dramatic changes that produce significant achievement gains in a short period (often within two years), followed by a longer period of sustained improvement” (Calkins, Guenther, Belfiore & Lash, 2007, p. 4). Typically, these schools have accepted some form of additional funding from state agencies or private foundations (i.e. the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation) to rapidly change their measured performance. These
funding sources related to Obama administration’s 2009 signature Race to the Top (RTT) program, whose goals calls for “turning around our lowest-achieving schools” (Spring, 2014, p. 445), among other things.

RTT was a significant government investment into turning around struggling schools (Spring, 2014), and the Schools of Hope grant created by Florida was similarly motivated. CCS connection with TBS through the grant provided me the unique opportunity serve as a TBS representative during the turnaround process. I came to CHS through a mix of good fortune and circumstance. Without the help of Dr. Wilhelm Schwartz and the wonderful people at CHS, I would have never been able to conduct this study.

**Personal Background**

I had been connected to Tampa Bay State in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies working closely with Dr. Wilhelm Schwartz for several months in 2018. There I was involved with several projects, most notably developing an initiative to work with English Language Learners (ELLs). Dr. Schwartz has a passion for working with English Language Learners, as do I. After several months of work and earning a graduate certificate in ESOL, I met with Dr. Schwartz to discuss our future project related to ELL student services.

Dr. Schwartz informed me that had recently become involved with a joint project between CCS and TBS, working in conjunction with the Florida’s Department of Education to “turnaround” CHS. We learned that CHS had recently experienced some unsatisfactory outcomes and county leadership had determined to remedy the situation. Unlike other turnaround initiatives (Disare, 2017), the leaders of CCS, decided to make a significant investment in their staff rather than opt for wholesale replacement or a third-party takeover, in conjunction with the state (Meyers & Darwin, 2017; Meyers & Smylie, 2017; Schueler, 2019).
TBS’s work centered around helping CHS staff build long-term capacity through obtaining master’s degrees in subjects like Educational Leadership. Dr. Schwartz suggested that I join his work at CHS as a type of “Graduate Student Assistant,” helping the school’s staff navigate master’s degree difficulties. Twenty members of Cheryl’s staff decided to pursue their master’s degrees with the county’s support (19 of whom saw the project through to completion). They came from diverse backgrounds and departments and many had never met each other, despite years of common employment, and I had the good fortune of building relationships with the staff during my 14 months on campus. Through conversation and observation, I learned about the staff’s struggles and motivations and future aspirations. Some were very excited to work with TBS and felt pride that Cheryl High had received the Schools of Hope investment. Some felt overwhelmed by the challenges associated with balancing the pursuit of higher education, the pressure to perform in the classroom and the rigors of navigating school in turnaround status. Some expressed their frustration with resource allocation and believed that high stakes testing pressure dominated the entire education system. Others were afraid for Cheryl High’s future, especially once the external influences and support had ended and they were to be charged with their own affairs once again.

I watched them meet, often for the first time, other similarly motivated staff members and work their way through the time management issues that plague most graduate students. I helped them develop plans for their futures in school leadership. Many were committed to Carter County, while others envisioned their futures elsewhere. As the Schools of Hope grant represents a large-scale financial investment and the staff’s experiences were as unique as the PD initiative itself, documenting their perceptions of this effort represents important research for future initiatives in schools.
Overview

In this chapter I have outlined the study's background, offered a historical look at public schools generally and professional development specifically, both in Florida and nationally, and have detailed many issues involved in “turnaround school” initiatives. I discussed the State of Florida’s “Schools of Hope” grant, the connection to Carter County, and the implementation strategy. I detailed the research questions that drove the study and offered relevant terminology definitions. Chapter Two includes a literature review about the history of professional development and turnaround initiatives in the United States and in Florida, and current trends in both.
CHAPTER TWO

In this chapter I discuss professional development (PD) and turnaround literature. PD refers to organized efforts to improve teaching practice and is commonplace across the educational system. Turnaround initiatives often involve significant amounts of professional development but refer more specifically to efforts to improve struggling schools, usually in a rapid timeline. The two concepts are, therefore, intertwined and often connect to related policy initiatives.

Literature Review

The literature review generally utilized academic works published in 2009 or later but made exceptions for methodological texts. Reference pages from pertinent articles helped generate additional secondary sources. I made no effort to cite every article related to PD in keeping efforts connected to the research questions.

Results

PD literature varies from broad-based “generic” to content or pupil-specific inquiry. A review of national, state, and local trends and challenges about PD relate to the academic struggles mentioned by Carter County Schools (CCS) in the “Schools of Hope” grant application. CCS's concerns about staff capacity and student achievement relate to educational concerns that have existed for many years. Before I investigated the “Schools of Hope” grant implementation, I endeavored to understand educational world that led to the grant’s creation.
National History of PD in Schools

Educator PD programs have a long history in what is today the United States of America. The reasons for establishing public schools varied by geography and context, but “public education” typically featured an effort to generationally transfer Anglo-American culture. “One reason for the 19th century development of public schools was to ensure the dominance of Anglo-American values that were being challenged by Irish immigration, Native Americans, and African Americans. Public schools became defenders of Anglo-American values with each new wave of immigrants” (Spring, 2014, p. 6).

**PD as Cultural Transference**

A child’s role and society’s responsibility for “developing” the child had their roots in British and European philosophy. “[John] Locke’s concept of childhood greatly influenced the development of public schools in the 19th and 20th centuries. The concept of the child as a blank slate allowed educational leaders to believe they could create good society through the proper molding of children” (Spring, 2014, p. 42). The overarching “Anglo-American” and European philosophical traditions found champions in individuals who helped create both American public schools and the initial aspects of teacher professional development.

Horace Mann was one such architect of modern American schools, beginning his work in the 1830s (Forster & Thompson, 2011, p. xi). Mann knew that schools did not function without educators and creating the workforce was a primary importance. Historians typically call these initial forays into public education “common schools.” The common school was expected to imbue a republican moral fabric and “professionally trained” teachers were the way to do so. “Consequently… a major goal of teacher training was to link methods of instruction, classroom management, and the character of teachers to the development of
students’ moral character” (Spring, 2014, p. 144). Teacher development programs focused largely on young women’s moral character and behavior due a variety of cultural factors in the early years. Teaching itself remained, in many ways, a relatively “low-prestige” occupation throughout the 19th century, but efforts to train and develop a quality workforce did exist.

The first American “teacher training” programs arose in the 1820s, though some debate about the originators remains. “Traditional histories of education identify the Reverend Samuel Hall’s private school, established in 1823 in Concord, Vermont… however, a good argument can be made that the first teacher training institution in the United States was the Troy Female Seminary, officially opened by Emma Willard in 1821” (Spring, 2014, p. 141). The exact origins aside, the common school’s importance grew before the Civil War. The war would have a profound impact on American society overall and on public education, largely through plantation slavery’s destruction. Slavery’s demise would have additional effects on organized efforts to develop educators.

**PD for a Post-Slavery World**

Following the legal end of American plantation slavery in 1865, academic leaders endeavored to train teachers to educate the newly freed black population. Programs like the “Freedmen’s Bureau” tried to create a workforce that would help former slaves participate in society and the desire to train teachers spread throughout the country (Fultz, 2008, p. 82). In 1868, the Hampton Institute developed “the industrial model of teacher training” (Spring, 2014, p. 119). Many states, including those in the southeast, worked with the politically dominant “radical Republicans” to “formalize state control over schooling” (Borman & Dorn, 2007, 21). Governmental efforts to influence schools coincided with America’s post-war
economy which was expanding rapidly due to a combination of immigration, urbanization and technological innovation.

The industrializing post-war economy helped install a new emphasis for teacher development programs: industrial labor. The changing economy influenced educational priorities and while the newly liberated African Americans were not ignored by educational leaders, even the most reform-minded educators believed that classical studies developed only vanity in black students and should not be part of the teacher training curriculum for black students. Therefore, rather than studying the traditional liberal arts, Hampton male students worked in a sawmill, on the school farm, as dishwashers and busboys in the kitchen… (Spring, 2014, p. 188)

Educational planners knew that educating the former slaves would require a professionalized and capable workforce. However, federal commitments to common schools declined after the Republicans lost power, especially in the election of 1874. Spring (2014) found that “government financial support (for schools) declined rapidly after the 1870s” (p. 190). The end of the 19th century found federal government less interested in public education. Influence over public education gradually returned to state and local control. Local control over education has remained throughout the United States well into the 20th century.

**PD for the Progressive Age**

Federal public-school involvement increased during the “Progressive Era.” “The Smith-Hughes Act of 1917… required hiring home economics instructors on college campuses to train teachers” (Spring, 2014, p. 2008). “In-service” teacher training format was born, as “after the turn of the century, and especially in the 1910s, this training vehicle was formally linked to changing state certification requirements and was promoted from the mid-
1910s through the latter part of the 1920s” (Fultz, 2008, p. 88). Beginning the early 20th century, academicians and scholars began to write about “improving” the educational system, often for a variety of nationalist, pragmatic, or geopolitical reasons.

One such person was John Dewey whose work helped educational leaders rethink strategies surrounding PD. Dewey’s work cultivated the idea of socialized classroom activity... Articles in educational journals and books on group classroom activities appeared in large numbers. The topics ranged from socializing arithmetic drills to teaching cooking with self-organized groups. Following the lead of education professors like Michael V. O’Shea at the University of Wisconsin and Irving King at the University of Iowa, courses in social education began to be offered (Spring, 2014, p. 255).

The Universities of Wisconsin and Iowa were not alone in offering coursework that aided teacher development in the early 20th century. When the world was devastated by the two World Wars and the intervening economic disaster, all aspects of society, including public education, were altered.

**Cold War PD**

Like the Civil War, the trauma of the two World Wars had a profound impact on how Americans believed society, and by extension public education, should function. Reformers like Edward Thorndike (d. 1949) and William Bagley (d. 1946) wrote influential texts on teacher education that helped develop a mechanistic and “rigid” approach to classroom management and content delivery. Their ideas influenced teacher training during the middle parts of the 20th century (Spring, 2014). Later “in the twentieth century, schools of education were expanded to include graduate studies and educational research in addition to teacher
training programs. These new graduate schools of education became centers of professional control” (Spring, 2014, p. 289). More thorough and rigorous efforts to develop educators corresponded to a post-war vision about America’s role in the world. The teachers and staff necessary to ensure America’s youth had a quality education became part of our national security.

America’s victory in the Second World War lead directly into Cold War competition with the Soviet Union. The ideological and political struggle between the world’s two remaining superpowers found a “participant” in America’s educational system. “Cold War concerns also got the federal government involved in developing new curricula, particularly in the areas of mathematics and science. Money flowed from the National Science Foundation to develop curriculum materials” (Spring, 2014, p. 370) and to professionally develop educators. Many leading American politicians came to believe that systemic educational improvement was key to defeat their Soviet adversaries. Lyndon Johnson’s Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1965) with its many “Titles” and Ronald Reagan’s Nation at Risk (1983) were two federal analyses of and interventions in public schools.

Leading Americans believed that the scholastic system was not serving America or her desire to defeat the Soviets. America, or so the thinking went, needed “brain power” to develop the technology, weaponry and advanced economy in order to win the Cold War. This belief varied by circumstances, but A Nation at Risk (1983) showed that decades after Japan’s surrender American leaders remained afraid that their school system was failing the national effort in their global struggle. The Soviet Union’s collapse in 1991 ended that particular fear, but government planners’ desire to improve schools did not. The improvement trend continued with other federal acts, like No Child Left Behind (2001) and Race to the Top
These initiatives have had a significant effect on America’s current education system, including how educators are professionally developed. Programs like these have altered expectations and criteria for success, in addition to procedures for staff training.

**PD for the Modern Era**

Through the bills passed by Congress, Presidents Lyndon Johnson, Ronald Reagan, George W. Bush and Barack Obama have had a profound impact on American schools. They believed, among other things, that schools had a duty to help America compete in the world. (Duke, Carr & Sterrett, 2013). Nearly 20 years after the Soviet Union’s collapse, President Barack Obama endeavored to improve America’s education system, building on his predecessors’ templates by increasing funding for charter schools and supporting standardized tests that monitored student achievement (Tanner, 2013). Obama believed the increased economic interconnectedness called “globalization” affected both schools in America and the rest of the world. Many nations, including the United States, adopted “… the model of the age-graded classroom, using a standardized curriculum and textbooks, promoting up an educational ladder leading to higher education, and providing professional teacher training” (Spring, 2014, p. 141). Educationally minded politicians from diverse perspectives believed that deliberate government efforts to “fix” public schools were key to continued economic viability and global competitiveness.

Under Obama’s leadership the federal government passed the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act in 2009. Called the “Stimulus” in common parlance, this massive bill’s parameters affected government at many levels, including educational testing and staff professional development. As a significant “part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan introduced the legislation with a specific
reference to global competition” (Spring, 2014, p. 445). Obama and Duncan’s Race to the Top (2009) contained four primary “initiatives,” the third of which called for “recruiting, developing, rewarding, and retaining effective teachers and principals” (Spring, 2014, p. 446). Race to the Top (2009) funded data generation designed to, among other things, create teacher-training programs. “Schools of Hope” in Florida is, in part, a state government response to the data that exists because of Race to the Top.

The new data measures student standardized test scores and uses the information to grade schools. In addition to programs that collect data, the Federal government partnered with certain states to craft initiatives like the “Common Core Standards.” Federal-state partnerships have taken the lead in designing and implementing curriculum, testing results, and writing teacher preparation standards, all complete with connected data. Some studies found that successful turnarounds focused on “key strategies,” including a deliberate focus on needy subgroups, staff collaboration, quality leadership, consistent usage of data to make decisions, community involvement, district support, and pedagogical strategies designed to increase student engagement (Huberman, Parrish, Hannan, Arellanes & Shambaugh, 2011).

**Contemporary Concerns about PD**

Concerns about professional development (PD) and execution in American public schools exist in academic literature. Teachers can exhibit various degrees of resistance when faced with change initiatives. Snyder (2017) found that veteran teachers can be “resistors” to change and that special efforts may be necessary to get veteran teachers’ participation. Zimmerman (2006) found that “resistance is a major factor in reform failure” (p. 238) and that understanding why certain teachers resist is crucial for scholastic leaders interested in reform.

Veterans, according to Zimmerman (2006), “not only might fail to recognize the need for
change but undoubtedly [have] also witnessed previously unsuccessful efforts” (p. 246) and were unwilling to genuinely participate. Conversely, “too ambitious” reform efforts and professional development initiatives might prove daunting to new teachers or too exaggerated for veterans (Ladson-Billings, 2004). Gainsburg (2012) found that when “reform practices were more difficult they would seem especially prohibitive for new teachers. Alternately, veteran teachers, more deeply mired in tradition, might be more resistant to change” (p. 6).

Some academic literature about PD features severe language. Educational writers have called America’s public-school situation a “national disgrace” (Forster & Thompson, 2011, p. xi) while complaining that the system provides “insufficient time” (Duke et al., 2013) to carry out lofty PD goals. Too much PD is not “related to actual practice” (Earley & Porritt, 2014, p. 115) and follow-through is lacking (Duke et al., 2013). Educator fidelity PD strategies of various types tend to “dissipate” over time. “Most intervention initiatives include provisions for PD, but most often that is as far as it goes. The choices, changes, and comprehensive ‘people strategies’ that might [actually help] including compensation and incentive strategies are set aside for another day” (Calkins et al., 2007, p. 41). Teachers are likely to revert to previous habits once discouraged (Duke et al., 2013; Lee & Day, 2016). Sustainability and staff “ownership” are significant concerns, inasmuch as diminished returns tend to follow a lack of either. These concepts have greatly influenced thinking about contemporary American PD. Some states, like Florida, have helped lead educational reform ideas with programs that have served as models for Federal initiatives.

Florida History of PD in Schools

The State of Florida’s “Sunshine State Standards” are a modified version of the Common Core Standards, all designed to standardize and modernize teacher performance.
Professionally developing staff constitutes a significant part of those standards. Florida’s Department of Education (DOE) website states that “the purpose of the PD system is to increase student achievement, enhance classroom instructional strategies that promote rigor and relevance throughout the curriculum, and prepare students for continuing education and the workforce” (Department of Education, 2018). The state believed that these goals were achievable through practitioner, school and district standards. “The scope, focus and required elements for Florida’s PD system are set forth in a series of connected statutes and State Board of Education rules… every school district in Florida is required by law to provide a high-quality professional learning system for its employees” (Department of Education, 2018). The state required that each county detail spending on PD training, utilize needs surveys, proceed with a DOE-approved training programs, and agree to on-location reviews to ensure that quality PD occurred. The Schools of Hope grant offered districts funding to create these types of PD programs.

Florida’s PD regulations are currently governed by statute 141012.98, the “School Community Professional Development Act.” This calls on state education institutions, primary county-based districts, to develop and execute quality PD programs, among other activities. The state’s political and educational history and climate helped create the current regulatory structure. Florida’s schools have much in common with other southern states and the country overall, but the state is unique in many ways. Florida’s public schools were once racially segregated, but unlike many other southeastern states Florida has had a large Hispanic population for some time (Borman & Dorn, 2007). Florida’s governors have tried to foster more commercial and tourism growth than their agriculturally focused southern counterparts, directly impacting scholastic policies (Lee, Borman, & Tyson, 2007, p. 243).
**PD and Traditional Florida Values**

Florida used public schools to uphold “traditional” values and resist hostile forces, real or perceived (Laats, 2015) during its early history. That commitment waned during the 20th century, but the historical echoes remain within Florida schools. These traditions included local community control of public-school operations. However, educational power transference from local to state offices began in the 1970s as politics changed (Borman & Dorn, 2007). Campaigning as agents of reform, several “Education Governors” won election in the latter part of the 20th century.

**Jeb Bush and PD**

The state’s education system was most influenced by Governor Jeb Bush. Bush changed Florida’s education apparatus in significant ways. Bush became governor in 1999 and, with legislative help, passed several education initiatives. Bush’s ideas involved reforming standardized testing, developing services to help students with disabilities, creating programs for teacher training, and removing “Civil Rights Era” rules like “Affirmative Action,” among others. A statewide agency replaced the individual “Boards of Regents” that had governed each university (Borman & Dorn, 2007, p. 1). Borman & Dorn (2007) found that Florida’s education system inspired much of what became No Child Left Behind (2001). “Florida’s system of high-stakes testing and accountability accelerated what had existed for many years in some states, such as Texas and North Carolina, attaching significant funding rewards for very specific and complex performance criteria” (Borman & Dorn, 2007, p. 12).

Bush’s plan for Florida called for “greater use of standardized testing in accountability… merit pay… vouchers… public school choice… test-best teacher licensing… fire requirements for teacher education based licensing… the restructuring of the Florida
Board of Education as a ‘K-20 superboard’... “and... the revision of Florida’s school laws” (Borman & Dorn, 2007, p. 4) to support private schools. Bush’s efforts to increase “choice” and “competition” were largely successful. Florida was “the nation’s leading school-of-choice state, also had the nation’s lowest legal and regulatory barriers” (Forster & Thompson, 2011, p. 170) by 2011. The state had additionally become a focal point of “turnaround” efforts. Duke (2014) claimed that

nowhere has the quest for turnaround specialists been undertaken with a greater investment of resources or on a larger scale than in Florida, where the state Department of Education in concert with the Southern Regional Education Board has used generous funding from the federal Race to the Top initiative to launch the Florida Turnaround Leaders Program. (p. 80)

The “Common Core Standards,” the “choice” movement and state-based standardized testing have their roots, in part, in the system designed in Florida by the Bush administration. The student test scores that motivated Carter County officials to apply for School of Hope grant funding came from this system. Florida experienced some academic success following Bush’s tenure as governor. According to the Department of Education’s website, by 2014 Florida was “the only state in the nation” (Department of Education, 2014) to close the gap on 4th and 8th grade reading and math scores between white and black students. However, there remain significant statewide educational challenges, including PD concerns.

Doing PD the Florida Way

Florida has experienced significant educational change during the past 20 years. Florida teachers no longer need to earn their professional license directly through a university. Instead, they can obtain the required certificate through completing a county-created program.
A bachelor’s degree with passing score on a subject-area test now suffices to qualify for employment as a public-school teacher, marking a significant departure from previous policies (Borman & Dorn, 2007, p. 4). Florida adopted “statewide assessment processes to determine the degree to which teachers experience effective PD and student learning is impacted” (Darling-Hammond et.al., 2009, p. 3). Florida is one of “only four states (Arizona, California, Florida, and New York) [that] require all teacher candidates to demonstrate competencies in ELL instruction” (Casteel & Ballantyne, 2010, p. 55).

Florida’s teachers participate in more PD than some states, as “participation in PD on reading instruction in 2008… [was] 52 percent in Oklahoma… [and] 83 percent in Florida (Wei et al., 2010, p. 32). Florida also ranks relatively high in PD for ESOL training. Data from 2008 showed that the “states with the highest percentage of teachers reporting more than 16 hours of professional development were Arizona (41 percent), California (27 percent), and Florida (21 percent)” (Wei et al., 2010, p. 33). Florida had one of the highest “average cumulative hours” of PD with 54 hours. Oklahoma was the lowest with 33.

My home state of Michigan often finds six or seven school districts serving a single small city. Florida’s districts, however, are geographically and often numerically massive. Florida is one of only a few states that mandate school districts to share borders with counties (Boser, 2013). Many of the largest school districts in the entire country are in Florida, as Miami-Dade County Schools, Broward County Schools, Hillsborough County Schools, and Orange County Schools and Palm Beach County Schools are all in the top 15. Carter County is one of the 50 largest (US Department of Education, 2012).

PD initiatives in Florida and in the Country vary significantly by county and by region, but typically are managed by their own administration. Florida’s 67 districts have experienced
varying levels of success and academic growth, and Carter is no exception.

**PD Struggles in Carter**

Schools in Carter County have had some recent issues with individual school grades, including CHS. “Cheryl Senior High School earned their second consecutive D in the 2016-17 school year and therefore must begin a district managed plan during the 2017-18 school year” (Florida Department of Education, 2017). There have been many challenges facing Carter’s PD apparatus, as far back as 2007. Poor attendance at PD sessions had become a significant concern. A county-produced pamphlet called for “structuring the PD according to skill level [as] another incentive for teachers to attend training. Conducting a needs assessment is the best way to find the skill level of the teachers” (Richard, 2007, p. 25).

Carter County’s reform centered primarily on elementary schools, as the district believed that focusing on younger grades would make for future scholastic gains. The county’s “Turnaround Option Plan” (TOP) plan focused on five elementary schools (Florida Department of Education, 2016). In addition to working with elementary schools and partnering with SPS and Tampa Bay State (TBS) at Cheryl High School (CHS), district leaders believed that “community connection” needed improvement. Building community relationships had been a focus of Carter County Schools and is one of several trending topics in PD literature.

**Current Trends in Professional Development in Schools**

PD has been a key component to turnaround initiatives like the program at CHS (Murphy & Bleiberg, 2019), but documented PD struggles reveal that the current system is governed by “several seemingly contradictory component and adversarial actors, including federal legislation that sets standards for teacher qualifications but allows states to make the
final decisions about how to define those standards” (Tobin, 2012, p. 497). According to Calkins et al. (2007) “...schools fail because the challenges they face are substantial; because they themselves are dysfunctional; and because the system of which they are a part is not responsive to the needs of the… student populations… to serve” (p. 8). PD has moved toward a context-based and group-dynamic learning methodology (Labone & Long, 2016), but “workshops” remain a significant part of PD.

**Traditional PD**

Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson & Orphanos (2009) found, however, that “workshops for new teachers tend to be ineffective” (p. 12). The United States, it seems, has made comparatively high investments in these “ineffective” workshops (Wei, et al., 2010), but Darling-Hammond et al. (2009) found that the United States offers less total PD than some of its industrial counterparts. Some authors have found that PD programs have lacked a component “of a cultural competence perspective to understand how to connect with teachers’ local school cultural contexts” (Flory et al., 2014, p. 283). Others have found that “hard data about which PD models lead to better teaching are difficult to come by” (Krasnoff, 2014, p. 13). The data further suggest that national teacher training programs have moved “toward increased uniformity and homogeneity” (Lee & Day, 2016, p. 12).

The Federal government has, through funding initiatives, increased its systemic control and is focused on measuring teacher development and quality, making contextual flexibility decreasingly ideal. Governments across the county are pressuring schools to improve student scores and lower achievement gaps between various sub demographic groups (Behrendt, 2017), but these pressures are leading to great systematizing of scholastic delivery models. “Expert teachers” have lost favor to “education technicians” who are able to move from
classroom to classroom or school to school and deliver similar instruction, context aside.

“Expertise for quality teaching [is now] seen as the province of ‘excellent’ classroom teachers. Theoretical perspectives [are] no longer central to quality in initial teacher education” (Lee & Day, 2016, p. 98). The national government’s efforts to “influence” or “improve” education have had varied results, depending on state willingness to accept federal funds and initiatives.

Florida has been a leader in developing new regulatory parameters and has exercised its educational agency in many ways. One of those ways has been through its job-embedded PD efforts. The Schools of Hope grant implementation that took place at Cheryl High school was unique form of “job-embedded” professional development. There are, however, other forms of PD that have gained recent prominence, such as “Action Research.”

**Action Research as PD**

Action research has a long history in education, dating to John Dewey’s work (Krell & Dana, 2012) and has been a method for helping teachers take “ownership” in improving their practice, content knowledge and pedagogical awareness. Theoretically, action research occurs in a cyclical fashion, beginning with posing critical questions, collecting and analyzing data, and making changes based upon the findings. Proponents of action research believe that this cyclical process is crucial to effective PD designs (Deneroff, 2016). Some studies have argued that mentor-based PD is better implemented when combined with “action research” employed by the developing teacher (Bleicher; 2014; Casteel & Ballantyne, 2010). This implies a commitment to self-analysis and introspection about practice (Meijer, Kuijpers, Boei, Vrielings & Geijsel, 2017). “Action research brings the voices and expertise of those closest to the classroom... teachers who examine their practices through action research bring a relevant, authentic information to our efforts…” (Caro-Bruce, Flessner, Klehr & Zeichner, 2007, p. vii).
CCS incorporated “action research” into its PD efforts, and CHS developed its own sort of “action research” PD through direct efforts to build relationships with students and the community (Florida Department of Education, 2016).

**Job-Embedded PD**

Unlike action research, job-embedded PD is a relatively new phenomenon. Robinson (1984) was one of the first to document the importance of “clinical supervision,” a concept that has modeled into job-embedded PD today. Academic journals from the 1980s documented teacher-development strategies (Joyce, 1980; Bradley, Chesson, & Silverleaf, 1983; Smyth, 1984) and national governments began some initial systematic reports (Smyth, 1984). Practitioner research increased significantly from 1990 to 2017, indicating an increase in interest about new PD strategies. Based on this analysis, it seems that the 1990s gave rise to academic interest in “job-embedded PD” and that interest grew to maturity in the 21st century. Job-embedded PD is less common than the external expert model (EEM), which typically assigns or employs an “expert” who administers a “workshop,” typically through anecdotal information, media and lectures. Teachers are expected to absorb new information and utilize the new strategies later, but Strieker, et al. (2012) found that teachers tend to abandon these strategies if they are “unsuccessful” after a single application.

Job-embedded PD is different from the traditional “expert model” in several ways. Job-embedded PD involves “cycles” of daily practice, observation, reflection. PD is on-going and relates to the teacher’s skills and local context. Some researchers have found that job-embedded PD can lead to improved student results (Althauser, 2015; Cavazos, Linan-Thompson & Ortiz, 2018; Owens, Pogodzinski & Hill, 2014) if sustained. Through its partnership with SPS and TBS, Carter County embraced job-embedded PD as a vehicle for
improvement. The Carter County “Office of School Improvement implements job-embedded PD by highly trained educators who are experts in content areas, behavior management, administration, and data analysis” (Florida Department of Education, 2016). County leadership believed that “Job-embedded professional development, especially research and evidence-based coaching support, will enhance teaching strategies and best practices, and decrease barriers to learning” (Florida Department of Education, 2016).

CCS decided to work with TBS and create a “cohort” of master’s students as part of their job-embedded professional development. Cohorts involve students progressing through material together (Compton & Compton, 2017; Greenlee & Karanxha, 2010), usually taking classes at the same time and in the same progression. Recent research into cohort-based education exists and often focuses on online learning environments. “Cohort education, in which students share a common set of classes and experiences, was not common between 1940 and 1980” (Dent, 2000, p. 56). Cohort models range in type (Hickson, 2016) but tend to offer beneficial “social support networks” (Bullough, Clark, Wentworth & Hanson, 2001; Holmes, Birds, Seay, Smith, & Wilson, 2010; Schroeder & Terras, 2015). Cohorts are, however, not without documented struggles. Some evidence exists that cohorts can elicit negative feelings from individuals outside the group (Barnett, Basom, Yerks & Norris, 2000). Cohorts have been shown to form group identities that can make interaction with professors strained or even unpleasant (DeWitt, Birrell, Ega, Cook, Ostlund & Young, 1998).

Tucker and Codding (2002) studied “digital mediums” allowing for greater cohort learning to occur in PD initiatives. Several other studies have focused on cohort models serving principal and leadership training programs (Cator, Lathram, Schneider & Vander Ark, 2015; Sandfort & Gerdes, 2017; Sutcher, Podolsky & Espinoza, 2017). Madden (2015)
studied an effort to create student cohorts to improve staff capacity, but the cohorts were comprised of students rather than staff. Staff cohorts created with capacity building in mind are far less common. Twenty Cheryl High staff members decided to join the cohort and pursue advanced degrees with the district’s support, the number later dropping to 19. Their TBS and SPS work occurred concurrently while working full time as classroom teachers. As efforts to professionally develop staff and build capacity at turnaround schools through cohort learning has not been significantly researched, this study helps fill some of that knowledge gap and can add to the literature’s understanding of effective PD.

**Effective PD**

Most states have added “effective professional development” to their state standards (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009, Wei et al., 2010), yet “researchers struggle to name with absolute certainty what makes an effective professional development program that would impact student achievement the most” (Martin & Polly, 2017, p. 241). There are various themes designed for quality and “effective” professional development, such as “common planning,” “significant teacher involvement” and “school-wide” collaboration (Calkins et al., 2007; Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Duke et al., 2013; Sachs, 2011; Lee & Shanahan, 2018; Wei et al., 2010). Job-embedded modeled instruction (Casteel & Ballantyne, 2010; Duke et al., 2013; Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Sachs, 2011) and cross-curriculum teams charged with examining data (Krasnoff, 2014; Reyes & Garcia, 2014; Shea et al., 2018; Wei et al., 2010) are other variations of “effective.” Additionally, value has been found when teachers work with and learn from “mentors” (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Flory et al., 2014; Krasnoff, 2014; Martin & Polly, 2017) while engaging in content-specific material focused

There are several other identified factors that contribute to PD quality. “Continuing” or “ongoing” PD that involves sufficient time, follow-up and building upon successes and/or failures (Anglada & Banegas, 2012; Earley & Porritt, 2014; He et al., 2011; Krasnoff, 2014; Lee & Buxton, 2013; Sachs, 2011) have been mentioned. “A school community environment that emphasizes collaboration as well as shared decision making and management among its teachers and staff constitutes another critical feature” (Lee, Borman, & Tyson, 2007, p 242) of effective PD. According to the State of Florida, effective PD should include “Weekly Academic Leadership meetings… to focus on the issues of the students, staff and community. Each grade level was represented…. Qualitative and quantitative data [are] discussed at each meeting” (Florida Department of Education, 2016).

These points of “consensus” aside, there exist many documented challenges for PD programs and for schools overall, and less consensus about why the PD that “works” is not the PD typically found in American schools. PD struggles connect to school struggles, leading educators and politicians looking for solutions to fix, or “turnaround” failing schools.

**History of Turnaround Schools**

Turnaround schools are typically those that have struggled over an extended period of time and are under pressure from state or local governments to improve. “School turnaround draws its philosophical inspiration in part from a neoliberal approach to education reform” (Murphy & Bleiberg, 2019, p. 4). One act of the neoliberal movement was The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001. NCLB brought fixing struggling schools into national public policy and mandated that schools unable to improve after five years had to “implement some
other significant reform that fundamentally change[d] the school” (Huberman et al., 2011, p. 1). The Obama administration built on this foundation through significant monetary commitments while calling on schools to either transform through leadership changes, turnaround the school by making wholesale staff changes, restart the school by becoming a charter or falling under the guise of an external operator, or close the school entirely. This represented a change from previous school improvement policy, that it outlined four specific steps that states and districts were expected to implement. Turnaround efforts are not new, as they relate to long-standing efforts to improve student achievement, but their current constitution exits due to Obama-era legislation. Nor are turnaround efforts limited to the United States as they have occurred in places Malaysia and Indonesia (Harris, Jones, Ismail, Adams & Sumintono, 2018) and China (Liu, 2017).

Turnaround schools are defined as schools that have a high proportion of students failing to meet state standards of proficiency... for two or more consecutive years... turnaround model attempts to make quick, dramatic improvements within three years... in a turnaround school, a principal may have to hire and train a small group to implement and lead change immediately. (Rosenbach, Flowers, Bird & Algozzine, 2017, p. 11)

A recent study looked at professional development facilitation as a central component of turnaround initiatives (Peurach & Neumerski, 2015), while another study found that rather than improving teacher capacity and driving student gains, turnaround initiatives funded by federal programs led to decreases in student achievement and increased teacher turnover (Heissel & Ladd, 2016). These studies looked at governmental efforts over many years following the publication of The Turnaround Challenge (2007).
The Turnaround Challenge

“Turnaround” programs have “basic elements of school improvement plans [that] do not vary from state to state. Common features include goals and objectives, strategies for achieving the goals and objectives, and time lines [sic]” (Duke et al., 2013, p. 4). One of the most important texts written about turnaround schools was The Turnaround Challenge (2007), published by the Massachusetts Insight Education & Research Institute and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. It called on America’s public-school system to institute “a dramatic and comprehensive intervention in... low performing schools that... [produce] significant gains in student achievement within two academic years.” (Calkins et al., 2007, p. 2). Schools needing turnaround funds were in the bottom 5% of academic performance and could be expected, through the program, to achieve significant positive change within two years. The planners believed $250,000-$1,000,000 annual financial investment could fix those low-performing schools. This document was very influential in altering the turnaround and school improvement landscape and helped shape contemporary approaches.

Common Approaches

Turnaround initiatives currently follow different formats, but often have a similar formula. “Some common approaches were teacher collaboration for instruction and instructional planning, targeted professional development in specific areas, and careful reviews of curricula to ensure that the curricula focused on essential content and addressed state standards” (Herman, Dawson, Dee, Greene, Maynard, Redding & Darwin, 2008, p. 15). States very widely in their activities but share some commonalities. 2015’s ESSA law called on states to inform the federal government how they would both identify schools in need of targeted support (TSI), comprehensive support (CSI) and more rigorous interventions (MRI)
(The Collaborative for Student Success, n.d.). All 50 states had to complete their compliance documents to receive federal funding. Some states, like Florida, outline very specific measurements and remedies for schools with low student achievement data. Others, like Washington, are much opaquer. New Hampshire state law even prevents the state education agency from intervening in some local situations. Some states force schools to remove school leadership or turn over administration to third party companies (Meyers & Smylie, 2017). Initial PD stages in certain states follow instructional goals in turnaround efforts, including focusing on teacher pedagogy and content-knowledge. “The approaches to professional development varied, but all involved collaboration and a focus on instructional goals” (Herman et al., 2008, p. 16). SPS’s efforts followed this model.

Four years after the *The Turnaround Challenge* (2007), academic researchers were asking new questions about “turning around” schools. For example, they asked, “has what we have been doing worked so far?” Villavicencio and Grayman (2011) looked at two low-performing middle schools in New York that had “turned-around” their academic performance. One had a wholesale staff change, including firing the principal and many teachers, while the other did not. Their findings offered “important lessons for educators and policymakers, both here in New York and around the country” (p. 1). They believed that “turnaround” programs were successful when “three conditions that principals and teachers reported were essential [were met]: 1) aligning needs with goals, 2) creating a positive work environment, and 3) addressing student discipline and safety” (p. 2). The leaders in both cases fostered positive professional relationships with their staff and created safe schools through a commitment to behavioral discipline. Florida, like New York, has an extensive history with turnaround programs.
**Building Capacity**

Hines, Moore, Mayes, Harris, Vega, Robinson, Gray and Jackson (2020) documented that most turnaround literature focuses on teachers and administrators and offers little analysis for support staff. Focusing on counselors, Hines et al. (2020) found it “is critical that all school personnel are involved in improving school outcomes, such as academic achievement and graduation rates, in the lowest performing high schools in the United States” (p. 216). Many turnaround efforts have documented the need to build staff capacity at struggling schools, but there have been examples of schools making programmatic changes that inflate short term scores gains during turnaround process (Dinham & Crowther, 2011). Building capacity has been a part of some successful turnaround efforts (Evan, 2019), and typically focuses on efforts to professionally develop and retain quality staff. Capacity building involves long-term efforts to connect theory to practice, helping staff to deliver high quality lessons to which students can relate, and sustain efforts to ensure effective pedagogical habits. A part of CCS’s turnaround efforts involved these types of deliberate capacity building strategies, both through partnering with SPS and the graduate program with TBS.

**Best Turnaround Practices**

In studying several turnaround efforts in different states, Backstrom (2019) identified nine crucial components for sustained success. Turnaround schools that had community and political support plus a strong leader were the first steps. A turnaround school then needed high quality staff committed to the project and the freedom to act within a structure. Students and teachers needed to regularly formulate goals and use data to analyze and inform any necessary adjustments. Early successes needed to be defined, measured, and then shared with the public to maintain community support. Regular communication, especially with families
and the media, had to be a key component (Murphy & Bleiberg, 2019). Finally, the turnaround school had to provide families the opportunity to relocate if they so desired. Parents, Backstrom (2019) argued, needed to commit their children to actively partaking in the turnaround process or attend school elsewhere.

Government reports have recently studied academic literature and state DOE data regarding school turnaround efforts, making some conclusions about “best” practices. Meyers and Hambrick Hitt’s (2017) analysis of turnaround literature suggested that “there is little question that high-quality school principals are important to the success of any school, and it is possible that chronically low-performing schools need those types of principals even more” (p. 53). However, the special qualities that separated a quality turnaround leader from a “regular” quality leader had not been effectively discerned, although “the research also indirectly suggests that turnaround principals likely need to possess attributes, qualities, and characteristics that effective principals do not” (Meyers & Hambrick Hitt, 2017, p. 53).

**The Importance of Leadership**

Educational reformers believed that “improving a chronically low-performing school required additional skills, knowledge, and core beliefs. If every principal [could] turn around a low-performing school in a relatively short period of time... there would not be so many low-performing schools” (Duke, 2014, p. 81). Long-standing beliefs indicated that systemic or financial or organizational changes were not the issue; quality leadership was. These low-performing schools could not be “turned around” without dramatic effort and quality leaders to “steer the ship.” “To enact the necessary changes, the schools were to create ‘a protected space free of bureaucratic restrictions and overly stringent collective bargaining agreements… [and provide] incentives to challenge and motivate people to do their best work’” (Calkins et
al., 2007, p. 5). Once liberated from burdensome restricts, the empowered turnaround leader could be trusted, and expected, to solve the school’s problems. The Schools of Hope grant implementation at Cheryl High school had these types of dramatic goals in mind.

Leaders in turnaround schools often encounter struggles, including insufficient or misplaced funding, a school’s poor reputation in the community, or staff unwillingness or inability to engage with and execute the turnaround strategies (Huberman et al., 2011; Murphy & Bleiberg, 2019). Citing a few notable exceptions where reforms paid heed to local context, Backstrom (2019) found that most turnaround efforts were costly failures, whether they featured widespread school closure and replacement with charters, small-scale localized efforts at specific reforms, or anything in between. Creating incentives that keep current school staff and leadership intact... Bringing in district sponsored or outside consultants to write up a reform plan and leave it in the hands of existing school or district staff.... Simply changing the curriculum, but shying away from fostering whole-school culture changes… Efforts to fix academics and culture while ignoring governance and operational dysfunctions do not work… successfully turning around a low-performing school cannot be achieved by approaching reform in piecemeal fashion. (p. 36)

CCS’s turnaround effort employed some strategies Backstrom (2019) argues are doomed to fail while utilizing others he believes are the keys to success. No matter the disparities, academic studies about turnaround schools seem to agree that quality leadership and engaged and committed staff with support from the local community are crucial for school turnaround success (Backstrom, 2019; Meyers & Smylie, 2017, Murphy & Bleiberg, 2019). These elements do not, however, guarantee successful turnaround, either in the short or long terms.
Overview

I discussed pertinent literature related to professional development initiatives and turnaround school programs in this chapter. I detailed how PD programs had changed over time and discussed contemporary PD concerns. I documented Florida's history with professional development, described the changes brought about by Jeb Bush's governorship, and connected Florida's PD traditions with struggles in Carter County. I also described contemporary trends in professional development, including traditional, action research, and job-embedded approaches. I attempted to make connections between professional development ideas and the philosophical foundations of turnaround schools. I concluded by talking about common turnaround approaches, the importance of turnaround leadership for success. In chapter 3 I discuss this study’s’ methodology, including the research paradigm and the data collection and analysis methods. I outline the nature of the case study of Cheryl High School, provide purpose for the research questions, and address this work's trustworthiness.
CHAPTER THREE

This chapter presents the study’s research design and methodology. This includes the study’s purpose, the research questions, participant selection, data analysis, and paradigmatic foundations. I detail the historical and philosophical foundations of pragmatism and interpretivism in educational research and show how they blend to form this study’s foundation. I explain the study's purpose to the reader and provide the motivation for the research questions while over viewing the nature of policy ethnography. I also describe the iterative and descriptive coding process used to analyze the qualitative data and provide information about efforts to make the study as trustworthy as possible.

METHODOLOGY

This study was a policy ethnography that employed qualitative methods. Qualitative research has long been utilized in different types of social science inquiry, including education research, and can be either inductive or deductive. The qualitative research methods I employed included the use of transcribed interviews and ethnographic journaling triangulated with document analyses and member checks. Triangulation refers to studying data points from “multiple perspectives” (Neuman, 2014, p. 166) rather than one alone, to increase the richness of the results. I organized the data chronologically and coded thematically (Saldana, 2013). Data was coded using NVivo software (Sotiriadou, Brouwers & Le (2014), and I organized the findings thematically in chapter four.
Other qualitative research methodologies used in education research include case studies, content analysis, phenomenology, and action research, all of which share some common methods with ethnography (Brantlinger, Jimenez, Klingner, Pugach, & Richardson, 2005; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). At its most basic, qualitative research refers to the type of research that produces findings not arrived at by statistical procedures or other means of quantification. It can refer to research about persons’ lives, lived experiences, behaviors, emotions, and feelings as well as about organizational functioning, social movements, cultural phenomena, and interactions between nations. Some of the data may be quantified as with census or background information about the persons or objects studied, but the bulk of the analysis is interpretative. (Strauss & Corbin, 2008, p. 11)

Qualitative research is employed along a philosophical spectrum, with some writers arguing that “moral stances” should play a greater or lesser role in data collection and analysis. The degree to which the ethical underpinnings of the author influence the study can vary by methodology and subject matter and depend largely on the author’s paradigmatic approach.

**Research Paradigm**

I used a “Pragmatic Interpretivist” approach to question formation, data collection, and data analysis (Biesta & Burbules, 2004; Creswell & Miller, 2000; Hatch, 2002; Lichtman, 2013; Saldaña, 2013; Stake, 1995; Thomas, 2016). Several authors have argued that using pragmatism and interpretivism as foundations for qualitative research can be effective for understanding social phenomena (Biesta & Burbles, 2003; Goldkuhl, 2012; Stake, 1995). Qualitative research typically involves studying the “meaning” or “quality” people associate with their experiencing various types of social phenomena. “Qualitative research, thus, refers
to the meanings, concepts, definitions, characteristics, metaphors, symbols, and descriptions of things” (Lune & Berg, 2017, p. 12). A researcher guided by pragmatism tries to understand their subjects’ world while offering plausible and practical suggestions for improvement, remaining mindful of context.

**Pragmatism**

A pragmatic scholar in generally committed to linking theory and practice and believes that studying human society “represents an obvious and appealing way of linking… observations about… politics to political science and policy studies… in order to better discern what is special or unique” (Boswell & Corbet, 2014, p. 304). Pragmatism has a long history in American social science research, “particularly among early… thinkers such as Peirce, James, [and] Meade” (Biddle & Schafft, 2015, p. 322), but especially with the work of John Dewey (d. 1952). A pragmatic approach to education research provides a philosophical foundation rather than a specific ontology, epistemology and methodology. Pragmatism is therefore useful for understanding different studied phenomena in educational settings (Morgan, 2014). While pragmatism in social science research has been the philosophical foundation for many “mixed-methods” studies (Biddle & Schafft, 2015; Biesta, 2010; Pearce, 2012), the tenets of pragmatism are also useful for qualitative inquiries, because

Pragmatic inquiry focuses on knowledge as the fallible and constantly revised product of experience... [therefore] research design and methodology may take a multitude of forms including quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods research depending on what the researcher judges will most effectively produce a warranted assertability [sic] of knowledge claims given available data, possibilities for analysis, and available resources (Biddle & Schafft, 2015, p. 324)
The philosophical flexibility connects to “interpretivism,” which also has a long tradition in educational research. The interpretivist researcher argues that societal knowledge is largely socially constructed and that research findings are filtered through the researcher’s personal lens before dissemination (Lichtman, 2013).

Interpretivism

Interpretivism is a paradigmatic approach to social science research where researchers themselves operate as a “filter” through which data and knowledge flow (Lichtman, 2013). Interpretivist researchers argue that the empirically based methodologies employed by “positivist” studies have limitations when studying social phenomena (Grix, 2010; Marshall, 2016; Martin, 1993). Data points in interpretivist research are typically qualitative and often include observations, interviews, and document analysis. Interpretivist approaches can help understand governmental policy implementations, especially in education, because interpretivism “… represents a turn… towards studying [phenomena] as... understood by political actors, and enacted through the beliefs they hold and the cultural norms they practice” (Boswell & Corbet, 2014, p. 298). Governmental figures can, therefore, benefit from the data interpretivist studies produce.

Interpretivism in social science research is related to “constructivism” in many ways. Interpretivists and constructivists share ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions, underpinnings and traditions. “The interpretivist/constructivist paradigm grew out of the philosophy of Edmund Husserl’s phenomenology and Wilhelm Dilthey’s and other German philosophers’ study of interpretive understanding called hermeneutics” (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006, p. 3). The use of interpretivist and constructivist studies in educational research increased in the 1970s when academicians moved against the methodological “stranglehold”
positivist studies had thereto had over educational research (Chowdhury, 2014; Howe, 2003; Marshall, 2016). Partially arising as a rejection of positivism’s insistence on using data points that can be numerically obtained, quantified, measured and reported, interpretivists employ notetaking from observations as a form of data collection (Lichtman, 2013).

Observations can be especially beneficial for educational researchers because the activity does not require significant financial resources and focuses on contemporary context (Shipman, 1985), which can provide valuable diverse data for governmental researchers and other political actors. Focusing on the “real world” that is influenced by local context can be a positive benefit interpretivist research. This connects interpretivist methods to pragmatic approaches in important ways, but before exploring that connection, it is important to discuss the relationship constructivism has with interpretivism, and why an interpretivism approach worked best for this study.

“Constructivism is a term often used interchangeable with interpretivism” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 9), but I employed “interpretivism” instead of “constructivism” for some important reasons. Interpretivism is sometimes considered an “umbrella” term covering a variety of social science research (Lichtman, 2013). Constructivism is a term connected to the “coconstruction [sic]” of knowledge by both researcher and research participants, rather than the directly centering the researcher as the “vessel” through which the data will be obtained and promulgated.

Interpretive social science (ISS) has several varieties: hermeneutics, constructionism, ethnomethodology, cognitive, idealist, phenomenological, subjectivist, and qualitative sociology. An interpretive approach is associated with the symbolic interactionist Chicago school in sociology of the 1920s–1930s. Often people just call ISS qualitative
research because most interpretive researchers use participant observation and field research. (Neuman, 2014, p 103)

The interpretivist researcher shares methodological strategies with constructivists, as both utilize “Hermeneutic principles… to guide researchers’ interpretive [constructions] of participant perspectives” (Hatch, 2002, p. 15). Interpretivism is, therefore, like constructivism a specific research methodology that aims to understand both individuals and phenomena based on context. The interpretivist researcher desires to understand how individuals make meaning of their contemporary situations and what those individuals find particularly pertinent in their lives. They also make a deliberate effort to center the researcher as the “font” of knowledge, rather than arguing for a collectively constructed epistemological “truth.” Interpretivist studies center the researcher as the “filter” through which knowledge passes from the data sources to the reader, and the interpretivist writer acknowledges that their own opinions and biases affect the result (Lichtman, 2013). As I was the sole investigator and I alone organized the study, designed the interview questions and analyzed the qualitative data, an interpretivist approach to data collection and analysis made sense.

The “pragmatic interpretivist,” therefore, seeks knowledge to understand social behavior with genuine improvement, betterment and enrichment in mind. The desire to learn about improvement based on context is why “pragmatism” and “interpretivism” combine to underpin this study.

**Pragmatic Interpretivism**

Pragmatic Interpretivism “provides a more nuanced conceptual basis for interpretivism’s ‘core’ to engage with its ‘peripheries’” (Boswell & Corbet, 2014, p. 304), and aspects of traditional pragmatism and interpretivism in qualitative research “can be mixed”
Teacher beliefs about a program’s aspects, for example, can directly connect to both pragmatism and interpretivism.

When looking at teacher testimony, it is possible to consider the ways in which the teachers teach, or their past influences that contribute to their teaching pedagogy. By considering the ways in which teachers use those influences to guide their teaching practice, we can satisfy both of these empirical foci. Likewise, any interpretation provided by a narrative researcher based on that testimony will identify both the mechanisms by which teachers construct their beliefs as well as their understandings of the actual pedagogical practices. Importantly, such an interpretation from the narrative researcher will be based upon both of these empirical foci, which enhances justification for their claims. (Christopher, 2016, p. 114)

A pragmatic interpretivist effort to formulate and execute a research study can provide important data that illuminates how teachers make meaning of PD or turnaround experiences.

Pragmatism and interpretivism may appear to have some diverging aspects when conducted as entirely separate studies, including their ontology. To help demonstrate those areas, I have adapted the original table (see Table 2) from Goldkuhl (2012, p. 142).

Table 2. Pragmatism vs Interpretivism: Ideal-Typical Differentiation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pragmatism</th>
<th>Interpretivism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ontology</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empirical focus</td>
<td>Constructivism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of knowledge</td>
<td>Beliefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of knowledge</td>
<td>Understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of investigation</td>
<td>Interesting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data generation</td>
<td>Field Study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of researcher</td>
<td>Data through interpretation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Engaged in change</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This chart helps illustrate philosophical differences between strictly pragmatic and strictly interpretivist studies. Pragmatism in educational research is flexible enough to work with interpretivist data analysis, however. This study sought to be both “useful for action” while focused on teacher “beliefs and actions.” Pragmatism involves understanding contemporary context and offering plausible and positive solutions for issues encountered by pertinent stakeholders that are connected to studied phenomena, which was a central part of the research questions, the data analysis, and the discussion in chapter five. I embraced a role as a pragmatic interpretivist researcher in creating the data as well as offering plausible solutions for positive outcomes while accounting for context and biases.

**Purpose**

This study’s purpose was to learn how the Schools of Hope grant unfolded at CHS. The grant application’s language focused on six goals intended to turnaround CHS’s performance. I sought to understand the effort to achieve those six goals through studying events on the ground and learning about teacher perceptions of the process. To do this, I conducted ethnographic observations on campus over 14 months, analyzed pertinent documents, and interviewed 12 of the 19 master’s degree cohort members. The interview questions focused on their experiences related to the grant. I believe that doing so would add to the literature’s understanding of professional development and turnaround programs through answering two research questions.

**Research Questions**

1. How was the “School of Hope” grant implemented at Cheryl High?

2. What do the grant participants perceive to be the impact of the Schools of Hope grant?
Answering these research questions provided valuable insight into staff perceptions of this unique turnaround initiatives funded by the “Schools of Hope” grant. I endeavored to answer these questions through using qualitative research methods based on a pragmatic interpretivist approach. The study that emerged from the research questions and the paradigmatic approach was a policy ethnography.

**Policy Ethnography**

I served as a TBS representative and worked closely with various professors, SPS representatives and Dr. Schwartz to coordinate the turnaround program. My commitment to CHS resulted in approximately 20 weekly hours spent on campus, although the hours varied. This provided me capacity to conduct significant “participant [observations], informant interviewing, and artifact collection in an effort to come to understand the cultural knowledge that group members use to make sense of their everyday experiences” (Hatch, 2002, p. 21).

Through an ethnography that utilized focused observational data collection and targeted interviews, I gained insight into a policy implementation that governmental macro-data collection efforts cannot provide.

Ethnographies, like many other qualitative methods, have a long history in academic social science research. Ethnographic studies often involve embedded researchers studying unique communities over significant lengths of time. "Ethnography enables a researcher to embed him/herself in a specific community in a way that can provide in-depth coverage and analysis of policy issues that are often rendered invisible if we use other methods, even qualitative ones" (Pacheco-Vega, 2018, p. 2), but combining ethnography with policy studies has been less common. "This means that over a period of twenty years, just seven pieces published in the last 20 years of JCPA issues do explicitly use ethnography as a method for
comparative policy analytical work” (Pacheco-Vega, 2018, p. 5). The turnaround program’s unique nature at CHS provided symmetry with utilizing an ethnography to study a policy implementation.

“Policy ethnography” as an aspect of social science research is relatively new and owes a great deal to the work of Yanow (1997) and Fischer (2003), the latter of whom argued that “the ethnographic approach to participatory observation emphasizing social interaction and unstructured talking” (p. 150) could be particularly beneficial to policy analysis. Building on Fischer’s (2003) work, Dubois (2009) argued that “Policy ethnography approaches provide useful qualitative data that give a nuanced and realistic ground-level view of policies too often analyzed abstractly from the top” (p. 221). The policy ethnographer, therefore, embeds themselves within the policy implementation context, either through participating or observing. The information gleaned therein can, in many cases, provide valuable insight into how policies (often constructed at “the top”) come to be implemented (on “the ground”). By centering the analysis of a policy’s implementation through active and sustained observation on the ground, this study illuminated both the specifics of the grant implementation’s parameters and how staff members made meaning of the Schools of Hope grant at work at CHS.

Making meaning of a policy’s implementation through ethnographic study was Blaustein’s (2015) focus. Blaustein (2015) argued that “policy ethnography is a methodology which recognizes that the administrative spaces through which policies are formulated and take on meaning can be studied empirically…” (p. 3). While not a study of educational reform efforts, Blaustein (2015) helped guide the policy ethnographer’s effort to “generate detailed ‘snapshots’ of what are (hopefully) active and relevant contact zones” (p. 87) and understand
“that reflexivity constitutes a fundamental component of policy ethnography, regardless of the methods utilized to connect case study methods with policy ethnography methodology” (p. 96).

Ethnographies often feature observations juxtaposed and cross-analyzed with document analyses and related interviews (Brantlinger et al, 2005) and significant time in the field. These efforts to “triangulate” ethnographic observations can help add to a study’s trustworthiness and can provide context for the reader. I attempted to use these strategies during my time at CHS, and was able to collect these types of qualitative data through my work with TBS. TBS’s work provided me with the opportunity to study “layers of implementation… [and] on the localized context of each classroom to examine hidden motivations, embedded ideologies, and/or inadvertent consequences of… policy…” (Palmer, Henderson, Wall, Zuniga & Berthelsen, 2014, p. 395).

Studying these layers helped me learn about implementation “on the ground” and provide any interested reader with details about the experiences of those executing the implementation. I attempted to take “the role of the critical friend” (Blaustein, 2015, p. 213) during my time at CHS and strove to affect positive change wherever I could. CHS figures with whom I interacted understood that I was not an entirely neutral observer, nor present simply to collect data. Rather I was employee of one of the collaborating organizations, and both the cohort and CCS’s leadership knew I was collecting ethnographic data for a study from late Fall 2018 onward. I believe that the cohort of master’s students believed me to be, in one degree or another, a friendly face from TBS who had their best interests at heart. This relationship developed through significant time spent with the cohort members from CHS,
assisting them with their projects, listening to their concerns and offering advice when appropriate, both in person and over the phone.

*Case Study of Cheryl High*

To answer my research questions, I studied Cheryl High as “bounded” case-study (Miles, 2015; Stake, 1995). Case studies that are “bounded” are limited to certain groups or individuals based on context and the research questions (Brantingler et al, 2005; Hatch, 2002). All stakeholders involved in the turnaround process to whom I had access were part of the bounded case, including TBS and SPS employees, CHS staff, and CCS administration. I took ethnographic notes at cross-departmental meetings, jotted down notes after important conversations, took pictures of significant events, and detailed observations from master’s classes, Professional Learning Committees (PLC), and in school hallway happenings. I combined these ethnographic recordings with analyzing pertinent documents and staff interviews while keeping the single case of Cheryl High as the centerpiece of the study.

The master’s cohort, comprised of 20 (and later 19) staff members, received special attention. I made a deliberate effort to select interview participants to obtain a cross-section of analysis, selecting 12 of the 19 cohort members to interview at the project’s end. I triangulated the transcribed interviews with ethnographic field data and relevant documents during the data analysis phase. The staff in the educational leadership cohort came to the program with different life experiences and histories. Logistics and the research questions made interviewing all 19 unnecessary. I therefore created three separate interview subject groups and organized them by years of service, due to research that documented occasional levels of varying resistance from veteran teachers (Snyder, 2017). The first group featured “new teachers” with less than six years of tenure. The second was from seven years to 13 years in
education, and the third was composed of teachers with 14 or more years of experience. I attempted to interview two men and two women in each subgroup but could not for one group due to staff availability. Unintentionally, the interview subjects comprised a cross section of content areas, with three math teachers, three language arts, two science teachers, two social studies and two electives teachers.

Employing case studies within ethnographic research has been involved in previous qualitative studies. Hatch (2002) argued that “it is not perfectly clear that qualitative case study research is distinct from ethnography or participant observation studies” (p. 30). Ethnographic approaches to qualitative inquiry can involve case studies, especially when they feature observations, significant time in the field and effort to detail findings with “thick description” (Creswell & Miller, 2000). As 12 of the 19 cohort members were interviewed, combined with member checks, document analysis and 14 months of note taking, this study provides detailed descriptions about how the Schools of Hope grant was implemented and can help future leaders make decisions about other related PD and turnaround programs.

**Data Collection**

This study used data collection methods typically found in constructivist and interpretivist inquiries (Neuman, 2014). I had the good fortune of being able to conduct the field research because of my work at CHS. I had a variety of direct responsibilities as a TBS representative, but I also sought out engagements and interactions with important stakeholders unrelated to my duties on my own. I took ethnographic field notes (Delamont, 2016; Emerson et al, 2011) based upon observations and informal conversations with cohort members, school administrators, TBS professors, SPS employees and district leadership, among others. I could document these observations due to my work at Cheryl High, as I was assigned by TBS to
CHS as a graduate assistant for the master’s cohort. My job involved assisting the 19 cohort members with practicum projects, reading assignments, and the general struggles associated with working and studying full time. I also served as a University Supervisor during Spring 2019, overseeing four on-site undergraduate student teachers. Their mentors were master’s cohort members and this position allowed me to further develop relationships with cohort members, CHS administration and SPS staff.

There were several occasions in which SPS and CCS figures requested that I complete a task, some larger and more intricate than others. Table 3 details the nature of my exposure to the implementation effort at CHS and is designed to serve as a guide for the reader. The hours are approximations based on weekly estimates as I did not keep an official time sheet. The hours listed represent the time taken to conduct the various activities, and not efforts to analyze those data points for this study's findings.

**Table 3. Data Collection Breakdown**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Total Hours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Semi-structured Interviews</td>
<td>I conducted 12 semi-structured interviews during the summer 2019 as the grant implementation approached its end. I had spent several weeks before the interviews began making logistical arrangements for their completion. The interviewers featured eight overarching questions that can be found in the Appendix A. They lasted between 30 minutes and just over one hour, and I asked several follow-up questions depending on each respondents' answers. The interviews were recorded using an electronic recording device and then transcribed and coded. Interview responses were recorded verbatim, an no effort to correct grammar or word usage was made.</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master’s classes</td>
<td>Masters classes for the cohort in educational leadership took place in summer 2018, fall 2018, spring 2019 and summer 2019. I served as the graduate assistant of record for one class each semester, attending that class and often the other section offered that week. I once was responsible for the activities of an entire class. Depending on the day's events, I would assist the students with their projects, offer my thoughts about pertinent readings, or help the professor's with administering the material.</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3 (Continued) Data Collection Breakdown

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Master's classes</td>
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<td>180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overseeing Interns</td>
<td>I served as a TBS University Supervisor in Spring 2019. TBS has had a long-standing tradition of sending student teaching interns to geographically proximate counties, including Carter, but the Schools of Hope grant implementation inspired a greater than usual interaction. Four interns, three teaching English language arts and one teaching science, were placed at CHS where I served as their supervisor, responsible for grading their submissions and observing their student teaching work.</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cross-Org Meetings</td>
<td>TBS, SPS and leadership from CCS met monthly during the grant implementation process. I attended these meetings from August 2018 until May 2019. I made a deliberate effort to take detailed notes from these interactions and saved and leader coded pertinent documents produced by the three organizations. A significant portion of this study's ethnographic data arises from these meeting notes.</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On-Campus Office Hours</td>
<td>I worked from the TBS's conference room for a complete school day, at least once weekly, from August 2018 until June 2019. On some weeks I was there for two school days. The master students would occasionally approach me to discuss various aspects of their programs and would sometimes text or call me to discuss various concerns.</td>
<td>275</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal Meetings</td>
<td>My time would vary from working in tandem with other graduate assistants to doing classroom observations to informally conversing with CHS leadership or the SPS trainers, depending on the week.</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Through my significant exposure to CHS over 14 months, I endeavored to triangulate (Bowen, 2009; Neuman 2014) three data sources types of information: semi structured interviews (Kallio, Pietilä, Johnson, & Kangasniemi, 2016), document analysis (Ary, Jacobs, Irvine, & Walker, 2018) and ethnographic fieldnotes (Delamont, 2016; Emerson, Fretz &
to produce a coherent narrative. The effort to do so was extensive and each data point played a significant role in the final product. The most significant aspect of the final data set was, however, the ethnographic field journal.

**Ethnographic Fieldnotes**

Recorded information from observations are important data points for almost every qualitative research study. Observations as data points have long been employed in social science research and are used to develop “themes.” Themes can be thought trends or behavior patterns or stimuli reactions (Lichtman, 2013). I became privy to a variety of data, quantitative and qualitative, related to the grant’s implementation through those relationships. I kept reflections of interactions with various individuals involved in the grant implementation in an ethnographic journal. I reflexively recorded my thoughts in a deliberate and organized manner (Davies, 1991; Eisenhart, 2017), and I paid special attention to data related to the implementation of the six stated goals in the grant. Areas believed to “successes” or “failures” were of special interest.

I began the note-taking process in Spring 2018 after my first meeting with Dr. Schwartz. These notes featured bullet-point “highlights,” where I attempted to record important information, typically related to activities in which I was to engage, or details that I thought would be important later. The note-taking process changed once summer classes began. I looked for physical or verbal reactions from the master’s students, or the staff, and tried to keep details about attire, timeliness and preparedness related to class material. I endeavored to describe the moods and appearances of those with whom I interacted (Emerson et al., 2011). At first, I recorded each new meeting or event on a separate document, but by August 2018 I employed a single file in a secure folder in the cloud. I actively took notes
during master’s classes and cross-organizational meetings. I switched between using my computer, typically to keep a form of “minutes” (Emerson et al., 2011), and my smartphone to record information after informal interactions (Gorman, 2017). This technological variance allowed me to quickly record important details, often immediately after the event (Emerson et al., 2011). Through multiple “reads” (Saldaña, 2013), I organized the notes, sometimes adding further clarification. I made sure to add dates to every new entry, which assisted greatly in the coding process (Emerson et al., 2011; Saldaña, 2013).

The process of verbally or quickly recording notes resulted in some disjointed information, but by Spring 2019 I had compiled all earlier notes into a single document named “Field Journal.” All previous field notes had been placed therein and organized chronologically. After each interaction related to the grant implementation, I opened my electronic device and recorded my thoughts. I attempted to record important data about my observations, including walks into classrooms and conversations with SPS and CHS leadership. I obtained a significant amount of data through these varied interactions and the information collected through these observations and informal conversations constituted nearly half of the qualitative data, slightly more than the data obtained from the staff interviews, with documented analyses rounding out the remainder.

**Transcribed Interviews**

Interviews are the most common data collection method in qualitative inquiries (Charmaz, 2002). Qualitative interviewers typically begin with open-ended questions, move on to connecting questions, and then conclude with purposeful terminal inquiries. Semi-structured interviews also allow for mixed focus and flexibility, providing direction for both the interviewer and interviewee while accommodating for adaptation and local context. A
A semi-structured approach allowed for maintaining focus but also real-time adjustments. I collected data through a semi-structured interview of 12 cohort members (Kvale, 1996). The questions required some reflection about the project’s events and their experiences related to grant implementations. I attempted to elicit specific responses about the six official goals of the grant application and ask for the cohort predictions about the future. The semi-structured interview allowed for the interviewees to change focus based upon their interests but centered around the master’s classes and their work with SPS. The questions for the initial interview can be found in Appendix A. The interviews took place in June, July and August 2019. I utilized an electronic recording device, saved the files to a secure folder and employed a transcription service to create the data record. The transcribed interviews are stored on secure a USB drive to which only I have access. Pseudonyms were used for all formal names to protect anonymity.

**Participant Selection**

I did not interview some cohort members due to logistics and context. I limited the interview participants to classroom teachers who were connected, to one degree or another, with SPS. See table 4 below.

**Table 4. Interview Participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Breakdown</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group 1</td>
<td>Classroom teachers that have taught from 0-6 years and are master’s cohort members.</td>
<td>4 total, 2 male, 2 female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 2</td>
<td>Classroom teachers that have taught from 7-13 years and are master’s cohort members.</td>
<td>4 total, 2 male, 2 female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 3</td>
<td>Classroom teachers that have taught from 14+ years and are master’s cohort members.</td>
<td>4 total, 1 male, 3 female</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To create a cross section of data and to connect with documented differences between veteran and new teachers related to change initiatives (Gainsburg, 2012; Snyder, 2017; Zimmerman, 2006), I grouped the teachers into three subsections based on years of service. However, the cohort did not present an easily definable group. Three cohort members have over 20 years’ experience, but one was a guidance counselor and the other was a math interventionist. Nine members had less than 10 years of service, with one in his third year in education. Snyder (2017) noted the differing definitions of “veteran” in the literature, with some categorizing teachers with six or more years of service as such. Others looked to teachers with 20 or more years of service as a special category separate from other “veterans.” Snyder’s (2017) categorizations combined with the cohort’s composition helped form the interview groups, but the group’s constitution also influenced the final participation.

This study’s first grouping was teachers with zero to six years of service. The second included teachers who have between seven and 13 years, and the third and final group featured staff with 14 or more years in education, based on total experience rather than years at CHS. Some veterans had taught for many years but were new to CHS, while others had spent their entire educational career at the school. The information about teacher years of service was just one data point in a large spreadsheet I created near the project’s beginning that contained data about the individuals in the master’s cohort. That broader information was part of TBS’s efforts to organize Fall 2018 practicum projects, and we accepted the information provided to us by the master’s cohort without external verification. I asked the staff to specify their years in education, rather than their years in the classroom. One of the veteran teachers had worked in the field for over 20 years, but many of those years had been in the district office as an
administrator. Other veterans had also left the classroom for varying lengths of time before returning.

I made a deliberate effort to feature two men and two women in each subgroup to gain insight about varied perspectives but was limited by participant willingness. It may have been beneficial to have racially diverse staff members in each grouping, but the cohort’s demographics did not easily allow. I did not plan to ensure that each subgroup came from diverse content areas, but unintentionally finished with three language arts, three math, two science, two social studies and two electives teachers. There were seven female and five male participants, three African American and nine Caucasian American.

**Document Analyses**

Analyzing available documents is an important aspect of qualitative research and was a significant part of this study. Document analyses can be utilized in a variety of ways. As Neuman (2014) points out:

> Qualitative researchers look at multiple facets of a document and its content. For example, a magazine article can carry content that entertains readers, is a vehicle that allows an author to build a reputation, triggers a public controversy, and is a way to boost magazine sales (p. 372).

There is no all-encompassing prescriptive guide to qualitatively analyzing documents, but many “approaches are based on identifying concepts or telling stories” (Lichtman, 2013, p. 265). In this study, the most important document was the grant application itself, downloaded from Florida’s Department of Education website. I highlighted the grant application’s six stated goals and presented them to the interviewees to obtain their thoughts about the process. I kept the grant application goals and parameters in mind throughout the data analysis process.
and compared various aspects of the document to the other qualitative data points. Like the interview data and ethnographic notes, the documents were analyzed with coding software and later organized thematically (Saldaña, 2013). I qualitatively analyzed several other documents, using the grant application as a foundation for understanding the thematic progression of events at CHS.

Themes from document analyses can be produced by studying a variety of data points, especially when evaluated in context. Therefore, I analyzed the grant, shared emails, and official SPS, TBS and CCS documents to help tell the policy implementation’s story. The latter included district-created handbooks, state and district guidelines and legal mandates that come from Florida and the federal government. I looked for language related to expectations, implementation strategies, and efforts to monitor “success” as defined by SPS, TBS and Carter County Schools leadership.

Additional documents included SPS’s programmatic paperwork, including their publicly available “tools.” Documents that I have created, or have access to, including spreadsheets with information about teacher experience, syllabi and practicum project proposals connected to TBS’s master’s program, and documents shared by TBS and SPS with one another were studied in conjunction with the transcribed interviews and ethnographic notes. Coding the documents was central to understanding their relevance to the implementation process. Through an iterative (Neale, 2016) process of adding and subtracting various documents to a NVivo software milieu, the relevance of various themes within important documents emerged.
Data Security

Pseudonyms were used for the research participants and the organizations involved in the Schools of Hope grant to protect the privacy of all involved. All pertinent data is stored on an encrypted thumb drive that is kept in a locked safe to which only I will have access. The only physical data are signed consent forms for interview participants, which will be kept in the same locked safe. All data will be kept for a minimum of five years after the final report has been submitted. Only I will have access to these transcribed interview recordings, as the digital data on thumb drives is password encrypted. The only physical data are the signed consent forms. All data, digital and physical will be stored for five years. After five years, the physical data will be shredded. The recordings will be maintained for five years after the report has been submitted (final report is submitting to the IRB). Five years after the final report has been submitted, the audio recordings will be deleted and the USB device will be reformatted, erasing all content. Data is monitored monthly to ensure security.

Data Analysis

I endeavored to identify major themes emerging from my data. I coded transcripts using NVivo software (Sotiriadou et al., 2014) through a descriptive process (Saldaña, 2013). Maxwell’s (2005) three types of codes served as a philosophical guide. Maxwell (2005) called for (1) “organizational” codes that are broad topics anticipated prior to interviews, such as those under the stakeholder groups or turnaround components headers; (2) “substantive” codes describing subjects’ perceptions without implying an abstract theory, such as adjectives describing communication between leaders and stakeholders; and (3) “theoretical” codes implying an abstract framework, such as those in the ideology/pragmatism category. I based

70
the final codes on initial NVivo word clouds that I refined through a repetitive process, but some descriptive codes emerged directly from the interview data.

**Descriptive Coding**

The interview and observational data formed the backbone of the research and was supported by document analyses. Qualitative data coding aided the search for themes, trends, and overall findings. Data coding for thematic analysis was appropriate for this study and has a long history in qualitative inquiry. “A code in qualitative inquiry is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and or evocative attributes for a portion of language-based or visual data” (Saldaña, 2013, p. 3). This study descriptively coded keywords (Saldaña, 2013). Descriptive coding involves assigning labels to certain transcribed data to detail a single concept. Typically, though not always, this is done with a single word that describes a theme. “Descriptive coding summarizes in a word or short phrase... the basic topic of a passage of qualitative data... Descriptive Coding is appropriate for... qualitative studies, but particularly for... ethnographies, and studies with a wide variety of data forms” (Saldaña, 2013, p. 88). Descriptive coding was helpful for organizing different types of data collected over significant periods of time.

There are some qualitative “methodologists [that] advise... your choice of coding method(s) and even [suggest that you] provide a provisional list of codes... beforehand (deductive) to harmonize... your study’s conceptual framework... but emergent, data-driven (inductive) coding choices are also legitimate” (Saldaña, 2013, p. 65). Pragmatic interpretivism allows the researcher to contextually and inductively code. Inductively coding qualitative research involved a series of steps. First, I read the text data in its entirety. I then organized important sections into segments or themes, then into smaller categories depending
on the results. “Categories are generated through the same analytical process of making comparisons to highlight similarities and differences that is used for coding. Categories provide the means by which theory can be integrated” (Soklaridis, 2009, p. 728). I reread the text and codes in a deliberate effort to look for redundancy, broadened the terminology and organized the results chronologically.

I used Microsoft Word to create a three-column file that included sections for raw data for coding (Saldaña, 2013). I input a total of 57 documents into the coding software, changing the combinations and sections while looking for various themes. I began by utilizing the auto-coding feature to create an initial word map. This helped form the foundation for a more specific set of qualitative codes. I coded through “cycles” (Saldaña, 2013) while being mindful of Creswell’s (2012) advice to limit overall themes to five or six major categories. I identified five themes that connected to “moods” based on chronology. Within each major theme, there existed several “sub-themes” whose “appearances” ebbed and flowed throughout the data set.

By using coding software to complement my work as a pragmatic interpretivist researcher, I was able to provide a thick description of the ethnographic and interview data surrounding the grant’s implementation. “Thick description” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Thomas, 2016) formed the finding’s primary structure, and coding software helped organize those results. Thick description means creating a report with complex and comprehensive information. “The purpose of a thick descriptions is that is creates verisimilitude, statements that produce for the readers the feeling that they have experienced… the events being described in a study” (Creswell & Miller, 2000, 129). The thick descriptions evolved over
several drafts, rewrites, and large-scale reorganizations. I analyzed the data numerous times before drafting final study.

*Iterative Coding*

Saldaña (2013) describes coding through multiple cycles. Other authors refer to this refining and repetitive process as iterative coding (Neale, 2016). Iterative processes, or efforts to redefine and reform various efforts, have had important roles in educational leadership development (Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2003). Iterative processes typically involve an initial analysis or thought process, followed by additional rounds of adaptations depending on the author’s needs. The iterative process in this study occurred simultaneously with data collection through a repetitive process. Using NVivo software, I began by coding the ethnographic journal using single-word descriptions (Saldaña, 2013). NVivo’s word maps were especially helpful, as they are simple to redefine by changing analysis parameters (Sotiriadou et al., 2014). I then coded a single interview, detailing themes that related to the ethnographic journal or a pertinent document, identified new codes, and refined the coding process (Merriam, 1998). Coding throughout data collection helped address concerns about trustworthiness. I developed tentative themes and adapted the coding process to seek out evidence that could counter any emerging theories (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). I re-read the data several times, adding and altering codes on each occasion (Neale, 2016). I attempted to identify the most significant trends in the thought patterns or actions of the important stakeholders. The twelve themes found in chapter four gradually emerged from this cyclical process.
**Writing as Thinking**

Through the coding process and several draft revisions, I came to understand that “writing is thinking” (St. Pierre, 2008, p. 328). The multiple analyses and rewrites helped develop the study’s thick description (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Using multiple rewrites is an important part of academic writing generally (Cooper, 1986; Menary, 2007) and qualitative inquiry specifically (St. Pierre, 2008; Honan & Bright, 2016). I used descriptive coding developed through an iterative process, which helped uncovered themes related to the efforts of both SPS and TBS under the “Schools of Hope” umbrella. The thinking-through-writing process forced me to engage in several structural reconstructions and data reorganizations. Every coding activity added clarity and precision to the data set.

After studying the data with the help of NVivo qualitative analysis software, I uncovered several themes based on chronology. These themes are reflective of the energies and efforts of the various stakeholders involved in this project at CHS. I utilized a pneumatic device to name the five time-blocks, each of which contain four or more themes. The blocks’ names describe the general mood of the time period, but are meant to be broadly, rather than narrowly interpreted. For example, “Peace” refers to a sentiment of calm, termination, culmination and finality, as much or more than it references a time of happiness, enjoyment and relaxation. My intention was, therefore, for the reader to interpret the names of the five time-blocks and 12 themes in the broadest possible terms.

Through the iterative coding process, I discovered that the time-based blocks related more directly to the first research question, which directly asked about the grant implementation’s parameters, while the themes about emotions and execution connected more to the second query, which asked about teacher perceptions. However, both the five time-
blocks and twelve themes helped answer the two research questions, and elements of each can be found throughout chapter four. I organized chapter four with these findings in mind and a chart of the themes can be found at the chapter’s beginning.

While this study was qualitative in nature, a pragmatic interpretivist is open to mixed methods approaches and varied data points, especially concerning triangulation efforts. I determined to reference several pieces of quantitative data provided by other sources as triangulation points for this study’s qualitative data, some of which emerge directly from the grant application. These included school scores provided by the Florida Department of Education and survey data results generated by SPS. The grant itself featured important quantitative data points that I included in this study. These data points served as reference and comparison points and helped triangulate the documents, journals and interviews and were helped add to the study’s “trustworthiness.”

**Trustworthiness**

Qualitative researchers endeavor “to demonstrate that their studies are credible. To this end [there exist some] common procedures for establishing validity… qualitative researchers routinely employ member checking, triangulation, [and] thick description” to prove “validity,” but “discussions about validity procedures provide little guidance as to why one procedure might be selected for use by researchers over other procedures” (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 124). Thomas’s (2016) guidelines of “rigor and quality” for ensuring “trustworthiness” helped guide this study. Thomas (2016) argued that “there are characteristics of research, though – very general ones – by which we can unequivocally judge quality” (p. 74).

Thomas’s (2016) work aligns with “constructivist” and “interpretivist” studies, where “prolonged engagement in the field” and “thick, rich description” (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p.
127) make for a quality study. These characteristics include the writing’s “clarity,” the depth and rationale for the a priori research questions, the methods used for data collection and analysis, a sufficient recounting of the research process, the effects of my biases on the findings, and the clarity of my results and their connection to the evidence. I utilized Thomas’ (2016) framework to produce “rigorous and quality” findings that are “trustworthy.” To create quality research, the author has to ensure that terms used are consistent, the research questions relate to the “problem or question being address” (p. 74), the methods were effective at producing “sufficient… and not too much” (p. 75) information about the research process and the main claims clearly relate to the evidence. To help remain faithful to this framework, I also used post-interview member checks as another layer of trustworthiness.

Member Checks

“Member checks” in qualitative research involve sharing collected data with involved individuals (Kornbluh, 2015; Thomas, 2017). Showing the transcripts, describing thematic interpretations, or discussing the researcher's preliminary findings are examples.

Member checking continues to be an important quality control process in qualitative research as during the course of conducting a study, participants receive the opportunity to review their statements for accuracy and, in so doing… they can feel a sense of relief that their feelings are validated (Harper & Cole, 2012, p. 1).

In order to involve the participants in adding to the study’s validity, I shared some initial findings during August and September 2019 follow-up interviews. “In member checks validation is often done by first returning the data… and/or results (e.g., themes and interpretations) to the research participant and then asking them to provide input on whether the data are accurate…” (Smith & McGannon, 2017, p. 103). I limited the second interviews
to six of the original 12 interviewees for a variety of reasons, some logistical. One of the
twelve had moved away, another was unable to coordinate in a timely fashion. I decided to
study the initial interview responses and further limit the follow-up interviews to former cohort
members I believed had additional contributions or had discussed topics about which I desired
further clarification.

I checked for their approval, took notes about additional feedback, and added pertinent
findings to the ethnographic journal. The second interviews were much more informal that the
first and were based on the study’s initial findings and the interviewee’s initial responses.
Further follow-ups every few months to discuss the project’s sustainability would have been
helpful additions, but the grant’s composition combined with the everyday realities of
professional life in education prohibited the ability to do so. In addition to follow-up
interviews, I conducted member checks by sharing thoughts about the various findings with
various members of CCS, TBS and SPS. I spoke on the phone for 45 minutes with CCS’s
Director of Federal Programs during the summer and discussed the grant, the master’s cohort,
and some initial analyses. I worked carefully with Dr. Schwartz to construct the final process,
utilizing his shared experiences at CHS to help uncover themes. I also spoke with several TBS
professors about their involvement with the grant, both during and after the implementation’s
completion. In one such conversation with Dr. Schwartz I was particularly heated, as I had left
a Spring meeting very frustrated with recent happenings at CHS. Those frustrations caused me
to write reflexively about my own experiences as a researcher.

**Reflexivity**

Qualitative research benefits from the author’s honest reflections about their topics and
how the research results have potential consequences to involved stakeholders (Gilgun, 2015).
As the partnership between SPS and TBS grant represented both a significant state financial investment and an emotional and professional investment from CHS’s staff, I was forced to temper my generally negative sentiments about PD initiatives with the excitement I felt for being a part of the process. In recent years I have visited many of Florida’s public schools have seen example after example of students in classes that I believe waste their time and fail to provide quality education (Harper & de Jong, 2009; O’Brien, 2011). My time both in public schools as a student and a teacher have left me suspicious of new initiatives designed to cause major and quick improvement. I have written about “eye-roll” initiatives in other academic work, where staff members learn about “some new program” at an early-year staff meeting and cannot help their physical reaction. My mother is particularly mistrustful of public school “reform” efforts, despite spending years as a volunteer at my elementary and middle schools. I can close my eyes and hear her derisively say “look, here’s another task force that will go nowhere” while driving home following the school principal’s latest presentation.

I understand that my own analysis of the university’s effort in this process was colored by my own involvement as a university employee. I had far greater exposure to the inner workings and internal debates of TBS then either SPS or CHS, making my perspective particularly unique in that I was attempting to study the grant implementation in its entirety. As an official TBS employee and a graduate student, I felt myself to be at odds with SPS’s approaches and their interactions with myself as an individual and the university overall. Furthermore, there were several occasions in interacting with either contractor or CHS figures where I felt limited in my ability to criticize the university, even when listening to complaints. This was especially true in situations where I found myself agreeing with the concerns CHS and SPS figures had with TBS. Other scholars have detailed the power dynamics that are
involved in various types of social science research (Campbell & Hart, 2018; Varcoe, 2006), and my own experiences as a graduate student navigating the inner workings of three large institutions while also being an employee could serve as a basis for future questions about these types of interactions.

Despite this background, I believe in the spirit of reform efforts and that well-intentioned people doing their best can be a positive force for the educational system. I believe it is, more often the not, systemic structures that causes school difficulties, rather than any failure on the part of individual educators. These beliefs affected the data-analysis of this study, including the initial data recordings, the coding process, and the narrative construction. As I was the vessel through which this study’s information flowed, my sensibilities about public education’s past, present and future influenced the findings. I frequently discussed my observations with Dr. Schwartz, often with strong emotions. I felt alternatively frustrated and exhilarated as the themes from the findings seemed to both appear and dissipate after each new read and conversation. I both wanted the process to end and to go on forever.

Perhaps these feelings relate to the fact that I am hopeful that public schools can survive and thrive in the coming years and generations, but I believe that today’s political realities make that less than certain. It seems to me that the current electorate has little interest in preserving traditional public schools, and that powerful figures are actively seeking the system’s replacement with charters or vouchers or both (McIntyre, 2019). I approached interactions with the private sector consultants with an academic researcher’s critical lens, and the reader should understand that this background shapes the study’s findings. It does seem, however, that House Bill 7069 represented a major state-level investment into improving the existing public-school structure.
**Limitations**

The study has several limitations. This policy ethnography is about a single case, Cheryl High school. The grant implementation’s context is unique, although it is conceivable that another secondary school will partner with a research university and an external consultant in the future. The “Schools of Hope” grant created a 14-month program, making impossible the many years of observation often found in ethnographies. I limited interviews to master’s cohort members who served as classroom teachers and did not formally interview staff members outside of the TBS program. Doing so would have added data to the study, but as the grant’s entirety was the impetus for my work, I believed that limiting interview data to those involved with both the university and the external contractor made for a better overall product. Finally, the data generation and analysis methodologies were generated entirely by me, making clear that my biases affect the entire study.

**Overview**

In this chapter I detailed the pragmatic interpretivist paradigm that guides the study, described the research questions, outlined the qualitative methodology utilized for data generation and analysis, and discussed the study’s limitations. I described how the ethnographic data was organized, coded and thematically organized, described the interview group’s composition, and discussed the rationale for conducting formal semi-structured interviews with 12 of the 19 cohort members. Several rounds of qualitative coding combined with multiple close readings of the data reveal a thematic progression of events. In chapter four I detail the findings that arose from this substantial data set.
CHAPTER FOUR

This policy ethnography collected data through using qualitative methods. An iterative coding process revealed a chronological progression of events that contained specific phenomena, or themes. The themes are indicative of the actions and moods of various stakeholders connected to the grant implementation. The themes are an amalgamation of various data points I obtained through ethnographic journaling, transcribing interviews, and analyzing pertinent documents. NVivo software was critical for data analysis, as I employed an iterative, or a cyclical and repetitive process. The data indicate that the grant implementation proceeded through four time-blocks, detailed in table 5 on the subsequent page.

FINDINGS

I detail the chronological and thematic findings this study produced through the process of answering the two research questions. Answering them revealed a five-part time-based implementation process that related strongly to both questions but had a greater connection to the first. The divisions between the time-blocks were not rigid, but rather were approximations of the activities and emotions of CHS, TBS, SPS and CCS personnel attempting to enact the grant's parameters. The names given to the time-blocks and the 12 distinct themes evolved from the coding process but were precisely defined into single-word descriptors by me to provide the reader with clarity. I present the five time-blocks
chronologically before delving into the themes that occurred therein. The themes progress chronologically as well, but in a less linear fashion than the time-blocks, as the events and their associated emotions and energies ebbed and flowed. The thematic narrative complements each time-block’s chronological progression and is designed to immerse the reader in the CHS grant implementation through the researcher’s lens.

**Table 5.** Chronological Blocks of Events

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time-Blocks</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Executing the Plan</td>
<td>The grant implementation's initial stages are documented in &quot;The Plan.&quot; Here the data reveal widespread efforts to make the six overarching goals a daily reality.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pushing to Implement</td>
<td>The new school year's energetic beginning is featured in &quot;The Push.&quot; Unfolding from June to November 2018, &quot;The Push&quot; to implement featured SPS's full-time exposure to Cheryl High school’s context and their preliminary pedagogical reform efforts. TBS's first five master's classes occurred during &quot;The Push.&quot; The Masters cohort moved from an introductory stage to formulating their principal practicum projects.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pausing to Make a Patch</td>
<td>The three major institutions endeavored to review their initial activities, discussed strengths and weaknesses, and determined to make specific changes. TBS changed its schedule while SPS dramatically changed its training focus.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pressing to Perform</td>
<td>Following the changes from “the patch,” SPS, TBS and Carter County schools pressed forward with their reformed ideas. Changes included SPS’s directional focus, coordination between the three organizations and cohort’s efforts to execute their practicum projects.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheryl High at Peace</td>
<td>Key figures involved with the grant's implementation took time to reflect on the successes and struggles of the process near the program's end. Data from this time frame demonstrate that many stakeholders believed the program had several positive aspects, but also several areas of disappointment.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Within the five time-blocks arose 12 distinct themes, each connected to the grant implementation.

The 12 themes relate to both research questions but have a stronger correlation to the
second. The themes are present throughout the five-block timeframe, but some themes were more limited to certain blocks, while others were heavily present in one and only slightly so in another. The thematic organization is designed to provide the reader with in-depth detail about how the grant implementation unfolded. It is not designed to demonstrate every aspect of the 14-month program, but rather to exemplify the most significant data points to which I had access. Like the time-blocks, the 12 themes did not occur in a rigid fashion and were often interrelated. The agency I employed as a pragmatic interpretivist researcher was central to developing the thematic organization. I made specific choices regarding the thematic construction, including the configuration of data points that might appear outwardly related. I made these decisions based on contextual analyses and relied heavily the knowledge generated though my professional relationships with individuals involved at CHS.

**Table 6. Grant Implementation Themes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Novelty</td>
<td>“Novelty” refers to new or unique or unexpected “happenings.” These data points were distinct from the regular “newness” found in the academic year (Schuck, 2009), or managing classes of new students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morale</td>
<td>“Morale” data points relate to feelings of standing in the world or the community, felt by Cheryl High staff members or leadership officials. These were both positive and negative feelings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pressure</td>
<td>This theme involves systemic pressure from governments and the pressure individuals placed on themselves, and not the “regular pressure” that educators typically experience (Jacobs, Burns, Yendol-Hoppey, 2015).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resistance</td>
<td>“Resistance” describes data points related to intransigence, backlash, or refusal for individuals and organizations to engage with a myriad of strategies and activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excitement</td>
<td>“Excitement” covers data related to positive emotions about activities or events, as well as positive feelings about an event happening concurrently with the emotion itself.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delivery</td>
<td>“Delivery” describes data related to the enactment of important grant items, like pedagogical strategies, leadership programs or other scholastic reforms, and, importantly, reactions to the grant in action.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6 (Continued) Grant Implementation Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Struggle</td>
<td>“Struggle” differs from resistance as it involves faithful efforts to engage with activities or initiatives, but those involved encountered difficulty. It is distinct from the regular struggles educators face with preparing students for tests, classroom management, or interpersonal relations common in public schools (Tesfaye &amp; White, 2012), and instead focuses specifically on the grant’s implementation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development</td>
<td>“Development” involves data related to growth and improvement. Unlike “delivery,” development describes areas of success, or believed success, within important aspects of the grant.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appreciation</td>
<td>“Appreciation” deals with emotion-based data points, involving feelings of relief or hope in connection with the grant implementation process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disappointment</td>
<td>“Disappointment” relates to emotion-based data points, involving feelings of regret, anger, or defeat in connection with the grant implementation process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress</td>
<td>“Stress” relates to emotion-based data points, involving feelings related to angst, anxiety or discomfort in connection with the grant implementation process. These stressors were distinct from the typical stresses of being an educator in contemporary public schools (Travers &amp; Cooper, 2006).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection</td>
<td>“Reflection” describes individuals from various entities analyzing their progress or the results of various grant implementation efforts. This occurred more towards the end of the implementation, but efforts to reflect on the process occurred at varying times.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Executing the Plan - February to July 2018

By February 2018, CCS had collected data from a needs assessment survey, successfully applied for the grant funding, and had begun its initial direct interactions with TBS and SPS. Dr. Marta Longoria and Wilhelm Doloroso from CCS worked directly with SPS leadership and Dr. Schwartz from TBS to finalize details. The grant application informed the State of Florida that “the partnerships with SPS and TBS will provide an accelerated professional learning plan for both effective leadership and ambitious, rigorous instruction that will transform not only the quality of teaching in the classroom but the culture of the school into a positive learning environment for students, faculty and families” (Carter County Schools, 2017, p. 20). SPS began first, arriving at CHS in the Spring 2018 to conduct the first
"rigor walk," a type of focused observational data-gathering activity central to their initial plans.

SPS shared rigor walk results with TBS and CCS at a summer gathering. I recorded with surprise the active engagement expressed by TBS figures with SPS’s methodology. Several professors asked questions and took notes, including some who attended only initial meetings. The findings indicated that a large percentage of CHS staff were not engaged with types of approaches that SPS believed could help students reach "the depth of the standards." Some teachers, for example, were observed playing entertaining but not academic movies. Those who were engaged in educational activities, SPS believed, devoted too much time and energy to teacher-centered learning approaches, and the students often appeared disinterested. CHS’s new principal and CCS’s leadership were disappointed by these results but were confident that the upcoming year's turnaround program would improve their performance. SPS's observations also described significant aspects of “defeatism,” where the staff believed that most students were incapable or disinterested in rigorous work. These results related to the school's morale.

Morale – “Morale is down, I’m ready to move on”

As 2017-2018 school year ended and CCS planned to turnaround CHS, many staff members were ready and happy to be a part of a change initiative. Some seemed quite dissatisfied with the school’s status quo. Morale had been damaged by several years of bad news. “Morale is down,” one teacher said during her interview. “Your teachers that you have are good teachers that are honestly just trying to hold on. They know this is a good school, they love Cheryl, and they know it will get better, but then it didn't get better'.” Another said “Well, the school… seems like the press, the media, it’s always negative. Even if we have
something positive come out of here, they rarely put that on the front page. As soon as something happens negative at this school, it seems to make the breaking news story.” The school’s reputation prior to the grant implementation had been harmed in the community by a variety of recent events. I remembered reading about CHS before my involvement with the program, and the news was rarely positive. I learned at a later meeting that trash on campus had been a significant issue in previous years. One teacher told me, “the school’s been going through the ringer for a decade, longer than I’ve been here, and that’s been administrative turnover and other district stuff. It’s been chaotic anyway, so the foundation and the school culture was already shaken.”

Another said that she “was disgruntled with teaching and was ready to move forward in my career. I made my displeasure known and was called to the Assistant Superintendent’s office and asked what I wanted to do. I said I wanted to do something in Administration. He suggested this cohort…I joined it.” Many teachers were unhappy with their experiences at CHS, including both veterans and newer teachers. Some believed that the master's program offered by TBS was a way out, a way up, or a way forward. Not all morale surrounding CHS or its staff was negative, however. One interviewed cohort member told me that “if a teacher’s been here awhile, they are resilient.” CHS had been experiencing several challenges, as is typical for most turnaround schools (Murphy & Bleiberg, 2019), but some cohort members admired the quality of certain staff members that had endured many difficult years at the school. These veteran teachers were believed by their counterparts, in many cases, to be professionally strong individuals capable of delivering results. The new program offered a chance for growth and development.
Development - How do we do this effectively?

The grant application contained little specific information about activities in which these various stakeholders were to partake. As the document focused on overall structures, leadership from TBS, CHS, and SPS were left to plan the execution. Planning meetings designed to do so occurred during the first months of 2018. The frequency and participants varied week to week and month to month. Leadership typically met at CHS, although occasionally at CCS offices, to discuss initial program ideas. TBS’s staff answered questions from CHS teachers and administrators and organized the documentation necessary for enrollment in April 2018. I recorded that the process felt “rushed” from the very beginning, but TBS’s administrative figures seemed up to the challenge. My own biases certainly played a role in this analysis.

The involved institutions were concerned about effectively coordinating activities but often debated the meaning of “effective.” The organizations committed to collaborative planning and generated facilitation tools. One was a shared Google sheet that I created which contained monthly goals, measurables, and the parties responsible for production. I created this document at the behest of Dr. Doloroso, who expected that TBS and SPS would confer regularly to discuss and execute the various goals housed therein. The efforts to develop the project indicated that much of SPS and TBS’s integration with CCS was new to all three organizations.

Novelty - New and quality leadership needed for success

SPS and CCS believed that quality leadership was necessary to increase student success, a common belief in turnaround programs (Murphy & Bleiberg, 2019). The grant
application’s authors argued that this would be an area of strength during the turnaround program.

A new principal has been assigned to Cheryl for the 2017-2018 school year… The Carter County School District also has several areas of strength: highly motivated to learn and improve, new effective leadership, and prior experience with positive implementation of school improvement interventions. Carter has struggled in the past with providing effective and sustainable school improvement so there is a heightened sense of urgency and awareness of the critical need to continuously refine our systems and structures. In summary, based on our needs assessment and consultation with stakeholders, a specific action plan has been determined… (Carter County Schools, 2017, p. 3)

TBS was central to that action plan. TBS’s College of Education had been committed to developing quality educational leaders dedicated to serving all students for many years. This philosophical coherence was a contributing factor to the district's desire for the university partnership, as CCS desired to produce and support a quality leadership pipeline. The grant detailed this vision in specific terms. “Three main professional development strategies will be implemented as part of the TOP3 project to provide additional professional” including the creation of a “master’s cohort program through a partnership with Tampa Bay State University” (Carter County Schools, 2017, p. 13). TBS was to be the principal tool for achieving this leadership capacity growth, but the CCS also called on SPS to develop the staff’s short and long-term ability.
**Delivery - SPS has the formula**

SPS utilized two full-time staff members, one for social studies and language arts, the other for science and math. They had never employed full time trainers at a secondary school in this fashion. These trainers worked at CHS five days a week and supervised pedagogical instruction. The two full-time trainers were the human faces of SPS's effort to improve student achievement at CHS. They, more than any other individuals, represented the focal point of the grant implementation. Their office was near the central part of campus and I frequently observed them conducting coaching cycles, walking the hallways, and serving as central figures at professional learning communities (PLCs). Additionally, SPS employed senior official Kate Glaris to work closely with school administration, particularly the first-year principal. Ms. Glaris at first had a varied schedule and was typically present two or three days weekly, but in Spring 2109 she worked at CHS full-time. I noted that Glaris had a strong, confident personality and seemed both committed to SPS’s formula and capable of quality execution, but that some TBS figures were not positively disposed to her approaches. Their concerns seemed to relate to her capacity to communicate. Finally, SPS employed a variety of academic researchers, planners, and data-collection specialists who occasionally visited campus and participated in monthly meetings.

SPS’s approach involved the development and utilization of student “teams,” and student-centered learning, pedagogical theories made popular authors like Marzano (2007). See Figure 3.
Despite commitment to Marzano (2007) theories about teaming and student-centered learning, SPS expressed interest in obtaining research-based information about their approaches, at least at initial monthly co-planning meetings. They were interested in both quantitative and qualitative information about teacher commitment to implementing their strategies and data about their approaches’ effects on short-term score gains.

A consultant researcher expressed early interest in three questions. She asked, “does this model result in increases in equity and access to a superior education? Does this prepare students for the world of work? Does the academic team increase the level of social and emotional skills of the students within the team?” She then offered, “we believe yes.” She explained that SPS was “…learning more about the ‘teaming’ effect.” When questioned by a TBS professor for further explanation, she continued, “It’s about a collaborative effort to support teams of teachers who work with teams of students. Everybody learns, everybody
masters content, everybody progresses professionally. We don’t want people to fall behind.

Our theory is, the stronger those teams, the higher the performance of the students as a whole, and the school as a whole will be.” SPS figures regularly mentioned variations of the expression: “teams of teachers assisting teams of students” at monthly gatherings PLCs. They called the approach taken at Cheryl High an “Enhanced Model for Rigor.” Many cohort members mentioned and prior familiarity with SPS’s approaches, some arguing that “they had heard all this before in other initiatives.” I made special note of two veteran members of the cohort who believed that SPS’s methods were like previous PD efforts executed at the school. Others, especially newer cohort members seemed less familiar. I noted no discernible or definable patterns, however, with teacher tenure and levels of resistance.

**Resistance – “Won’t matter, even if you pay them!”**

CCS notified CHS staff in Spring 2018 that Summer 2018 would involve SPS-related training. One cohort member related her frustrations about this when interviewed.

Part of the things we were told in the grant, the curriculum—we were supposed to have training over the summer, and then it got canceled. I think that was a lot of the problem too: these teachers lost so much class time… So, if you don’t tell people about when we’re gonna have summer training ahead of time. Even if you’re gonna pay them. People lay out their plans way ahead of time. If you don’t—and you email people over the summer and say, ‘Hey, I want you to come to school a week early. We’re gonna give this SPS training.’ Well at that point people have made plans. Not a lot of people committed to come into training, so they eventually canceled it.

(Interviewed Cohort Member, 2018)
This teacher noted what other cohort members had mentioned. Lost class time to prepare curriculum units late in the year caused frustrations related to planning and implementation and reminded the staff of their earlier frustrations. Some believed that better Summer 2018 planning might have alleviated this issue.

This interview response indicates that financial incentives for engaging in extra activities may have a limited capacity to motivate, especially when understood in conjunction with effective and timely communication of expectations. The teacher mentioned the importance of offering bonuses for attending extra training but believed that staff participation was less than ideal due to poor communication. She and others were not willing to disrupt their summer lives on short notice, even when paid to do so. These communication concerns affected the implementation’s delivery of its promises.

**Delivery - TBS builds leaders**

The university constructed and executed a condensed version of their already existent master's program. They created a cohort model housed at the high school rather than at their main campus. This plan appealed to many CHS members for two main reasons: cost and convenience. One told me “I've wanted to get my master's for a long time. It's just been one of these things that life happens and just kept putting it off… but I really wanted it from a top tier research institute. When this opportunity came here, I felt… I had to take advantage of this.”

The university offered three classes in summer 2018, meeting Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays for eight daily hours. Each summer class met on six occasions, totaling two weeks per class. During Fall 2018 and Spring 2019 semesters, the classes met on Mondays and Wednesdays from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. with extra online classes for various necessary certifications.
(including ESOL, a requirement about which many cohort members were surprised to learn). The school system, through the grant, reimbursed the students for tuition and books.

TBS’s plan built on its existing programmatic foundation. In “Educational Leadership 2”, for example, students began an “appreciative process,” designed to take their Summer 2018 “Educational Leadership 1” ideas and reframe them with an "appreciative lens.” This progression of events is typical for traditional TBS master’s students who study educational leadership on campus. TBS’s “appreciative” approach to educational leadership has a long history and involves employing a positive and success-based mindset to reform efforts (Cooperrider et al., 2003). The master’s students were expected to take their initial ideas and use the “appreciative” focus to sharpen their efforts. See figure 4 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Iterative cycle of review, refinement and action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>STEP ONE: TOPIC EXPLORATION, REFINEMENT AND REVIEW</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Refined Appreciative Topic:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At Cheryl High School, we will create a culture of purposeful collaboration among teachers and students that promotes students’ exploration of their personal interests and related post-secondary pathways to improve secondary curriculum alignment with students’ interests.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Original General Topic:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We will maximize alignment between student interest and post-secondary goals by allowing students to become more involved in mapping out their future plans.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 4. Example of an Appreciative Inquiry - Adapted from a master’s cohort appreciative group-project*

Practicum project creation was a central component of the fall semester and the master’s students experienced several difficulties. TBS expected the students to familiarize themselves with pertinent literature and use their contextual knowledge of CHS to formulate a plan of action. The cohort then needed to seek out a CHS administrator who would agree to oversee
their project. The formulation was particularly challenging for some, with one cohort member telling me “I had been out of undergrad [studies] for ten years, so I was a little rusty… I was not used [it] to at all.” As many master’s cohort members had been classroom teachers for many years, some felt intimidated by the coursework. TBS made adjustments to accommodate the grant implementation’s unique nature and allowed several master’s cohort members to partner in groups of four to five during parts of the practicum.

Despite these consternations, most of the 19 final cohort members believed that they had been given a quality opportunity to advance their careers. Several mentioned that taking classes on campus after school made the process more viable. One cohort member told me, “I couldn’t do a trip to [TBS] campus for classes. I wouldn’t be able to schedule around it, so it definitely a convenience thing…” while another responded to the question “What drew you to Leadership?” by saying “I think ‘cause the ease of it being brought right here.” Another cohort member told me “I commend the professors for being able to put it together. I commend them... It would be really hard to build a brand-new type of program; not just any program, but a brand-new format.” CHS’s staff seemed to appreciate the plan to facilitate the grant implementation. Staff motivation and willingness to engage played a central role in how “the push” to implement unfolded.

**Excitement – “We were uplifted”**

The energy from the master’s students was palpable from the beginning of Summer 2018. I observed just over 20 highly motivated, energetic, and prepared staff members who seemed eager to begin this new process during Summer classes. I saw the students exerting significant effort through the summer and fall semesters, coming to class with book sections highlighted, asking pertinent questions, and engaging with their professors. “I was definitely
excited to be part of it all” a cohort teacher said during our interview, though she later expressed frustration, especially related to a lack of communication from both TBS and SPS. Another told me “I’ve wanted to get my master's for a long time. It's just been one of these things that life happens and just kept putting it off… but I really wanted it from a top tier research institute. When this opportunity came here, I felt… I had to take advantage of this.”

In-depth conversations about SPS’s strategies were also regular occurrences during Summer 2018. The master’s students sought advice from TBS figures, including myself, about a variety of topics related to pedagogical theories. But one of the most striking aspects of the master’s cohort did not directly involve “work.” During our interview, a Math teacher told me “Here, when I started this, I didn’t know it would be so cohesive or even more of a family thing. We got more involved with each other, and they were more uplifting, in a sense, and more connection, more unity. It was very helpful.” This veteran math teacher cohort member found the unity and cohesiveness within the cohort itself both noteworthy and unlike his prior experiences with graduate school. Not only did he learn information he believed to be valuable, but he formed relationships and collectively struggled with coworkers. Mostly importantly, he believed that the new working relationship existed only due to the master’s program. Many of the cohort members, we learned, despite many years of common employment, had never met. This new “family” pushed together through summer classes and prepared for the upcoming school year.

By the end July 2018 summer classes had ended and the “Push to Implement” was on.

**Pushing to Implement – July 2018 to November 2018**

It seemed to me that summer classes began and ended rapidly, as the thrice-weekly 8-hour meetings combined with substantial levels of reading and writing made the two week-
long courses move quickly. SPS had planned its initial steps with CCS, but I had little exposure to their operations, especially when compared to our close collaboration during Fall 2018 and Spring 2019. The initial cross-organizational meetings between CCS, SPS and TBS to which I was a participant began with the new school year, and many early moments were utilized making introductions to personnel and learning various organizational philosophies. I noted that many CCS, TBS, SPS and CHS staff members seemed to be very excited.

Excitement - We’re in it together now

The central figures from SPS, TBS and CCS were in place. These individuals seemed to believe that the grant application’s goals could be realized through their combined effort. I noted that the 20 highly motivated, energetic, and prepared staff members who comprised the master’s cohort seemed eager to push for success. I served as a graduate assistant for one of the three classes, fellow graduate students assisting the other two. The students generally came to class prepared, having read the assigned material and many artfully furthered discussions. I observed many notepads and laptops complete with underlined paragraphs, highlighted sections and prepared remarks. Occasional “drifting” into web browsing during class time occurred, but no more than any of my other university experiences.

The secondary school students returned to the new school year in August 2018, and I noted that in just a month’s time frustration related to SPS’s pedagogy was building in certain departments, especially math and social students. The science department, however, seemed more inclined to engage, which may have influenced the later creation of the “model teachers.” Some frustration related to SPS’s perceived inflexibility. One teacher mentioned that “I think they really focused in on three tools that they wanted us to use throughout the year, and I think that we were exposed to those quite in-depth,” during our interview. This veteran teacher
detailed her knowledge of Marzano (2007) and argued that she understood the connections SPS had been trying to make. However, she argued, the pedagogical limits SPS placed on its training program had limited any potential success. The grant’s aggressive timeline and push for achieving quick wins may have pressured SPS into narrowing its focus.

Pressure – “Because the grant, because the grant, because the grant”

The grant placed enormous pressure on SPS, TBS, CCS and CHS to perform. One interviewed cohort member told me that the feeling around school was “You’ve got to do it now because the grant. Because the grant. Because the grant. Because the grant.” She believed that the staff was forced, because of the grant’s language, into a variety of activities they might otherwise have avoided or adjusted. Although she admitted that she had not thoroughly read the grant, she had heard SPS and school administration cite the document as an explanation for various inquiries and complaints, including at training sessions and PLCs. The pressure to perform, it seems, existed from the implementation’s initial stages. Beginning in February 2018 many staff members felt enormous pressure to both learn and implement SPS’s pedagogy. The cohort did as well, but also had to navigate TBS’s expedited master’s program timeline.

One science teacher noted the difficulties, recalling “I think that doing TBS coursework and being involved with SPS to the level and degree in which I was involved was extremely difficult for me.” Several other members reflected on the struggle working in the turnaround program while pursuing higher education. I noted that the master’s cohort’s energy and commitment to SPS initiatives generally declined as the year progressed, especially as major TBS projects came due. “It almost took away time in the classroom, which I didn’t like. I think had I just worked moderately within the scope of SPS and not gone to the level of
having them in my classroom two hours plus a day, I would have been able to put forth more effort towards teaching and then maintaining my schoolwork better.” This teacher later served as a “model teacher,” which provided additional pressure from more frequent walkthroughs and planning sessions with both the trainers and administration, beginning Spring 2019. This was especially difficult as the third overall semester featured many in-depth and time-consuming TBS assignments.

An English teacher mentioned SPS’s programmatic rigidity as a pressure point for the staff. SPS pedagogical expectations focused on a single style (student teaming) implemented on a specific schedule. “I’m not sure why there was such a rigid—a rigidity with the pacing,” the teacher explained. “I don’t know what they were using that for. I don’t know why we had to show our culminating activity in week four when ours wasn’t even due until week eight, and they knew that when we planned it... I really don’t know why that was an issue, but it seemed to be an issue.” Aware of the grant’s timeline, SPS and CCS seemed to press for results, even early in the process. SPS expected certain activities, like designing and implementing of new units, to be developed and enacted within a few weeks. This seemed to cause varying but noticeable levels of consternations for some staff members. Financial pressures also appeared to be a concern.

Pressure – “Pressure with the money”

Some cohort members recalled their initial experiences related to financial pressure during our interviews. “It was laid out to Administration back in February… [that the plan was to] reimburse the students for tuition and books for all of the classes.” CHS staff members had to move quickly if they wanted to participate in TBS’s cohort and take advantage of the funding opportunity the grant offered. One teacher said that while engaging
in her regular professional duties in late Spring 2018, “next thing I know, I get an email that says, ‘You need to be at this meeting to go over the TBS cohort.’ This was back in February. That started. Then we had to have all our paperwork in to TBS by a certain time. It was almost like it happened too quickly that we couldn't get it all done.” The need to move rapidly affected several parts of their experience. “Even the nature of the cohort was in 14 months, which is extremely fast to do everything....” she explained. Members of the master’s cohort seemed to know that CCS had made a major investment in their futures, but the grant’s speed and rapid planning placed undesirable pressure on them to quickly produce results.

Upon reflection, some cohort members believed that the academic program’s overall quality may have been sufficiently rigorous, but that some master’s students had not efficaciously capitalized on their opportunities. The grant’s financial components may have affected this sentiment. “I get that there is that pressure with the money, and the eyes are on you, and it represents the university, but I’ve seen some of the work that—say, my work, even, or of my colleagues, where I’m, like, ‘This is so not grad-level work,’ but it gets passed” one cohort member told me. Two other cohort members, one a new teacher and the other a veteran, believed that the program should have had a more rigorous admission’s process and admitted fewer participants. I recorded similar feelings in around Spring Break 2019. The program's ultimate successes and generally positive reputation in the district helped the creation of a second cohort, but their beliefs about admission requirements were accordingly realized as TBS increased the rigor of its admission process. This latter success contrasts with the disappointment many felt surrounding SPS’s Fall 2018 activities.
Disappointment – “I don’t see much”

SPS attempted to implement a specific formula centered on student “teaming.” My Fall 2018 interactions indicated that improving test scores was a priority for both CCS and SPS, and both organizations outwardly believed that the new pedagogical approach was the appropriate method for doing so. SPS trainers consistently expressed a willingness to work all CHS staff members, but a cohort member who taught electives told me that “my interaction was minimal, bein’ in the field that I’m in. I would see them [SPS], certain people, and in the halls, I hear about ‘em but, for me, it was more of a meet and greet.” While SPS asserted that their pedagogy could work for all staff members and content areas, their focus seemed to be on core content areas, like math, social studies, science and English. The SPS trainer charged with math and science did, however, interact with several teachers outside her focus, but this typically occurred after a teacher made a direct request for assistance.

Some staff members had broad pedagogical awareness and significant experience with pedagogical theory before the grant implementation. SPS’s targeted and narrow focus seemed to affect them in significant ways. To help CHS staff understand the “teaming” focus,” where students were organized into small groups and assigned “roles,” the teachers received a four-part “tool.” This tool was designed to help the teacher move from “teacher preparation” to “teacher verify,” stages one and four of SPS’s “rigorous” model. The tool has not been included in this study for copyright reasons, but it formed the central observational instrument used during “Coaching for Implementation (CFI)” walks, described later in this chapter.

SPS desired to show teachers how to guide the students in the process of taking control of their own learning. Significant teacher preparation was expected to occur during the process’s initial stages, but gradually, over time, the teacher would “release” the students to
engage in the day’s material. Once in stage four, a teacher would provide minimal instruction when a class began and then spend the remainder circulating, observing, and occasionally asking probing questions. SPS taught CHS’s staff about this model through professional learning community (PLC) meetings, monthly training sessions and during the discussion periods of CFI walks. Several cohort members mentioned the “tool” and SPS’s related training efforts, typically derisively. I personally went on three CFI walks during my time at CHS, and every observed teacher was working, according to the SPS trainers, on “stage one.”

**Delivery - We can collaborate better**

My efforts at Cheryl High centered on working with the master’s students to refine their efforts into practical activities. Two classes were held in Fall 2018, on Mondays and Wednesdays. I made notes about anecdotal evidence from a variety of sources throughout my time on campus, including conversations with SPS figures and CHS staff outside of the cohort. By September 2018 I had noted varying levels of disconnection between SPS’s perceptions and school leadership’s desire for cohort engagement. SPS and CHS leadership wanted the cohort to lead several campus initiatives, including various projects promoted by the consultant. After several informal conversations with Kate Glaris, I decided to lead an effort to enhance our collaboration and inspire the cohort to more directly engage with SPS.

I invited the two full-time trainers to speak at a master's class in late September 2018. We discussed presenting some of their recent on-site work and sharing some their pedagogical theories with the cohort. Our initial idea centered around generating additional cohort “buy-in” to SPS’s work. I organized the visit in conjunction with the class’s professor of record in a deliberate attempt to connect the academic work to the consultants' field work. The professor was very helpful and worked with me based on his syllabus, as we believed that SPS’s
presentation needed to relate to the cohort’s graduate school endeavors. The representatives from SPS’s seemed positively disposed, but communication difficulties and last-minute schedule changes forced one trainer to withdraw her participation. Kate Glaris took her place.

SPS hoped to push the cohort into taking a greater leadership role, and Glaris believed that her visit could help that process. SPS’s representatives explained their version of a “quality” school during their presentation. Glaris constructed a detailed “half-pyramid” drawing that demonstrated their beliefs about how schools progress from failure to success. The cohort reacted positively to the presentation, asked some important questions, and interacted professionally with SPS’s personnel. I did not, however, hear about this meeting again from either the master’s cohort members or from the two SPS presenters. Based on my judgement, the activity had little productive value.

**Novelty – Meetings Galore**

Key figures from all three institutions met for a monthly planning session on October 17 to discuss the previous two months of implementation. The external consultant made clear that despite their nationwide presence, their model at CHS was a novel approach. Much of their work was based solely on providing training for curriculum-delivery, and they referred to CHS as an “intense” school-level intervention. By the middle of October, the school year had been in session for just under two months and SPS felt it necessary to “reset” their curriculum work. This mandated an addendum to the contract, expected to be completed by November 1, ready to begin by November 14. Their “first cycle” of data generation, targeted coaching and specific reflection had ended and now SPS was engaged in analysis and adjustment. CCS leadership expressed some confusion about the need for contract changes and wanted to be
sure that additional funding was not required. The specific resolution to this confusion were
not revealed over the course of this meeting, nor did I learn the details of how it was resolved.

As the fall semester wound down SPS, TBS and CCS leadership met again on
November 28 to discuss the progress that had been made. The fall semester classes were
ending, and the students had developed the outlines of their practicum projects to be executed
in Spring and Summer 2019. SPS had been pushing the staff for nearly three months and used
the meeting to report on their successes and struggles. I talked about my forthcoming research
plans and an SPS academic officer detailed their efforts to close “achievement gaps.” Kate
Glaris recounted her work with CHS’s leadership. Dr. Doloroso asked for progress updates
and information about SPS’s collaboration with TBS.

Glaris informed the group that two “diagnostic” analyses had occurred, one at the end
of September 2018, the other at the end of November 2018. Glaris had conducted both
diagnostic efforts and had made a deliberate effort to observe a mix of content-areas and grade
levels. The rigor diagnostics themselves were a mix of observational and quantitative data.
Glaris entered classrooms and marked various scores based on her notes. A teacher engaged in
a specific practice, for example, received a certain score related to SPS’s tools. Correctly
using terminology related to state standards was another area of focus. These various scores
were coded numerically and presented to the group using various color-coded graphs. Some
areas had improved, while others had declined. She noted improvement in the “taxonomy”
levels of teacher-student activities, as well as improvement in the five “buckets” of “rigorous”
activities. The overall results were well received, but CCS and SPS agreed that a pause was
necessary to analyze the work that had been delivered thus far.
**Delivery – “Looking for quick wins”**

SPS also expressed concern for their work’s long-term effects while “looking for quick wins” during the November 2018 cross-organizational meeting. One quick win they desired was the improvement of CHS’s overall instructional practices, with more rigorous approaches to “reaching the depth of the standard.” To that end, SPS had planned a “coaching clinic” on October 31, where teachers were expected “to take the lead on coaching.” I observed and noted in November that many of the same phrases about coaching, leadership and teaming were repeated from previous meetings, almost verbatim. Phrases that originally impressed me as remarkable and creative had become stale.

The repetition of ideas and professional tenets, did, however, connect to the rigor diagnostics that SPS conducted at host schools four times annually. By looking for and measuring similar facets of a school’s implementation, SPS believed they could provide their client with reliable progress updates. The data was made available on their “trend tracker,” a digital tool with which staff members were expected to become familiar. In addition to the “rigor diagnostic,” SPS made us aware of a “school leadership team survey,” designed to generate pertinent data. Kate Glaris informed the November gathering that “our coaching encourages looking at teaching rather that conditions.” In other words, teachers and school administrators were expected to stop worrying about minor behavior issues (headphone usage, texting) and focus on what the students were doing academically on a minute-by-minute basis. Good teaching, according to SPS, was not context-specific, but rather formulaic.

Glaris noticed and reported on significant disconnects between SPS and school leadership on defining “rigorous classroom instruction”, and disagreements about how to properly conduct PLC meetings. She noted her first-hand observations “leadership team
survey” results as evidence. Glaris believed that there were “three tracts” in which cohort members could benefit the partnership while obtaining the practicum hours and experiences necessary for their master’s degrees in educational leadership, which alleviated some of Dr. Schwartz's concerns. The first was “Collaborative Coaching and Feedback,” designed to support teachers in the effort to implement the new pedagogical strategy. The second was “School Culture and Climate,” where the “discipline team” would participate in “discipline walks.” The third was “New Teacher Development,” where cohort members would work directly with deans and assistant principals to organize and assure the effectiveness of new teacher meetings. CCS leadership ended the November meeting pleased with SPS and TBS’s initial collaboration but wanted more some shareable specific evidence in the future. I noted that the CCS’s interchanges with TBS and SPS were respectful and helpful, but that some animosity about the absence of contractor “measurables” was building.

**Resistance – “Animosity about who gets involved”**

Feelings of resistance were observable four weeks into the new school year. Two teacher members of the master’s cohort privately expressed their frustrations to me before an early Monday night class in Fall 2018. One math and the other social studies, their feelings of resistance centered around the consultant’s inability to work with “new teachers” and poor summer preparation. I later learned that “new teacher” mentioned by the cohort member was a recent university graduate who CHS leadership had believed would soon become a “star” in her department. Frustrated by the insistence on using the consultant’s pedagogy, the new teacher quit after just a few weeks. In order to prevent others nearby from hearing the complaint, the concerned math teacher wrote a description of her concerns about SPS’s training regime. See Figure 5 below.
According to this math teacher, SPS had the department reorganize curriculum maps according to the consultant’s parameters. Once done, teachers were expected to create “learning targets” parallel to “altered” units and then develop aligned tasks for students. A unit was supposed to last two weeks. Yet just over a month into school, the concerned cohort member believed that insufficient planning, preparation and communication had caused obstacles. She believed that frustrations related to these activities and SPS’s “hovering” presence had made the new math teacher feel uneasy and had contributed to her decision to leave.

At the October cross-departmental meeting SPS promised to provide some anecdotes to complement their survey and observational data but relayed that a significant problem existed at CHS. The math coach had rejected their pedagogical approach and was refusing to participate. Glaris reiterated SPS’s policy that they would not work with “the unwilling” and
had been “going around” the math coach. She also informed us that CHS’s new principal had been working directly with the math coach, but the negative situation had remained. This troublesome issue would remain throughout the implementation process, and some cohort members believed it negatively affected the overall math scores.

Later conversations with the that same cohort member related to staff’s perspectives about the early “push” to implement. “This was quite the substantial undertaking,” she said, and “There is some animosity about who gets involved.” The staff involved in this work were often notified “last minute,” which she believed had affected morale. The staff members selected to develop the unit wondered “Why did we get picked?” Three of the four math teachers selected were in the TBS master’s cohort but many mentioned that they already felt strained by their master’s work and regular professional duties. SPS had explained that “you’re going to become a teacher leader, we’re going to need you to build capacity.” Several teachers I interviewed mentioned feeling pressured into participating with SPS, as developing new units was a significant part of SPS’s contract with CCS. I noted that they seemed more willing to indulge these pressures at the school year’s beginning, less so as time progressed.

The gradual reduction in willingness to unit-build during regular school hours during Fall 2018 seemed to influence CCS’s decision to move these activities to Saturdays during Spring 2019. One math teacher expressed dismay at spending time away from his students for unit building and admitted to not fully committing his mental faculties to the process. His main concern, according to his interview, was the students on his roster who were learning under substitute’s direction. Some other teachers were also upset because unit-building required seven days of classroom pullouts. They believed that significant time away from their students would limit their academic and social growth. Behavior concerns were
especially prescient vital, as interviewed teachers mentioned the time needed to “restore behavioral norms” after time away from their students. The unit reform process had begun by the second week of school, but some team members charged with unit-building learned about the activity only the day before it began. This forced them to put together substitute teacher plans “at the last minute.” Several cohort members had struggled with the process.

Struggle – “Playing lip service”

I observed other difficulties throughout the 14 months and interviewed cohort members to confirm details. SPS had, for example, selected a first-year ELA teacher to become a teacher leader, which appeared to bother some veterans. SPS’s activities occurred almost weekly during Fall 2018 but some teachers believed they were “forced” to participate. I recored the expression “we were strongly influenced” to encapsulate their feelings. Others mentioned inconvenient CFI timing and disliked that the visits were limited to five- or ten-minute intervals. Many staff members mentioned the quick visits as insufficient periods for assessing pedagogy, especially concerning teacher “positioning” in the SPS “four-part tool.” SPS trainers explained that “we’re using a target-task alignment tool, and you’re looking for where they are on the tool” during my first CFI walk, but the participating teachers seemed to resist using the “tool” as only success monitor. Furthermore, the observed teachers were supposed to receive “debriefs,” or feedback, within 24 hours, but the one teacher mentioned that “all the actual work is done by the coaches and the teachers. SPS just wants the notes on the debrief, they don’t do it themselves.” The teachers resisted taking responsibility for conducting post-observation activities of their coworkers, believing that SPS should have taken the lead role.
Seeing signs of resistance all over CHS, on October 10 I walked to the SPS office to meet with the two trainers and Kate Glaris. I informed them that I wanted to improve our collaboration and we discussed a variety of topics, including research-related questions about staff approaches to the initiative. Glaris wondered “are staff actively participating in meetings? Are they using data to drive their meetings? Is there purpose, plan and product to their collaborations? Are they using their planning time effectively?” They did not feel confident about the answers to these questions. Glaris and the trainers believed that CHS was relatively less willing to participate than previous schools and that many staff members were "playing lip service" to the strategies. Participation had declined and while the administrative team had been verbally supportive, they had done little to improve the situation. Glaris believed that the trend was continuing downward. While trying to understand their complaints, I relayed the teacher concerns about the coaching walks that had occurred.

The three believed that I could help motivate cohort members to engage with SPS’s curricular strategies and encourage them to take on greater leadership roles on campus. One way they suggested was attending additional coaching walks and encouraging greater cohort participation during the master’s classes. I learned there that SPS tried to see four teachers per hour during walks, but with immediate debriefing sessions and associated travel time only a few minutes of actual observation occurred in each class. The math teachers involved in my first walk seemed frustrated by time and by planning failures. These instructors mentioned the voluminous standards necessary to cover before End of Course (EOC) exams explanations for the impotence of short visits. Poor summer preparation limited observation time and poor communication seemed to be central sources of resistance to SPS from CHS staff, but the most influential stressor was the failure to “model.”
Stress - The refusal to model

I often heard CHS staff members and TBS employees complaining that SPS “refuses to model!” during the grant implementation. Variations of that phrase was consistently mentioned by cohort members during interviews and was a regular discussion point in my interactions with SPS. SPS’s explanation for modeling avoidance was simple and direct: “We cannot run your classroom.” SPS consultants, trainers, leaders and academic researchers expressed similar beliefs at cross-organizational meetings. They argued that modeling an example of an “effective” strategy would take ownership away from the teacher. Duplication of quality, they argued, was not possible. Teachers, like their students working in teams, needed to engage in a “productive struggle.” Their explanation was striking, especially because of the philosophical juxtaposition expressed by some CCS figures. Dr. Doloroso mentioned at our November cross-organizational meeting that staff engagement with “extra” activities had been less than ideal because “we don’t model enough what we do in these meetings for school-based people.” He wanted to “invite cohort members to meet with the leaders of the institution,” with January being an ideal time. His expectations centered on the cohort gaining leadership experience by observing CCS administration in action.

SPS seemed to reject this concept and argued that CFI walks, therefore, were less about the teacher being observed and more about the teachers doing the observing. A science teacher told me, “They weren’t in the classrooms modeling. They said they didn’t model, but that’s what teachers needed. They needed them to come in and show them and help them. There just wasn’t enough. “Well, we want the teachers to come to us,” but if you’re not willing to reach out to the teachers too, then that makes it difficult.” SPS expected the teachers doing the observations during walks to be the real beneficiaries, rather than teachers they were
observing. I believe that CFIs were more a lesson about learning from failure and not on observing replicable success. SPS theorized that the “walking” teachers would learn through observation and conversation before taking the lessons learned back to their own classrooms for application. This was to be done by the debrief session, where the observers would discuss how the recently witnessed class could have improved.

Some teachers outright rejected the tenets of the CFI process. Others refused to participate in unit building and rejected SPS overtures for help. I recorded that a CCS leader cautioned SPS that most staff members were not willing to “give up a Saturday,” paid or not, to participate in unit building. A small but substantial minority made sure to never engage with SPS at all. One interviewed cohort member said “my other co-teacher, she just didn’t like it. She just didn’t wanna do it. She didn’t want anybody in her classroom.” In action at CHS, SPS’s willingness to work with “only the willing” caused significant consternation for several cohort members, including a veteran social studies teacher whose classroom I observed for an entire period in early fall 2018. He felt that feedback from SPS observations was lacking, and when he sought additional information, he was rejected in favor of looking at a website report. Pressing for more feedback and not receiving the desired amount, this social studies teacher believed he “fell out of favor” with his SPS trainer and had very limited interactions with the consultant from Fall 2018 on.

Resistance - Favorites and the fallen

Another cohort member told me the story of her “fall from favor” with SPS during her interview. “I was down [willing to engage]. I did a lotta the coaching cycles. I volunteered to be a mentor… I was in the PD’s.” Although new to teaching, this social studies teacher had a strong theoretical foundation through her own studies and was a valued contributor in the
master’s cohort. “I could help my department, who was not 100% on board. I understood it. Some days I felt like I understood it better than our facilitator…” She applied the teaming strategies to her classroom with fidelity, at least at first. “I had an incident in my classroom that had to be addressed… I took the day off in between… Immediately after that, I was dropped from any leadership possibilities.” This teacher believed that her close collaboration with SPS ended after the first inopportune interaction. “I was left off of emails… I also know that we lost—a teacher retired last year after getting in a big blow-out fight with this lady. That, to me, shoulda been where that facilitator was replaced.” She believed that a clash of personalities, both on an individual and on a departmental level, affected the implementation effort’s quality.

This teacher had expressed willingness to engage with SPS’s pedagogical approach and had made an active effort to help lead their turnaround efforts. However, she believed that she was ostracized for failing to participate fully in an October gathering. She further believed that her professional relationship with SPS never recovered and that this deterioration was demonstrative of her entire department’s experience. An electives teacher mentioned “I feel like some of the contractors come in with the, ‘it’s my way or the highway,’ attitude. It’s a top-down push, as opposed to, ‘We understand where you’re comin’ from. Let’s work together. Let’s do this together. I may not be the expert, but I’m gonna take what I know, take what you know, and we can come to a solution.’ I think that has created a rift.” Many staff members were clearly disappointed with the rift that had developed in Fall 2018.

Disappointment – “We’re going to lose her”

Glaris mentioned that struggles would potentially increase as they moved into curriculum design and implementation in Spring 2019 at our November gathering. Dr.
Doloroso suggested replacing the difficult math coach in favor of someone more inclined to engage but assured the group that that decision should be left to CHS’s first-year principal. I learned that the math coach’s role changed over the school year. Once clear she would not work with SPS, she changed from lead the department to covering three of the vacated teacher’s classes. She spent the rest of her working hours “in planning,” which caused considerable angst within the math department. One cohort member greatly lamented losing the promising young teacher, saying “I think she felt there were some things in SPS that were really good. I think she thought it was too much too fast for everybody concerned, including my math teachers…” This one math teacher had inspired considerable hope in CHS’s leadership, and SPS had marked her as a future star. This designation was part of SPS’s motivation to closely engage with her practice. “When we lost this one, I think that she was here because she wanted to be a teacher… She was really good, and I think that’s why she got picked as a Lead Teacher for SPS…. I think that she was upset that Administration didn’t heed the warning that we’re gonna lose her and [to] back off on some of this SPS stuff with her; and we did lose her.” This cohort member believed that the math department never really recovered from this loss.

SPS’s diagnostic data combined with anecdotal evidence from TBS and CHS had forced CCS administration to consider some organizational changes. As the Fall semester came to an end and Thanksgiving Break approach, CCS paused to patch the implementation process.

Pausing to Make a Patch – November 2018 to December 2018

The first semester neared its end and the three organizations paused to assess their progress. All three celebrated successes at the November gathering, using qualitative data that
indicated an improved attitude among students and staff as evidence. TBS leaders detailed the master’s cohort’s successful work in fall classes and related their various plans for upcoming “practicum projects.” SPS talked about improving and observable “quality work” from the staff, noting a change in attitude related towards teacher preparation and commitments to executing “meaningful tasks.” Yet some challenges existed. SPS’s two full-time trainers had led several “coaching walks,” working carefully with the willing staff and various instructional coaches. SPS had begun their “on-the-ground” implementation efforts by August 2018 while I worked closely with Dr. Schwartz to administer fall classes. One of SPS’s primary PD strategies was the previously mentioned “Coaching for Implementation” walk, or CFI. CFIs featured one or both full-time CHS trainers, one or more academic coach, a select group of teachers, and occasionally a school administrator and would last the entirety of a school day. The observed teachers were aware that “walks” would occur during their classes, and although they knew the class period, they were not told the precise time. CFIs usually occurred on Tuesdays, Wednesdays or Thursdays, but Wednesdays seemed to be the most common. I went on three CFIs over the course of the school year, all on Wednesdays, and typically stayed for the first half of the daily process. SPS had been largely displeased by CFI results after three months of implementation and felt pausing to analyze their work was necessary at the end of Fall 2018.

I recorded that teachers seemed to always be “labeled” on “step one” of SPS’s four-part tool. This occurred for several teachers I personally thought were doing quality work. One science teacher (not a cohort member) was a particularly striking example. I learned that this teacher had been a long-time staff member at CHS and had a quality reputation. Her lab was large and full of experiment equipment and computers and materials. The students in her room
seemed to work well in small groups. However, the SPS trainers were not pleased during the
post-observation debriefing session. They argued that her material “lacked rigor” and the
activity had a dearth of “higher order” questions. I was very surprised by this commentary and
by the general agreement shared by the fellow “walkers.” I argued that the students were
engaged, well behaved and seemed to enjoy their work, but the SPS trainers expected more. I
reflected that day on how those discouraging results may have negatively affected CHS’s
willingness to participate.

The “coalition of the willing” dwindled throughout 2018 and as SPS made “lists” of
teachers with whom they would work. Anyone labeled a “resistor” was removed from the list
and largely ignored, unless they specifically requested help. By late September 2018 SPS
decided to revise their overall plans, decisions that were largely finalized at the November
gathering and gradually revealed to the staff after Thanksgiving break.

Resistance – “We have no time for that!”

Teachers were becoming more and more likely to reject SPS overtures for interaction
as the Fall progressed, typically complaining that they did “not have time for that.” Dr.
Schwartz was becoming concerned with academic fatigue and worried about how spring’s
pressures would affect the cohort, especially during “testing season.” In conjunction with
other TBS professors and graduate assistants, he determined to continue the Monday class
meetings through December and reduce the meetings in January, February and March by a
single gathering each. This decision partially related to his experiences with the cohort, but
also the grant’s aggressive timeline. TBS’s regular master’s practicum project utilized the
summer semester to design the process, with the fall and spring for execution. The grant did
not allow for this, so Dr. Schwartz believed that the three additional Mondays in December
would afford the group extra time. This may have benefitted the master’s cohort practicum projects, but several interviewed teachers mentioned feeling “burned out,” partially due to missing their typical December break. Dr. Schwartz believed that missing the break may not have been ideal, but was necessary to help ensure the implementation of quality practicum projects.

**Delivery – “We did what was necessary”**

SPS had also made changes and seemed prepared to execute their reformed model. Glaris mentioned frustrations during the December meeting with the effort Cheryl High’s staff and SPS made to reorient their strategies in the classroom. “We’ve identified nine teachers to be ‘model teachers’” she explained. These nine would “receive extra feedback and support.” Through their aim to “coach future coaches,” Glaris and SPS believed these model teachers would be the “success” that had been lacking thus far. She made us aware that SPS had “recruited these nine teachers to get more access to classrooms. We’ve asked them to take significant risks and identify one class they would like to try out their new strategies.” Each teacher was expected to select a class, pick up supplies for the process and agree to “intentional coaching” targeted at those classes.

SPS believed that the change to model teachers was necessary due to widespread staff “apathy”, especially regarding beliefs about “student capacity.” Over and over, in both my observations of “Coaching Walks,” meetings with SPS staff and conversations with cohort members, I noted subtle (and sometimes not subtle) teacher dispositions about “these kids” being unsuited for student-centered approaches and teaming. Teachers consistently believed that the students were either incapable or disinterested in taking command of their own learning, and that various versions of a “teacher-centered” approach were the best ways to
reach them. Glaris noted that “one of the things we picked up on is they [need] to not be apathetic with students and challenging the students with rigorous work.” SPS believed that they needed to press the teachers into challenging long-standing beliefs and allow students to productively struggle. This effort had met with significant resistance and due to SPS’s refusal to work with “the resistant,” they had decided to commit the majority of their future efforts to these nine “model teachers.” Three cohort members became model teachers. The nine came from different content areas and some were veterans, while some were newer teachers.

**Novelty - Adaptations were needed**

TBS had adapted their master’s program to accommodate the grant’s requirements in geographic and programmatic composition and in pacing. Typically, TBS students pursuing master’s degrees in Educational Leadership live and work in a widely dispersed geographic region, and most often develop and execute practicum projects at their place of employment. The standard approach involves the master’s student partnering with an AP or school principal to develop a year-long project based on the school’s needs. Initial development begins with summer classes that provide a research foundation, followed by fall and spring “practicum classes” where the plan is implemented. The AP or principal working with the practicum student then provides feedback and “scoring” to the university.

TBS remained committed to this model, but university leadership realized that adaptations for the CHS cohort were necessary. The first issue was numeric. Twenty master’s students comprised the cohort (later dropped to nineteen). There were only five members of the leadership team at CHS and a limited number of potential foci. TBS had never attempted to facilitate such a large number of practicum projects at a single site simultaneously. TBS leadership therefore decided to have the students formulate their overall practicum ideas in
groups by the end of fall 2018. The graduate assistants, including myself, worked carefully to organize like-minded students into groups and connect them to a school administrator. These efforts directly related to the grant application’s six goals.

**Development – “We need more of that”**

Much of SPS’s work also involved new activities, both for their company and for CCS. One cohort member told me “with SPS, they're really big on making the students more accountable, which I like because I think we need more of that.” This interview response relates directly to observational data about the creation of student-led teams. “What they ended up suggesting was that we create team binders. In the team binder, the students had their names and their roles. They had, if they were getting into an argument, this is what we're gonna do for our conflict resolution.” Another cohort member mentioned pedagogical changes’ effect on the county’s science mandates, which had already been developed and implemented. The science department had recently incorporated a district-developed “curriculum map.” Many science teachers believed that his had cost the district a significant amount of time and money to construct, and felt connected to the idea of faithful execution. SPS seemed to begrudgingly accept that their approaches needed to incorporate the district plan, but several science teachers expressed frustration about the lack of programmatic alignment.

TBS’s new program also affected CHS’s staff, including in ways not directly tied to the turnaround program. One cohort member said, “this year was actually one of the first years in probably four or five years that I can remember Cheryl having intern teachers on campus.” TBS had decided to expand its student-teacher program at CHS based on the grant’s allotment of extra personnel, myself included. Three of the teacher-interns taught English Language
Arts, but a fourth taught science. Observing and assisting both the science intern and her cohort member mentor provided unique access for observing how SPS’s work attempted to blend the district’s methodology with their pedagogical theories. I noted that there appeared to be little conflict between the SPS’s teaming approaches and the county’s science requirements, and the real consternation was anecdotal from the science teacher herself.

**Pressing to Perform - January 2019 to May 2019**

By January 2019, SPS and TBS had made mid-year adjustments. TBS classes included the practicum project and education law, where I served as the graduate assistant of record. SPS had reformed its program and was ready to press forward. Two GAs regularly offered classes on Monday nights to complement the work of Dr. Schwartz, while the cohort gradually spent more and more time developing and executing their practicum projects. I helped create and maintain organizational documents that TBS used to manage their progress, and I made consistent overtures to SPS for coordination at Dr. Schwartz’s direction.

**Reflection – “Why the change?”**

SPS’s focus shift caused me to reflect on the project’s progress in early 2019. I wondered about their decision-making process, as I was unsure why the move to model teachers had occurred at that time. I noted that the trainer who focused on math and science seemed to have a much better rapport with the staff than her counterpart, and often worked with teachers outside of her subject area expertise. This seemed to be confirmed by later interview data. I recorded a meeting with the ELA/Social Studies trainer and the reading coach on February 6. They wanted to discuss a reading initiative they thought might could improve staff performance. The SPS trainer had noted “issues with collegiality in the reading departments,” but “better success in the English department.” Unfortunately, they found that
“social studies is a mess.” According to them, there were issues with attendance and turnover, so they thought it was a good idea to “utilize a common text to build common purpose.” This reading activity was to be employed to “build links and extend the learned strategies into the classroom.” The trainer further asserted that the staff was not “emotionally invested in the craft,” and that “apathy is a big problem.” Her beliefs seemed to be reflected in her working relationship with CHS’s staff. She hoped that a “few people from the cohort could help lead the [new] process.” I assured the two that I would relay their concerns, but that the cohort was extremely busy with their professional activities, common planning work and graduate school efforts. I believed that this idea had almost no chance of moving forward, but I kept those concerns to myself.

Two weeks later I attended a Saturday curriculum planning session at CHS. SPS brought three additional trainers, one to work with math, another with ELA and a third to work with science, social studies and electives. These Saturday sessions were the adaptations from Fall 2018’s pullouts that many interviewed teachers mentioned at the project’s end. Most attending staff members were cohort students and roughly half of the cohort attended. Dr. Schwartz and I had worked carefully with SPS and determined that these Saturday sessions could apply to some “practicum hours” the cohort needed for their master’s degrees. We informed the cohort that attendance on Saturdays would be helpful on several occasions, which may have contributed to the significant cohort representation.

CHS’s principal was with the math group when I arrived. All groups were creating curriculum units complete with standards, learning targets and “culminating tasks.” According to the SPS trainers, the culminating task was expected to demonstrate “full intent” of the state standard, which could include several subsections. This ambition struck me as exceedingly
difficult to achieve, as many Florida state standards consist of several components. SPS trainers utilized CHS’s classroom projectors and used their own PowerPoint presentations, while the staff members used school laptops, notebooks and graphic organizers to complete their various assigned tasks. I deliberately dressed informally (relatively speaking) and moved from room to room to casually discuss the staff’s activities. I recorded these observations in my ethnographic journal after several informal conversations in all three rooms.

*Delivery - We can’t complain!*

The master’s cohort engaged in many different activities during Spring 2019, often divided by the interests of the various practicum groups. The class meeting held on March 11 was indicative of a typical Monday night in the Spring. The two assigned professors (Dr. Schwartz and a principal from another CCS school) and their graduate assistants briefly lectured and then allowed for student presentations related to various concepts about educational leadership. Groups of students with similar practicum projects then received time to plan and produce together, while individual students worked with professors or the graduate assistants to obtain practicum hours, fill out logs, or learn about pertinent literature. Some students were ahead of schedule and nearly completed with the hours necessary for graduation by mid-March. Others were significantly behind and the professors worked with the GAs to alleviate students concerns. The professors, graduate assistants and master’s students occasionally expressed frustration with the process, typically related to the time necessary for successful completion. Somewhat humorously, I often heard cohort members say “…but, this is free, so I can’t complain.”

The master’s classes pressed forward, through and past spring break and the groups executed the parameters of their various practicum projects. Some were involved in
“restorative justice,” others were involved with increasing CHS’s capacity to house and develop both mentor teacher and future interns. After spring break, Monday night classes featured little new academic work and allowed for significant time to work on practicum-related activities. Wednesday nights featured school law, a class the cohort seemed to thoroughly enjoy. The class was taught by a school principal from an adjacent county who had worked as an attorney “in another life.” The students appreciated the opportunity to work on their practicum projects and seemed to make good use of their time. Attendance was often an issue however, a problem that I did not note as being nearly as pervasive in Fall 2018 or the two summer semesters.

One of those Monday night classes took place on April 1, 2019. I noted that just 13 of the 19 were present on time. The students were informed that the class would feature a Florida Educational Leadership Exam (FELE) preparation session from two visiting TBS professors. Dr. Schwartz began with information about “practicum logs” and “monthly reflections” that had not yet been turned in. The students actively engaged once the FELE preparation process began. They asked questions about PD strategies related to FELE preparation and worked with the two professors for over an hour. I then discussed strategies for putting together final principal practicum portfolios with the entire class. It seemed that TBS’s most impressive accomplishment was successfully administering the separate 19 practicum projects at a single campus during Spring and Summer 2019, something they had never before attempted.

By the end of April, the Spring classes had come to an end, SPS’s work was mostly completed, and most master’s students had or were about to successfully pass the FELE. But there had been significant areas of resistance, struggle and disappointment.
Disappointment – “A culture of distrust”

Besides losing significant classroom time with the students, the staff came to believe that SPS cared little for End-Of-Course (EOC) exams, because staff counterarguments against their “teaming strategy” related to passing EOCs were largely rejected. Many staff members, especially in math, believed that teacher-centered strategies worked better to prepare students for the aspects of the EOCs that Florida requires for graduation. These scores directly affected the overall school grade, but SPS consistently insisted that their student-centered approach would lead to better results. Later interview data confirmed feelings of resistance and frustration. One math teacher told me that “I thought that the company really established and bred a culture of distrust between the company itself and the teachers… The walkthroughs that this company was claiming were non-evaluative were becoming evaluative.” Another said “I think for a seasoned teacher to come in and try to reorganize and restructure everything that works for me isn’t really a good idea in my opinion. Bits and pieces of it I could take and probably use occasionally, and it would be great, but to try to restructure everything that I do down there was not a good idea.” Despite later becoming a model classroom teacher, this veteran educator was disappointed because she believed that SPS’s work mostly benefited newer teachers rather than those with experience.

Continuing with the model teachers, SPS’s two full time trainers seemed to abandon other activities. On March 18, I noted how the previously mentioned “book club” initiative had fizzled. The idea had involved engaging the staff in a monthly reading activity with improving classroom practice and pedagogical awareness as the goal. “The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks” was SPS’s chosen book, and the ELA/Social studies trainer had believed that I could have been a conduit to greater master's cohort's participation. In theory, the staff
members involved would have read a book monthly and then met to discuss the material. The lessons learned therein could then be applied to the teacher practice. The SPS trainer had envisioned the school's librarian leading the activity with the Reading Coach, the SPS trainer and myself in support. They knew that I would have been happy to help, but I made clear that other commitments made taking leadership role difficult. Furthermore, I suspected that the staff would not readily participate, being largely occupied with other activities.

The SPS trainer seemed convinced that this activity was not only plausible but would make for a valuable addition to SPS's social media presence, as she planned to record and post the monthly gatherings. I spoke on three occasions to the media specialist envisioned by the trainer as the leader of this entire process. Each time she expressed a willingness to engage, but I observed no follow-through. I asked the interns I oversaw if they were interested, as this endeavor had a strong focus on English Language Arts, but all declined. By the middle of March 2019, it was clear that this idea was no longer a priority for the media specialist and the SPS trainer had accepted that it would not proceed. As I expected, the staff was pressing forward with their main objectives and had little time, energy or interest in extra activities. The SPS trainer briefly confirmed her disappointment at an informal meeting near the project’s end.

**Disappointment – “Too much time on minor details”**

SPS endeavored to reform teacher classroom practice with, among other strategies, a focus on improved planning. Improved PLCs related to departmental efforts, in the same way that using the “tool” to move from “teacher prep” to “teacher verify” represented individual efforts. I attended one of the refined co-planning sessions near the end of February 2019. See figure 6 for the agenda.
SPS’s reformed planning efforts were in full effect and the staff believed that changes had been delivered. I observed teachers, principally in groups of four, discussing plans for the upcoming Florida Standards Assessment (FSA) testing. The interns I oversaw were readily participating. I found it striking the training was teacher-centered and very little work was “student centered.” SPS called on teachers to build teams of students who would take ownership of their own learning, but as previously mentioned, refused to model successful
implementation. These trainings struck me as an opportunity for doing just that, but instead the staff were largely passive and expected to listen and ask occasional questions. I recorded that “time was wasted discussing the nuances of minor details.” The staff spent four minutes on the intricacies of “success criteria,” just under 10% the planning session’s entirety. The ELA department discussed where students should be “expected to put a thesis statement,” a process that continued for several minutes. I was pleased to note that the TBS interns (fourth-year undergraduate students doing a form of student-teaching) contributed “as much if not more than the other teachers.” Some staff wanted increased usage of classroom digital technology, but there was an inconsistent availability of both laptop carts and internet.

One cohort member took a leadership role, delivering on the promise of expanded opportunities for cohort members. This appeared normal to all, because this cohort member was already a teacher leader, but her approach struck me as going beyond the “minimum.” Interestingly, the staff seemed worried about the students’ willingness to attempt the upcoming writing portion of the exam with fidelity, and efforts to motivate potentially disinterested students was a significant conversation topic. February in the ELA department was dominated by “testing concerns,” which was not dissimilar from the math, science or social studies departments. Teachers and SPS staff members consistently mentioned the importance of improving test scores. The observational data generated from this meeting was significant, as it took place near the end of February, just four months before the school year’s end.

**Novelty – Blending models**

CCS leadership had inquired about the challenges TBS and SPS were facing at an early Spring cross-organizational meeting. Dr. Schwartz explained that the university was making a deliberate effort to “push” the master’s cohort members into engaging with SPS initiatives,
including taking on leadership roles. He also observed that the university was making a
deliberate effort to blend its master’s program activities with the school district’s leadership
preparation program. Dr. Schwartz believed that utilizing grant funding to attract interns,
reward mentors and offer other financial incentives for school staff would be a “draw” to
entice both current and future educators to work in the county. CCS leadership promised to
follow up on these concerns and after celebrating some success points, asked SPS for
information about how CHS data compared to other schools. I recorded that no specific
response was provided.

I spoke at length with both SPS trainers shortly after that meeting. They indicated that
SPS and CHS’s leadership had adjusted their original model and were now pressing for results
in “testing season.” These types of adjustments were not limited to top-down SPS decisions,
but also “bottom-up” reactions from the staff. In the summer of 2019, one math teacher
reflected and told me that “I made adjustments during the spring semester, and now this
semester, to help alleviate that issue[s]” with curriculum difficulties. The work was more
intense than he expected, but he adjusted accordingly. He had been under significant pressure,
as had the entire cohort, but he had found ways to cope and looked back fondly on his own
progress.

Appreciation - They did the best they could

I focused observational data collection on efforts to achieve the grant application’s six
goals. I also asked the interviewed cohort members about their related beliefs. One teacher
said, “on the success rate of it, I’m not sure, but I do know that they [SPS] reached out and try
to do the best they can…” I asked him to follow up on the section that called for “increased
parental involvement and engagement in the child’s education.” He said “I think as a whole,
the school has tried to do this. We have committees set up to focus just on that. The cohort has tried to assist in that. We’re not probably where we wanna be… but… I do see some efforts to try to increase that.” These quotes and other observational data indicate that cohort members largely believed they had played a significant role in implementing the grant application’s goals, even in cases where our interviews represented their first direct exposure to the wording. In some cases, their practicum projects, largely created through their own creativity and TBS support, had played a central role in that effort.

There was, however, a widespread belief that four of the six goals had been “handed over” to SPS for achievement. “The effort to try was there perhaps, but I think there could have been a lot more… I think that three, four and five were basically given. They were put on the umbrella of SPS… they were linked and that was… the school’s way of saying, ‘Hey, we attempted these… through SPS.’” The staff understood that SPS had been given significant responsibility by CCS, and I noted that there was an initial “sense of awe” when staff members were first exposed to new SPS activities. The contractor exerted, at least initially, significant influence with the staff, but their influence seemed to limit the staff’s ownership of the initiative and made some staff members feel that they had little input in the initiative's direction.

**Struggle - Limited growth despite months of work**

I participated in additional CFI walks in April. SPS and TBS had been actively working on campus for over seven months, testing pressures had somewhat subsided, and the opportunity to observe a “reformed” pedagogical approach presented itself. I took notes and pictures during the April walk and saved the results in the ethnographic journal. See Figures 7 and 8.
**Figure 7.** An SPS-Influenced Daily Agenda in History Class Part 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standard</th>
<th>Success Criteria</th>
<th>Agenda</th>
<th>Homework</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| LAFS.1112.RL.3 | ● I can determine the similarities between multiple interpretations of a story, drama, or poem and the source text.  
● I can determine the differences between multiple interpretations of a story, drama, or poem and the source text.  
● I can analyze multiple interpretations of a story, drama, or poem evaluating how each version interprets the source text.  
Arthurian Legends Jigsaw - King Arthur Legends are divided up 110-15 stories per group.  
- BW: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=octo3t5u660](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=octo3t5u660)  
- Read Story  
- Then summarize into a slide used by the whole class  
- Answer the Questions  
No Red Ink  
45 minutes of SAT Reading & Writing Practice on Khan Academy |
SPS staff were pleased with the results, and school leadership consistently mentioned that the turnaround program had improved class organization and teacher behavior. Classroom walks, I noted, employed a consistent formula. I met with the two SPS trainers in their office before the school day began. We outlined whom would be observed and who would do the observing. There were usually between seven and ten in the observing group, and we stayed in each class for five to ten minutes. We took pictures of the walls and projectors and the assignments the students were doing without our cellphones before withdrawing to an adjacent room to discuss our observations. Many of us carried with us SPS's four-part tool, which
consisted of two double-sided printed papers full of tables that contained keywords. We then utilized those documents to organize the discussion about observed classroom activities.

Participants typically began by offering positive words about what they had just seen, before delving into ways in which they believed the lesson could have been improved. The trainers focused on the language written by the teachers on their whiteboards, typically related to learning goals, target-task alignments, and state standards rewritten in student-friendly language. Notably, the SPS trainers believed that every teacher we observed had been operating in part one of their four-stage tool, including the CFI walks near the end of the school year. I found it very noteworthy than none had advanced to stages two or three in their minds. These observations made it seem clear that despite several months of intense effort, much of the pedagogical work involved strategies and ideas that had not connected to CHS’s staff.

**Pressure - The individual’s drive**

Spring semester pressures were readily apparent in late April. I noted high absences and on, Monday, April 22, the attendees stressed over completing their practicum logs. The professor adapted accordingly, affording both time and individualized support for the students. Reflecting on their experiences in Summer 2019, many looked back on the pressure they had been under and were amazed by their progress. Furthermore, the cohort members had become aware that a new cohort of TBS master’s students would occur in CCS the following year. “Taking three and goin’ to school at the same time, taking them for one year, there was lots of pressure. There was a lot of pressure…. I enjoyed it, but I’m glad it’s over. It was pressure. It was a lot of pressure. We live with pressure. That’s the only thing I would change… Now, it’s two years to do.” While appreciating that the grant afforded them the
opportunity to earn a degree from a major research institution, some cohort members believed that the timeline created significant pressure on all involved. That pressure helped cause some members of CHS’s staff to resist aspects of the implementation effort.

**Development – “Seeing through a different lens”**

Many cohort members believed that had grown as professionals when interviewed in Summer 2019. One told me “This program has taught me to look through the lens of an administrator, and you see a lot of decisions and a lot of things that are deeper than what just goes on in front of you. I think with teachers, in general, that's where it gets tricky. A lot of people don't see past that, so I've seen some things through a different lens.” CHS’s teachers began the school year from a variety of different places, pedagogically, intellectually and geographically. Some believed that their experiences had helped change their professional practice and their overall outlook on leadership.

The cohort’s camaraderie seemed to make the work easier for many master’s students. School administration immediately recognized the group’s value and called on them to participate in a variety of committees related to the grant application’s goals, including a “Welcome Wagon,” and a “Discipline Committee.” The school principal expected that these new groups would help improve CHS’s performance. At a cross-organizational meeting in early 2019, Dr. Doloroso opened with questions. “What is the status of their committees (discipline, welcome wagon, etc.), how had ‘instruction’ been a priority? What is the welcome wagon doing to help overall instruction? How are we growing as leaders and from the people all around you?” One of the assistant principals, Kelly Duncan, asserted that they had “seen a lot of growth, although we aren’t where we’d like to be.” Duncan thought that school administration spent too much time disciplining students, which limited their ability to focus
on teacher instruction, but was positive about co-planning sessions, which had “been restructured and the feedback has been positive.” Glaris agreed, claiming “We’ve seen some improvement in the co-planning sessions.” Duncan thought that APs “taking over” co-planning had been helpful in the beginning, but they now felt comfortable releasing the activity to department heads and teacher leaders. This was done to allow them “to take back the leadership role with guidance and assistance.”

**Development - Changing views on discipline**

Almost all the consultant’s work I observed related to curriculum delivery and academics. Student discipline improvements were expected to connect to instructional shifts that helped students take greater ownership of their own learning. However, two master’s cohort practicum groups directly focused on projects related to student discipline. One engaged with "restorative practices" and attending a related academic conference in Summer 2019. Another centered their project on career readiness, arguing that a greater focus on real world curriculum would improve student engagement and interest in school. These practicum efforts connected to student discipline with other overall umbrella of “wraparound services,” the first goals mentioned in the grant application. These services included $209,720.14 to pay salary and benefits for a social worker, a career college counselor and a school psychologist, while the cohort’s work was largely self-designed and executed. Interview data consistently mentioned how helpful the psychologist had been, although the cohort knew less about the social worker and the college counselor.

The quantitative and qualitative data generated before the grant application showed a school with several significant struggles, but positive features from which to build. One of those struggles was student discipline, a primary concern of the grant's authors.
Student Discipline data shows 2336 discipline referrals for the school in the 2016-2017 school year. The district average for high schools is 2,372 indicating that this school is average for student discipline. While progress has been made in the number of out-of-school suspensions, in 2015-2016 there were 2627 OSS and 2016-2017 the number had dropped to 2392. However, more progress needs to be made. (Carter County Schools, 2017, p. 3)

Efforts to improve student discipline were cursory parts of the consultant company’s pedagogical strategies, but beyond some initial discussions at meetings in Fall 2018, I observed little sustained effort to apply their stated strategies to student discipline and engagement. The consultant company believed that their methods would have a positive effect on student discipline, but I observed little connection between theory and practice.

The grant application’s “third item” explained how “improving student discipline” would be accomplished. School staff were to learn about an early warning system related to attendance and discipline. The guidance department made sure every student had a graduation plan. The "Student Success Coach" mentored students at risk for not graduating and coordinated work with community volunteers. Students were to be prioritized based on data, with an expected “improvement in the graduation rate of the students with a 5% increase in the students who graduate with their 4-year cohort” (Carter County Schools, 2017, p. 6).

In addition to these personnel enhancements, grant funding would be used to employ a unique form of therapeutic team-building materials, called DRUMBEAT.

DRUMBEAT is an acronym for Discovering Relationships Using Music - Beliefs, Emotions, Attitudes and Thoughts. The drumming in DRUMBEAT... provides young people with a distraction… and a common purpose... The drumming creates a safe
medium for communication and emotional expression and delivers a reward for quick success. Rhythm games are a core part of DRUMBEAT and encourage social interaction, teamwork, trust, and a playful environment for practicing social skills… TOP3 funds will be used to purchase the drums, provide staff development on the program and to provide an additional teaching period. (Carter County Schools, 2017, p. 7)

This music-related therapy was expected to have a significant and measurable positive impact on student discipline.

DRUMBEAT will… [improve] discipline [and student] behavior… By the end of SY 19 there will be a 10% increase in the number of students with fewer than 10 absences and a 10% decrease in discipline referrals. These goals will be achieved by: 1. During spring of 2018 training in the DRUMBEAT program will be provided and the drums will be purchased. 2. Initial small-scale implementation of the program will begin by [the] end of spring of 2018 with full implementation occurring in SY 19. 3. Monitoring of the program impact will occur with classroom walkthroughs, tracking of discipline referrals and attendance, survey results of students and teachers. (Carter County Schools, 2017, p. 7)

Teachers mentioned the drumming activities in passing, and I overheard a few students mentioning the activity during my time walking CHS’s halls, but I never heard about the drums themselves or related events once the initial fall activities were completed. As of September 25, 2019, the drums were sitting in a storage room near back administrative offices. See Figure 9 below.
Student discipline was rarely discussed at cross-organizational meetings after Fall 2018, and I never heard the drums mentioned, but total referrals in school year 2018-2019 dropped to 2086 total, a 12.7% drop from two years before. Cohort members seemed to know little about school discipline changes, and when interviewed largely expressed ignorance about the school’s progress, but the combined efforts may have had some positive effect on student discipline.

**Delivery - Improved PLCs and the growth of the internship**

Discipline improvements were not the only successful development brought on by the turnaround program. On January 29 I observed an SPS English department co-planning session. This PLC training was an impromptu gathering in response to recent dissatisfactions with walk-through observations. As overseeing the four undergraduate university interns was
one of my duties, I attended this PLC to support their efforts. One intern told me that she found this PLC very informative. The interns actively participated, asked pertinent questions, and contributed value to the group. Three of the four interns worked in the ELA department, and all four served under cohort members who acted as their mentors. The close rapport between TBS and CHS seemed to facilitate quality collaboration, and all four interns were offered full time positions for the subsequent year. Three out of the four accepted.

I worked closely with the mentor teachers and during the spring discovered that one intern had difficulty with CHS’s climate. We collaborated throughout February and March on strategies designed to improve his experience. I was later pleased with the intern’s growth and professionalism over the semester, but ultimately, he did not accept a position at CHS. The other three (two ELA and one science) are employed at CHS at the time of this writing. TBS figures and CHS staff believed that this exemplified a successful collaboration between the university and the district. While not directly tied to the grant itself, TBS’ grant-based presence at the school seemed to improve the internship’s quality.

One mentor teacher cohort member mentioned this success during her interview. Connecting directly to the grant application’s six goals, she stated, “Identify, recruit, retain, reward. The most I could speak to with regards to that is for the first time since I’ve been here there is more of a kind of coordinated effort with the school like with the internship program. Our school has been successful at hiring I think three of the four.” CCS’s partnership with TBS had helped expand the university’s undergraduate reach. While TBS often sends student teachers to local districts and has widespread student-body connection with its home county, the grant implantation seemed to have tertiary benefits. TBS’s expanded presence helped
establish teacher mentors for spring semester interns, and the school successfully offered jobs for the following school year.

Accepting that the turnaround work had positive qualities, I noted that many CHS figures had reacted negatively to perceived rigidity, especially from SPS, which caused varying but substantial stress levels for almost all involved.

**Stress – “You could tell they were upset”**

High stress levels have become a normal part of an educator’s life (Prilleltensky, Neff, & Bessell, 2016), and the grant implementation effort at CHS was no exception. The fall semester's final weeks coincided with significant feelings of fatigue across the three institutions, but I ethnographically recorded that some “relaxation” had occurred in December. Dr. Schwartz decided to reform the practicum schedule to allow for more open days during the Spring. The cohort agreed to meet on three Mondays in December 2018 and meet fewer times in January, February and March. The staff believed that the year would be stressful when the project began, but several mentioned later that losing the typical winter break was an added stress factor. Teaching can be a mentally exhausting profession (Shen, McCaughtry, Martin, Garn, Kulik, & Fahlman, 2015; Van Maele, & Van Houtte, 2015) and the cohort members understood that adding master’s work plus engaging with SPS would prove challenging but disrupting the traditional scholastic annual rhythms may have exacerbated those feelings.

The middle weeks of Spring 2019 is where high staff stress levels became readily apparent. One ELA teacher accordingly described his department’s experience with unit building. “It was a great unit. It was in depth. It covered all the standards… and it lasted 12 weeks… we showed them and they signed off… all of a sudden, four weeks into it, and we’re supposed to have a culminating activity—well… we were only actually three weeks into our…
12-week unit. We were nowhere near… That threw them for a loop. You could tell they were upset about it… I don’t know… what their agenda is. I have no idea.” The English department’s interaction with SPS began early and was thorough, but this teacher believed that communication breakdowns and unclear expectations had led to misunderstandings as the project moved along.

When the three institutions met February 22 for monthly planning several SPS figures attended through web conferencing. Dr. Longoria and Kelly Duncan and CHS’s principal also participated. I noted that the two CHS leaders seemed stressed and pressed for time. We attempted to organize upcoming April “walks” as a group, including making necessary substitute teaching arrangements. The initial plans called for school administrators to walk one day, with “elective” teachers walking the day before, “core content” teachers the day after. The meeting was relatively short and focused on the upcoming CFI walks, and we dealt briefly with the following day’s planned “Saturday Session.”

I met with a cohort member on March 20 to talk about a variety of issues related to the grant. She impressed had me with her wit, intelligence and work ethic over the preceding months. I did not formally interview her as she was not a classroom teacher, but I wanted her views to be part of the ethnography. She seemed overwhelmed with family stressors and the “need to catch up on coursework.” She suggested that spring break was “going to be a catch-up time for reading and writing and turning in overdue reflection papers.” Her stress level struck me as related to a university calendar’s typical rhythm (Milyavskaya et al., 2014). Students had projects and papers “coming due,” and they also had the pressures of testing season (Neill, 2016). Several other teachers appeared stressed by their responsibilities. I noted their appearances and moods in classroom observations, interactions after school and
within the master’s classes. One was worried about his practicum project in late March and mentioned poor coordination with his assigned AP. He described the process as “stressful mess,” especially trying to organize his project’s central components. Changing to another AP might have been possible, but each of Cheryl High’s assistant principals already had other practicum students.

**Development - Utilizing model teachers**

I happened to pass an SPS trainer in the hallway on an early Spring 2019 Monday. I was on my way to observe an intern and saw the trainer conducting an observation. I there learned about their upcoming “model teacher” program during our subsequent conversation. I wondered how this science teacher could both be a “model teacher” and plan for the intern’s student teaching duties. The trainer explained that the mentor would handle a single class for “observational purposes” that would serve as the model. The SPS trainer and I then walked together to another future model teacher’s classroom. She was very impressed with this second teacher, stating that this was “one of the best examples of a teacher implementing their strategies.”

We observed the teacher give initial instructions and then spend most of her time walking around with a clipboard, making notes about student actions and activities. It seemed like she was grading their participation and listening to their conversations without participating herself. We left after roughly 30 minutes and then continued walking and talking. The trainer shared some of her experiences from her home state and how they related to Florida. She struck me as a genuine believer in SPS’s pedagogy. I interviewed this second model teacher in Summer 2019. “They were very interested in the fact that I was making it succeed in my classroom in an elective, because they had a lot of pushback from elective
teachers. Then of course, they could use that and say, ‘Well, if she can do it in an elective, then you definitely should be able to do it in reading.’’” This and other ethnographic data indicate that the staff believed that core content areas were the consultant company's focus. The trainers thought that the electives teacher’s success supported the claim that their pedagogical methods could function across curricular subjects.

The principal discussed this particular model teacher’s successes during our May gathering. First Dr. Schwartz talked about the process of recording hours, students taking the FELE, and the completion of their practicum projects. Then the principal said “SPS has given us good things, we’re doing things now that we weren’t doing before, PLC and co-planning now has a structure that didn’t exist before. Collaboration has improved. The departmentalization of high schools leads to professional segregation; we are trying to change that culture. The model classrooms are something to build on.” Cheryl High’s principal mentioned that the model classrooms were working well and that these teachers would take the lead on training new hires. He planned on continuing the “teaming aspect” and working with the “depth of the standard.” He admitted, however, that the year had struggles.

Ethnographic evidence seemed to support his claims. On April 15, I noted that cohort students were making comments about the importance of leadership showing solidarity with SPS as necessary for obtaining staff “buy in.” The master’s cohort itself had developed a reputation for leadership, with one interviewed cohort member told me “I’ve noticed, ‘Oh, you’re in the cohort? Oh, wow, that’s neat. How’s that going?’” The cohort's various activities had obtained notoriety across campus, and CCS had decided to form a second, broader cohort with district-wide eligibility.
Disappointment - No follow through

Interview and observation data indicated that the implementation effort had encountered significant struggles throughout the year. One math teacher struggled with TBS’ course load and did not continue with the program. Others were surprised by the quantity of reading and acknowledging that master’s level academic work was a challenge having been out of the classroom (as students) for some time. By the end of Summer 2018, the master’s students were both mentally drained and yet excited about the year to come. Several members mentioned the struggle of balancing a full-time master’s program, working with SPS, and their regular responsibilities as educators, especially in September and October 2018. SPS staff had mentioned in early meetings that an “October Wall” had been a hindrance in their previous projects, but that they were prepared to work through those difficulties. SPS depended on school leadership and TBS cooperation to help alleviate the expected struggles.

SPS sought to utilize staff members as “Tracking Leaders.” “Through extensive field experience and research, SPS has discovered the critical role of onsite leaders. These Tracking Leaders will be a critical component to implement and solidify the new model of instruction as a Demonstration School for Rigor” (Carter County Schools, 2017, p. 8). I, however, observed little in the way of “tracking.” I asked one interviewed teacher “could you explain what ‘tracking standards’ mean?” She said that they had a “special program” where tracking leaders were to “go around with an iPad” to check on student progress. The effort was designed to observe and record if “students met the target, were in progress of meeting the target, or had nothing whatsoever.” I followed up by asking about specifics, especially measuring successful student engagement. She replied, “we never actually got to that piece… to fully answer that question, I can't because I never actually did it. When they introduced us with it, that was my
first taste... At one point, I did ask our principal if we would have access to this program going forward, and he did not know…”

I told her I was surprised that this never came up again. “It never got used,” she explained. “I never got retrained on it. That's what I really didn't like from the beginning was because you were trying to teach me something, but I didn't have all the pieces that I needed… that's pretty much where it ended.” An English teacher I interviewed mentioned submitting material to the “standards tracker” as part of a SPS/English Department combined effort to redesign a “unit,” while another English teacher told me about using the tracker “to help come up with learning targets and things.” A social studies teacher complained about feedback and used the tracking system as evidence. “I had got one feedback in the growth tracker all year, from the reading coach. That was it. Nobody else ever gave me any feedback. I didn't understand the point of these walks if it wasn't to give me feedback for what they're doing.”

**Resistance – “No time to be micromanaged”**

I wondered if SPS would mention “tracking leaders” during our cross-organizational meetings, but they did not. There Glaris explained that the Social Studies department was struggling with “tasks.” Dr. Doloroso agreed, saying he had observed far too many days of “PowerPoints and worksheets” and little rigor. He added that when observing the “best” teacher in the department, he saw a video being played with little valuable academic work. Glaris had similar observations, noting that the “harder we push, the more resistance we receive.” Teachers were becoming more likely to reject SPS overtures, typically by “not having time for that.”

I asked cohort members about these struggles during our interviews. One told me, “I think maybe the execution and the micromanaging got a little bit intense at the end there…”
now it was a shift from voluntary and self-led to ‘this is what you’re supposed to do,’ this is where we’re—everybody is going.”  Another said, “my co-teacher, he could have benefited greatly from it... he tried. He just couldn’t get it. The services weren’t enough... we would have PLCs and they would say, ‘Okay, do this’ and it was for 25 minutes. Then we’d have this long PLC on a day where we’d have a teacher-in-service day, but the coaches weren’t enough.”  I met with Glaris in October to discuss the various issues SPS was having with CHS’s staff. She singled out the cohort's willingness to lead. She thought I could do several things to get the cohort to “better engage,” including increasing my presence on CFI walks. Too many CHS staff members, according to her, were struggling with the reformed pedagogy.

**Struggle – “I don't know anything about that”**

SPS mentioned that they had “worked out everything” with Dr. Longoria to amend the contract for spring changes during a March cross-organizational meeting. Glaris offered that SPS was “moving forward with the 9 model classrooms lead by ‘willing’ teachers. We’ve been pushing in and supporting then, focused on team ownership. We’ve been looking for more autonomous thinking. Our big takeaways were their thoughts about how their practice has changed, so we can get them to think about more intentional planning.”  She continued by saying, “we tried to focus on techniques to engage with disinterested students. In some classes students are readily talking, but the conversations are haphazard, so we’re focused on getting students talking, even if it isn't always focused on content.”  She offered that SPS had been very pleased with the reading coach’s leadership and largely released work in that department to his initiative. She had encountered some scheduling challenges with organizing follow-ups with teachers who go on CFI walks. Teachers were allowing walkthroughs of their own
classrooms, but scheduling conflicts or lack of interest had limited opportunities for those teachers to walk themselves.

Glaris believed that my work with SPS was supposed to give me “some intellectual ammunition” with which to increase cohort participation. At that point I had personally become somewhat disappointed with SPS’s interdepartmental communication and their work with TBS on various initiatives. I felt reticent to take a leadership role in furthering collaboration, especially with SPS’s CFI walks. TBS, it seemed, had made consistent overtures related to information sharing and general collaboration with little reciprocation.

Glaris suggested that I talk to Ms. Milos, a cohort member of the math department, to facilitate further interactions. Milos would be expecting me and would help organize, Glaris claimed. I did so later that week, but Milos seemed unprepared, saying “I don’t know anything about that.” I ethnographically noted the following Monday that no follow-up had occurred, and the issue later disappeared. Glaris seemed genuine, but I heard resignation in her voice when talking about teacher apathy during a subsequent informal conversation.

Other issues contributed to struggle in the project. Glaris informed us that SPS had “sent out a culture survey, but only got 46% response rate,” with “the school’s email firewall” negatively affecting the response rate. Dr. Doloroso seemed perturbed by this technology failure and wanted better results, but Glaris assured us that there was nothing that could now be done, either by CCS or TBS, as the necessary timeline had come and gone. Longoria pressed SPS for “deliverables” that could be presented to the state as “evidence” that the grant’s initiatives were in progress. She asserted that TBS had provided several “deliverables,” to which Glaris offered the “rigor diagnostic” as potential evidence. I noted that this comparison reflected positively on TBS, and CHS figures seemed perturbed, although
their responses seemed guarded. Longoria and Dr. Doloroso wanted to more fully go over the rigor diagnostic, which Glaris promised to provide later.

**Struggle – “Maybe next year”**

The three institutions met again on March 4, 2019. Glaris opened by sharing issues about what “learning targets should look like” in the classroom. I noted that this seemed to be a fundamental aspect of the training and sharing just a few months before the project’s end was odd. She also reported about staff confusion related to “wording things in student friendly language” while not losing the” meaning of the original standard.” Meaning and depth, according to Glaris, were still “watered down” in CHS classrooms. She also expressed concern about the Saturday training sessions, wondering if staff members sufficiently understood how to frame and utilize “target-task alignment.” She went on to discuss their third data analysis walk, which occurred every 30 to 60 days. Some teachers mentioned these struggles in their interviews. One said “we fail to really focus on—which some of the contractors have, I guess, but to me, the effort has not been streamlined to where you can see both happening—is the social and emotional piece of this whole thing to get these kids—it's like the contractors come in with a solution or somethin' that worked for an elementary school, not takin' into account this is high school.”

By the end of March, I noted that one of the model teachers seemed “very tired of all the SPS pressure of being their model teacher.” I spent significant amounts of time in another cohort member’s room related to his work with interns. This teacher and I got along well and talked about football, educational theories and our thoughts about our futures. I saw “SPS themed” posters on his classroom’s walls, which designated student roles and responsibilities for group activities. He organized the classroom to seat students in groups of four, but I never
observed him utilizing “teaming.” Near the project’s end I asked him about the posters. He said that they were “up for show only” and that he “almost never utilizes them,” but that many SPS strategies worked well, especially related to students “taking charge of their own learning.”

It seemed by then that CHS was struggling with SPS’s processes and many had “checked-out” mentally by mid Spring 2019. Near April’s end I learned that Glaris and CHS’s principal had walked classrooms together and “saw movies being played.” The principal was very upset, especially with the APs and department heads for their supposed lack of leadership. A rumor spread across campus that one teacher had even left her students unattended, being caught by an AP who had come to observe. I had no ability to confirm this rumor, but these types overall struggles were briefly covered at the April gathering. A CCS official relayed, “today we walked four classes. Some are progressing nicely, but we really need to work on rigor. The content doesn’t delve deeply into the standard.” The principal agreed, saying “I agree we aren’t getting as deep into standards as we would like. We can look for ways to do this in the summer. I think a lot of teachers duplicate their own experiences as students.” The leadership believed that they needed “a better dive into rigor and pedagogy.” They thought that “maybe next year is an opportunity to really focus in depth on rigor in the classroom.”

The principal believed that some struggles related to CCS’s traditional evaluation tool. He asked, “What evaluative tools do we have that helps drive toward further standard rigor? We as administrators have to model for them.” CCS leadership admitted that “our evaluations are more about compliance” and that “the evaluative tool might be harming motivation to do things outside of the compliance factor.” Dr. Doloroso mentioned that “We’re doing an update to the evaluation tool” but that it would be a “year process.” He wondered about how the tools
could be reformed with commitment rather than compliance in mind. This was because Dr. Doloroso had noted that CHS’s teachers were often unwilling to let students struggle. The principal agreed, believing that this caused frustration for students and staff. “This is a hurdle to jump,” he concluded.

The final cross-organization meeting in May featured discussion about the program's successes and struggles. The principal noticed the staff had been “on summer vacation” and took the blame for not sufficiently pressuring the APs. Glaris admitted they had failed to have the desired buy-in, which explained their move to model teachers. Their struggles with the staff led to “abandoning” the other 100 teachers due to perceived unwillingness. “All was not lost,” Glaris said. “We took the punch.” I took this to mean that SPS had come to understand their struggles and sufficiently adapted accordingly. However, the Principal remained concerned about staff understanding related to the depths of Florida’s standards. He wondered “What does PD look like? It can’t be a force feed. It felt force fed a little, I know the staff felt that way.” Interviewees shared similar sentiments. After attending an SPS summer conference in Orlando after the program’s conclusion, an interviewed teacher said, “Having gone to this conference, I definitely see the value in—I see how some things can work, but just like anything else, it's not cookie-cutter. You have to be able to apply certain things to different situations, and I feel like that’s what’s missing with what’s being implemented with a contractor.”

The year’s stressors were exemplified in small exchange in the final cross-organizational meet in May 2019. Glaris and the school principal had what I documented to be “a snarky back and forth” about coordinating their meetings together. It seemed to be a year’s worth of frustration unleashed in one small clash. Glaris made a remark after learning
how simple it had been for the principal to find time to meet with me. This related to an anecdote I shared about which I had little thought before making. Dr. Longoria helped the group move on from that exchange and offered her reflections about the project she had helped create. She lamented that Cheryl High “will lose 5-6 units [professional positions due to funding]. The extra positions in the grant will be lost. Also, [we will lose] several intervention teachers.” I documented her sadness over losing these positions. She said there were “hard choices for next year” and “no pretty scenarios.” The grant’s ending meant that the extra staff dedicated to wrap-around surfaces would no longer be funded, a significant area of disappointment for her.

**Disappointment - Attendance suffering**

I noted a decline in academic production of the master’s cohort near Spring 2019’s end. Attendance had become an issue, and on May 15 only 13 of the 19 students arrived on time. I tried to elicit greater in-depth analysis from the cohort that day but had little success. Some seem frustrated by my probing questions while others seemed worried I would “call them out,” something about which I had apparently developed a reputation. One cohort member admitted, “We’re all seasoned educators, we’re not drinking the Kool-Aid, we’re just doing the assignments.” I left disappointed with their performances but understood that the years stresses and pressures had taken their toll.

Some cohort members had developed lasting negative feelings related to the turnaround project. One mentioned how “SPS and… the micromanagement of teachers… the morale is very low, a lot lower than what you would have probably expected it to be” and the program came to an end. She believed that SPS’s pressure combined with administration’s inexperience led to communication breakdowns and shrinking staff morale. Another cohort
member more explicitly recognized the ways that negative attitudes had dissimulated. I’ve had two professors this semester (summer) [and they] have both said, ‘Well, we’ve had long discussions with some of the cohort members about how terrible SPS is and how our school has done nothing to blah, blah, blah about it’ and that just really puts a negative vibe out.”

But, despite these struggles, stresses and disappointments, there were reasons to celebrate the Schools of Hope grant, and much that was appreciated.

A Spring 2019 TBS meeting related directly to that success. Several TBS professors and administrators, including Dr. Schwartz, wanted to present the graduate assistants and myself with a progress update. CCS had been very impressed with TBS’s program and decided to create additional “cohorts” of master’s students, like the one created by the Schools of Hope grant. Unlike the previous year’s program, however, the upcoming plan would feature a longer timeline. TBS would offer master's degrees in both educational leadership and reading, the latter of which would include an important state endorsement. Another change would be that the master's in educational leadership degree would directly align to CCS’s "Aspiring Leaders" program. This addressed earlier concerns and made new graduates immediately eligible to become assistant principals. Finally, the new students could come from anywhere in the district, but entrance requirements would be more stringent. Potential teachers were expected to have three years of successful classroom experience and pass an interview process. Dr. Schwartz and the other TBS administrators believed that this new program signified widespread satisfaction with their efforts from CCS.

The cohort’s positive reputation related to some of their initial experiences. At the project’s beginning, many had never met despite years of employment at the same school. By the end, several new friendships and professional relationships had formed. One interviewed
teacher told me, “We felt like, ‘Wow,’ we were surprised to see so many teachers actually care and feel the same way we do. It seemed like such a toxic environment, but yet, when you’re around a bunch of people that think like you’re thinking, you realize, ‘Hey, it’s not so toxic.’ We just never had a chance to get together and realize that we’re all on the same page.” Much of the mood surrounding the turnaround effort had been negative, especially in the beginning. Yet despite these circumstances, the cohort model had allowed them to interact with one another in ways that were previously impossible. By Summer 2019, both the cohort and CHS seemed to be at peace.

**Cheryl High at Peace - June 2019 to July 2019**

CHS’s scholastic school year ended in May 2019. The cohort continued with their practicum projects and logged practicum hours, although some members had largely finished. Two additional summer classes, each taught by local area principals, occurred on Wednesdays and Fridays for six weeks in June and July. Some cohort members ended July ready for graduation, while others still had not passed the FELE nor completed their logs.

In June I reflected that I had discussed the Schools of Hope grant with Dr. Marta Longoria, the grant application’s principal author, near the program’s conclusion. We spoke on the phone about several topics, including the grant’s spending initiatives, and discussed the various stipends that had been designed to improve teacher retention. Dr. Longoria believed that the grant’s projects had been largely successful, although she reiterated her belief that the timeline had been too aggressive. I had come to learn that some School of Hope money allocated for TBS had not been spent and there was significant funding left over for future cohorts and classes. Dr. Schwartz announced that summer that TBS’s presence in CCS would
expand the subsequent year, and I helped TBS screen future applicants. I believe that this represented CCS satisfaction with TBS, and Dr. Schwartz seemed pleased overall.

I had gone for the final CFI walk on April 10 and reflected heavily on that walk during the summer. Some initial confusion with participants and timing had frustrated me, but I reread that SPS’s mood regarding CHS had “lightened” to one of acceptance. This was the first instance of “peaceful acceptance” I noted ethnographically. The walk began at 7:15am in a cohort member’s room. One other cohort member joined me, three classroom teachers, Glaris and the two trainers as “walkers.” After our first observation and debriefing session, I ethnographically recorded “Here we’re are in the middle of April, the teachers don't even seem to understand basic SPS stuff.” The SPS trainers were unhappy with rigor, teacher translations of standards into student friendly language, overuse of “summaries” rather than “in-depth analysis,” and usage of “jigsaw” activities. After the walk’s conclusion I met briefly with the SPS trainers and Kate Glaris. The social studies and ELA trainer expressed her frustration with staff apathy, especially regarding her recent effort to create a “group reading initiative,” but all seemed resigned to the outcome. I noted that their energy and intensity had waned.

Summer classes began in June 2019 and the staff patiently awaited their school’s grade. Summer classes met on Wednesdays and Fridays, while Mondays were utilized for practicum hours. These classes were during the day rather than at 3pm. It seemed that the earlier start time combined with the absence of regular school responsibilities had reenergized the cohort. Several master’s cohort members attended an SPS conference, where a few presented their own research projects, causing them to miss classes one week. I continued my work as a graduate assistant on Wednesday, assisted with practicum projects on Monday, and finalized arrangements to conduct this study’s interviews. By then several students had completed the
hours and logs necessary for practicum completion, and many had taken and received passing FELE results. Some had not passed on their first try, while a few had not yet taken the exam. I noted how interested the cohort was in their fellow students’ grades, often uncomfortably [for me] announcing their own successes or failures. Some, it seemed to me, shared their own results in order to elicit information how their classmates had done.

One cohort member had been particularly successful throughout the year, passing the FELE far sooner than the others. The principal thought highly of this student’s capacity and they were later promoted. This promotion soon became known to the other cohort members, and I noted that reactions were mixed. Some seemed generally supportive and impressed, while others struck me as jealous or dismissive. A sense of competition had encroached the mood of some cohort members in Summer 2019, perhaps because they had come to realize that all 19 would soon be pursuing related jobs. Before Summer 2019 I had noted that “cliques” had formed within the cohort, as certain teachers seemed to prefer the company of specific others, but, in general camaraderie and positive collaboration had before been the norm. Those positive collaborative feelings endured throughout the summer’s completion, but it seemed to me that thoughts about their future professional prospects had influenced the cohort’s collective psyche.

A social studies cohort member shared her thoughts about staff opinions related to the cohort in June. She said that many teachers outside the master’s group believed that the cohort members were impressive, but most wondered if the cohort’s practicum efforts were futile. This sentiment caused me to think about the process in its entirety. I wondered what CHS was like before my presence there, something about which I could know little outside of anecdotes and looking at standardized test scores. I looked back on notes and later realized that a visible
peace had come over the cohort during Summer 2019. Moods seemed lighter, the staff smiled more, and attendance slightly improved. CHS’s staff and leadership was preparing for a year after SPS and seemed ready to move forward. One day during the summer, the principal congratulated the cohort on their successes and wished them the best in the future. He and I then chatted briefly on some of our recent successes and disappointments.

**Disappointment - What does it mean?**

Key figures associated with the CHS turnaround seemed were disappointed with certain aspects of the process. One interviewed teacher, unhappy with initial communication, told me, “We were never told anything about SPS from the beginning other than, ‘they're gonna be helping us.’ What does that mean? What did that mean?” It seemed that the grant’s program involved no staff input, outside of the initial needs assessment. CCS expected the staff to first embrace, then master, and finally implement SPS’s strategies, all without opportunities for offering their input. When SPS discontinued interactions with “the unwilling,” efforts to reform the whole school changed to work with the “model teachers.” That same teacher explained “…then that's where it kind of felt like we were being taken over almost… they were here to assist and help, but it never came off that way.” SPS also refused to model examples of the reformed pedagogy and relied instead on discussions during PLCs and CFI walks. Many teachers rejected this approach, one saying, “because I know from my experience that learning should be modeled. I know from my experience that learning there’s no one way that impacts all students. Also, Marzano has I think nine or 10 high yield strategies that they advocate and what they were given was just advocating one.”

I had a lengthy discussion with the Principal about these and other disappointments during “The Press to Perform.” We met privately and had a friendly conversation about the
school's athletic teams, general staffing issues, the school’s future before delving into the gathering that had brought us together. He expressed genuine disappointment with teacher turnout for the Saturday planning session, events we noted had been of prime importance to CCS leadership and SPS. We mentioned that turnout would have been much lower without the cohort, observing that of the nine people in the mixed curricular room, eight were members. My interactions with the principal caused me to reflect on my own positionality. While not a consultant nor a figure with any discernable power, the principal thought of me as someone worthy of a level of his trust. Perhaps due to his observations of my work, or my extended presence on site, he felt that he could confide in me in confidence. He struck me as a confident individual, but one slightly unsure of where and when to apply pressure, and when to step back and allow others to take the lead. He felt no issue, however, with expression frustration related both the SPS and CHS’s staff’s occasional apathy.

One interviewed social studies teacher discussed her beliefs surrounding the increase in staff apathy and disinterest over the project’s course. “It'd be hot and cold. I felt like with their whole group people would fall. You'd either be in favor or out of favor at the time… [you’d] watch someone be the golden child and was in everything, and they were talking them up to everybody with it. Then… some people made a face during training or made a comment or did something or havin' a bad day, and then they were out… There's a number of people I saw that happen to.” This teacher was extremely disappointed with the feedback he had received, citing the growth tracker. “I implemented that lesson in the class… then I never got feedback. The worst thing I found from them was I got no feedback throughout the year… I had got one feedback in the growth tracker all year, from the reading coach. That was it. Nobody else ever gave me any feedback. I didn't understand the point…”
The math and science trainer and I briefly discussed the growth tracker during “the Patch” she demonstrated some of SPS’s digital resources. I was decidedly unimpressed, and later recorded that their digital material largely resembled mirrored found online. They typically were simplistic, single page digital resources and included things like graphic organizers or word-suggestion maps designed to stimulate intellectual conversations.

It seemed that CHS’s principal had similar disappointments near the project’s conclusion. We met for a second time early in the morning on April 10. He had asked an AP to find me, as he wanted my “true genuine opinion” about SPS’s activities. I told him that I thought that their ideas about teacher preparation, planning and team-based work had value, but that their approaches were too rigid and that their philosophy’s connection to data, both quantitative and qualitative, seemed limited. We both were guarded in our language however, which perhaps reflected the power dynamics associated with such a large grant implementation.

He believed that the process was “too fast” and although SPS had some good ideas, “it’s not really a plausible thing to try and implement so rapidly.” He also thought that their model worked better in some content areas than in others, and that the unique challenges secondary schools present had limited SPS’s effectiveness. Too many students had been “spoonfed” their whole life, he argued, which made the implementation very difficult in such a short timeframe. I remembered that Tanesha Dalton, an area superintendent, had mentioned at a meeting that many “administrators are frustrated by the ‘School of Hope’ grant’s speed and that it ends so quickly.” CHS’s principal and I agreed.

The principal and I met privately for the third and final time on May 8. I had learned that he was very upset and had met with CHS’s leadership team to express his displeasure.
Together we discussed the lack of rigor he had observed. While it was not “watch cartoons or movie time,” most teachers were engaged in what he called “busy-work worksheets.” He thought this material was designed to occupy time and did not meaningfully connect to state standards. His observations connected to the original “rigor walks” SPS had performed the previous year. These habits seemed to endure for many staff members, and he was especially disappointed that some master’s cohort members were among the poor performers. He did see some quality work, but overall, he was unimpressed. He made sure to blame himself for lightening the pressure and refused to hold SPS or the administrative team accountable, despite my inquiries about SPS’s reactions to these developments. I personally found this to be an admirable leadership trait but wondered about the turnaround program’s effectiveness if the principal believed this was part of the result. I, however, had a hard time holding him personally accountable and recorded in my journal that he seemed to want to shift any potential criticism towards himself and away from the staff. He concluded by admitting that after spring break his walkthroughs had decreased and his connection with SPS had frayed. This “pressure reduction” influenced teacher performance.

**Reflection - Embracing the process**

Dr. Doloroso said early in our work that “the power is in the process.” That phrase stuck with me for the project’s remainder and helped me think about interview question design. When discussing their motivations for taking part in the process, one interviewed cohort member said, “I felt like is the perfect opportunity… to be a better leader in the school system.” Some cohort members looked to the future and believed that this program would augment their already existing qualities. Others were motivated to finally further their own educations. “I've wanted to get my master's for a long time. It's just been one of these things
that life happens and just kept putting it off… but I really wanted it from a top tier research institute. When this opportunity came here, I felt… and I had to take advantage of this. I was really excited.” Others had done further study and resonated with TBS and SPS’s reputations. “I embraced that because it is a research-based formula that works.” Many other teachers readily accepted SPS’s pedagogical focus on teaming and student-centered learning, and some believed that contemporary research made this approach more palatable.

Not every teacher was thrilled by the process, however. “I was very hesitant at first to join… [but later] I jumped in with both feet and I was deemed a model teacher, which meant that SPS was in my classroom.” This cohort member was a veteran teacher who had experience with many initiatives. She initially resisted involving herself in the consultant company’s activities, but after observing their operations and receiving some encouragement, she engaged with their work and agreed to become one of the nine model teachers. Another model teacher said, “it was a learning process for us… TBS, this has been great, but it was the first time it had ever been done, so you had to be flexible with that, so that is understandable” She looked back on the entire process understanding that this had been experimental and that their frustrations were to be expected.

Some reflected further on their difficulties over the previous year. One math teacher said “It was really hard having three classes all year long, and working, and all the changes my job had this year. This is probably the hardest year I’ve ever had at school.” The cohort members seemed ambitious enough to take on leadership roles in committees, while engaging with the external consultant and enduring the rigors of a master's program. But by the year's midway point, many were feeling overwhelmed by the process' magnitude. Some offered suggestions for potential changes. “I would change the course progression. I think we should
have had a class in finance. I’ve been primarily frustrated with the communication…

transparency’s big, and I know a lot of teachers, that’s a problem for them is they don’t know
the why. They know it’s been done. They know that these people are telling them what to do,
but they don’t know the why,” said one teacher during our interview. Some looked to the
future, and two teachers mentioned “feeder schools,” one saying “the feeder school maybe
have a lot to do with what’s gonna happen to your school, year after year. I teach lower-level
kids, so my personal opinion is this.” They believed that future successes would depend on
connected elementary and middle schools. Efforts to improve teacher practice at secondary
schools were important, but they believed that work done at other neighborhood schools would
also affect their future.

Other cohort members reflected on Cheryl High’s leadership situation during the
interview process. “Then, you get pretty darn-new administrators. Either they had not been
assistant principals in high school before, or in the case of our principal, he had never been a
principal… I would never wanna have my first principalship in this situation, period.” This
cohort members realized that the effort was led by a first-year principal and many assistant
principals who were relatively new to educational leadership. Some cohort members
mentioned this during reflection, believing that veteran leadership could have better navigated
the three institutions' working relationship.

CHS’s staff also thought about their upcoming grades, and several mentioned future
successes in their interviews. “We moved from a D to a C on our own before the grant was in
place. If we’re gonna go from a C to a B, we’re gonna do it on our own.” While understanding
that the external consultant had engaged in a variety of activities over the year, some staff
members believed that the school's future had always been and would continue to be in their
own hands. Only through their collective focus would the school's situation improve, they thought. The grant may have been a positive factor, but some staff members believed that CHS’s future success depended, ultimately, on the staff themselves.

**Delivery - The scores are here**

Several years of struggling scores by students in a variety of sub-demographic groups was the primary motivation for CCS's grant application, so the upcoming scores were of prime importance. I recorded several comments related to the school’s grades during Summer 2019. As the year drew closer to its end, many figures associated with the implementation effort anticipated CHS's 2018-2019 official score report, with guesses becoming a common topic of conversation. A table containing the results can be found in Appendix B. I asked the cohort members about their predictions, both for the previous year's scores and the future of the school during the interview process. Many answered by describing the hope they felt about the upcoming years but were reticent to make concrete predictions about what would happen. I recorded that of those that offered direct appraisals of the future, roughly half had positive thoughts. Only one was explicitly negative, predicting that CHS would soon close and be replaced by a charter school.

I asked these questions during the semi-structured interview process, several weeks after the staff had learned about the previous year's results. School grades arrived in early Summer 2019, with initial information spreading via word-of-mouth transmission. I personally became aware of the new scores through overhearing a conversation in a master’s class. Overall, CHS maintained its "C" grade, but scores in math, science, ELA and social studies declined. I recorded that the master's cohort was largely disappointed, but several mentioned changes to the student body based on administrative decisions as a primary factor,
rather than efforts by SPS or the staff. CHS's principal also seemed discouraged but believed that the subsequent year would be positive. I never heard anyone from SPS mention CHS's scores.

**Appreciation – “Overall, we did it well”**

“I saw a spark,” one cohort member told me during her interview. “I did see a spark, and I did see a lot of good feedback from students, from parents, and I want to see that continue to grow… I think if we continue to do that, you will get better impact.” Another said that “I’ve seen the school go from having nothing to having something… I think it’s a good thing overall.” The school was on the path to success, and both TBS’s program and work with SPS had helped, or so several cohort members believed. “I would say that those six goals have been implemented fairly well, actually,” a math teacher told me when discussing the grant’s primary objectives. “I think that through a lot of our practicum projects through our cohort, a lot of our practicum projects point to at least pieces of all of these ideas or topics.” Another singled-out Spring class as being particularly helpful. “Finance and school law, the school law was covered. I thought that was great… this program has taught me to look through the lens of an administrator, and you see a lot of decisions and a lot of things that are deeper than what just goes on in front of you.”

Most members of the master’s cohort expressed some level of appreciation for TBS and SPS’s work when interviewed. One math teacher said “Well, it’s great impact because [the] curriculum and so forth and having an impact. They try to instill a rich curriculum. I like some of the stuff that was integrated with so much, so much information.” Some members of the cohort believed that the new approach to “curriculum” was and could be very effective with faithful implementation attempts. While perhaps overwhelmed by the quantity of new
information, these teachers believed that external contractor's pedagogy had real value. School administration seemed to agree, and CHS’s principal verbally committed to continuing the process of “student-teaming.” An informal conversation with a science teacher revealed that she believed the staff could improve if properly motivated. All they needed, she argued, were the right opportunities to learn and practice.

The cohort seemed thankful for the opportunity to earn an advanced degree from a quality research university. The cohort members also discussed their initial feelings regarding this program in their interviews. One told me that “I could not really pass the chance up.” He believed that educators would develop their practice if institutions make the necessary investments. Others had done further study and were impressed with TBS and SPS’s reputations. “I embraced that because it is a research-based formula that works.” Many teachers accepted SPS’s pedagogical focus on teaming and student-centered learning, and some believed that contemporary research made this approach more palatable.

Leadership opportunities seemed to be in the cohort’s future. Two were promoted before the program’s completion. One told me “I'm really, really pleased with this program. Everybody I've talked to that have gone through other principal prep programs and master's and leadership, I don't feel any of them were getting the preparation that we're getting for this. I really feel prepared. I felt prepared for the FELE exam when I went in there. I felt prepared to step into AP role.” Some CHS cohort members seemed legitimately were excited about the future.

**Excitement - A new professional family**

The cohort’s camaraderie seemed to make the work easier for the master’s students. School administration immediately recognized the group’s value and called on them to
participate in a variety of committees related to the grant application’s goals, including a “Welcome Wagon,” and “Discipline Committee.” The school principal had expected committees to assist CHS’s performance, and although energy and participation waned over the 14 months, most cohort members integrated their committee projects into the practicum activities. The implementation’s timeline enabled the learning of important lessons about the pressure to perform, and the new cohort’s timeline involved an additional year for completion. One interviewed teacher mentioned that “we’ve had other teachers from here do the second round of the applications and try to get in because of what we’re going through.” The new cohort was open to staff members from throughout the district, rather than just CHS. Anecdotal evidence provided by cohort members indicated that their success stories had inspired staff members from across CCS’s scholastic spectrum to apply.

Dr. Doloroso positively informed TBS and SPS that positive change had occurred at CHs during one of the last cross-organizational meetings. He believed the school had improved in “cleanliness, order and spirit” from just a few years before. Kelly Dalton agreed, noting that “the staff is much more collegial than they used to be.” Cohort members later told me more about their feelings as the program ended, one veteran telling me, “I think that if it’s given the right guidance, the sky’s the limit.”

CHS veterans had endured significant change in the preceding years, but most still believed that their school had a positive future. Various efforts, they believed, including the Schools of Hope grant, had an influence on that brighter tomorrow. A newer teacher told me, “honestly, after taking the courses, I’m pretty excited about the possibilities now, and what I know now versus what I knew a year ago is pretty incredible.” The program’s ending and the interview responses caused both the cohort members and me to reflect on the 14-month
process. I wondered “what have we achieved?” Others important stakeholders had similar reflections.

**Reflection – “Maybe the scope was too big”**

As Summer 2019 wound down CHS mentally prepared for its future. I helped administer the final classes and the next cohort’s development. Some master’s students worked to finish their practicum projects, while others prepared to take or retake the FELE. I had discussed potential staff interviews related to my project during Spring 2019, and CCS had been made aware of my interview plans. Before I began the interview process, I remembered that Dr. Marta Longoria had admitted that “the scope was in the impact, maybe the scope of their grant was too big, maybe we need to do curriculum work in a smaller section.” I also reflected on prior meetings with Glaris and Duncan related to curriculum design, leadership development and theories about student-teaming, especially SPS’s desire and CHS’s opposition to “teacher-pullouts” for building new units. Dr. Doloroso told the members of an early cross-organizational meeting that “too much time out of the classroom” was never a good thing. But, he believed, the staff needed to be involved in SPS’s and TBS’s processes. “The power is in the process,” he said.

By July 2019, the process was no more. The trials and tribulations of the Schools of Hope grant had come to an end, and Cheryl High seemed to be, once again, at peace.

**Overview**

In this chapter I have outlined the thematic progression of events that occurred over 14 months at Cheryl High School. I have presented my ethnographic findings, outlined the connections between the various themes, and presented evidence from field notes, semi-structured interviews of cohort members, and document analyses. In the next chapter I
connect these thematic findings to relevant literature, offer pragmatic suggestions for future professional development and turnaround initiatives, and discuss implications for future research.
CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

This policy ethnography attempted to detail how a novel turnaround initiative unfolded at Cheryl High School (CHS), and to describe the experiences of the stakeholders during the process. I discuss the study’s themes and their relationship to current literature in this chapter. In order to make relevant connections and coherent arguments, some related themes will be discussed in conjunction with one another. I describe how the related themes connect to discussions about professional development and turnaround programs in pertinent literature. I offer implications for how the grant implementation at CHS offers implications for practice, including work on professional development generally and turnaround schools specifically. I conclude by detailing this study's implications for future research efforts.

Discussion of Themes

Turnaround programs, like the one at CHS that this study covers, are by nature aggressive attempts to quickly improve schools (Schueler, 2019). The chronological time-blocks that began chapter four relate to concepts of “time” found in contemporary turnaround literature (Calkins et al., 2007; Meyers & Smylie 2017; Mette & Scribner, 2014). The need to quickly produce meaningful results manifests in “pressure” to quickly reform and improve and can have a significant effect on moral, hence “time,” “pressure” and “morale” will be analyzed together.
Implications of Time, Pressure and Morale in Literature

The pressure on educators to perform has probably never been more intense than in the current moment (Meyers & Hambrick Hitt, 2017). Meyers & Smylie (2017) found that “conventional thought on turnaround contends that three years is sufficient time to achieve dramatic improvement in student performance” (p. 515). The findings from this study suggest that nearly everyone involved with the CHS turnaround believed that the implementation timeline was too rapid to successfully implement. The pace seemed to affect the project’s quality more at its end than at its beginning or its middle, due to the shifting energy and commitment of the master’s cohort and the trainers brought in by Scientific Pedagogy Services (SPS). Time is a crucial component in education generally and in reform efforts specifically, as “highly developed and coordinated… infrastructure… [has allowed]… teachers and leaders to focus their time… to address the educational needs of students” (Peurach & Neumerski, 2015, p. Z382). Time crunches in improvement efforts add to the pressure educators feel.

School turnaround efforts typically involve significant pressure to perform, originating from combinations of state governments, district leadership and the local community (Mette & Scribner, 2014). These pressures manifest in federal government programs like No Child Left Behind (2001), Race to the Top (2009), and the Every Student Succeeds Act (2015), and in state programs like the Florida’s 2017 Schools of Hope (Zimmer, Henry & Kho, 2017). Some research has shown that the schools that show the greatest sustained improvement make steady but relatively small progressions year after year, which is contrary to federal and state emphases on rapid turnarounds (Huberman et. al., 2011). Quick improvements, it seems, have been primary goals of recent turnaround policy (Murphy & Bleiberg, 2019), and SPS mentioned their desires for “quick wins” several times. But quick victories have been few in
number nationally and difficult to maintain (Meyers, 2019, Meyers & Hambrick Hitt, 2017; Murphy & Bleiberg, 2019). Time constraints can limit school and district administrations’ capacities to plan and execute a turnaround plan, making the employment of an external operator like SPS an attractive option (Mette & Scribner, 2014). “Challenges in school-level design, system-level turbulence, and the conventional preparation and knowledge base of educational leaders creates a dependence on new types of lead turnaround partners as key collaborators, with the educational work of school turnaround outsourced to these novel, emerging enterprises” (Peurach & Neumerski, 2015, p. 388). Governments across the United States are pressuring school districts to raise student scores and lower achievement gaps (Behrendt, 2017). “In nearly all cases, leaders of successful turnarounds focus on a few, visible early wins with big payoffs to gain momentum” (Public Impact, 2016, p. 8). Accordingly, Dr. Doloroso pressed SPS for data that could count as “wins” at several meetings, but they often responded that such data was not readily available. Without examples of success to serve as guides, those charged with selecting turnaround partners often lack evidence with which to make important decisions.

Connor (2017) argued that standardized testing pressures cause teachers to engage in practices with which they often do not agree or feel comfortable utilizing. This relates to CHS’s staff’s widespread resistance of SPS’s model and the consulting agency’s inability to provide specific examples of quick wins. The study revealed further connections between time-related pressures and the moods of the staff members. Schools in turnaround status typically have had several years of struggle (Huberman et al., 2011; Meyers & Smylie, 2017) and low teacher morale is a common component of turnaround schools (Heissel & Ladd, 2018). In line with these findings, staff members at CHS expressed that morale had been low
for some time. Many schools experience “dysfunction [and] instability” prior to the turnaround process (Schueler, 2019, p. 130). The pressure associated with quick turnarounds can have a negative effect on already strained teacher morale (Heissel & Ladd, 2018), but as positive staff morale has been shown to positively affect student achievement (Abazaoglu & Aztekin, 2016; Reeves, Pun & Chung, 2017), offering options and incentives for students and staff to increase their learning time has become a regular part of these interventions (Heissel & Ladd, 2018). Ways in which they occurred at CHS was in the form of the master’s cohort for staff and extracurricular activities for students, like the DRUMBEAT.

**Implications of Novelty, Delivery, and Development in Literature**

Peurach and Neumerski (2015) suggested that academic research on turnarounds needed “descriptive case studies… with evidence of success” that could answer four emerging questions:

1) What is the design for school-level and system-level educational infrastructure? 2) What is the strategy for re-creating and leveraging the design for educational infrastructure in and among large numbers of chronically underperforming schools? 3) What is the process of continuously improving educational infrastructure over time? 4) What is the timeline for designing, recreating, and effectively leveraging educational infrastructure? (p. 389)

In the case of CHS, the first two questions involved SPS’s “Model School for Rigor” plan with two full-time trainers, rigor diagnostics, targeted “coaching walks,” curriculum redesigning, and leadership coaching. There appeared to be no “system-level” strategy, as their effort focused entirely on the single school. The third question was addressed through Tampa Bay State University’s (TBS) master’s cohort program, designed to build long-term teacher
capacity for a small group of interested and motivated staff members. The timeline was 14 months of execution, with several extra months utilized for program development.

The turnaround approach employed at CHS utilized a new principal, but unlike other school improvement efforts, the new principal was not brought into to replace a recently removed leader. Instead, the new leader had worked with a “mentor” principal who had recently returned from retirement for a single year prior to the turnaround initiative, and then worked closely with Kate Glaris during the grant implementation period. No direct effort was made to pursue the wide-ranging staff changes that are common at turnaround schools (Zimmer et al., 2017). The first-year principal at CHS described his versions of the successes and struggles near the program’s end, arguing “teacher accountability within the classes I have observed] has been an issue. We’re seeing some improvement but not as much as I would like. Implementation has been inconsistent.” Some of that resistance related to staff beliefs that the new pedagogy would “go away” at program’s end, consistent with literature about teacher resistance (Murphy & Bleiberg, 2019; Snyder, 2017).

Many teachers, it seemed, had enquired about the future of SPS’s pedagogy, believing that “things would revert to normal” once the grant ended. “I’ve been asked about where these things go for the future, I’ve been consistent about conveying that these strategies are here to stay,” the principal reported. Some successful turnarounds have made commitments to “aligning goals and needs,” maintaining a positive work environment and making sure students are safe (Villavicencio & Grayman, 2012). The findings suggest that the latter two occurred at CHS, but the former was sometimes lacking.

“Intensive professional development” (Reyes & Garcia, 2014, p. 354) has been an important component of turnaround initiatives. The cohort model employed by TBS was a
type of intensive professional development. Cohort models in higher education have been utilized in a variety of ways and have been shown to have positive effects on student learning, retention, building a sense of community and organizational logistics (Hickson, 2016). The drawbacks to cohort models can involve competition for limited positions in the form of internal tension or jealousy (Lei, Gorelick, Short, Smallwood, & Wright-Porter, 2011). This finding is consistent with observational data near the program’s end, as news of two cohort members receiving promotions increased negative feelings among certain “cliques” that had formed.

School turnaround analyses vary widely, from confident assertions that specific formulaic approaches can result in success (Junge & Krvaric, 2018), to pessimistic studies who have found that the rare examples of short-term increases are typically not sustained (Meyers & Smylie, 2017). “Talent development” was one of four domains identified by Junge and Krvaric (2018), further divided into three best practices: “Recruit, develop, retain, and sustain talent… Target professional learning opportunities… [and] Set clear performance expectations” (p. 2). This approach was evident throughout the Schools of Hope implementation at CHS. Pemberton & Akkary’s study (2010) concluded that cohort models in education settings offer far more benefits than drawbacks and argue convincingly for their adoption in various situations. The cohort implementation at CHS seemed to confirm their assertions, in my opinion. The construction of a second, larger and more ambitious cohort, indicates that Carter County Schools (CCS) agreed, and believed that TBS’s cohort model would contribute to the sustainability and effectiveness of their country leadership program.

Player and Katz (2016) found that schools in Ohio that employed a coordinated turnaround model experienced both short-term and sustainable success. The effort at CHS
attempted to achieve similar goals. Reforming PLCs, a common aspect of other turnaround initiatives in the country (Huberman et al., 2011), was led by SPS and a part of the sustainability emphasis. The Ohio program focused on three aspects: leader development, district ownership, and regular use of specific data. District ownership of the process was unique in that turnaround process, as each school was assigned a “shepherd” who had responsibility for overseeing the turnaround program.

A version of this occurred at CHS, as Dr. Doloroso and Dr. Longoria collaborated monthly with SPS and TBS. Other CCS officials were occasionally at meetings and offered their advice or recommendations for various activities, but I could not discern a single individual who bore full responsibility for overseeing the Schools of Hope initiative at CHS. As discussed in Chapter Four, when presented with intransigence from the CHS math coach, Dr. Doloroso suggested that she be replaced, but that the final decision should be left to the principal.

Some key figures in the grant implementation believed that the master’s program had helped to develop the staff. Dr. Doloroso asked about the principal’s views on the cohort several times during various meetings. Near the end of the program he said “we’re here in April. Can you compare the cohort’s work to the rest of the staff?” The principal stated that “the cohort seems better able to understand what rigor means relative to where they were last year. Collaboration, student-centered etc., the work with TBS and SPS seems to have influenced the cohort members.” While some research has argued that cohorts can generate negative feelings from outside individuals (Barnett, Basom, Yerks & Norris, 2000), some cohort members mentioned receiving positive accolades from their coworkers. The principal shared this belief, claiming that it was “night and day” with certain cohort members. The
principal further claimed that he planned to continue the “teaming aspect” and working toward “depth of the standard,” indicating that, in his opinion, SPS’s curricular work had been helpful.

**Implications of Resistance in Literature**

A part of successful turnarounds has been effectively dealing with staff resistance (Villavicencio & Grayman, 2012). Turnaround efforts with limited acts of resistance have involved higher levels of collaboration and development (Schueler, 2019). School leaders can run into several types of difficulties when engaged in change initiatives (Brown & Poortman, 2018). Changes that disrupt excitant approaches or beliefs often are met with staff resistance. Zimmer et al. (2017) wondered if turnaround programs could overcome localized resistance, arguing that “if reform cannot be effectively overseen and managed by local districts, it would suggest that outside management is necessary to observe significant improvement” (p. 672).

The external operator at CHS was charged with overseeing the reforms necessary to turnaround the school but had no direct authority over staffing and immediately withdrew support and interaction with any staff they perceived to be “resistant.”

Furthermore, the consulting company consistently maintained that their strategies were not content specific and could be applied across curriculum areas. This was an area of particularly strong staff resistance. Several interviewees expressed their displeasure at the pedagogical direction they were suggested to take, arguing that those efforts were not always appropriate for their specific content area. The staff’s professional involvement with the two on-site consultants began with a curricular division, one consultant working with the social studies and language arts departments and the other with science and math. By winter break an organizational change developed mainly to personalities and interactions, in my opinion. Some staff members found themselves at odds with their assigned consultant, and the clash of
various personalities led to severing the professional development work they had previously begun. In one case, a cohort member outright rejected the help of their assigned consultant in preference for the other.

Turnaround research seems to directly oppose this approach. “Successful leaders also quickly try new tactics, measure results, discard failed tactics, and do more of what works. Time is the enemy when the status quo is failure” (Public Impact, 2016, p. 8). Rather than discard failed tactics, the staff, school leadership and the consultant hardened their approaches when faced with difficulties and resistance. I observed varying levels of willingness to engage with the new strategy, with the language arts and science departments generally more willing to implement, at least initially, than the math or social studies departments. SPS expected some staff resistance and had prepared accordingly. One leader from the external consultant relayed that efforts to obtain participation from the "willing" had the dual purpose of generating positive engagement from staff, but also a deliberate effort to socially and professionally ostracize teachers who were less than 100% on-board.

Dr. Schwartz mentioned during a cross-organizational meeting that change initiatives like this one forced some “teachers who feel the need to seek out other opportunities, feeling that this type of teaching isn’t for them.” The principal agreed but later lamented that working with only the “coalition of the willing” had limited the size of the coalition. While accounting for the varying interactions with certain individuals on a case by case basis, SPS abandoned professionally developing the entire staff in favor of focusing on nine “model teachers” by early February 2019. These nine and the administrative team comprised the bulk of SPS’s efforts for the remainder of the implementation process. During the interview portion of this study, one veteran teacher discussed these struggles. “I don’t think that’s gonna last. That’s
In my experience, 14 years you see something go. It’s here for a year, it’s gone. That’s just the way education works.”

Implications of Struggle, Stress and Disappointment in Literature

Many turnaround efforts fail to quickly raise student scores or sustain any short-term success. Scores often drop during the turnaround process (Heissel & Ladd, 2018; Meyers & Hambrick Hitt, 2017), which happened at CHS. There is no singular reason why most turnaround efforts fail, but “dependence on lead turnaround partners is as much [a] problem as [a] solution” (Peurach & Neumerski, 2015, p. 387). This may be because there exists a dearth of entities with significant turnaround experiences, especially with programs targeted at specific contexts (Murphy & Bleiberg, 2019). SPS had experience working in turnaround scenarios but had never executed a program like that at Cheryl High. SPS’s academic research mentioned that their pedagogy could work across varied subjects and age levels, saying that “our theory is, the stronger those teams, the higher the performance of the students as a whole, and the school as a whole will be.” But as described in Chapter 4, many teachers resisted aspects of SPS’s program and were removed from the list of staff members eligible for help.

One area mentioned by staff as particularly disappointing were the Saturday planning sessions. SPS placed “departments” into rooms, the various teachers taught these disparate subjects, and due to low turnout, typically were on their "curricular" own. While not a PLC, this effort to redesign school curriculum relates to PLC reform efforts that have been common in turnaround initiatives (Huberman et al., 2011). These struggles related to participation and organization. For example, one of the teachers taught AP Human Geography and a class called AP Seminar, a course dedicated to college preparation. No other social studies teacher present at the Saturday session teacher taught a related subject, so there was an inability to co-
plan standards, align targets to task, or create meaningful culminating assignments. As these were the principal objectives of the Saturday session, the staff believed that very little productive work occurred.

Turnarounds frequently encounter related staffing issues, sometimes due to geographic or financial concerns, and finding capable teachers to administer turnaround programs often proves difficult (Murphy & Bleiberg, 2019). These staffing issues can be deleterious, as high teacher turnover can directly affect turnaround efforts (Backstrom, 2019; Miller, 2013). Investing in staff, in this way or any other way, cannot be productive if the staff leave the school and/or education entirely. Several members of the CHS grant implementation recognized this, including one science teacher who mentioned the problems associated with staff turnover. “If they leave the school, that doesn't do anything for the school. Right now, I know of at least two people that are leaving the school, so that doesn't—like I said, that doesn't help us.”

Organizations that undergo significant and abrupt changes can experience high levels of internal stress (Meyers & Smylie, 2017) and educators “often experience discomfort… due to the stress of trying to master new materials” (Peurach & Neumerski, 2015, p. 414). One science teacher complained that SPS’s work “can become very micromanaged, and that's what I did not like.” The teachers appreciated some of the pedagogical approaches but did not care for the “nickpicking” that occurred. One model teacher remarked these corrections were common, as “the hammer is always gonna come down,” a punitive approach that commonly surrounds turnaround schools (Backstrom, 2019). She said that “from conversations that I had with some people, they were tired of people always coming in their classrooms, the feeling that they're always being watched and not doing something right… micromanagement.”
seemed unable to adapt to CHS’s context in many ways, losing a new and promising math teacher in the process.

The cohort members expressed additional disappointments during their interviews. Connor (2017) found that “providing effective feedback may be the most important... aspect of coaching” (p. 80), yet several Cheryl High staff members, both veterans and newer teachers, complained that SPS provided no feedback after their CFI observations. The disappointment went both ways, as the social studies/ELA trainer expressed her frustration with significant levels of staff apathy during spring CFI walks. Glaris mentioned the cohort’s potential to me directly several times, but also that their passion and priorities made them consistent resisters. Despite the efforts by CCS to foster collaboration between TBS and SPS, there never seemed to be the “true collaboration, with a focus on common goals” (Greenlee & Karanxha, 2010, p. 360) needed for effective group-based work. Several cohort members became model teachers and two were promoted to leadership positions as the grant ended, but SPS’s and TBS’s work seemed to be mostly two separate operations occurring simultaneously.

I spent more overall time working with the cohort than any other aspect of the grant implementation. Their growth seemed to parallel information found in other studies about cohort models in higher education, which have been shown to contribute to improved learning outcomes, a sense of camaraderie and common purpose, and improved leadership skills (Barnet et al., 2000; Compton & Compton, 2017). They have also been shown to contribute to a loss of individuality, conformity pressures and the development of social cliques (Greenlee & Karanxha, 2010). The observational data indicates that the cohort model at CHS helped the students cope with the stresses of the grant implementation. They expressed gratitude at having one another to help navigate the program’s rigors. But consistent with literature on
cohort models in higher education (Lei et al., 2011), some master’s students expressed negative feelings towards some of their classmates and others reacted jealously upon learning about others receiving promotions.

The 20 cohort members from Summer 2018 dropped to 19 for the Fall 2018 semester, as a single member thought the workload was too onerous to continue. By April 2019, the vast majority of the cohort had deeply immersed themselves in executing their projects, leaving little time or interest for additional SPS work, even when presented with leadership opportunities. The speed of the grant implementation limited their ability to engage with material in-depth, and some directly mentioned “going through the motions” near the program’s end. This is consistent with analysis of time in school turnaround (Meyers & Smylie 2017). Some performance changes may have been due to personality and policy conflicts between SPS staff and Cheryl High teachers, but most seemed to be typical of school-year rhythms found in American public schools, centered around holidays and the ends of quarters (Bullough et al., 2001).

It is clear from both this study and from the literature that deliberate efforts related to improving staff retention need to be part of any successful turnaround effort. This does not mean that initial staff changes are always undesirable, but rather than once implemented, the staff charged with the turnaround work need to be supported. One way to do this is to make sure as many as possible feel appreciated and excited about the turnaround work (Prilleltensky et al, 2016; Schueler, 2019).

**Implications of Appreciation and Excitement in Literature**

Teachers who enjoy their work and feel they are engaged in meaningful practice have been shown to have positive effects on student outcomes (Handford & Leithwood, 2013; Lavy
Additionally, teachers can have greater positive impacts on certain marginalized groups when they believe they are supported (Jennings, 2016), and quality teachers excited about helping the neediest students can be key component to student achievement (Nieto, 2003). Excited and happy teachers “drive reform of public school systems. Students… learn because their teachers… [are] energetic, well prepared, and engaging” (Hill & Celio, 2010, p. 7). CCS recognized this and attempted to realize it through the grant application, partially through the master’s degree and the connected financial incentives.

Passion, excitement and commitment are also important for teacher retention and student achievement (Behrendt, 2017; Nieto, 2003) and staff performance seems to improve when teachers believe they are supported (Hunzicker, 2011). Several teachers mentioned feeling appreciated during their interviews, one commenting that the grant implementation caused her to “see a spark.” One teacher told me “It didn’t make any sense to pass a free master’s degree up for something that I was gonna get eventually anyways,” while another said when the grant’s proposals were unveiled “… I just felt like I would be stupid if I did not jump at this opportunity.” For others, the master’s program inspired them to dream bigger for their own careers than they ever had before. One newer teacher told me “I just always wanted to be a teacher… Honestly, after taking the courses, I’m pretty excited about the possibilities… I feel like I’ve gotten to see that throughout this program… being an administrator, a vice principal, a principal, I think is something that I’d be good at. I never really gave that a chance before.” These findings indicate that the staff appreciated the grant’s benefits, both financial and professional.
Quality professionals are often excited about opportunities for professional growth and make deliberate attempts to further their own learning (Nieto, 2003), as did the cohort. Furthermore, teachers who feel supported by their administration have been critical in sustaining turnaround success over time. Many mentioned the sincere appreciation they felt for the district and state’s investment in them as educators. The 19 cohort members invested in their own futures, sacrificing time and other work opportunities to further their own education, and were therefore central to the turnaround process at CHS. A “positive work environment [has] helped ensure the success of… [turnaround] strategies” (Villavencio & Grayman, 2012, p. ES-2). The cohort developed a sense of camaraderie and a positive reputation around campus, causing notable pride amongst certain members. This is consistent with literature about the types of relationships that cohort models can help form in higher education (Greenlee & Karanxha, 2010). Related to group dynamics and turnaround programs, consistent and quality communication with an involved and committed local community has been shown to positively influence turnaround initiatives (Schueler, 2019).

One group of master’s students sought to support the school’s efforts to connect with the community through their practicum projects. The group’s success helped motivate CCS to create a new, larger cohort with a lengthier timeline.

Implication for Practice

The findings from this study presented several implications for public practice and can provide useful insight for future turnaround initiatives. Some of these findings relate to decision-making authorities, others to finances, and others to specific strategies for professional development. The context of CHS’s Schools of Hope grant implementation
cannot be duplicated but the lessons learned by the experience can help other practitioners think about and make decisions related to future turnaround efforts.

**Professional Development**

Improving teacher practice and capacity were essential components of the turnaround initiatives implemented at CHS. SPS was contracted specifically for this reason, and TBS was employed to help improve the long-term leadership capacity of a cohort of CHS staff members. The effort to do so was expansive, time-consuming, and thorough in many ways. However, there were several areas, based on pertinent literature, in which the turnaround effort at CHS could have benefited from certain changes.

**District Commitments**

The cohort model enjoyed levels of success like those documented in literature (Lei et al., 2011, Pemberton & Akkary, 2010). TBS’s subsequent program master’s program with CCS offered two sets of degrees, one in leadership and the other in reading. Based on ethnographic data from this study, it seemed that both institutions believed that their relationship was mutually beneficial. It would therefore be wise for research universities from across the state and the country to consider partnering with their local districts in a similar manner. Doing so would provide a steady stream of quality students in higher education and help provide districts with capable leadership personnel.

CCS utilized several members of its leadership team to serve a variety of purposes related to the grant implementation, but no single individual seemed to have direct oversight over the entire process. Even the leadership groupings appeared to involve overlapping responsibilities, and SPS and TBS personnel interacted with different leadership figures over the 14-month period. Meyers (2019) argued that focused district leadership and involvement
with turnaround schools is critical for success. Future turnaround efforts should, therefore, assign either a single individual or a small group with specific oversight responsibilities, complete with regular monitoring and the capacity and authority to adjust as necessary. A CHS, for example, CCS leadership seemed unsure how to proceed when presented with an intransigent department coach. When it became clear that this individual was resisting the implementation effort, there seemed to be an inability to take decisive action.

Districts should take a direct and broad but focused role in managing turnaround efforts. “There are a number of strategic decisions district leaders can take to increase the likelihood that principals and teachers of low-performing schools can have turnaround success” (Meyers, 2019, p. 15). While district leadership was intimately involved with both the development and the execution of the Schools of Hope grant, no singular person seemed to have direct oversight or responsibility for the program. Rather, a mix of leadership figures added input and made various suggestions over time. Hines et al. (2020) found that “in turnaround schools, it is critical that all school personnel are involved in improving school outcomes” (p. 216), meaning that a non-compliant math coach should not have been allowed to derail the process. Based on the data, it seems likely that a district figure with appropriate authority could have made the types of quick personnel decisions that the unstructured leadership hierarchy could not.

**Pedagogical Professional Development.**

CCS determined that closing CHS or replacing its leadership and staff were not ideal options, even though both actions have been taken by other districts that house struggling schools (Huberman et al., 2011). Instead, CCS decided to invest in their staff’s long-term capacity through building a master’s cohort through a partnership with TBS, and to improve
their pedagogical practice by working with SPS. These commitments culminated with TBS, at the time of this writing, awarding 13 master’s degrees and the district promoting two members to leadership positions. As school districts are facing teacher shortages across the country (Aragon, 2016; Sutcher, Darling-Hammond & Carver-Thomas, 2019), some school districts, especially larger ones like those in Florida, are both uniquely positioned and financially capable of making these types of investments in their staff, if there exists the necessary local will.

As part of the effort to professionally develop their staff, SPS and CCS partnered to reform PLCs. This was done for both curricular and pedagogical purposes, in a deliberate effort to change the staff’s approach to content delivery. CHS administration expressed that these efforts had successfully developed some teacher leaders and improved the PLC process. The PLCs I observed utilized “sit-and-get” approaches to teacher education, which was notable considering SPS’s commitment to student-led instruction and a reliance on teacher-facilitation. Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) argued that active rather than passive learning is key to successful professional development, and SPS attempted to employ more active approaches during the Spring 2019 Saturday sessions. “Active learning, in sharp contrast to sit-and-listen lectures, engages educators using authentic artifacts, interactive activities, and other strategies to provide deeply embedded, highly contextualized professional learning” (p. 7).

Yet as the principal discussed, the Saturday curriculum redesign sessions were populated largely by the cohort members, many of whom were motivated to complete their practicum hours, rather than any broader commitment to reforming the school’s curriculum maps. Future PD efforts should involve active learning, but a robust commitment from staff
and administration is needed to make the work worthwhile. Schools and districts should develop, maintain and enforce high expectations with PD activities while providing substantial incentives for committed participation. Quality feedback from classroom observations that directly connects to the new PD needs to be conducted by experienced professionals familiar with local context (Connor, 2017). Both students and staff will more readily engage with material they find interesting and meaningful (Behrendt, 2017). This requires states and districts to be both culturally and contextually aware when designing and executing the professional development programs that are central to turnaround efforts (Flory et al., 2014; Mellom et al., 2018; Meyes & Smylie, 2017; Murphy & Bleiberg, 2019).

**Turnaround Schools**

The findings from this study combined with an analysis of pertinent literature have helped me develop several implications for future turnaround practice. Turnaround initiatives have occurred in a variety of forms (Murphy & Bleiberg, 2019), and it seems likely that educational planners will continue to try novel approaches to improve struggling schools. These planners should keep the following in mind.

**Specific Focus with a Sufficient Timeline**

Trujillo and Renee (2012) called on turnaround efforts to engage with six broad goals, including “Focus school turnaround policies on improving the quality of teaching and learning rather than on technical-structural changes” (p. 4). CHS’s program attempted to do this using SPS’s framework. But “improving teaching” requires a stable staff workforce who both believe in the improvement process and have the capacity to execute. “Improving quality” is a broad enough concept to mean many different things to many different people, so turnaround planners need significant experience in the local community to determine A) pre-turnaround
staff capacity (Day, 2014), B) specific and targeted obtainable goals within the turnaround timeline (Peurach & Neumerski, 2015) and C) contextually based long-term targets with sustainability as the goal (Day, 2014, Meyers, 2019; Murphy & Bleiberg, 2019).

These actions could be as simple as, for example, a deliberate focus to “improve staff capacity related to reading gains for the bottom 25% over a three year time frame;” or, that “teacher retention rates will improve for a specific percentage over several years.” There are numerous potential turnaround objectives, but no matter their design, input from the staff and a specific focus seem to be key. No matter the turnaround expectations, quick wins seem to be extremely difficult to obtain. Time, usually in the form of years, is necessary to turnaround struggling schools, many of which took several years to reach “turnaround status” in the first place (Player & Katz, 2016). The struggles that turnaround schools typically face do not rapidly develop, and neither do their potential improvements (Murphy & Bleiberg, 2019). As concepts like “extended learning time” have been part turnaround efforts (during the school year) and deemed to be helpful for students generally (Heissel & Ladd, 2018), logic dictates that the staff charged with turning around a struggling school would similarly benefit from additional time to achieve sustainable gains.

Teachers need time to expand their practices and feel comfortable with new strategies (Travers & Cooper, 2006). The turnaround effort at CHS introduced staff, both veterans and new teachers alike, to pedagogical approaches about which many were unfamiliar. These new methods were expected to be absorbed and effectively implemented almost right away, and when staff members demurred or expressed consternation, they no longer received help from SPS. In the same way teachers need time to learn about their students’ needs and capacities to develop effective instruction (usually in the first few weeks of a new year), those
implementing turnaround efforts need time to learn about the context of a struggling school before introducing a new model. An English teacher told me that “it’s just like when we come in each year and we get a whole slew of teachers. Average teacher has about 130 kids. You got to spend some time pulling the data to see where your kids are, doing some initial assessment to see, you know, how you start, how you tailor what you’re going to be doing.” She applied this logic to thoughts about the turnaround initiative at CHS. “It’s the same information you’re delivering. I just think and its common knowledge that you need to feed teachers differently based on, you know, where they are in their learning and their profession. I think that would’ve made a difference.”

**Real Accountability with Incentives**

“Finding experienced external providers is a challenge and may require state efforts to plan and train individuals and organizations to support” (Therriault, 2016, p. 19). School turnaround has thus been a difficult enterprise across the country. Outside of their guaranteed contract, SPS had little financial incentive to produce results as defined by CCS at CHS, and they had never utilized the model they employed. A SPS trainer expressed a desire for new data about their method early in the process, yet confidently asserted that their strategies would work. Finances aside, the full-time trainers and SPS specialized trainers did seem generally interested in helping CHS’s staff and were frustrated by their inability to do so, but financial motivations may have helped motivated the company to be more contextually flexible and potentially effective. The logic of utilizing financial incentives relates to current turnaround practice (Murphy & Bleiberg, 2019).

CCS argued for the importance of financial incentives in recruiting and rewarding teachers and mentioned various ways of doing so in the grant application. If financial
incentives for educators is going to remain a significant part of turnaround initiatives (Murphy & Bleiberg, 2019), that same logic could and should apply to any external entity charged with professionally developing the school. Programs like Race to the Top (RTT) involve targeted and specific financial incentives for various measurable areas of success (McGuinn, 2012), and the Schools of Hope grant at CHS detailed several layers of incentives, both financial and educational.

While the turnaround application written for CHS mentioned areas for desired improvement, no specific goals, nor rewards for specific success levels were directed at SPS. This stands in direct contrast to many government turnaround concepts. “RTT’s design—and specifically its use of a competitive grant process—was intended to avoid these problems by relying on incentives instead of sanctions to drive state reform” (McGuin, 2012, p. 138). Incentives, both financial and otherwise, have been significant parts of educational reform and improvement efforts, including motivating students to participate in longer school days (Huberman et al., 2011). Perhaps future turnaround literature will debate the merits of incentive-based approaches, but these efforts seem to be the norm. Therefore, if states and districts are going to continue offering various incentives in conjunction with high stakes testing and pressures for turnaround reforms, it seems reasonable to extend those same types of incentives any contracted external operators.

Financial commitments to further professional development have the potential to effective, especially if the staff appreciate the investment. However, Podolsky, Kini, Darling-Hammond & Bishop (2019) argued that “successful program models tend to… recruit and select candidates who are academically strong, committed to teaching, and well-prepared; commit recipients to teach with reasonable financial consequences if recipients do not fulfill
the commitment” (p. 25), but avoided financial penalties that caused potential participants to negatively calculate risk-reward consequences. Two cohort members specifically mentioned the lack of a long-term commitment clause in a “contract” for participating in the cohort, and several TBS professors expressed a variety of philosophical concerns about that very issue. Long-term incentives, both financial and otherwise, could have positively affected the program’s results, both for the leadership development offered by TBS and the pedagogical improvement promised by SPS.

**Leadership Placement and Development**

Duke (2015) argued that “if every principal [could turnaround a] school in a relatively short period of time, developers reasoned, there would not be so many low-performing schools. Ensuring capable leadership for low-performing schools is [therefore] a fundamental social justice issue” (p. 81). Successful turnaround leaders have been committed to successful action, aware of problems and obstacles, understood why they existed, could plan and focus energies to overcome them, and were able to lead staff in a common direction. Ambitious and widespread turnarounds seem to require experienced leaders to see them through (Junge & Krvaric, 2018; Meyers & Smylie, 2017). CHS, however, lacked the experienced leadership necessary to navigate their many challenges while navigating the grant implementation. Several cohort members mentioned the need for experienced leaders with significant training during their interviews, both in relation to the principal and the assistant principals.

On April 26, I heard that the principal and Kate Glaris had observed non-educational movies in several classrooms while other were utilizing general “busy work.” Harris concurrently admitted they had not had the “buy-in” they had wanted, which was the main reason for moving to the “model teachers” and away from working with the entire staff. At
this same meeting we learned that the principal was very upset and disappointed with both the APs and department heads. During this final cross-organizational meeting, the principal said that he believed much of the staff had recently been “on summer vacation.” He blamed himself for not putting the pressure on his APs and department coaches in the preceding months. It seemed that principal believe CHS leadership, including himself, had demonstrated an “[un]willingness to disrupt complacency” (Meyers & Hambrick Hitt, 2017, p. 52), which can be key for turnaround leadership. And while employing a new principal can lead to achievement decline (Dhuey & Smith, 2014), as can principal turnover (Miller, 2013), veteran and quality leadership seemed to be important components to successful school improvement efforts (Heissel & Ladd, 2018; Junge & Krvaric, 2018; Meyers & Smylie, 2017). The CHS implementation data seem to confirm the need for strong leadership at turnaround schools.

The Importance of Veteran Personnel

Simply replacing the principal and starting anew does not seem to serve turnaround schools well. Ginsburg and Smith (2018) found that “researchers learned that principal [replacement] had no effect on teachers’ perceptions of the quality of leadership, perhaps because many of the new principals were inexperienced. Such findings point to the importance of understanding how interventions work within local contexts” (p. 7). “Effective school turnaround implementation requires a) the introduction of key stakeholders to proven turnaround models, and b) making certain that there is genuine buy-in and a willingness to change” (Rhim, 2013, p. ii). One interviewed science teacher said “The principal I was hired under had been here since 2004, so about five, six years, so you had that stability… it was consistent—pretty much consistently at a C, so that was good. Then he left, and then it—that's when the—kind of the domino effect… then we couldn't stay out of the news.” Leadership
issues can affect big and small picture issues, from visions for success to filling out the necessary paperwork for projects, including things staff members may desire. One cohort member noted problems “because with all the shuffling of principals, I don't know if paperwork wasn't filled out for us to be a host school or if the principals knew about it or what the case may have been.” Educational leaders need, therefore, specific skills that allow them to offer quality and targeted feedback directed and the classroom learning environment and instruction (Connor, 2017).

Additionally, leadership at the district level needs to take charge of turnaround efforts. Specific goals based on context need to be coherently outlined and consistently monitored. One cohort member suggested that “the only thing I think about is, let’s see, has there been any professional development for administration? 'Cause we have a whole new administration, right, and not all leaders are created equally… 'Cause we have a lot of new folks. Their level of true expertise… that’s the only thing that might’ve been a good addition.” Regular communication, high expectations, and consequences for leadership need to connect with the turnaround’s original goals.

Turnaround efforts need competent administrators that are committed to implementing the turnaround vision. This need includes assistant principals who have significant levels of content and pedagogical awareness. The CHS staff generally did not feel confident about leadership’s capability to enact the turnaround program, both at the school and district level. “I felt like there was a lack of communication, a big lack of communication. People didn't know who was in charge of what. You would try to email someone and find out. That person would never respond back to an email. I'm talking, this is district personnel. This is school administrators. That is very frustrating,” said one during our interview. Turnaround educators
need to trust their leadership’s capacity for school improvement to occur (Handford & Leithwood 2013; Van Maele & Van Houtte, 2015), and far too often this was lacking at CHS.

The Importance of Trust, Collaboration and Stability

School-wide efforts need collaboration, both vertically and horizontally. Teachers have a tendency to work in isolation, especially cross-departmentally. The cohort gave CHS’s staff some of the first opportunities to not only collaborate on school-wide initiatives, but actually meet their fellow staff members. Some discussed the collaborative process the grant implementation provided during their interviews. “I felt like we could have collaborated on some of the things and actually really made it better,” one science teacher explained. “I felt like there was a little distance at times with those and almost like, this is my project. Don't do anything with it. Instead, I'm doing this over here, and you're doing this.” She believed that organizational efforts to interact could have been much better. “We could actually collaborate and make it better or expand on it or get some ideas from each other. That never really happened. I thought that would have—I think that was a missed opportunity to do that.”

Murphy and Bleiberg (2019) analyzed turnaround literature and found that schools are also hampered by the fact that success is expected in turnaround initiatives, when such beliefs deny the reality of the “risk of failure”... they are also hampered by the belief that new teachers can be found and that they will be supported and work seamlessly into their new schools... There is also evidence that “oversell” by districts, promising a good deal of things that never materialize, can be placed in the obstacle bucket. (p. 132)

It seems that Carter County Schools engaged in these practices to varying degrees. The Schools of Hope grant ambitious and attempted to intertwine the work of three large
organizations in a short period of time.

One teacher talked about the “salesmanship” of the grant during our interview. “I’ve seen grants like this... If you’re gonna say that this fits all schools, it can’t… I don’t think that this specifically was tailored to our school… I would have come at it with a different approach than just saying, ‘SPS is the band-aid that’s gonna fix these that we’re gonna use this for.’ I think it should have been SPS plus [the input and work of other grant stakeholders].” The Schools of Hope grant application author did conduct a needs assessment and gathered staff opinions about CHS’s struggles, but no efforts were made to engage the staff in generating solutions to those problems. Rather, CCS leadership enlisted TBS and SPS and charged them with executing the primary aspects of the grant application’s six goals, and some staff members resented the exclusion.

“You kind of lost your—you lost some trust with it, ultimately. It felt like you didn't trust your teachers” one teacher told me during our interview. “You didn't trust them to be professionals. You didn't trust them to be—teach, essentially.” She recognized the importance of trusting in the professional capacity of the school's staff (Van Maele & Van Houtte, 2015). Teachers who do not believe they have the confidence of school’s leadership are less likely to perform well and were likely to leave the school and the field entirely (Aragon, 2016). CCS wanted to encourage high staff retention rates, partially through reformed pedagogy, partially through the TBS cohort, and partially through offering financial incentives. Further collaboration in designing the program itself, it seems, could have generated additional staff ownership of the process and increased the “coalition of the willing.”

**Substantial Financial Investments**
Carter County Schools detailed their financial investment in the Schools of Hope grant application. The official statement reads:

Supported by… research and… to provide operational flexibility and improve both the recruitment and retention of… teachers… the following additional strategies will be implemented as part of TOP3: A recruitment sign-on bonus will be provided to all instructional staff at the school who have a performance evaluation rating of effective or highly effective. A retention bonus will be provided to all… who have a performance evaluation rating of effective or highly effective, stay at the school and have at least 51% of assigned students who achieve learning gains... [this] will be to create a stable and highly effective teaching team that will foster a positive, rigorous and engaging learning environment at the school. This will be accomplished through a collaborative and periodic stipend incentive that serves as a gesture of not only recognition of quality work but also of appreciation. (Carter County Schools, 2017, p. 18)

The interviewed cohort members mentioned the incentives during their interviews, and I recorded that a general appreciation of the effort existed, but most believed that communication related to the incentives as well as the quantities were insufficient for most personnel. “I think I wouldn’t have kept the grant [rewards] like a secret…” one teacher mentioned during our interview while discussing the bonuses. “Just telling more people about what was coming ‘cause I think it was a neat opportunity.”

Murphy and Bleiberg (2019) found that “states were loath to invest resources for actions (i.e., hiring new staff) that would add financial burdens that would remain after federal resources ceased to flow” during turnaround initiatives (p. 126). Hines et al. (2020) found that
“the focus of turnaround schools is school leadership (e.g., assistant principals and principals) and teacher effectiveness to transform low performance into success” (p. 218). This was the case at Cheryl High, but significant funds were also spend on “wrap around personnel.” Dr. Longoria, the grant’s principal author, lamented the inability to retain the three additional support staff brought on by the grant’s funding, and several teachers mentioned that one of the extra counselors had been particularly supportive. If additional staff, like counselors and career readiness coordinators, are indeed beneficial for a single year or two, it seems logical that their benefits could be much more widespread and long-term.

In explaining “the strategies the school district will implement to identify, recruit, retain, and reward instructional personnel,” (p. 17) Carter County Schools (2017) outlined their eighth action item:

Research… shows that recruitment and retention bonuses for hard to staff positions is an effective strategy (Kowal, Hassel, Hassel, 2008: "Financial Incentives for Hard to Staff Positions: Cross sector lessons for Public Education")... One specific research study showed that paying math, science, and special education teachers in high poverty schools $1,800 bonuses (about $2,500 adjusted for inflation), reduced teacher turnover by 17 percent (Clotfelter, Glennie, Ladd, Vigdor, 2008: "Would Higher Salaries Keep Teachers in High Poverty Schools?" Journal of Public Economics). Another study conducted right here in Florida looked at $1,200 (about $1,700 adjusted for inflation) retention bonuses given to middle or high school teachers in certain subjects. The research found even more pronounced results: Teachers who received the relatively modest payment were about 25 percent less likely to quit than similar teachers who didn't receive the pay incentive. (Carter County Schools, 2017, p. 17)
The effort to financially reward quality teachers involved in turnaround schools may be varied, but almost all agree it matters (Murphy & Bleiberg, 2019). Teachers will respond to financial incentives to a point, but there are limits, especially when educators engage in individualized cost-benefit analyses. “Why stay here for this when I can go somewhere else and do my job for the same amount of pay?” one teacher expressed during our interview. “We lost some teachers, I think, because of that.” The staff I interviewed noticed significant difficulties in recruitment and retention. A social studies teacher told me, “They kept losing teachers. It was hard to fill—you really can't fill that many positions with actual qualified teachers to see this through. You can fill it with people who will survive the job, and even then, they may quit.”

If financial rewards and incentives are going to be a part of the future of turnaround schools, they need to be substantial enough to positively influence an educator’s internal accounting. Podolski et al. (2019) argued that financial incentives for educators to take on challenging assignments can be effective, but typically only when the numbers are “substantial enough… to be an effective inducement” (p. 24). Detailing the attendance-related bonus, I learned that “you could only miss two days a semester, essentially, one day in nine weeks, and you only got $500.00, so by the time they took it out of your taxes, it was $350.00” from a teacher during our interview. “A lot of people were like, I'm not even—it doesn't matter at that point. As far as the reward goes, for some people… it was so low, they didn't care. I think that's interesting.” The same teacher continued “I thought we were gonna make like an extra $7,000 for the year… I would think with $4.4M, you had money to try to recruit people. ‘Hey, you’re highly qualified. I’ll give you an extra $5,000 if you come to Cheryl and help us change our school.’ I didn’t see that happening. So, I think that was really a missed opportunity… The rewarding personnel, the only thing I saw was happening was attendance bonuses.”
Rhim (2005) found that “one of the incentives for… [external operators] to manage public schools is they may earn a profit. If the opportunity to earn a profit appears tenuous at best, the pool of potential vendors will be somewhat shallow. If districts want to realize… [gains], they should leverage the potency of profit to… motivate the companies” (p. 11). External operators tend to be motivated by cost-benefit analyses when developing and executing turnaround programs. These behaviors can connect to teacher motivations as well. Podolsky et al. (2019) conducted an exhaustive study about various reasons for teacher shortages and best practices for improving teacher retention.

A large part of the Schools of Hope grant implementation at CHS involved that same goal, obtained, in theory, through improved professional capacity after SPS’s pedagogical reforms and direct investments in staff through specific financial incentives and bonuses. “A bonus was the carrot that they dangled. That’s basically it,” explained one interviewed teacher. “If you mentored kids, you got money. If you had attendance, you got money. If you did this, you got money. If you did that, you got money, but the rules changed constantly.” Podolsky et al. (2019) offered suggestions for continuing education, training, housing incentives and others, but their argument’s general thrust centered on the need for the country to make teaching a more financially feasible career, especially for young and new teachers. Murphy and Bleiberg (2019) found a discrepancy with turnaround approaches in relation to finances, with some schools receiving insufficient aid for effective turnaround, while others quickly received significant funds. However, “the additional financial resources have ended too soon for the schools to completely implement their interventions fully” (p. 169). This was the general feeling about the Schools of Hope program at CHS.
Dr. Doloroso mentioned the importance of CHS’s recent aesthetic changes, believing that the cleaner local environment had positively improved morale. Financial investment in schools should, therefore, involve structures as well as direct payments (Meyers, 2019). Schools need to be clean, safe, modern environments with up-to-date technological capacities and comfortable climates. Ideally, schools should exist in geographically convenient locations and have schedules that best align with the community’s needs (Kim, Koedel, Ni & Podgursky, 2017; Wahlstrom & Owens, 2017).

The bonus structures most often mentioned by the teachers I interviewed related to teacher attendance and mentoring those that hosted student interns (student teachers). But the sentiment surrounding attendance bonuses was not positive. One teacher told me that the attendance requirements were too onerous, making the small (in their opinion) amount not worth the trouble. “There were no extenuating circumstances or something, and the bonus was really small, so most people disregarded it anyway.” Other bonuses were poorly communicated and therefore had minimal effect on motivation or performance. “The school grade bonus, whatever they called that, came through for people who were here during last year, but we didn’t even know how much that was gonna be. There was no communication about it, so maybe it could have been a reward, but it wasn’t publicized enough to mean much to keep people here for this school year.”

Implications for Further Research

This study sought to understand how the Schools of Hope grant was implemented at CHS, and to report on how grant stakeholders experienced the process. The effort to do so has produced a variety of qualitative themes that detail the events and several important
implications for practice but has also generated additional potential academic research questions.

**Long-term Sustainability**

Educational researchers need more information about the long-term sustainability to turnaround initiatives (Murphy & Bleiberg, 2019, Player & Katz, 2016, Villavencio & Grayman, 2012). “That's one of my biggest fears with this, ultimately, is that we've done all this work this year, and then now SPS is off campus, so what does that mean for us going into next year?” one interviewed teacher mentioned to me. “The first TBS cohort will be done, so what does that mean?” There exists a need for studies about long-term “effectiveness,” especially the need for qualitative and quantitative data generated over long term, multiyear studies, including ethnographies. Very few ethnographic studies about turnaround implementations in schools exist, and none that detail long-term sustainability. Academic researchers would benefit the scholastic community by filling this gap.

**Turnaround Secondary Schools’ Connections to Local Feeder Schools**

One interviewed teacher said “I need more involvement of coordination. Coordination, whatever we’re gonna call it. If I’m going to ninth—or the eighth grade to prepare for that, who’s looked over that? Who’s at the middle school to seen what’s goin’ on there to make sure?” More work needs to be done on researching the relationship between secondary schools in turnaround status and they're connected elementary and middle schools. What work, if any, is being done to coordinate activities, outcomes, and learning goals between these various institutions? As there appears to be no research on specific factors that prevent schools from high poverty areas from making initial declines and maintaining student scores
(Murphy & Bleiberg, 2019), making direct connections between struggling secondary schools and their associated feeder schools would be very helpful.

**Factors in generating interest and commitment to PD indicatives**

Researchers could fill a current literature gap about external contractors working with public schools where financial incentives for gains are a contractual reality. At the time of this writing, no academic comparative analysis of external operators working with results-based incentives compared to those who are not has been made. Zimmer et al. (2017) called for further research into the effectiveness of incentive policies on turnaround efforts. As CHS’s staff largely believed that the incentives offered in the Schools of Hope grant implementation were insufficient and poorly communicated, this may have limited the perceived effectiveness.

The program’s speed served as an incentive for some staff members. “I researched a bunch of other programs and they all lasted 22 to 28 months or something crazy, and this one was shorter. It was a little bit more condensed,” said one teacher during our interview. What, therefore, is the “ideal” length for a continuing education component of a turnaround initiative, and how do various lengths affect initial participation, attrition, and successful completion? Time pressures relate directly to turnaround initiatives, so further coordination with long-term PD efforts and the needs of staff seem crucial for future success. A comparative analysis focused on PD program length would be a helpful addition the literature.

I found that the cohort members were very appreciative of the district paying for their master’s program, but they seemed equally happy with the program’s geographic convenience as its financial benefits. “I think [I wanted to do it] ‘cause the ease of it being brought right here.” “Speaking plainly, it was free so long as we finished.” “When this opportunity came here, I felt like this was just—fall into my lap, and I had to take advantage of this.” What,
therefore, are the implications of geography for connecting research universities that develop leaders and educators and various school districts? While some recent scholarship has studied how schedules can affect learning (Groen & Pabilonia, 2019), and the impact of geography on leadership development programs (White et al., 2016), more work is needed on understanding geographic limitations to turnaround and PD efforts like the one enacted at CHS.

**Recommendations**

Schools and districts interested in taking advantage of programs like Florida's Schools of Hope grant should consider the lessons learned from this study in several important ways. First, any contracts with external or third-party entities should be narrow, targeted, and have reasonable financial expectations connected to definable success, especially if the trend of financial incentives connected to turnaround programs is to continue. Second, the staff expected to execute change initiatives should have a significant role in the program's creation, including an initial assessment of score decline causation, action plans for execution, and responses to both successes and struggles that may arise. Turnaround efforts should have high expectations for educators and students, but also be conscious of contextual capacity. Third, districts should ensure that struggling schools have experienced, capable, and committed educators, both in administration and in the classroom, who have a vested interest in the long-term sustainability of their institutions. A commitment to serving all students requires educators to be willing to make certain professional adjustments based on need. School districts should reasonably expect their most veteran and highest quality teachers to work directly with their neediest students. As significant staff turnover and inexperienced leadership are anathema to turnaround initiatives when quality replacements are unavailable, financial and educational benefits can and should play a role.
Finally, partnerships with universities for conducting PD make sense for school districts in certain circumstances. However, geographic and personal connections can limit the ability to build these types of professional relationships. The turnaround program at CHS was benefited by the willingness of TBS professors to provide classes on site, but that geographic benefit also connects the broader limitations districts and universities face. A district like Carter County would have logistical issues contracting with other research universities that were father away, and vice versa, or with universities that lacked the personal connection in a figure like Dr. Schwartz. Therefore, both school districts and universities need to think of ways to expand their PD connections beyond the traditional geographic and interpersonal limitations.

Summary Concluding Statement

SPS consistently remarked that their pedagogical approaches could serve all subject areas and grade levels. Perhaps this is so, but their unwillingness to work with resisters seemed to limit their effectiveness. My own passions about helping ELL students and my many hours in classrooms that serve them gave me further pause related to their processes. I personally believe in the need for students to take command of their own learning, but I also believe that his requires strong teachers who possess access to quality curriculum in order to be successful. Much of my experience working with ELL students in Florida shows me that both are too often lacking (De Jong, 2014; O’Brien, 2011). Students with language barriers are some of our neediest students and deserve quality educators to help them navigate the difficulties of scholastic life. If SPS’s approaches are to continue in places like Carter County that possess increasing ELL populations, far more needs to be done to prepare teachers to serve these students through differentiated instruction. I observed no effort by SPS to help
their teachers prepare for their district’s growing ELL population, nor any pressure from CCS to do so. If CCS and other districts have a genuine desire to serve all students and improve their scholastic scores, more needs to be done on this front.

As previously mentioned, the consultant company called for student-centered approaches to content delivery, and many teachers attempted to do this with fidelity, at least at the beginning. This effort, juxtaposed against most staff training activities, was striking. At almost every planning session, PLC, or staff meeting I attended, a top-down approach was applied. Trainers or administrators delivered content to staff through a banking model (Freire, 1970). Attendees were expected to sit, pay attention, and learn the new material with only rudimentary efforts to elicit staff engagement or ownership. Efforts to change this training mentality, especially at "coaching walks" and Saturday curriculum planning sessions, seemed ineffective, and efforts to develop the entire staff were abandoned in favor of work with the nine model teachers halfway through the school year. This, combined with SPS's refusal to “model” their vision of effective classroom content delivery, seemed to make their efforts to change CHS’s pedagogical approaches difficult. I believe that the effort to change long-standing approaches to education cannot be successful if the staff do not have prolonged exposure to the desired methods. When faced with challenges, teacher instincts drew them back to the approaches with which they were familiar, including their own experiences as students.

My own personal and professional experiences directly relate to this. When I want to learn how to do something new, I go to YouTube and watch a demonstration video. The idea that the video contains a situation that is not entirely my own and therefore I would be unable to duplicate it in my own context is absurd. Yet this was the central philosophical tenant of the
external consultant company, from which they refused to adjust, no matter the level of resistance they experienced. They claimed that modeling would prevent the teacher from taking ownership of the process, and that the unique nature of their classrooms made modeling inappropriate. The staff consistently disagreed and the “coalition of the willing” dissipated. Despite significant literature about turnaround and professional development (Meyers & Hambrick Hitt, 2017; Murphy & Bleiberg, 2019) calling for flexible approaches based on context, culture and capacity, the implementation at CHS took a largely rigid approach to staff and leadership development.

I hope that this study provided a valuable insight into the implementation of a “Schools of Hope” initiative. I desired for it to help the reader understand stakeholder perceptions about the significant combined efforts of an external consultant company and a research university as part of the effort to both increase short-term scholastic scores and build long-term capacity. I attempted to detail the struggles and successes of a unique cohort of high school staff members seeking to earn their master’s degrees while at the same time embracing aspects of the novel approach to content delivery offered to them by their district’s partnership with SPS. I sought to offer valuable information for policymakers, researchers and educational practitioners, and provide a starting point for future policy ethnographies concerning governmental efforts to improve education through increasing staff capacity. Thank you very much for reading.
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APPENDIX A

Interview Questions

1. What first drew your interest in participating in the master’s cohort?
2. How do your experiences compare to your initial expectations?
3. Describe your involvement with the external consultant.
4. After showing the interviewee the six desired targets within the grant application and giving them a moment to reflect, “In your view, what has been the impact of the effort to implement these six goals?”
5. What aspect of this process did you most dislike? What caused you the most consternation or anxiety?
6. What, if anything, would you change about your experiences?
7. What are your predictions for the future of this High School?
8. What else might you be interested in sharing?
APPENDIX B

CHS Scores – Adapted from fdoe.org/accountability

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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>ELA Gains</td>
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<td>39</td>
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<td>ELA Gains of the lowest 25%</td>
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