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Supports Provided To Improve Schools In Need Of Intensive Supports In Chicago Public Schools (CPS) Evaluation

Jeffrey Alstadt

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A THREE-PART DISSERTATION:

Part 1:
SUPPORTS PROVIDED TO IMPROVE SCHOOLS IN NEED OF INTENSIVE SUPPORTS IN CHICAGO PUBLIC SCHOOLS (CPS) EVALUATION

Program Evaluation

Jeffrey Alstadt
Educational Leadership Doctoral Program

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of Doctor of Education in the Foster G. McGaw Graduate School

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Document Origination Statement for Digital Commons @ NLU

This document was created as one part of the three-part dissertation requirement of the National Louis University (NLU) Educational Leadership (EDL) Doctoral Program. The National Louis Educational Leadership EdD is a professional practice degree program (Shulman et al., 2006).

For the dissertation requirement, doctoral candidates are required to plan, research, and implement three major projects, one each year, within their school or district with a focus on professional practice. The three projects are:

- Program Evaluation
- Change Leadership Plan
- Policy Advocacy Document

For the **Program Evaluation** candidates are required to identify and evaluate a program or practice within their school or district. The “program” can be a current initiative; a grant project; a common practice; or a movement. Focused on utilization, the evaluation can be formative, summative, or developmental (Patton, 2008). The candidate must demonstrate how the evaluation directly relates to student learning.

In the **Change Leadership Plan** candidates develop a plan that considers organizational possibilities for renewal. The plan for organizational change may be at the building or district level. It must be related to an area in need of improvement, and have a clear target in mind. The candidate must be able to identify noticeable and feasible differences that should exist as a result of the change plan (Wagner et al., 2006).

In the **Policy Advocacy Document** candidates develop and advocate for a policy at the local, state or national level using reflective practice and research as a means for supporting and promoting reforms in education. Policy advocacy dissertations use critical theory to address moral and ethical issues of policy formation and administrative decision making (i.e., what ought to be). The purpose is to develop reflective, humane and social critics, moral leaders, and competent professionals, guided by a critical practical rational model (Browder, 1995).

Works Cited


6.20.16
Abstract

The program evaluation examined systems provided to schools in the city of Chicago which needed intensive supports. This was done by evaluating qualitative and quantitative data. Much of the qualitative data was derived from interviews, while the majority of the quantitative data was compiled through Chicago Public Schools’ publically accessible data system. There were many advantages to looking at only the schools needing intensive supports. There were many similarities in these schools which helped strengthen and align with the qualitative data produced from the individuals interviewed. There were also publically released studies that validated the qualitative data from this study. There were significant changes to the matrix used to evaluate the effectiveness of Chicago Public Schools. The results of evaluations performed through this matrix determined which schools needed intensive support. However, and even though the performances of the schools did not actually change through standard-based assessments, the district projected schools improving using the new matrix system. The findings from the program evaluation pointed to CPS needing to put new systems in place to support building level administrators.
Preface

I was a building level administrator for Chicago Public School for five years. My job responsibilities included more work than I could ever have imagined. I came to CPS from the suburbs, and had been trained in best practices, and implementing systems through a continuous cycle of improvement. The work I had done prior to CPS was rooted in teaming and collaboration. While at CPS, I worked in one of the lowest performing schools in the state. Through these practices we could turn the school around. It was extremely more difficult to implement these systems within CPS. During my tenure at CPS, I learned a great deal about the characteristics of successful implementation of best practices, as well as characteristics of unsuccessful efforts. One aspect of the work that stood out the most within CPS was when the district modified the school evaluation accountability matrix.

The shift in the matrix changed the landscape of schools receiving intensive support from the district. CPS adapted the school evaluation accountability tool from School Year (SY) 13 to School Year (SY) 14. Due to use of the revised evaluation matrix, there appeared to be a dramatic decrease in the total number of schools that had been identified for intensive support by the school district. The decline for those identified schools was from 223 schools in 2011 to just 17 in 2015. There was also a great deal of personnel turnover within the district and network level leadership positions. Although the number of schools receiving intensive support was drastically lowered, the performance on the NWEA assessment did not improve. Through the qualitative and quantitative data analyses, it became clear that building level administration required intensive supports, but was not receiving them.
CPS had a great deal of training available for administration and teachers. One major theme was that everyone was extremely busy, overwhelmed and did not have the time to take on added trainings. When schools needed intensive interventions, they were working and living day-to-day. Instead of merely labeling schools with intensive support, we needed to provide those schools with intensive support. It was extremely difficult for staff to implement best practices they were aware of, when they were already overwhelmed with the amount of their current work.

I found that CPS schools were attempting to implement several best practices. They can create a list of the practices they attempted to implement. The problem surfaces that nothing is being implemented well. Many things are brought into the school, implementation is attempted, and failure quickly follows. Many programs or systems are touched on but never implemented with depth. This creates schools with staff that become pessimistic to any new ideas, or best practices that administration attempts to implement. Everyone is working hard. Unfortunately, that work is not moving the school in a positive direction.
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SECTION ONE: INTRODUCTION

Purpose

I have often asked myself: what are the real factors that inhibit certain schools in the Chicago Public School (CPS) from mobilizing the community to create excellence and equality in their neighborhood schools? To offer encouragement for schools to create such an outstanding and fair learning environment, CPS uses a rating system to identify a school’s progress toward reaching those goals. The School Quality Rating Policy (SQRP) is the Chicago Public Schools Board of Education’s policy for evaluating school performance wherein each school receives an annual School Quality Rating and an Accountability Status. Among other things, the SQRP aids in keeping communication open between CPS and school stakeholders concerning the academic success of each individual school, and furthermore the entire district. This system guides the Board’s decision-making processes around school support and intervention.

As noted, all schools receive an SQRP, including neighborhood schools, magnet schools, charter schools, selective enrollment schools, and option schools. (See Appendix A.) Level 1+, the highest performance category, designates a school as nationally competitive with the opportunity to share their successes and best practices with other schools. Level 1 denotes high performance, and a good school choice with many positive qualities. Minimal aid is needed for Level 1 schools. Level 2+ equates to average performance and additional assistance from the network team is required to implement interventions. Level 2 is considered below average performance; this status needs increased reinforcement from the network. Level 3 is the lowest performance; Level 3 schools require rigorous and thorough intervention directed by the district.
Interventions for Levels 2+, 2, and 3 offer both school leaders and teachers with wide-ranging professional development personalized to the detailed needs of each school to improve student achievement (CPS.edu, 2013). Charter schools (See Appendix A) rated as Level 3 are placed on an academic warning list. In 2014, there were 44 schools identified for intensive support (Level 3) (CPS.edu, 2014).

After researching urban school turnarounds, I am encouraged that CPS can deliver high quality education to all students they serve. We owe it to community members and families to provide a school that we would send our own children to. I have performed a program evaluation of the comprehensive supports provided to Level 3 schools, whose goal is to afford all students in CPS with high quality opportunities to learn. However, to deliver such high-quality options, these Level 3 schools require efficient and effective resources. The purpose of this evaluation was to increase awareness of the current state of intensive supports and to help transform the supports offered to schools.

Within CPS, there is another layer of leadership between the schools and district office known as the Network Office. Each Network Office has a Network Chief who oversees 20-40 individual schools. The Network Chief’s staff includes a deputy chief, instruction support leaders, data strategists; the Network Chief is furthermore responsible for management of processes and protocols for family and community engagement, and social emotional support. The intensive support that schools receive comes directly from the Network Office. However, the CPS website has no clear description of what Network Support actually is. In 2015, schools could apply to be removed from Network Support, and become autonomous and self-sufficient. There is no clear evidence or data to espouse the effectiveness of CPS’s Network support structure. Moreover, while working
within CPS for five years, I saw the Network's Chief position filled by new leadership seven times since 2012. This program evaluation has examined how the quality of support offered to schools cannot be truly effective with such transient upper leadership.

Rationale

This program evaluation focused on the supports that a large school system, such as CPS, provided to struggling schools. In particular, I focused on Level 3 schools. After working in a Level 3 school, I found that the changes to improve the school needed to resonate and be supported at the building level. However, my personal experience at the Level 3 school revealed that CPS did not, in fact, provide many of the supports needed. The supports that we received from CPS tended to be compliance-based activities. As a team, we were extremely frustrated that the support that we received was not the support we needed. Despite that, we were still able to move the school from Level 3 to Level 1 status. We did so by implementing systems, such as setting high expectations, working collaboratively with staff, using excellent operational skills, providing high quality professional development, and collaborating with community partnerships. These were administrative-based initiatives. Network support was visible through the lens of three different Network Chiefs in two years. There was no support of school-based initiatives, and little to no time spent on fostering relationships; meetings were focused on compliance reports and, rarely did the conversations focus on the students themselves.

The school that was at Level 3 status was considered a school that people sent their children to as a last resort. These parents were unable to put systems in place to send their child to any other schools. It was very disheartening to hear the community speak of the school in such a negative light. Both parents and community members
desperately wanted a high-quality neighborhood school that they could send their children to. Public leaders were unable to explain why the school had been underperforming for two decades, but wanted to help turnaround the school.

The staff was ready for change as well. The theme of desperation was as strong with the staff as it was with the parents and community members, as they had been working hard at the school for many years. They were frustrated and wished to work at a school where they wanted to come to work at every day. They struggled with the stress of the working environment. However, they were very hopeful and responded to positive leadership, and could furthermore see the school developing in a positive direction, and were happy to support the work that needed to be done to improve and enrich the school experience for the students.

Level 3 schools have many characteristics in common and have many of the same struggles. With so many consistencies, there needs to be a system of intensive supports that helps the district, but also supports the individual Level 3 schools. This program evaluation will help break the cycle of helplessness in Level 3 schools. It will show stakeholders the importance of support administrators at the building level as it advocates for meaningful support in neighborhood schools and the surrounding community.

**Goals**

I have been part of many different types of schools; however, CPS is a system like nothing I have ever experienced. I struggle with how large the system is and how quickly changes and adjustments can be directed at the school level. I truly believe that the system can be changed and it can be changed at the building level. It can be changed with principals.
Through data collection I have identified what is needed and what has worked to mobilize Level 3 schools within CPS. My goal for this program evaluation was to find high leverage steps for the district to use when supporting Level 3 schools. The influential feedback will result in schools creating environments which would serve the students and their communities as well as the schools by putting systems in place to prioritize support of student learning. Many of the students in Level 3 schools within CPS are below the national average in attainment for English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics. The students are entering grades well below the national average and leaving high school well behind other students in the state and nation. By improving the support we offer to Level 3 schools, we can increase the number of students and schools scoring above the national attainment for ELA and Mathematics.

**Primary Research Question**

The primary research question for this program evaluation was: what supports are provided to improve schools in need of intensive supports in Chicago Public Schools (CPS)? More specifically, I analyzed what supports they received, how schools were selected for supports, and what internal systems were used by the schools.
SECTION TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

There is a great deal of research about the current state of schools within CPS (Barrow & Sartain, 2017; Myers, 2010; Russo, 2014), and many articles that focus on changes that CPS needs to make to implement a sustainable transformation. There are also many research studies, articles and books that focus on school improvement, in some cases a dramatic “about-face” for the better (Eberhart, Barnes, & Abell, 2014; Fanselow, 2007; Lieberman & Miller, 2011; Shields, Milstein, & Posner, 2010; Wagner et al., 2010). Within this literature review, while the focus is the state of affairs inside CPS, I will also provide insight into large urban school districts turnarounds, and factors for success.

CPS State of Schools

Chicago Public Schools would not be the first large school district to face many challenges (Dubin, 2017; Fiel, 2013). According to the Chicago Public school’s website (CPS.edu), CPS has 664 schools within the district. The schools throughout the district are extremely diverse; of the 664 schools, 44 schools are identified as Level 3 schools, the lowest performing school level. CPS is faced with the challenge of supporting those 44 schools, a majority of which are servicing low socio-economic, minority students. As with other larger urban districts (Kirk & Sampson, 2013; Richards, Aguilera, Murakami, & Weiland, 2014), CPS is faced with the challenge of closing the achievement gap and properly servicing poor students of color, as approximately 85% of CPS students are Latino or African-American. The student body includes 87% from low-income homes, and 12.2% of students are reported to have limited English skill. The district provides all demographic breakdown on the website CPS.edu.
A study by Healey, Nagaoka, and Michelman (2014), through the Consortium on Chicago School Research, states that six of every 100 CPS freshmen would earn a bachelor's degree by age 25. Three in 100 Black or Latino men would earn a bachelor's degree by age 25. This study tracked Chicago high school students who graduated in 1998 and 1999, wherein 35% of CPS students who went to college earned their bachelor's degree within six years, below the national average of 64%. The study also added that just 8 percent of CPS ninth-graders would earn a bachelor’s degree by the time they reached their mid-twenties (Healey et al., 2014)

CPS has many success stories. According to the U. S. Department of Education’s website, each year the Department of Education (DoED) recognizes hundreds of public and private schools across the United States for their dedication in overcoming exceptional challenges as they properly educate all their students, and furthermore commit to educational excellence for all (DoED, 2017). These schools receive the National Blue Ribbon of Distinction, a unique honor for those schools that retain and instruct their students, while maintaining the highest of educational goals. According to the National Blue Ribbon website (DoED, 2017), the Blue Ribbon Award celebrates the notion that all students, regardless of background, ability, or location, deserve an excellent education. The current winners are listed on the U.S. Department of Education website. If you look closely at the demographics of all CPS National Blue Ribbon schools one thing becomes clear - the CPS schools on the list have a financial sustenance system outside of CPS funding. When looking at the list of National Blue Ribbon Schools from Chicago, not one of the schools has a low-income percentage above

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80 percent. Likewise, all Level 3 schools are below this percentile. Many questions come to the forefront when looking at this data. How can CPS continue to celebrate having National Blue Ribbon schools in the district, but not publicly discuss the lowest performing schools in the state are within the district? How is CPS providing care and backing to the students in Level 3 schools to ensure that they too have an opportunity to receive a National Blue Ribbon quality education?

Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, and Easton in Organizing Schools for Improvement: Lessons from Chicago, (2010) remind us that Secretary of Education, William Bennett, labeled Chicago Public Schools as the worst in the nation. The authors furthermore discuss that CPS has been servicing a district of students wherein 90 percent fall below the poverty line since 1994. The study spanned a seven-year process and features what the authors coined the Five Essential Supports for School Improvement (Bryk et al., 2010). CPS has been using these essential five supports since 2010, yet still we have not seen a shift in the district. CPS is a large district; large districts face complex and difficult challenges. Nonetheless, many large school districts have been successful in navigating those difficulties.

There is a foundation in CPS for schools to build best practices around teaching. CPS created the CPS Framework for Teaching. According to the district website, it is a modified version of Charlotte Danielson's Framework for Teaching (2013). According to The Danielson Group’s, The Framework (2017), may be used as the “foundation of a school or district’s mentoring, coaching, professional development, and teacher evaluation processes, thus linking all those activities together and, in the process, aiding teachers to become more thoughtful practitioners” (The Danielson Group, 2017, para. 3).
The *CPS Framework for Teaching* was changed in collaboration with the Chicago Teachers Union and Charlotte Danielson to include shifts in teaching practice required by the Common Core State Standards, as well as to create common verbiage, including the designation of Level 3 schools, when discussing best practices involved with teaching. As we can see in the upcoming findings section, CPS will have identified fewer Level 3 schools, a seeming improvement; however, the data from the classrooms with this new *Framework for Teaching* remained unchanged.

**Large Urban District Turnarounds**

Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS), in Maryland, is one of the largest school districts that has been able to create systems which close the achievement gap and properly serve poor students and students of color. According to Horng and Loeb (2010), in their article, *New Thinking About Instructional Leadership*, they found large districts need strong managers and posit:

Strong managers develop the organizational structures for improved instruction more than they spend in classrooms or coach teachers. Strong organizational managers are effective in hiring and supporting staff, allocating budgets and resources, and maintaining positive working and learning environments (Horng & Loeb, 2010, p. 67).

The Superintendent of MCPS, Jerry Weast, built systems that did exactly that. Weast started with a restructured leadership team. MCPS then used these effective management strategies with the principals at the school level. In contrast, with such high turnover in CPS’s district leadership, it has been difficult to implement such a system as Weast accomplished at MCPS.
Joseph M. Porto, Superintendent of the Avoca District, struggled with the lowest performing school in his district. During his class, *Leading Major Change in Education: What the Beatles Can Teach Us*, (Porto, 2016), Porto explained that although the school is low-performing in his district, the school was performing at high levels compared to schools with similar demographics in neighboring districts. Porto argues that the team and committee building process are essential when helping the lowest performing schools in districts (2016). His team, in a three-year planning cycle, could put systems in place to take schools from the lowest performing ones to the highest performing, based on achievement scores within the district. Porto credits his success to using similar strategies as Weast in MCPS, such as capacity building (See Appendix A) (Santos, Caetano, & Tavares, 2015; Teasley, 2017) and leveraging successes from the school and the district.

Often the lowest performing schools are the ones that educate students from low incomes. The achievement struggles within these schools stem from how students in those schools are taught. Anyon (1980, 1997) described that when there were changes in social class in the community, she began to see changes in the school. Anyon recorded that specific hidden curriculums in the classes which were embedded into different social-economic communities. These curriculums perpetuated movement from one social class to another. She discovered that the working-class children were being prepared for factory type or labor positions.

Moreover, the middle-class students were being exposed to lessons that prepared them for corporate America. They were not taught to question institutions, or attempt to probe or examine how the school’s systems functioned. They were exposed to
curriculum that taught some problem-solving skills. On the other hand, the children of the professional rank were being exposed to a curriculum that mirrored their parents’ scholarly achievements. These students were asked to create, analyze, and express themselves. The last group was exposed to curriculum that simply taught them to gain ownership and control of the physical capital and the means of production in society (Anyon, 1980). Anyon identified that districts need to recognize, expose, and put systems in place to close the gap on the high quality of instruction that students are receiving throughout a given district. As Anyon so aptly concluded:

The identification of different emphases in classrooms in a sample of contrasting social class contexts implies that further research should be conducted in many schools to investigate the types of work tasks and interactions in each, to see if they differ in the ways discussed here, and to see if similar potential relationships are uncovered. Such research could have as a product the further elucidation of complex but not clear connections between everyday activity in schools and classrooms and the unequal structure of economic relationships in which we work and live (Anyon, 1980, p. 90).
Factors for Success

1. Systems for Success

In Wagner (2014), *The Global Achievement Gap*, the author dedicates an entire chapter on closing the gap. The author writes, “Schools hold themselves collectively accountable for quality student work and student success in college and beyond. Rather than measuring themselves by the results of a standardized test” (Wagner, 2014, p. 259). Districts have used data to drive district interventions, but this is certainly not a perfect specimen or the best and most desired approach.

There were major successes of the Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) as described in Childress, Doyle and Thomas’s book, *Leading for Equity* (2009). One foremost success was to employ widespread, precise standards using differentiated resources and instruction. MCPS made it clear that every child is capable of meeting such exacting standards, but that each child begins from a different place. By using data driven differentiated instruction delivery, MCPS applied the ‘value chain’ thinking to the K-12 continuum.

Originally published on the Montgomery County Public Schools’ website was a call to action that included: implementing a strategy of common, rigorous standards with differentiated resources and instruction which can create excellence and equity for all students; adopting this approach to the K–12 continuum increases quality and provides a logical frame for strategic choices; Blurring the lines between governance, management, staff, and community increases capacity and accountability; creating systems and structures that change behaviors is a way to shift beliefs if they lead to student learning gains; breaking the link between race, ethnicity and student outcomes is difficult without
confronting the effect that beliefs about race and ethnicity have on student learning (Marietta & Foundation for Child Development, 2010, pp. 2-17).

Using a systematic approach, such that of MCPS, allows for increased likeliness of developing a successful organization, and thus student success. CPS will need to reduce the number of compliance-based tasks, and should furthermore develop consistent structures to build a professional learning community, provide outstanding professional development, and remove local school councils. High-quality early learning is essential and achievable, and can be integrated into a system such as CPS; such early learning is crucial to raising elementary reading skills, closing achievement gaps, and readying all students for college and career success (Wechsler, Melnick, Maier, & Bishop, 2016).

2. Trust

Another key factor to success is to ‘blur’ the lines between traditional roles and responsibilities of the school board, leadership team, principals, teachers, unions, and parents; conflict will happen, unions will clash. The goal is to unite all stakeholders, rather than isolate and consolidate power. This can be carried out by deeply engaging in the important work of achieving excellence and equality, a course of change and transformation of systems and processes that are deeply rooted. However, having these deep-rooted institutions working together, instead of against each other, was key in the successes of MCPS (Simon, 2012). Collaboration will generate systems, processes, and structures that reinforce all those behaviors necessary for success.

In Trust in Schools: A Core Resources for School Reform, (2004), Bryk and Schneider discuss the importance of relational trust among organizational members with a focus on CPS. They go on to explain that members will put the common good of the

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organization before self-interest when relational trust has been built (Bryk & Schneider, 2004). Teachers within CPS felt it was difficult to discuss their feelings, worries, and frustrations with their principals. If teachers are unable to express their feelings, it becomes impossible to build a culture of relational trust (Bryk & Schneider, 2004). The article went even deeper as it explored teacher-to-teacher relationships. It was revealed that teachers not only mistrusted the administration, but they did not trust each other as well. The article determined that CPS would need to go through a major cultural shift to build a district that displays evidence of relational trust (Bryk & Schneider, 2004).

Linuesa-Langreo, Ruiz-Palomino and Elche (2016) elaborate further that relational leadership includes a process wherein a group of individuals strive to accomplish change intended to benefit the common good. This practice values the leader as being ethical and inclusive, and expects that the leader will recognize and respect followers’ abilities to bring diverse ideas into working toward a common goal, or a common good (Jansson, 2013). One technique that ought to be used to create relational trust within the CPS would be to bring stability and calmness at the school level by maintaining consistent leadership; thus, a message and an understanding of ‘what is important’ can be relayed with uniformity and stability, also evoking trust within CPS. With recurring shifts in leadership, it becomes difficult to spend time on instructional rounds, building quality programs, professional development, and encouragement to the staff. On the other hand, if the staff feels supported in this way, relational trust can be a driving force to begin to move the school into a positive direction.
3. Teacher Effectiveness

Leading for equity is a common method for success in large urban school district turnarounds. Leading with equity was Jerry Weast’s hedgehog. According to Collins (2001), organizations are more likely to succeed if they focus on one thing (for example, a hedgehog), and do it well. By doing so, they can truly have a great organization. Weast was very focused on the hedgehog concept and never wavered from the overarching goal to mobilize his community to create excellence and equity for all students. Weast’s team built systems that created opportunities not only for their students within MCPS, but that are likewise available to students in other areas. Weast and his team confronted the effects that misconceptions about race and achievement have on student performance, and helped teachers and students apply this knowledge to their day-to-day work in classrooms.

The Widget Effect (2009) discussed the unaddressed question of poor teaching practices throughout education. The authors inform that 99% of all teachers are evaluated as satisfactory; however, student performance does not correlate with teacher evaluation ratings throughout the nation. This article confirms the importance of teacher effectiveness. Teacher effectiveness was not consistent from classroom to classroom. Schools were identifying teachers as being effective, but the schools’ attainment data is not showing effectiveness (Weisberg, Sexton, Mulhern, & Keeling, 2009). As the authors articulately state:

In a knowledge-based economy that makes education more important than ever, teachers matter more than ever. This report is a call to action—to policy-makers, district, and school leaders and to teachers and their representatives—to discuss

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our national failure to acknowledge and act on differences in teacher effectiveness. To do this, school districts must begin to distinguish great from good, good from fair, and fair from poor. Effective teaching must be recognized; ineffective teaching must be addressed (Weisberg et al., 2009, p. 2).

According to Cynthia Coburn’s (2006) article, *Framing the Problem of Reading Instruction: Using Frame Analysis to Uncover the Microprocesses of Policy Implementation*, scholars of policy implementation have argued that the degree to which policy implemented is related to the “skill and will”. *Skill* is the science of teaching; it involves a teacher's pedagogical and content knowledge. It determines how well teachers know the subject and how well they can help students learn it. *Will* has to do with a teacher's passion; it is the art of teaching. It involves teachers' drive to help all students be successful. Expert teachers have both high skill and high will. They do not just know their profession well, they also have the emotional fortitude, determination, and motivation to be the best (Jackson, 2014).

Because teaching is such a complex activity, cursory feedback and standardized support can never cultivate a teacher’s’ progress to the master level. Unless you understand both their skill and their will, you cannot provide the targeted help that they may require.

Rather than rely on Hollywood images of effective teaching, or our own notions of what good teaching should look like (based on how we were taught or what we ourselves did as teachers), assessing a teacher's effectiveness requires a much more objective and comprehensive idea of what masterful teaching looks like and how it incorporates both skill and will (Jackson, 2013, pp. 12-13 )
Teachers require ongoing training around developing curriculum which aligns with grade level benchmarks. They also need incentives to implement the district initiatives. As the *Widget Effect* and the Coburn article point out it takes the *skill and will* to implement district-wide policies. Nonetheless, pressures to comply takes priority over teacher effectiveness (Johnson, 2006).

In a Delaware study about the effects of standardized testing on teaching, researchers concluded that instruction had become less individualized and purposeful, and more regimented; curricula were increasingly likely to be driven by state tests, and teachers were increasingly working in a culture of compliance, where decision-making power had moved “further from the classroom and the school” (Banicky & Noble, 2001, pp. 1-16). There was substantial evidence that teachers were teaching to the test even when their efforts were inconsistent with state standards or with preparing students for the next grade (p. 8).

4. **PLCs**

In the past several years, school improvement research has placed a growing emphasis on professional learning communities (PLCs) and revealed several benefits associated with them. A professional learning community is a group of educators that meets regularly, shares expertise, and works collaboratively to improve teaching skills and the academic performance of students (Pirtle & Tobia, 2014). Giles and Hargreaves (2006) stated that PLCs have been shown to help in sustaining school improvements. They support the development of human capital, and are important to the construction of teacher leadership as individuals undergo a process of peer validation. PLCs can be the source of powerful forces of support or resistance to change initiatives, and have been
shown to impact students through aiding the spread of instructional innovations. PLCs are also seen as offering the potential for teachers to examine the moral and ethical implications of their work and as an important factor in strengthening the professionalism of teaching (Hord & Tobia, 2015).

Based on the benefits attributed to professional learning communities there seem to be several good reasons to promote them in schools. The literature shows that they can be built up through the structured intervention of professional development programs. With evidence of their value and examples available that they can be developed through multiple avenues PLCs ought to be common entities, but this is not the case.

McLaughlin and Talbert (2006) suggest that part of the challenge with building and sustaining PLCs is that they are vulnerable to systemic influences, and that broad universal change is needed for them to become widespread and sustainable. Since CPS is such a large district, you can only find functioning PLCs at the school level (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006; Talbert, 2010).

Most of the research on using professional development activities to develop schools depicts variations on a single design. According to Lieberman and Miller (2011) this model builds professional learning communities over time with external support, often from multiple researchers/facilitators, and it is seen in communities that grow outside of schools as well as within individual schools. The model relies on consultants and facilitators to bring teachers together and support the process of community development through activities that encourage teacher interaction for a shared purpose. The purposes of the programs themselves can vary from developing mentoring skills in experienced teachers, to strengthening support for student teachers, or improving
instruction in a particular subject, but the specific purpose is less important than the role that purpose plays in making the professional development coherent with a particular need and providing a focus for teacher interactions (Lieberman & Miller, 2011).

In contrast, CPS has been utilizing a model where staff teach their peers. They have been requiring schools to deploy teachers to network training. The teachers then return to their buildings to train the staff. There has been little to no evidence to support the effectiveness of this practice in CPS, while it is proven otherwise, that providing outstanding professional development will reap great rewards (Barrera-Pedemonte, 2016; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2017).

CPS struggled as a district to build PLCs. CPS has had many articles and research published about the supports needed and provided to schools. Many of the articles revisit best practices that the district should utilize for successful turnaround. These articles all point into one direction. That is, CPS, like other large urban districts, can improve.
SECTION THREE: METHODOLOGY

Research Design Overview

My research design utilized a mixed methods approach and focused on the empirical analytical as well as the constructivist-interpretivist paradigms. Results from the new accountability model, SQRP, uncovered areas of concern and need for change when evaluating the new accountability tool. The findings from the qualitative data were deep and rich, although some findings were more profound than others. The data within the research presented in this program evaluation are from schools at Level 3.

I will address my biases, as well as potential biases of the participants, related to experiences with CPS. It is vital for the researcher to be cognizant of the participants’ (as well as the researcher’s) bias and worldview, which is naturally present in qualitative research, whether intentional or not (Fields & Kafai, 2009). Utilizing the Empirical-Analytic Paradigm (Table 1., next page) removed much of my bias from the analysis process. I utilized quantitative data as well as qualitative data from interviews with five former CPS personnel: two principals, one assistant principal, an instructional support leader from the network, and a teacher. The quantitative data from the Chicago Public Fund (2016) was upheld through examination of the qualitative data from the coded interviews. Utilizing multiple data sources, such as these, is known as triangulation of data. Table 1, next page, expounds on the processes I used.
Table 1.
Staying within the Empirical-Analytic Paradigm

| Goal: | To generate empirical explanatory theories of human behavior; basic invariant laws of human behavior; generalizable knowledge to enable prediction and control. To search for empirical regularities and correlations through detached and impartial observation. |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| Treatment of Qualitative Material: | Transcripts and videos are rated and coded, to transform them to numerical data. |
| Uses for Qualitative Techniques: | Hypothesis generation (but not hypothesis testing). Monitoring treatment implementation. Triangulation (to investigate validity of quantitative measures). Illustrative examples of quantitatively identifiable relationships (case studies). |

[Suggested by (Packer, 2011). Critical Interpretive Research: An Introduction, Chapter 6].

Qualitative studies examine complex phenomena within their context, a valuable method for research to develop theory, evaluate programs, and develop interventions because of the inherent flexibility and rigor (Baxter & Jack, 2008). A qualitative study was chosen as part of this study because it provided an opportunity to rely on human perceptions and understanding to explore the real-life experiences of staff at CPS, and both the barriers and the opportunities for advancement of success. The intent of the study was to develop an understanding of how these former CPS staff reflected on those personal experiences. A qualitative study design provides the researcher an opportunity to achieve a rich, complex, in-depth perception of the social context of the phenomenon being considered (Baškarada, 2014). Within this research, open-ended questions were asked during interviews with the participants. These questions were exploratory in nature, allowing the interviewer the ability to evoke responses both relevant and
meaningful, as well as not cuing the respondents to answer questions in a particular way (Roberts et al., 2014).

The interview questions were formed through the lens of face validity, which Patton (2008) states occurs when “you look at the operationalization and see whether ‘on its face’ it seems like a good translation of the construct” (p. 589). I strove to ensure I was not just presenting data that exposed under-achieving schools. I sought to utilize the qualitative data from the interviews to present a deeper understanding of the research question. The qualitative and quantitative data were reviewed separately, and then together, such as is suggested in Table 1. (Staying within the Empirical-Analytic Paradigm, Packer, 2011).

The two data sources were sufficient to address the research in this study, which aimed to understand the perceptions of former CPS staff, along with quantitative data culled from CPS.edu. Utilizing multiple data sources, as well as several data analysis methods, is known as triangulation in qualitative research (Carter et al., 2014). In this way, I could discover a comprehensive understanding of the research study. “Triangulation also has been viewed as a qualitative research strategy to test validity through the convergence of information from different sources” (Carter et al., 2014, p. 545).

This program evaluation will be an appraisal of the sustenance provided to improve schools in need of intensive supports in the Chicago Public Schools (CPS). I have analyzed resources provided by the district related to selected schools. CPS rates their schools, placing them into five tiers where Level 3 are the schools in most need of support, and Level 1+ are the most effective schools, requiring little or no support. Many
schools have moved from Level 3 into higher rankings, and this research is concerned with how certain schools are able to make this transition. I will be interviewing former CPS employees, and I will be analyzing resources provided by the schools via interviews and public documents. More specifically, I will be analyzing what supports those Level 3 schools received, how schools were selected for supports from the Office of Strategic School Support Services network within CPS, and what internal systems were used by the schools.

Participants

The participants of this study were former CPS administration, teachers, and Network staff at Level 3 schools. By interviewing former CPS staff, I developed a better understanding of how they moved out of Level 3 status. The five participants were chosen purposefully:

Purposeful sampling is one of the core distinguishing elements of qualitative inquiry. Nothing better captures the difference between quantitative and qualitative methods than the different logics that undergird sampling approaches. Qualitative inquiry typically focuses in depth on relatively small samples, even single cases (n = 1), selected purposefully … The logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry, thus the term purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002, p. 272-273).

The participants ranged in age from 35-50, and were both male and female, as well as racially mixed, and all had experience within Chicago Public Schools. I was very
transparent about the program evaluation in eliminating any potential feelings of coercion. Avoiding undue discomfort or embarrassment to those who participated in my program evaluation was very important. I was acutely aware of avoiding any harm or political consequences would come to the individuals who provided information for my program evaluation. That is why I chose to gather qualitative data from individuals who no longer work with CPS. I reached out to the participants via phone calls. In my initial phone call, I described the study which I was doing, and advised them that I was interested in getting their perspective. I also communicated to potential participants that their participation was voluntary. If they indicated that they were interested, I emailed them the informed consent and asked them to return a signed copy prior to our interview. According to Patton, “[e]valuators respect the security, dignity, and self-worth of the respondents, program participants, clients, and other stakeholders with whom they interact” (2008, p. 27). The accounts and data of this study will be kept confidential and secured in a locked file; the researcher is the only individual having access.

Due to integrity contained within the informed consent, I limited myself to utilizing former CPS staff to avoid any conflicts of interests. Furthermore, there was not straightforward access to Chicago Public Schools staff for research purposes. Based on these two criteria, I only interviewed former CPS, all of whom departed from the District to pursue alternative career opportunities.

Data Gathering Techniques

Throughout my dissertation work, I interviewed five former CPS employees. I reached out to the former CPS employees based on the work they had performed within the district. I telephoned them directly to request permission to interview them about
their experiences. The participants of my study were former CPS principals, teachers, assistant principals, and network supports at Level 3 schools. I selected participants based on my knowledge of them as former CPS employees, and that they were part of my professional network. By interviewing former CPS staff, I have a better understanding of how they moved out of Level 3 status.

I gathered quantitative data at the building level from the CPS.edu profile page. I captured findings by looking at the quantitative data provided by the district the School Quality Rating Policy. This is widely known as the SQRP. I looked at the school's ability to move out of Level 3 support. It was important to capture that data because it allowed me to draw a more comprehensive view of how certain schools have stayed at Level 3 with similar supports.

**Analyzing Data**

By analyzing the publicly available data about the schools, I had a fuller understanding of the characteristics of the schools, which helped me to place my interviews within the context of the schools. To analyze the quantitative data, I used charts to look for patterns and trends. When analyzing the qualitative data, I used the strategy of coding interview data. This coding was done in a way that was very beneficial. I created a unique coding system based of the verbiage only used within CPS. Finally, I analyzed the data, always keeping in mind the purpose of the evaluation. (See Appendix C, *Themes and Illustrative Quotes.*)
SECTION FOUR: FINDINGS and INTERPRETATION

Introduction

The interpretation of the data began with the quantitative information. CPS shifted in the school evaluation accountability tool from School Year (SY) 13 to School Year (SY) 14. According to Figure 1 below, there was a dramatic drop in the total number of schools that were identified for intensive support by the school district.

![Level 3 CPS Schools](https://illinois.5-essentials.org/2016/)

**Figure 1.** Level 3 CPS Schools (Sourced from CPS.edu.).

The total number of schools identified for intensive support dropped from 185 to 43 in one school year. The following year, SY 15, only 17 schools were identified for intensive support through the school quality rating policy (SQRP), a five-tiered performance rating system based on a broad range of factors including student test score performance, student academic growth, school culture and climate through the Illinois 5EssentialsSurvey (https://illinois.5-essentials.org/2016/) results, and attendance. If we view through the lens of Mathematics and Reading attainment, through NWEA
(Northwest Evaluation Association)\(^2\), a much higher number of schools are identified for intensive support (see Figure 2). Whereas through the lens of the SQRP, only 17 schools were identified for intensive support; yet, as Figure 2 shows, 264 schools were below the 50\(^{th}\) percentile for Reading attainment per the NWEA assessment.

![Diagram showing NWEA Reading Attainment](https://www.nwea.org/about/)

**Figure 2.** NWEA Reading Attainment (Sourced from NWEA.org).

CPS began utilizing the NWEA testing in SY13. The number of schools below the 50\(^{th}\) percentile did decrease in Reading from SY13 to SY15 by 27 schools. However, when looking at Level 3 schools that require intensive support in comparison to the two figures, the data does not collate. Based on test scores, there are many more schools that need support. Figure 3 also shows 240 school needing support in Mathematics.

\(^2\) NWEA® is a research-based, not-for-profit organization that supports students and educators worldwide by creating assessment solutions that precisely measure growth and proficiency—and provide insights to help tailor instruction. Retrieved from https://www.nwea.org/about/
attainment, whereas only 17 schools were identified for intensive support via the SQRP (Figure 1). The tool used to identify schools in need of intensive support has shown a dramatic drop in the number of schools needing support. Nonetheless, the attainment data shows that more than half of the elementary schools in CPS need intensive support. How can only 17 schools be identified for intensive support when so many schools are testing under the 50th percentile in reading and math?

![Figure 3. NWEA Math Attainment (Sourced from NWEA.org).](image)

The number of schools below the 50th percentile did decrease in Mathematics, as in Reading, from SY13 to SY15. CPS reported a decrease in 24 schools. When looking at Level 3 schools that require intensive support, Figure 3 confirms the findings from Figure 2. Two questions surface through this quantitative data analysis. How are schools
being supported that were formerly Level 3 schools? Has CPS ceased supporting those schools because the rating tool has changed? Within these schools the achievement data stays the same, and while many of these schools are no longer considered Level 3 schools, the achievement gap continues to remain.

**Interviews**

A group of five educators were interviewed individually to address the primary research question, which was: what supports are provided to improve schools in need of intensive supports in Chicago Public Schools (CPS)? The purpose of the interviews was to look deeper into the results of the quantitative data. Even though a new tool is being used to determine school's levels, we needed to determine if the support had changed. The interviews looked through the lens of support given to schools. The work done at the network level is driven from the district. (See Appendix B.) The interview protocol followed is outlined in Appendix D.

There was a total of five interviews performed, including 2 principals, 1 assistant principal, 1 network instructional support leader, and 1 teacher. The interviews averaged 60 minutes in duration. The interviewees had background knowledge and experience in working with the SQRP, and had knowledge of schools identified for intensive support by the district. Findings from each discussion session are reported, along with challenges noted, additional observations (when applicable), and the interpretation of results. In Appendix C is a summary of all 5 interviews; following is the narrative based on the interviews’ relevance to my research questions.
The Principals’ Perspectives

Principal #1

Principal #1 was able to advance a Level 3 school to Level 1 over a period of four years. This change happened before the shift to the SQRP model. When the administrator began the position, the school had been in state probation status for many years. As there were no clear operational procedures and protocols, Principal #1’s priority during the first year was devoted to “…. developing such operational procedures and protocols, along with building staff trust, and a constructive student culture and climate. The focus during the first year included ” discovering ways to place students and staff learning at the center.”

The second year Principal #1 concentrated on “…. curriculum mapping, data driven instruction, and academic and behavioral interventions.” The third year focused on teacher leadership, revisiting curriculum maps, and developing solid tiered instruction during core instruction and intervention blocks. The fourth year focused on continuing to strengthen established best practices and sustaining staff on the second and third year foundations. The main policies this administration utilized were “… professional development, team meetings, and one-on-one staff meetings.”

Principal #1, however, was able to produce positive changes in the school as was evident through the high growth represented in the NWEA³ data. There was also a dramatic decline in out-of-school suspensions, as well as an increase in student attendance. Principal #1 furthermore cited “… increases in teacher morale through

³ NWEA: Northwest Evaluation Association
yearly staff surveys.” This individual expressed that the community political leaders were encouraging and provided all resources they could to support the school. This principal viewed the position as one in which: “an educational leader must promote the success of all students by facilitating development and being a guardian of a vision of learning shared and supported by the school community.”

**Principal #2**

Principal #2 agreed with the challenges articulated by Principal #1, and reiterated some of the same difficulties: “Professional development for teachers and other staff was lacking ... and there was little time for face-to-face meetings with teachers and administration in need of such consultations. There were multiple changes and shifting in leadership of the network and central offices … “ during Principal #2’s tenure. “There was a great deal of turnover, it was very frustrating …. ” declared Principal #2. During this individual’s tenure as principal, there were “… four chiefs and three CEOs …” It was challenging to build relationships of support from the network and district because of the continuing change in leadership.

Principal #2 further stated, “I needed a reduction in compliance, as there are too many compliance-based systems usurping my time and energy away from the actual needs of the school.” For example, “… there were district attendance spreadsheets, and plans, and initiatives with no assistance to implement …” Much of Principal #2’s time was spent “… meeting with Network staff to explain the current state of the school, current action plans, and major incidents that may have happened in the school.” There were rare one-on-one meetings to build rapport, but the majority of communication
between the principal and the network was “via email.” This required much impersonal time in front of a computer.

Principal #2’s efforts were ultimately not as favorable as Principal #1’s, although the school improved from Level 3 to Level 2. The frustrations with CPS were conveyed with antipathy. However Principal #1 appeared to also have more experience and ease navigating “the multiple information systems and sources, data collection, and data analysis strategies”, all of which provided a clear advantage within the complex course of plotting toward success. Principal #2 was less-seasoned in these technical aspects and therefore struggled to “… bring the school only to a Level 2 status, and not what I had hoped for.” It appeared that district’s support was inadequate in the areas needed for Principal #2.

**The Assistant Principal’s Perspective**

The Assistant Principal (AP) had been in the position for more than 10 years and had supported several principals over the years. The perception from the AP was articulated in much the same way as Principal #1, in that: “My principal is overwhelmed with the amount of changes that came from transition in leadership [CEO] positions.” Consequently, while the AP was accommodating a revolving-door of principals to support directly, those very principals were experiencing the same issue with upper management, causing a ‘domino-effect’ of instability and dysfunction. This school did move out of its Level 3 status during the AP’s tenure, mostly due to the particular “forceful” and effective leadership style of the Principal. However, there were still some reservations about the sustainability of such a success: “I would have liked to spend more time coaching teachers and teams …” were the final words of this AP’s interview.
The Network Perspective

This staff member came to CPS through a partnership with an Ivy League Urban Education master degree program. The staff member taught in an urban education for five years prior, and felt ready to properly support teachers. At the start, the staff member supported five schools at Level 3 status. Being new to CPS, the staff member “… needed time to become familiar with the verbiage and systems used in CPS.” It was quickly identified that on-the-field training was needed to fully understand the various and different systems functioning within the schools.

This staff member said, “the work we engage in differs from school to school. With five schools, spread out geographically, it was challenging to spend time in supporting individual teachers.” The staff member quickly began to support administration to support the teachers. She would support administration on finding needs through data analysis, analyzing building trends, and high leverage action plans. The staff member expressed, “we worked directly with the administrative and instructional leadership team.” This staff member was beginning to see improvement in the middle of the year data through the instructional support provided to administrators in the five schools they supported. Unfortunately, the district restricted the network leadership and schools within the networks. The staff member decided that it would be best to seek employment outside of CPS.

The Teacher Perspective

The teacher was with CPS for three years. The teacher felt supported, but also commented that “administration was unable to provide adequate support,” based on the demands from the district and network. There were moments that the teacher felt the
school was starting to shift in a positive direction. There were gains in ELA and Mathematics, NWEA growth, and attainment scores. More support was needed “… focusing on classroom management and student discipline.” The teacher further commented that he wanted “to reach out for advice and cooperation from other teachers,” but felt everyone was overwhelmed, and hesitated to do so. The teacher did appreciate the support provided from the network, but sensed it was “touch and go, and that at any time it might not even exist.” He further expressed that “… network staff has been in my classroom a couple of times. However, I never received any direct feedback or had one-on-one conversations with anyone from network management. There were little or no follow-ups, and the trainings ranged across a broad range of topics; the trainings were informational-based and little discussion was included.”

The teacher saw a great deal of adjustments in network and district leadership. There were multiple associated changes that emerged through changes in leadership. “One year they would be utilizing one system for progress monitoring, and the next year it would be another system. We had to spend time learning these new systems, every year, it seemed” were the words of the teacher. Much time was spent on creating spreadsheets required by the principal. These spreadsheets were not principal-based, as the mandates came from the district and the network. When administration attempted to implement practices, the teacher was frustrated “… with the amount of compliance-based work required, and [felt] that it was difficult to deliver quality instruction, or focus on the students.” After three years, the teacher decided to leave the classroom and pursue a career in educational technology application consulting.
Interview Themes

The primary purpose of the qualitative aspect of this study was to discover deeper themes other than just factual data recorded from CPS.edu. in addressing the research question. During these five interviews, several common themes were revealed which included the necessity for these individuals to spend vast amounts of their work days performing job functions either not related to their specific roles or, even more importantly, preventing those individuals from the tasks of teaching and learning. It is apparent through these interviews that there was a great deal of frustration. Nonetheless, all parties were initially motivated and highly qualified, and proceeded during their varying tenures to transport their failing schools (Level 3s) into ones that were functional; they, themselves were the agents for change, however tenuous those changes ultimately turned out to be.
SECTION FIVE: JUDGMENT and RECOMMENDATIONS

Judgment

The primary question of the researcher was focused on the supports that a system as large as CPS provided to schools requiring intensive support. The five educators interviewed agreed on three (3) important components of a potential school turnaround. One was that schools required functional leadership, trained in implementation of best practices. Secondly, schools required support and autonomy from district level leadership. Lastly, support needed to come from the school level and not be compliance-based tasks.

Theory and research concerning leadership, especially in an organizational context such as CPS, suggest that leadership is a vital feature affecting work team processes and results (Morgeson, DeRue, & Karam, 2010; Randall, Resick, & DeChurch, 2011). Functional leadership, one of the three factors identified for success of intensive support in a CPS school turnaround, indicates being able to implement best practices related to instructional delivery, while nurturing a culture with operational systems of communication with teachers, parents, community groups, and district supports. Although many programs or initiatives come and go in CPS, simple leadership best practices hold true. Schools that are able to acquire leaders who can balance both instructional goals and culture-building have been successful, such as was the case with Principal #1.

There has been an enormous amount of turnover in district and network leadership within CPS. There has also been a great deal of restructuring at the support coming from the Network level. With new leadership comes new vision, new directives,
and new compliance-based systems. Schools find it difficult to find autonomy with consistent shifting in upper level leadership. Schools in one network were required to create data walls. Although data walls are important, and can be a successful strategy, the staff was not ready to utilize the strategy. They needed training on the system the data represented, frustrating those who did not receive such training, as was the case with Principal #2. Administration spent a great deal of time and staff resources creating the data wall based on the network directive. The teachers knew this was a top down decision, and did not come from their Instructional Leadership Team, causing much frustration among both the network staff and the teachers. If the school had true autonomy, staff might have used that time focusing on the needs they identified that could have resulted in higher leverage.

One school had below district average attendance. The school had identified the need for attendance interventions. The support that came from the district was through compliance-based systems. The school spent a great deal of time implementing attendance interventions based on district and network initiatives. They were not given resources or support to implement the initiative. They were not given a tool or program to support the work around attendance. Reports were pulled weekly and sent to administration. There was a great deal of pressure to increase student attendance. The Culture and Climate teams spent a great deal of time completing spreadsheets on students in need of interventions. Students were identified for needs of intervention, but staff was unable to implement the interventions with validity due to the lack of resources and support. The primary research question for this program evaluation is: what supports are provided to improve schools in need of intensive supports in Chicago Public Schools (CPS)? More
specifically, I analyzed what supports they received, how schools were selected for supports and what internal systems were used by the schools.
Recommendations

With any school turnaround successful leaders audit the school. They find the strengths in the school, take immediate action when needed, and find high leverage areas of focus. District and network leaders are quick to make changes and try and fix the schools they support. Many times, initiatives or systems are implemented at schools that are not ready, or actually do not need, those systems. Many schools are allotting time and energy in areas that are not improving the school. There is no quick fix to the schools requiring intensive support in CPS. These schools have systems that have been fueled by individuals’ needs for survival. Nonetheless, over the course of the duration of this research, there was a dramatic drop in the total number of schools that were identified for intensive support by the school district

When an area of need is identified, by school leadership that initiative needs to be supported. Supports can be identified through qualitative data analysis, but school based leadership have a complete picture of the school. We need to support leaders by removing the number of compliance-based systems. If these compliance-based systems are non-negotiable, we need to provide them with support to complete these tasks. Many directives from different departments are completed by the principal. As stated in the Chicago Public Fund (2016), the number one recommendation to keep high quality principals is to get out of their way. In the study, more than 70 percent of all principals say that reducing compliance will improve their job satisfaction. One of two things are happening: First, they are required to spend a great deal of time and energy completing these tasks in front of the computer. Secondly, they do not have the funds in their per pupil budgeting to hire staff or additional assistant principals, to carry the load of this
data entry (i.e., safety drills, attendance interventions, progress monitoring tools). Much of the district level workload outside of CPS, is delegated to the principals. Staff is pulled from other tasks to follow district mandates.

CPS has a great deal of training available for administration and teachers. One major theme is that everyone is extremely busy, overwhelmed, and does not have the time to take on additional trainings. When schools are requiring intensive interventions, they are working and living day-to-day. Instead of simply labeling schools as needing intensive support, we must provide those schools with intensive support. Furthermore, it is challenging for staff to implement best practices they are exposed to, when they are overwhelmed with the amount of work they currently must accomplish. I have found that schools are attempting to implement any number of best practices. They can create a list of the practices they attempted to implement. The problem surfaces that nothing is being implemented well. Many things are brought into the school, implementation is attempted and failure quickly follows. Many programs or systems are touched on but never implemented in depth. This creates schools with staff that become pessimistic to any new ideas or best practices that administration attempts to implement. Everyone is working hard, but unfortunately, that work is not advancing the school in a positive direction.

CPS ought to take a year and do a complete audit of the schools that require intensive supports. These schools have committed, talented, and passionate educators; they return to the schools, day after day, year after year, in attempt to support the students. Many of the staff have wonderful ideas on how to support the families and communities they serve. They need to be part of the turnaround. Many times, people
come into the school and tell them what they need to turnaround the school. The district, network and schools need to evaluate the current state of work happening in the schools. After a year of evaluating the schools, through a collaborative process, they can then identify immediate requirements. Through the implementation of best practices the school can focus on those few initiatives. Then, the following year the schools can build on the success of those initiatives. Each year the school can add a few initiatives. After five years we would see successful turnaround in many of the schools requiring intensive support. Through this support we would see dramatic shifts in the amount of schools below the 50th percentile in ELA and Mathematics.

Although the achievement gap continues to widen, I am encouraged that CPS schools can provide high quality education and opportunities to learn for all students they serve. We owe it to the community members and families to provide a school that we would send our own child to. To do so, these schools need to be supported effectively. If schools are supported effectively students can be exposed to quality schools in every neighborhood.
References


*Program Evaluation*


Myers, J. (2010). A matter of time: compared to national averages, the Chicago Public Schools school year is 10 days shorter and the school day 45 minutes shorter. Research shows low-income students stand to gain the most from extra learning time, and district and state officials are planning bids to win federal funds to pay for it. *Catalyst Chicago, (2)*, 4.


Appendices

Appendix A: Definition of Terms

Capacity Building – a process of developing and strengthening the skills, instincts, abilities, processes, and resources that building level administrators require to survive, adapt, and thrive.

Charter School - Each charter school has a curriculum, schedule, calendar, and admissions procedures that may differ from other public schools. There are charter schools operated by community organizations, universities, foundations, and teachers—all are held accountable for high student academic achievement by the Board of Education. Charter schools admit students based on a lottery.

Compliance-Based Task - have some rules attached to them, either by law or district policy.

Data Wall - tools used to individualize student instruction and have many benefits. Formative and summative assessments are stored on the data wall to see levels of students quickly and easily and how they progress.

Magnet School - Magnet schools specialize in subject areas, such as math and science, fine arts, world language, or humanities. These schools accept students from throughout the city.

Option School – Option schools offer additional supports and services for students who have been out of school and seek to return, or who may need opportunities to earn credits in an accelerated program. Some campuses offer additional supports, such
as child care, counseling, and alternative schedules for students who may work during the traditional school day.

*Selective Enrollment School* - The Selective Enrollment Elementary Schools are designed for academically advanced students. The schools consist of Academic Centers, Classical Schools, Regional Gifted Centers, and Regional Gifted Centers for English Learners. Testing is required to be considered for acceptance into these schools.

*Solid Tiered Instruction* - a way to reach all learners and accommodate each student’s learning style.

*State Probation Status* - When a school is placed on probation, the school’s Chief Area Officer (CAO) or other designee of the CEO will work with the school to develop a probation plan. This plan may include changes to the school’s budget and school improvement plan (SIPAAA), curriculum improvements, or other interventions. The goal of these changes is to improve the school’s ability to provide high-quality instruction to students.
Appendix B: CPS Organizational Chart

- Board of Education
- Chief Executive Officer
- Inspector General
- Office of Strategy Management
- Chief of Staff
- Labor Relations
- General Counsel
- Network Chiefs
- Schools
- Schools
- Office of Accountability
- Testing and Assessment
- Data Analysis
- School Improvement
- Instruction
- Curriculum
- Special Education
- Language and Culture
- Early Childhood Education
- Parent/Student Engagement
- Health and Wellness
- Knowledge Management
- Professional Learning
- Talent
- Talent Acquisition
- Leadership Development
- Employee Engagement
- Employee Solutions
- Talent Management
- Customer Service
- President
- Board
- CEO’s Cabinet
- Inspector General
- Directors/Managers
- Schools
### Appendix C: Themes and Illustrative Quotes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principal #1</th>
<th>Principal #2</th>
<th>AP</th>
<th>Network</th>
<th>Teacher</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>25 years Evaluation Development Team Instructional Coach Reading Specialist AP Teacher</td>
<td>22 Years Assistant Superintendent Principal AP Dean Teacher</td>
<td>18 Years Reading Interventionist Teacher</td>
<td>6 Years Teacher</td>
<td>3 Years Primary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>District Support</strong> Policy is forever changing. I needed a reduction in compliance.</td>
<td>I do what I can to protect my staff from the consistent changes in leadership. My principal is overwhelmed with the amount of changes that come from transition in leadership (CEO position).</td>
<td>We get our directives from our network chief, who gets their directives from the Chief of Schools.</td>
<td>I do not know engage with any district level staff. The relationship with the union and the district is very toxic.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Network Support</strong> The lens of quality support depends on the individual. There is a great deal of turnover.</td>
<td>I have had 8 Network Chiefs in five years. There is consistent change in Network Support Staff. I give them what they ask for.</td>
<td>The ISL (Instructional Support Leader) supports over 30 schools. The ISL’s intentions are good, but they do not have a playbook to support admin teams.</td>
<td>The work we engage in differs from school to school. I am there to support instruction.</td>
<td>I see the network staff in the building at times. The network staff has been in my classroom a couple of times. I never received any direct feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Building Level</strong> A great deal of my time is spent with the LSC. I would like to spend more time building the capacity of my administrators and teacher leaders.</td>
<td>I spend a great deal of time behind my computer. I want to be out in the hallways and the classrooms.</td>
<td>I am a compliance officer. I would like to spend more time coaching teachers and teams.</td>
<td>We work directly with the administrative and instructional leadership team. We also work with individual teachers.</td>
<td>I would like to spend more time with administration through the lens of coaching. They are supportive, but they are busy with other tasks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reason for Leaving CPS</strong> Administrative opportunity in smaller district</td>
<td>Pursue district superintendent position</td>
<td>Relocate</td>
<td>Relocate to east coast</td>
<td>Relocate near family on West coast</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Program Evaluation*
Appendix D: Interview Protocol

INSTRUCTIONS:
Good morning (afternoon). My name is Jeffrey Alstadt. Thank you for coming. I will ask you about your experiences as a (insert role) at CPS. The purpose is to get your perceptions of your experiences inside and outside of your role. There are no right or wrong or desirable or undesirable answers. I would like you to feel comfortable with saying what you really think and how you really feel.

TAPE RECORDER INSTRUCTIONS:
If it is okay with you, I will be tape-recording our conversation. The purpose of this is so that I can get all the details but at the same time be able to carry on an attentive conversation with you. I assure you that all your comments will remain confidential. I will be compiling a report which will contain all students’ comments without any reference to individuals.

INFORMED CONSENT FOR ADULT INTERVIEW:
Before we get started, please take a few minutes to read this preamble (read and sign this consent form). (Hand Informed Consent for Adult Interview.) (returns consent form, turn tape recorder on.)

QUESTIONS FOR INTERVIEW:
Tell me a little about yourself.
Tell me a little about your experience as an educator.
Tell me a little about your teaching experiences?
Tell me about your experience in the role of [insert appropriate former role]?
How long were you at that school?
How did you see the school change?
How long did it take to see changes?
What was your part in that change?
What are some of the strategies you and teachers used to move your school?
What kind of supports did you receive from the district/network?
Which supports from the network were the most beneficial?
What were some roadblocks to the turnaround?
How did you maneuver those roadblocks?
During your time at the school, a lot of partners and resources are often mandated at a school.
How do you take advantage of opportunities without being overwhelmed by them?
How do you sustain progress after the intense supports end and you lose some of the resources that come along with it?
What are some of the other big challenges you faced in your school?
What’s the single biggest thing you attribute to your school’s success?
Were there additional supports that would have been helpful to have during the turnaround?
Is there anything else about your school’s turnaround that you would like me to know?

DEBRIEFING:
Thank you very much for coming this morning (afternoon). Your time is very much appreciated and your comments have been very helpful. The purpose of this interview is to better understand experiences inside and outside of the classroom. We are interested in your opinions and your reactions. In no way is this interview designed to individually evaluate a person’s abilities. The task is not diagnostic, nor can it provide a measure of the “quality” of your performance. The results of this research will provide useful information to educators, in helping them to structure programs and policy that districts consider to be most effective and ideal in helping stakeholders. You will be kept anonymous during all phases of this study.

Is there any other information regarding your experience that you think would be useful for me to know?

Thank you again for your time. If you have questions later or you would like to have the results of this research, you may contact me at jalstadt@my.nl.edu or at 262.672.0219.