CLOSING THE OPPORTUNITY GAP FOR LOW-INCOME URBAN MINORITY STUDENTS IN TURNAROUND SCHOOLS

Cleophas Rodgers

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CLOSING THE OPPORTUNITY GAP FOR LOW-INCOME URBAN MINORITY STUDENTS IN TURNAROUND SCHOOLS

Cleophas (CJ) Rodgers
Educational Leadership Doctoral Program

Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements of
Doctor of Education

National College of Education
National Louis University
November, 2019
CLOSING THE OPPORTUNITY GAP FOR LOW-INCOME URBAN MINORITY STUDENTS IN TURNAROUND SCHOOLS

Dissertation Hearing

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

C.J. Rodgers

Educational Leadership Doctoral Program
ABSTRACT

As we prepare to address and stem many of the systemic racist policies that plague our low-income minority students, we have to remain diligent and innovative in our attempt to provide our low-income minority students, as early as pre-kindergarten, access to opportunities that will ultimately prepare them for post-secondary success. This study focuses on how accountability policies and expectations for turnaround schools have had a long-term impact on the type of opportunities students who attend these schools will ultimately have. This study also proposes two policies that work to not only increase opportunities for low-income urban minority students who attend these turnaround schools, but also work tirelessly and strategically to prepare students to take full advantage of these opportunities.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I realized that I would not be here in this position had it not been for the many people in my life who invested in me and prepared me for this journey, and continue to support me on this journey. First, I want to acknowledge the tremendous investment and support of Dr. Harrington Gibson, who served as my chair and mentor during this process. Thank you for pushing me and helping me focus my grand ideas into something impactful and tangible. Also, thank you for being flexible, accommodating, and patient during the entire process. I am truly appreciative of your leadership style and dedication, seeing all of your scholars to the finish line. Moreover, thank you so much for your vision in crafting and managing a program that focuses on high-quality, equitable leadership.

I have had the opportunity to work under and learn from some of the best leaders in public education. Dr. Sanford, your mentorship and guidance has helped me become a better father, husband, brother, son, and leader. I appreciate your vision, dedication, attention to detail, innovation and the constant push to continually improve. Your vision of creating public schools of excellence for students and families on the south and west sides of Chicago is something you should be proud of. Thank you for your leadership.

Ellen Reiter, you were critical in helping me take untapped, charismatic potential and turning into something that could make the world a better place for people who were not lucky enough to have the same opportunities as me. I thought I knew what support looked like, but your knee-to-knee support any day, at any hour, has been crucial in helping me develop as a leader. Thank you.

Liz Kirby, I would not be here if you had never given me the opportunity to be a day-to-day substitute at Kenwood. When I only knew that I wanted to coach basketball, you provided
the guidance, patience, and care that I needed to develop as a budding leader. You allowed me to make mistakes and instead of chastising me, you helped me understand and unpack those mistakes. You knew at the core of those mistakes was a guy working hard to provide all students with an exceptional, well-rounded educational experience. Moreover, you showed me what a high-functioning neighborhood school should look, feel, and sound like. I will always take my experience at Kenwood with me wherever I go. It is a testament that anything is possible with great leadership. Thank you.

To my New Leaders Cohort 11, thank you for always being open and transparent in your learning and leadership. Every single one of you have had a hand in shaping my leadership style. I am blessed to be a part of such a special group of passionate leaders who I can call at any moment for feedback, advice and guidance. Thank you.

To Annise and Megan, thank you for joining me on this journey. Your organization and unwavering grit were the reasons I was able to complete this program. You both have been great teammates and influencers not just in this program but in my professional career. As you know, this is only the planning phase; much bigger is ahead of us. Thank you.

Last but most important, thank you my family. Mom and dad, your sacrifice, selflessness, and hard work are core values that have been with me since I was born. Thank you for laying that foundation. Marcus, thanks for being a great brother and role model. I love how you have used your platform to transform the lives of those you coach. Tiara, Chloe, Morgan, and Trey, you can do anything you want. Keep working hard, stay humble, and keep God in your lives. Shari, you are my rock. You have sacrificed so much with grace and mercy. Please know that I am forever grateful. Every day, I thank God for the family that he has helped us
create. I want you to know that I am very appreciative of all you have done. I could not have done this without you and your support. Thank you.
DEDICATION:

To my wife Shari, and our children, Tiara, Chloe, Morgan and Trey. This project is my best attempt at modeling our purpose as a family. There are people out there who work hard, who are humble, and who are passionate, but they never get their opportunity. Our job is to do whatever we can to create opportunities for others, especially those who will not have access to the same opportunities that we have. As Dr. King so eloquently put it, “Life’s most persistent and urgent question is ‘What are you doing for others?’” Thank you for holding me accountable to our family values and calling me out when I am not modeling what I expect. I love you all.
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Purpose

In 2001, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act was signed into law, designed to identify and improve low performing schools in districts and states through increased accountability. Once these schools were identified, schools were then offered varying levels of support from the government and their states to help improve. Many advocates of the No Child Left Behind Act point to the increased test scores of black and Latinx students and argue that the achievement gap between blacks and latinos and their white counterparts are at all-time low in both math and English Language Arts (ELA) because of the increased accountability (Hoff, 2008). Critics of this policy point to the increased emphasis on standardized tests and how schools and districts that serve low-income urban minority students have taken a drop everything approach to solely focus on teaching to the test in both math and ELA (Gershon, 2007).

As a way to address increased accountability, districts began to implement different reform efforts to support their most struggling schools. One model of support was the Turnaround Model. While there are many turnaround models across the country, the one we will focus on calls for the following actions to happen at the school (UChicago CCSR, 2013):

- Staff replacement
- Leadership replacement
- Governance and Local control replacement
- Students remain

Turnaround schools are still held to the same accountability metrics as all other schools across the district and have quarterly accountability benchmarks focused on student achievement/test scores, attendance, and grades. Because of the increased focus on student
achievement, there is a huge emphasis on testing math and English Language Arts (ELA) skills. As a result of this emphasis on testing math and ELA skills, in most low-income urban schools, school leaders are working hard to remediate these skills in an attempt to bring students who are multiple grade levels behind, to grade level.

In order to effectively implement these interventions within the time parameters of a normal school day, school leaders are using short term, technical solutions to try to remediate skills. For example, school leaders are using a technique called curriculum narrowing. “By imposing state standardized testing in math and ELA, legislation like NCLB and other standardization and centralization schemes resulted in significant narrowing of the curriculum (Tienken and Zhao, 2013, p. 114). Examples of curriculum narrowing are replacing science, social studies, and fine arts with math and ELA intervention and remediation blocks to increase the amount of instructional time spent on these tested subjects. Leaders are also trying to increase math and ELA instructional time is by asking science, social studies, and fine arts teachers to lead math and ELA intervention blocks, in place of their normal units of study. While the premise makes sense-increase the amount of time students are engaged in math and ELA instruction-this microwaveable approach to student achievement causes our low-income minority students to overdose on procedural math and ELA strategies, even if they do not really need to do so. Therefore, low-income minority students are not learning and then practicing and utilizing skills that they will need to compete with their global counterparts. These students, instead, are learning basic skills such as recite, remember, and regurgitate, even for those students who have shown they have already mastered the basic level of learning.
Most importantly, by taking the short-term approach to student achievement, we miss the opportunity to intentionally teach the seven survival skills the students will need to compete globally, ultimately closing the opportunity gap.

These Seven Survival Skills are the following: (Wagner, 2014, p. 36):

- Critical Thinking and Problem Solving
- Collaboration Across Networks and Leading by Influence
- Agility and Adaptability
- Initiative and Entrepreneurialism
- Effective Oral and Written Communication
- Accessing and Analyzing Information
- Curiosity and Imagination

It is very difficult to script a comprehensive curriculum model that best puts our students in a position to learn and practice all seven survival skills because student results can range from kindergarten level to 10th grade level in any given elementary classroom. Therefore, teachers and school leaders are left to their own devices when it comes to improving student achievement and closing the opportunity gap in our turnaround schools.

I work for a turnaround organization (Office of School Turnaround) that specializes in turning around the district’s most struggling schools. We pride ourselves on being a results-oriented organization which provides high-quality schools for students right in their own communities. Our goal is to provide an exceptional neighborhood school for students and communities who are normally only privy to their neighborhood schools, many of which have been deemed some of the worst schools not just in the state, but in the country.
Because of the heavy emphasis on school accountability and a growing number of underperforming schools, Crystal Pond School District needed an organization that could specialize in taking the worst neighborhood schools in the district and turning them into vibrant learning communities performing above state and district requirements. All twenty-three of the Office of School Turnaround (OST) schools are located on the north and south sides of Crystal Pond in some of the most dangerous and impoverished communities. Priding ourselves on our results, at the end of the 2015-2016 school year, 73% of our turnaround schools achieved one of the two highest scores on the district scorecard and 85% of our schools were in good standing (one of the top three scores) according to CPSD’s accountability metrics.

While these numbers are fascinating and are a testament to the hard work of the many employees who service our students as well as to our philanthropic donations, what was evident in all of our elementary schools was the huge emphasis the network placed on the Northwest Evaluation Assessment (NWEA MAP), the district’s test that is used to determine school performance. Almost all practices that were implemented and mandated at the network level revolved around the two to three times of year where students take their NWEA MAP Test.

In order to improve student achievement, school leaders analyzed the NWEA data. They then spent a lot of time working with their teachers so that teachers were equipped to fill in the knowledge gaps of students in both math and ELA in an effort to help students perform well on these tests. In doing so, school leaders and teachers abandoned their curriculum and began crafting assignments and formative assessments around the math and ELA skills students needed in order to be considered on-grade level.

The goal of this project was to evaluate how effective turnaround schools were when it came to closing the opportunity gap. This particular turnaround model has produced
unprecedented student achievement gains in a short period of time due to the increased focus on climate and culture, instructional practices, and wrap around supports for students. However, in evaluating this model, I did a deep study into the curricular resources, professional development and community partnerships that were in place to see the impact all of these had on closing the opportunity gap for low-income minority students enrolled in turnaround schools. For the purpose of protecting confidentiality, all participants, the one turnaround organization, and the school district mentioned in this study have been assigned pseudonyms.

Rationale

Struggling schools in school districts most often serve low-income minority students and have chronically underperformed for an extended period of time. It normally takes a decade to truly turn around a school; however, school leaders in turnaround schools are given unrealistic timelines of two to three years to turn around these struggling schools. In doing so, school leaders employ technical solutions to get short term gains and results. However, I have always wondered about the long-term effects of this microwave approach to student achievement. Are we improving student achievement while still widening the opportunity gap for our students? After completing a pre-K-12 experience in our turnaround schools, are our scholars prepared to handle the rigors of college and beyond?

While these school leaders are under tremendous pressure to improve student achievement by any means necessary, there are other factors that need to be resolved in order to create an environment that is conducive to learning. Creating this environment means managing and resolving issues that deal with excessive bullying and gang affiliations. It also means having to deal with other issues that are caused by poverty, such as students and their temporary living situations that, in turn, have negative impacts on student achievement; students and families that
do not receive the proper medical treatment, with this lack of medical care having a negative impact on student performance; the lack of quality community and parental involvement which allow students the opportunity to utilize and cultivate the skills they are learning in school. These circumstances all strain the efforts of school and district leaders who are still responsible for meeting district accountability metrics. Therefore, as district leaders, how do we operate within the accountability constraints of our districts while still ensuring that along with learning the content and skills needed to score well on standardized tests, our low-income minority students in these turnaround organizations are also acquiring the survival skills enabling them to compete globally.

Goals

The first goal of this study was to define the opportunity gap that exists in turnaround schools in the Office of School Turnaround Network. The second goal was to evaluate the structures and leadership moves put in place at the district level to close the opportunity gap for turnaround students. The final goal, was to provide policy recommendations to other districts to help them better close their opportunity gaps. In setting these three goals, I wanted to create a sense of urgency for district leaders by defining the opportunity gap that exists and the long-term effects for students. I then wanted to create a list of recommendations that derive from my program evaluation of the Office of School Turnaround and from the perspective of researchers. These policy recommendations were designed to close the opportunity gap for poor minority students in turnaround schools.

Research Questions

The primary question that guided this study is how do school leaders of turnaround schools identify the opportunity gaps existing for low-income minority students enrolled in
turnaround schools? In an effort to answer this question, I used school leaders and researchers to help define the term opportunity gap and what ultimately happens to students long-term if turnaround schools do not work to close the opportunity gap.

After I gathered the definition, the secondary questions I asked was what structures have successfully been put in place to close the opportunity gap for low-income minority students in turnaround schools?

Finally, I was interested in seeing how both researchers and school leaders answer the following questions to help me better provide recommendations to close the opportunity gap:

- What curricular resources help close the opportunity gap? To what extent do low-income minority students have access to these curricular resources?

- What does professional development look like for principals, teachers and staff to help them better navigate the constraints of school accountability, teacher unions, and district mandates, in order to provide low-income minority students rich educational experiences designed to close the opportunity gap?

- How can community and business partnerships help close the opportunity gap for low-income minority students? In essence, are there opportunities for low-income minority students to experience relevant, real-time learning experiences such as seminars, internships, and apprenticeships throughout their educational journey?

Conclusion

The larger contextual question that we are trying to solve revolves around whether or not the United States’ educational system is equipped to prepare all students for postsecondary and career success. We have narrowed our focus to hone in on a select group of students in some of
the most underachieving schools in the nation, with the hopes of providing those scholars the same opportunities as their wealthier counterparts in other, more affluent school districts.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I examine research that outlines how effective turnaround schools are when it comes to closing the opportunity gap for students. To do so, I will first analyze the History of Turnaround Schools and the Turnaround Model to better comprehend how turnarounds have evolved and how their design better situates them to focus on closing achievement gaps. I will then examine a successful turnaround model as well as explore the difficulties associated with closing the opportunity gap for turnaround schools. Finally, I will also examine the definition of both the Achievement Gap and the Opportunity Gap to paint a clearer picture of both. While there is overlap in their meaning, I want to better understand why looking solely at achievement can be misleading and why the focus needs to be on closing the opportunity gap.

History of Turnaround Schools

Despite a steadily increasing urgency to improve the nation’s lowest-performing schools—those in the bottom five percent—efforts to turn these schools around have largely failed. These chronically failing schools need skilled outside assistance to help mount a comprehensive, sustained turnaround initiative. This requires a far stronger resource base of partners than the patchwork of individual consultants (mostly retired educators) now assisting with interventions and school improvement efforts in most states. In most turnarounds, lead turnaround partners integrate multiple services either as a contractor for school management or on a consulting basis, in conjunction with the district. Lead partners provide a comprehensive set of integrated academic (and perhaps some back-office) services to better support schools who have chronically underperformed and need assistance (Murphy & Meyers, 2008).
These chronically underperforming 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 high-poverty student populations they tend to serve. The school model our society provides to urban, high-poverty, highly diverse student populations facing 21st-century skill expectations is largely the same as that used throughout American public education, a model unchanged from its origins in the early 20th century. Yet, this highly challenged student demographic requires something significantly different – especially at the high school level (Duke, 2006).

Dramatic change in turnaround schools requires urgency and an atmosphere of crisis. If status-quo thinking continues to shield the dysfunctions that afflict these schools, there can be little hope for truly substantial reform throughout the system. Turnaround schools, in other words, represent both our greatest challenge – and an opportunity for significant, enduring change that we cannot afford to pass up. (Murphy & Meyers, 2008)

Successful Turnaround Models

A small but growing number of high-performing, high-poverty (HPHP) schools are demonstrating that different approaches can bring highly challenged student populations to high student achievement. Extensive analysis of HPHP school practice and effective schools research revealed nine strategies that turn the daily turbulence and challenges of high-poverty settings into design factors that increase the effectiveness with which these schools promote learning and achievement. These strategies enable the schools to acknowledge and foster students’ Readiness to Learn, enhance and focus staffs’ Readiness to Teach, and expand teachers’ and administrators’ Readiness to Act in dramatically different ways than more traditional schools (High-performing & Schools, 2007).
These nine categories are broken into three subcategories and are the following:

- **Readiness to Learn**
  - Safety, Discipline and Engagement
  - Action against Adversity
  - Close Student-Adult Relationships
- **Readiness to Teach**
  - Shared Responsibility for Achievement
  - Personalization of Instruction
  - Professional Teaching Culture
- **Readiness to Act**
  - Resource Authority
  - Resource Ingenuity
  - Agility in the Face of Turbulence

**Figure 1: How High-Performing, High Poverty Schools Do It:**

These High Performing, High Poverty schools have five commonalities that work to increase student achievement in turnaround schools:

1. An intense focus on improving classroom instruction through ongoing, data-driven collaboration, within schools, among administrators and teachers, led largely by teachers with oversight from the principal;
2. A concerted, systematic effort to create a safe and orderly school environment through implementation of research-supported practices that all staff members can adopt;
3. An expansion of both classroom and non-classroom time throughout the school week dedicated to instruction and tutoring in core academic subjects;

4. A strengthening of connections to parents, community groups, and local service providers to support the efforts of school staff to build a culture that expects success of all students;

5. A limited reliance on expert consultants to jump-start changes that school leaders and teachers sustain on their own. Five Things Successful Turnaround Schools have in Common (Anrig, 2015)

Turnaround requires dramatic changes that produce significant achievement gains in a short period (within two to three years), followed by a longer period of haphazard student improvement. This microwave approach can lead to increased student achievement in the short term but has not really proven to effectively close the opportunity gap. Researchers from the University of Chicago claim the slow growth in achievement might be disappointing for those who expected turnarounds to dramatically close the achievement gap and opportunity gap between low- and high-performing schools in the space of one or two years. These highly disruptive turnaround reforms are often justified with arguments that students cannot wait for their schools to show incremental improvements. Actually, though, these dramatic reform efforts in Crystal Pond did accelerate learning at a significantly faster rate than the district average. In fact, the rate of gains made by these previously chronically underperforming schools was higher than virtually every other school in the city between 2001 and 2009—the period of time studied for a previous report on trends in Crystal Pond (Allensworth & Jagesic, 2013).

So, while steady progress is being made on the student achievement front, there are still many causes that prevent minorities from performing at the same academic level as their White peers. In order to better understand why this is, there needs to be a stronger emphasis placed on
ways to close the opportunity gap for students who attend turnaround schools. In the next section, I discuss the role the opportunity gap plays in closing the achievement gap and why researchers believe that until the opportunity gap is closed, we will never fully close the achievement gap.

The Achievement Gap Versus the Opportunity Gap

The singular definition of the achievement gap is the academic performance difference between Whites and minorities (F. D. Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003). When determining how effective our educational system is performing, we use the achievement gap to measure progress and enact change. On the other hand, only looking at the achievement gap presents a multitude of issues. The achievement gap has been an important metric because it is necessary to hold educators accountable for providing optimal learning opportunities for all students and evidence of these learning opportunities is needed to gauge such learning. However, on the other hand, instructional practices and related educational experiences need to be constructed in ways that address and are responsive to students' varying needs because of the range of differences that students bring into the classroom and because of the social context in which students live and learn (Gay, 2010; Howard, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Milner, 2010). The Achievement Gap solely focuses on how students are performing on standardized tests and does not consider the whole student.

The achievement gap discourse in education usually focuses on students' scores on standardized tests; it also concerns student graduation rates, patterns in gifted and advanced placement, and other measurable outcomes that allow for comparisons between groups of students. However, standardization of policies and practices is at the heart of many reform efforts aimed to decrease and eventually eliminate achievement gaps, and standardization, in many
ways, is antithetical to diversity needed to fully understand why students are or are not learning at a rate comparative to another subgroup. This is because it suggests that all students live and operate in homogeneous environments with equality and equity of opportunity afforded to them (Ladson-Billings, 2000; Milner & Williams, 2008; Tate, 2008). Standardization reform efforts advance a sameness agenda when the playing field for many students of color and other marginalized groups is anything but even or level (Ladson-Billings, 2006). This uneven playing field can be squarely attributed to the lack of opportunities afforded to students of color and other marginalized groups.

Milner argues that opportunity gaps, especially those related to diversity, exist at all levels in education, and he challenges other researchers to look deeper than just the achievement gap because:

- Achievement gap explanations of educational practices can force educational researchers to compare culturally diverse students with White students without compelling, nuanced, and illustrative pictures of the reasons undergirding and behind the causes of disparities and differences that exist between and among groups;
- Achievement gap explanations can frame White students as the norm from which other racial and ethnic groups are to be compared (Foster, 1999). White students can be both overtly and tacitly constructed as intellectually and academically superior to others;
- Achievement gap explanations can force us into studying and conceptualizing students of color from a deficit perspective (Howard, 2010). Researchers focus on the perceived shortcomings of students rather than the assets that students and their families possess;
• Achievement gap explanations can force us to focus on individual students as well as groups of students rather than inequitable, racist and sexist structures, systems, context policies, and practices that lead to perceived achievement gaps (Milner, 2013, p. 696).

Educational researcher and teacher educator Jacqueline Jordan Irvine (2010) explained that a perceived achievement gap is the result of other gaps that seductively coerce people into thinking that an achievement gap actually exists. Rather than focusing on a perceived achievement gap, from her analyses, Irvine recommended that attention should be placed on closing other gaps that exist in education. For Irvine, some of the other gaps that shape our belief in an achievement gap include:

Teacher quality gap; the teacher training gap; the challenging curriculum gap; the school funding gap; the digital divide gap; the wealth and income gap; the employment opportunity gap; the affordable housing gap; the healthcare gap; the nutrition gap; the school integration gap; and the quality child care gap (Irvine, 2010, p. 697).

It is important for us to note that when we focus on achievement gaps, culturally diverse students, especially those attending these chronically underperforming schools, can be viewed in the minds, practices and designs of analysts as having conceptual deficits. Consequently, consumers and educators may adopt deficit perceptions and transfer them into their practices with this demographic of students. From an ecological perspective, many teachers design the learning milieu believing that their culturally diverse students are behind (Foster, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 2006), instead of focusing on the gaps that ultimately lead to this achievement gap.

The Education Reform defines the Opportunity Gap as:
the unequal or inequitable distribution of resources and opportunities—while achievement gap refers to outputs—the unequal or inequitable distribution of educational results and benefits.

These gaps in opportunities come in various types. However, to combat this opportunity gap, Milner proposes an Opportunity Gap Conceptual framework that can be used in explaining, problematizing, and perhaps more deeply understanding educational practices beyond an overreliance on an achievement gap. This framework calls upon educators to analyze:

- color blindness
- cultural conflicts
- myth of meritocracy
- low expectations and deficit mindsets
- context-neutral mindsets and practices.

The constructs or tenets embedded within the opportunity gap conceptual framework can be used as a heuristic to explain and shed light on situations in educational practices when teachers exhibit these behaviors, or when they do not. In this way, the framework can be used to illuminate the positive or negative aspects of the explanatory construct (Milner, 2012). This will ultimately shift the paradigm from looking at achievement gap data to problem solving and focusing on improving the lack of opportunities that will ultimate close the achievement gap. However, looking at the achievement gaps and focusing solely on improving instructional practices will not close the opportunity gap.

Examples of Gaps in Opportunity that Exist Within the School

*Culturally Relevant Pedagogy*
Many teachers fail to use the culture of African American students in instruction. This can result in a school culture that is alienating to many African American students and inconsistent with their own cultural experiences, dreams, hopes and struggles (Malloy, 1997). The same could be said for many Latino students. As Lynne Getz (1997) points out, people from different ethnic backgrounds may experience an entirely different relationship with the public schools. While White students may feel nurtured, enriched, and included, Latinos may experience "ostracism, alienation, and neglect" (Getz, 1997, p. ix).

*Classes Offered to High School Students:*

Black and Latin X students make up 37 percent of high school students but only 27 percent of students taking an AP class and 18 percent of students passing AP exams, according to the Education Department (Quinton, 2014). In addition, track assignment is not the only factor leading to differences in course-taking. At many schools with large numbers of students from low socioeconomic status backgrounds, even students in college preparatory programs typically take fewer academic classes (Oakes, 1990). This is a result of the fact that not all schools offer the same number of options for advanced courses. For instance, in California, regardless of high school size, the number of Advanced Placement courses decreases as the percentage of African Americans and Latinos in the school population increases (Oakes, Joseph, & Muir, 2004).

*Culture of High Expectations*

Richard Kitchen (2007) describes several examples of schools that are consistently high-achieving and that serve low-income students from many different ethnic backgrounds. In these schools, teachers have high expectations and offer sustained support for academic excellence. Teachers make teaching and learning their priorities to support high academic expectations; they provide supplemental support for student learning; and they regularly review basic skills learned
in the past. These schools have a great variety of teaching resources to support their teaching and provide regular access to professional development opportunities for their teachers (Kitchen, 2007).

*Three Solutions That Can Combat Opportunity Gaps that Exist Within Schools*

In order to successfully close both achievement and opportunity gaps for high-poverty schools need to take a proactive and innovative approach to supporting the whole child and not just looking at test scores. Schools that have been highly successful in educating these students have three salient characteristics:

- high expectations and sustained support for academic excellence
- challenging content and high-level instruction that focused on problem solving and sense making (as opposed to rote instruction)
- the importance of building relationships and getting to know the whole student (DePree, Celedon-Pattichis, & Binkerhoff, 2006, p. xiv)

*Outside the School Causes that Widen the Gaps in Opportunity*

*Inequitable Pupil funding*

In many places in the U.S., school funding is based mainly on local property taxes. Additionally, in many places a large proportion of African American and Latino students live in districts with less funding available. According to NAEP data from 2000, only 3% of White 8th-graders are in schools where more than 75% of students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch, whereas 34% of African American and 34% of Latino 8th-graders are in such schools. Conversely, a higher percentage of White 8th-graders attend schools with less poverty. The majority of White 8th-graders (64%) attend schools with less than one quarter of the students
being eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, but only 15% of African American and 25% of Latino 8th-graders do so (Strutchens et al., 2000).

**Figure 2: Math and ELA Achievement at K-Entry by Income, 2010**

![Graph showing Math and ELA Achievement at K-Entry by Income, 2010](image)

**Access to Early Education and Kindergarten Readiness:**

With respect to income, the readiness gap is clearly best described as a continuous gradient that spans the entire distribution. This suggests that most American children, not just those in poverty, are not being fully prepared for academic success consistent with their potential. Figure 2 also makes it clear that the gap between the bottom and top income quartiles is quite large, nearly a full SD. This is equivalent to a difference of twenty months in age for a child entering kindergarten. Note, distribution of scores by income is adversely skewed so that the entire bottom half of the income distribution falls somewhat below the mean score. The drop in readiness between the top income quartile and the second quartile from the bottom (below median income but above poverty) is quite large (Nores & Barnett, 2014).
Parent Education:

Figure 3: Achievement Gaps at K-Entry by Parental Education, 2010

Income is not the only family background characteristic associated with an achievement or readiness gap at kindergarten entry. We also examined disparities in kindergarten readiness by level of parental education. The readiness gaps associated with parent education are shown in Figure 3. Children of parents with less than a college degree, but with some education or training beyond a high school diploma, score only slightly below the mean. Those whose parents dropped out of high school enter kindergarten .60-.65 SD below the mean (and almost 1 SD below children of college-educated parents). Children of parents with a high school degree also underperform, entering kindergarten almost .30 SD below the mean and with a gap of about .70 SD relative to children with college-educated parents. As the income advantage associated with a college degree has steadily increased over the years, it appears that the advantages college-educated parents can provide to their children in terms of readiness have also increased. Because most young children do not have parents with a college degree, it is unfortunate that all other children begin school with scores below the mean. As with income, these gaps by education indicate considerable inequality at the starting line for formal education with little prospect for
improvement, as income and education will continue to confer advantages on those children who enter kindergarten ahead (Nores & Barnett, 2014).

Conclusion:

It is important to understand that schools alone cannot solve the achievement gap, let alone the opportunity gap. It is important for politicians, policy makers and educators to understand that poverty matters. Poverty affects children’s health and well-being. It affects their emotional lives and their attention spans, their attendance and their academic performance. Poverty affects their motivation and their ability to concentrate on anything other than day-to-day survival (Ravitch, p. 94). Until we begin to put comprehensive structures in place to address the impoverished situations many of our turnaround students reside in, we will have a difficult time closing the achievement and opportunity gaps.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Research Design Overview

In this chapter, I delve deeper into what solutions various researchers propose in helping to close the opportunity gap for students who attend turnaround schools. I performed qualitative research in order to evaluate what the Office of School Turnaround is doing to close the opportunity gap for low-income urban minority students in their respective schools. I also evaluated the effectiveness of the Office of School Turnaround as it pertains to closing the opportunity gap. The research was conducted in Crystal Pond School District (CPSD), with a network (Office of School Turnaround) that is charged with turning around some of the city’s most struggling schools. I then used my analysis and research to help answer my research question in closing the opportunity gap for poor, minority students enrolled in turnaround schools.

The primary research question that drives this study is how do urban school leaders describe the opportunity gaps that exists for low-income urban minority students enrolled in turnaround schools? In answering these questions, I really am trying to find solutions to better prepare low-income urban minority students for college completion and the skills needed to compete in an ever-changing global society. Therefore, it is important for me to evaluate this program by interviewing district leaders within the Office of School Turnaround (OST) and observing their practice along with utilizing research that has already been conducted around the opportunity gap. I used Patton’s utilization-focused program evaluation to inform my research design and employed qualitative methods to collect and analyze data. “Utilization focused-evaluators should facilitate the evaluation process and design any evaluation with careful
consideration for how everything that is done will affect use” (Patton, 2008, p. 37). The utilization-focused program evaluation helped answer the following question:

- What structures have successfully been put in place to close the opportunity gap for low-income urban minority students?

In order to effectively define the opportunity gap that exists for low-income urban minority students who attend turnaround schools, a qualitative study with purposeful sampling gave me an opportunity to effectively define the opportunity group, evaluate the program at the Office of School Turnaround, and ultimately determine recommendations for OST and other school districts. By using purposeful sampling of participants, I was able to better capture the unique, holistic character of the program, with special attention to context and setting (Patton, 2008). I conducted interviews with network leaders, observed network leaders, and analyzed OST public documents to see how the entire OST organization worked together to close the opportunity gap for students.

In Chapter 2, I address how High Performing, High Poverty schools have five commonalities that work to increase student achievement and close opportunity gaps. In analyzing these five commonalities in comparison to OST’s strategy, I noticed an overlap in three areas of curriculum; professional development and teacher support; and strengthening community partnerships. Therefore, in my interviews, observations and document analysis, I evaluated and zeroed in on those programs which resulted in the following secondary research questions:

- **Curriculum**: What curricular resources help close the opportunity gap? To what extent do low-income urban minority students have access to these curricular resources?
● **Professional Development:** What does professional development look like for principals, teachers and staff to help them better navigate the constraints of school accountability, teacher unions, and district mandates, in order to provide low-income urban minority students a rich educational experience designed to close the opportunity gap?

● **Community Partnerships:** How can community and business partnerships help close the opportunity gap for low-income urban minority students? In essence are there opportunities for low-income urban minority students to experience relevant, real-time learning experiences such as seminars, internships, and apprenticeships throughout their educational journey?

Participants:

In order to get a diverse group of participants who could speak specifically to each program, I used purposeful sampling. The participants consisted of three of the four Crystal Pond School District Area Superintendents who are each responsible for supervising and overseeing between five to ten schools and their respective principals. I interviewed the Area Superintendents for a number of reasons. First, they provided perspective on multiple schools at a time. This perspective is valuable because these Area Superintendents are uniquely positioned to identify trends around the three programs and provide data based on the work they see happening in their respective schools. Second, they interact more often and closely with both the external affairs and curriculum development teams. This perspective allows for them to better communicate the mission of the organization and how effective the mission is living and breathing in schools. Last, the Area Superintendents create and develop all principal professional development. In creating this professional development, I was interested in knowing how intentional they were in
creating professional development that is designed to both improve student achievement and close the opportunity gap.

The profiles of these Area Superintendents are:

- Two have worked with the organization for seven plus years and have served as school and/or district leaders
- One has worked with the organization for over four years and has served as school and/or district leader

Another participant is the director of external affairs at the Office of Turnaround. I interviewed her because she is the person solely responsible for finding community and business partnerships and partnering these entities with the right schools. I was also interested in how she defined the opportunity gap and how she perceived her role as it pertains to closing the opportunity gap for low-income urban minority students who attend turnaround schools. The profile for the director of external affairs is the following:

- Has worked with the organization for three plus years and oversees our external affairs/community partnerships

The last participant is the director of curriculum at the Office of School Turnaround. This director is responsible for finding curriculum and assessments that best prepare the network for success. I was interested in why all schools in the network decided to adopt the same curricular resource and its effectiveness in improving student achievement and closing the opportunity gap. I also wanted to know how they defined the opportunity gap that exists for low-income urban minority students in turnaround schools. The profile for the director of curriculum is:

- Has worked with organization for five plus years

Data Gathering Techniques:
Data gathering happened in the form of interviews, document analysis of the School Quality Rating Policy for Crystal Pond School District, and both formal and informal observations.

*Five Interview Participants*

The goal was to interview people in the organization who were solely responsible for ensuring policy and practices were both making their way into the schools. This way, they were able to give their definition of the opportunity gap and their role in closing the opportunity gap.

Because the Area Superintendents are responsible for evaluating principals, they have hands-on experience with the challenges associated with the different mandates that are designed to improve student achievement and close the opportunity gap. The Area Superintendents provided valuable information about how well the three programs (curriculum, professional development, and community partnerships) are being implemented; the effectiveness of implementation; the impact of the three programs; and gave suggestions for improvement. I also asked them to provide insight of how the organization has grown and adopted practices over the last five years to help close the opportunity gap.

The director of curriculum provided valuable insight on how well the chosen curriculum, assessments, and instructional practices were helping to both meet district accountability and close the opportunity gap.

The director of external affairs provided her perspective on the role community and business partnerships have played in helping us close the opportunity gap. It was interesting to hear what qualities we look for in companies that make them effective in helping schools close the opportunity gap. It was also interesting to hear the structures needed for schools to effectively maximize the resources afforded to them by these community partners/companies.
Document Analysis

I analyzed the data of all Office of School Turnaround schools in order to align how their results on their School Quality Rating Policy (SQRP) match up to their mission and vision. In analyzing the SQRP, I was able to drill down on key metrics such as student attendance, results on the Five Essential Survey, and student achievement data. While this data did not glean much about how well OST is closing the opportunity gap, it did shed light on OST’s current status as it pertains to student achievement.

I analyzed how OST schools’ performance over the last three years has improved and analyzed what role each of the three programs (curriculum, professional development, and business and community partnerships) played in improving the network schools. I also analyzed the results of the end of year survey given to principals and teachers.

Formal and Informal Observations

These observations helped me gather qualitative data throughout the school year around how school leaders connect how the actions of the OST network are helping to close the opportunity gap.

I observed and gathered notes during the following meeting spaces:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meeting Space</th>
<th>Purpose of meeting space:</th>
<th>How I gathered data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monthly school leader professional</td>
<td>At these monthly professional development meetings school leaders came together to</td>
<td>• Observed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>professional development</td>
<td>collaborated around curriculum best practice, attendance and on-track metrics, and to</td>
<td>• Created a checklist to determine how often observees were making connections to either the</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>developed their leadership capacity to do the work.</td>
<td>curriculum, professional development or community/business partnerships and how well they were closing</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>the opportunity gap</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Observed again using the</td>
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</table>


| Monthly district leader collaboratives | At these monthly meetings all district leaders came together to learn about our curriculum resources. Each district leader was then responsible for teaching the learned curriculum practices to their teams. They also progress monitored these practices with their respective teams. | • Observed  
• Created a checklist to determine how often observees were making connections to either the curriculum, professional development or community/business partnerships and how well they were closing the opportunity gap |
| Bi-Weekly Curriculum Meetings | These meetings with the Director and Curriculum and Lead Area Superintendent were designed to ensure the content is in place for professional development. | • Observed  
• Create a checklist to determine how often observees were making connections to either the curriculum, professional development or community/business partnerships and how well they were closing the opportunity gap |
| Quarterly Meetings with the Curriculum and Assessment External Partners | These meetings were designed to progress monitor the alignment between curriculum and assessment and to assess how well schools are implementing common core aligned practices with the help of their Area superintendent, and also to plan professional development for school and district leaders. | • Observed  
• Create a checklist to determine how often observees were making connections to either the curriculum, professional development or community/business partnerships and how well they were closing the opportunity gap |
| Quarterly Reflection and Planning Meetings with Area Superintendents | These meetings were designed to provide a structured space for Area Superintendents to reflect on both qualitative and quantitative data of their respective schools/school leaders. They were also able to reflect on their practices and share their learning and resources with their colleagues. They then had time in the afternoon to create their quarterly plans of support for each of their principals for the upcoming ten to twenty weeks. | ● Observed  
● Create a checklist to determine how often observees were making connections to either the curriculum, professional development or community/business partnerships and how well they were closing the opportunity gap |
|---|---|---|
| Quarterly External Affairs Meeting: | These meetings were designed so that the external affairs team could calibrate and evaluate the effectiveness of their programs. They also used this space to match schools with community partners. | ● Observed  
● Create a checklist to determine how often observees were making connections to either the curriculum, professional development or community/business partnerships and how well they were closing the opportunity gap |

**Ethical Considerations:**

During this research, I ensured careful ethical practices. I followed the steps below to ensure I remained ethical in my approach and research:

- Obtained informed consent by requesting permission from the OST.
  - Disclosed the intent of the research, its benefits and risks
- Worked to ensure that no subtle or overt harm was done to the subjects who allowed personal information to be included in the research
• Held the knowledge of personal experience in a strictly confidential manner
• Employed research techniques that were as valid and rigorous as possible
• Cared about the subjects
• Remained honest during and following the research (James, Bucknam, & Milenkiewicz, 2008, p. 28-29).

I did this because I wanted all participants to feel more confident sharing their honest insights. The more honest their insight, the better the outcome.

Data Analysis Techniques

In this section, I wanted to provide a brief summary of the data analysis techniques I used to help me determine my judgements, themes and recommendations.

Interviews:

Individual interviews were conducted; voices were recorded; and transcripts of the recordings were created. I sorted the responses of each individual according to themes around curriculum, professional development, and community partnerships. This allowed me to identify trends and similarities based on what each interviewee said in each one’s assessment of the three major programs designed to close the opportunity gap for students who attend turnaround schools.

The interview questions were created to evaluate how effective policies and practices around curriculum, professional development, and community partnerships were all making their way into the schools. This allowed each interviewee to give his/her definition of the opportunity gap, assess the respective programs and, ultimately, his/her role in ensuring how well these programs were working to close the opportunity gap.

Observations
Field notes were collected during each of the meeting spaces described above, focusing on all interactions, various pieces of evidence, and artifacts that helped define how the evaluated programs were working to close the opportunity gap. Moreover, these notes were used to further evaluate how OST had intentionally designed professional development, selected a curriculum and established business and community partnerships to help close the opportunity gap (James, Bucknam, & Milenkiewicz, 2008, p. 74).

After the first observation, I created a checklist that helped me narrow my focus for upcoming observations. In doing so, I was able to sort data by meeting space and date as the materials discussed changed over the course of the school year. By measuring the same spaces over time, I was able to identify trends in practice and topics discussed.

This data helped me better determine and triangulate the data from the interview as well as document analysis and observations to best determine which policies need to be in place to best help close the opportunity gap for students who attend turnaround schools.

Document Analysis

At the end of every school year, the OST provides its board, school community and principals an overview of the goals and how the network fared in comparison to those goals. I combed through the last three years looking to identify how the three programs had impacted overall student achievement.

I also needed to analyze the documents because many of the interviewees referenced goals and how their programs were designed to help the network exceed those goals. By reviewing the various documents, I was able to go back and look at the trends from my observation notes and interviews in order to fully assess all three programs.
Conclusion:

In choosing a methodology and subsequent approaches, I was able to clearly identify themes that emerged from the research that I conducted. Qualitative approaches such as interviews and observations allowed me to get a first-hand view of how the OST worked to operate within the accountability constraints of the district in order to ensure that our minority and poor students in these turnaround schools are learning the content and skills they need to score well on these standardized tests, and ultimately compete with their global colleagues.
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

Introduction:

In conducting my document analysis and reviewing my interview transcripts and observation notes, it became clear that The Office of School Turnaround (OST) had some structures in place that have effectively helped schools close the achievement gap for low-income urban minority students in turnaround schools. This is evidenced by the growth on Northwest Evaluation Assessment data and the rate in which students are growing year over year (+50% of 3rd-8th graders meeting national growth norms), the number of students On-Track to graduate in both elementary (+23%) and high schools (+15%), and the number of students accepted into college (96%). However, when we look at metrics associated with closing the opportunity gap, the data shows that there is still more room for growth. For example, fewer than half of the elementary students in OST have been accepted to a quality high schools (Schools that score a 1 or 1+ on the district’s accountability rating). Fewer than one third of the OST high school students are college-ready by 11th grade as determined by the SAT. Also, fewer than half (47%) of OST high school students receive college credit before their high school graduation. Moreover, we still are not tracking whether or not students are persisting in their post-secondary education careers.

The percentages in the number of students accepted into a quality high school, the number of students college ready by 11th grade, and the number of students receiving college credit have been on a steady increase over the last three years. This can be attributed to OST’s laser like focus on intentionally closing the achievement gap. Based on this data, I can make the argument that the opportunity gap is not closing as quickly as the achievement because OST has put a lot of emphasis on raising test scores to close the achievement gap.
By increasing the amount of time spent on rote math and ELA remediation, students are missing out on opportunities to build survival skills necessary to compete in a global society and ultimately close the opportunity gap.

In order to better discuss the change in practices needed to close the opportunity gap, I have analyzed the three programs using Wagner’s 4 C As-Is and To-Be frameworks. The chart below gives a description of the three programs using the As-Is framework. In Chapter 5, I delve deeper into the To-Be Framework and the change needed to help move us closer to our goal of closing the opportunity gap for poor minority students in turnaround schools. Below, the figure is a summary of the framework, which is further explained in this section.

As-Is Analysis

Figure # 4: As-Is Framework:
Figure # 5: As-Is Analysis:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4 C’s</th>
<th>Professional Development</th>
<th>Curriculum</th>
<th>Community Partners:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Context</td>
<td>Office of School Turnaround consisted of three different departments:</td>
<td>Schools used the Expeditionary Learning, Core Knowledge Language Arts, and</td>
<td>The Office of School Turnaround had an external affairs department that focused on</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● School Management</td>
<td>Eureka Math curriculum that spans from grades Pre-Kindergarten through 11th</td>
<td>school and community partnerships for all thirty-one schools.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Curriculum and Development</td>
<td>Grade. This curricular resource provided students with on grade level tasks</td>
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<td></td>
<td>● External Affairs</td>
<td>that aligned to the standards at each grade. Schools determined the science</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Both the School Management and Curriculum and Development team were responsible for all</td>
<td>and social studies curricular resource.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>professional development for teachers and school administrators.</td>
<td>Schools administered quarterly interim assessments that were aligned to the</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Principals and Assistant Principals met monthly in their respective Principal Collaboratives to receive professional development around the curricular resource, the data driven cycle, and various leadership strategies.</td>
<td>CCSS in grades 3-8.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher Leaders met quarterly to receive professional development around the curricular resource and basic leadership and facilitation strategies</td>
<td>Each curricular resource had an end of unit assessment or performance tasks that teachers administered.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Each school took the NWEA MAP test at least twice a year in math and ELA. The</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>spring score was used to determine school ratings.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Competencies</td>
<td>The team developed a curriculum team that consisted of curriculum specialists/coaches to help the schools and network with curriculum implementation. Schools also had part time or full time (depending on school size) coaches that coached teachers around the curriculum and classroom management. The curriculum being used has scripted lesson plans for teachers to use to help better guide students to their respective outcomes. The network has created various planning tools to best assist teachers and school leaders with delivering the lessons with fidelity.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Four Directors of School Leadership managed all thirty-one of the schools. Two Directors were split between both high school and elementary and two directors support only elementary. Each Director was responsible for providing professional development for their own collaborative of school leaders. Roughly three quarters of the professional development for school leaders and teacher leaders was used as a vehicle to support teachers in implementing the curriculum resources.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conditions</td>
<td>The curricular resource addressed the need to teach students on grade level standards. However, over half of the students performed below grade level. All schools had time embedded in their schedules for multi-</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional development occurred monthly for all principals and was 90% input with no time for application or process. Also, professional development was a one size fits all regardless.</td>
<td>Clusters of schools on the south and west side of town received additional after school programming. This created a space where a cluster of schools on the southside fed into the southside high school and a cluster of schools on the westside fed into</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>of the experience or talent level of the people receiving it.</td>
<td>tiered systems of support. This time was designed for teachers to use personalized learning and small group structures to best support students.</td>
<td>the westside high school.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Culture</strong></td>
<td>OST was a results-driven organization that had implemented some great data driven practices that decreased the achievement gap for students in the turnaround network. The curricular resource had been an emphasis in the network for the last three years to address the shift to more rigorous standards (Common Core State Standards). School leadership teams, and teacher leaders have been receiving professional development that revolved around the curricular resource.</td>
<td>The external affairs team had served as a support system to the school management and curriculum development teams. Its primary purpose was working to find partners to help both teams operate at a high level.</td>
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</table>

**Context:**

The OST was very strategic in the support and professional development that it had in place at every level of the organization. Principal Supervisors, principals, teachers and even education support personnel all received job embedded professional development to ensure that the schools are safe, have a culture for learning, and every student has access to high-quality, on grade-level instruction.
As for the curriculum, OST has adopted a new curriculum for their English Language Arts (ELA) classes and math classes that all thirty-one schools have adopted. This curriculum was aligned to standards, and provided students with grade level performance tasks at the end of each unit in each grade. In both ELA and Math, schools administered quarterly interim assessments that were aligned to both the curricular resource and Common Core State Standards. The network had also adopted the Northwest Evaluation Assessment to serve as another benchmark assessment to help progress monitor individual student growth.

The OST external affairs department spent most of its time working with community partners to secure additional funding for schools as well as gathering varying resources that helped students cope with much of the trauma and poverty they were experiencing outside of their schools.

Competencies

The network doubled down on its approach in supporting teachers and principals with the roll out of their new curricular resources. All of the professional development in the network had some tie to the network wide curricular resource. Moreover, network coaches had been hired to support school teams with implementing the curriculum with fidelity.

The external affairs team worked with schools that needed more support, speaking with the community and principal about their needs. Both the external affairs team and the school management team agreed that a pressing issue was getting students the wrap around supports they needed, especially in the areas of social-emotional learning and restorative justice practices. The external affairs team worked with schools to send principals and teachers to professional development so that they could better support students around social-emotional and restorative justice practices.
Conditions

All principals received professional development once a month. Teachers received professional development weekly at their respective schools. The network provided teacher leaders professional development quarterly. The curriculum exposed students to grade-level, standards-aligned instruction, but with many of the students performing below grade level, students were just not able to produce the expected quality of work.

The external affairs department secured funding that allowed for clusters of schools on the south and west side of town to receive additional after school programming. Moreover, it created a space where a cluster of schools on the southside fed into the southside high school and a cluster of schools on the westside fed into the westside high school. This allowed for the network to better track the progress of students in the network from Pre-K-12

Culture

The network wide focus on curriculum was a welcomed shift by teachers and principals, but it still made people a little uncomfortable because schools, for the most part, operated with autonomy, especially if they had a proven track record of closing achievement gaps for their students. The external affairs team provided schools the support they needed in order to continue to strengthen the school’s climate and culture.

Interpretations

In analyzing the network’s data, reading over the interview transcripts, observing various meeting spaces and analyzing important documents, there were some important themes that were prevalent.

Theme 1: There was a huge focus on closing the achievement gap and raising test scores.
Yet, what was most fascinating was that many people in the network realize just focusing on test scores and closing the achievement gap was not enough and was only a short-term solution. Assistant Superintendent 2 stated:

Our schools have to make sure that students are getting the instruction that they need in order to reach their growth targets. That means providing students with individualized or small group instruction for a nice chunk of time during the school day. If we continue to provide our students with only whole group instruction, we are going to be in trouble come June. But we also know that not exposing students to science with have an impact on our kids, especially when they get to high school.

They also understood that while focusing on test scores was very important, it would not move key metrics like post-secondary persistence, because students were entering college with superb test taking skills, yet, with the inability to think critically.

We must not deprive our students of the opportunity to learn, because the more we focus only on test scores, the more the opportunity gap grows. The opportunity to learn is critical, especially for our neediest students. The opportunity gap increases as the opportunity to learn decreases. The opportunity to experience and learn a broad, quality curriculum cannot be understated. Like many medicines, education policies and practices carry real risks of unintended side effects and complications (Tienken and Zhao, 2013, p. 112).

Interview participant #3 goes on to support Tienken and Zhao’s perspective stating, We are relying on short term solutions [helping students pass a test] to fix an epidemic [lack of high quality, consistent resources and support] that has plagued
low-income, minority students for centuries. If we really want to set our students up for success, we need to teach them how to think and how to adapt.

**Theme 2: Community Partnerships existed, but they were not an extension of the material students were learning in school.**

Interview participant #2 summed it up best when speaking about the role of community partnerships in school. The participant stated:

Our role is to find out what our partners are passionate about and then work to get those services to our students. In cases where our partners want to get involved, but not sure how, I then articulate the need for our partners and then they provide the funding to help us fill the need for our students and our schools.

Much of what the partners were providing were services that were needed, but not services that were an extension of the learning that students were receiving in their classrooms.

Many…teens came from places where they were the recipients of services, not the providers. I believed that if they were given the responsibilities, then they would embrace them. Kids get more and more experience. It was a progression; it built confidence and a real sense of self-esteem” (Duncan, 2018, p. 31).

In my analysis, the closest OST got towards partnerships designed to close the opportunity gap was a career day that a law firm does yearly with one of the schools. Other services that community partners provided were coat drives, a community service day at the school, backpack and school supply donations, and philanthropic donations.

**Theme 3: Students were not receiving a comprehensive educational experience that forced them to use or practice the seven survival skills in any other discipline besides math and ELA.**

Assistant Superintendent 3 said:
When I was in elementary school, we had different elective classes that our parents could sign us up for. These classes were Spanish, poetry, journalism, and computers/typing. What’s happening in our schools prevents us from being able to allow those things. And with budget cuts, we cannot even offer after-school programming. We spend so much time remediating, that we end up borrowing time from science, recess, music, PE, so that we can focus on providing students with the skills they need. If we were to provide students with a comprehensive educational experience, the school day would literally be 12 hours long. And, that is just not possible.

What I noticed in many of my observations was that OST had put a huge emphasis on small group instruction as an approach to remediate individual student performance. Assistant Superintendent #1 gave the reason why.

In any given third grade classroom, it is not uncommon to find students who are performing at a sixth-grade level, and students who are performing at a Pre-Kindergarten level. We are asking our teachers to do the impossible; they have to be skilled and talented enough to provide differentiated instruction to the varying levels of students in their classrooms.

When in small groups, teachers are spending most of their time filling in gaps and teaching students’ skills that they might not have learned in previous years.

This was important because Assistant Superintendent #1 also spoke to the idea that, When we assign students end of unit performance tasks, we just have not been able to get back the quality of work we expect. There are so many skill gaps that students have a difficult time completing the tasks. Our teachers need to be so
skilled and spend so much time planning and altering lessons. The support needed to get students to an average performance task is happening during small groups. This way, students are getting the support they need in a smaller setting, so that students can produce an average end of unit performance tasks.

These ends of unit performance tasks were important because these tasks were intentionally designed so that students were not taking multiple choice tests. Instead they were asked to demonstrate their learning in a variety of ways. This is the closest that students were getting to practicing and sharpening their survival skills. Unfortunately, this was happening only in math and ELA classes. “The Center on Education Policy found that 36 percent of principals of high-minority schools reported decreases in instructional time for the arts, while 21 percent of those in low-minority schools reported decreases” (Teinken and Zhao, 2013, p. 114). If we are not asking students to sharpen their survival skills across disciplines, we are widening the opportunity gap.

Theme 4: The goals and metrics that the OST and CPSD used to hold their schools accountable focused only on closing the achievement gap and relied heavily on student test scores and student attendance. There were not any metrics that focused on closing the opportunity gap.

CPSD had a framework that they used to rate their individual schools. Student performance on test scores made up sixty-five percent of a school’s rating, and attendance made up twenty percent. Because of this, OST was intentionally making sure that all of their initiatives in some way helped it improve specific metrics in the framework. This also explained why OST focused so much on improving test scores. In order for it to get an acceptable rating, the district needed to be able to improve test scores. Interview Participant #3 said:
CPSD hired us to turnaround their lowest performance schools. We have been charged with taking Level 3 schools and turning them into Level 1 and Level 1+ schools. The quickest way to do so is to improve attendance and test scores in our schools. Yes, there are so many things we have to fix in our schools, but this framework helps us prioritize what is most important. We can now focus on improving test scores and attendance, because test scores and attendance both account for eighty-five percent of the framework. If we improve those two metrics, we improve our schools.

Interview participant #3 referred to the different ratings for schools. CPSD had five designations for school:

- Level 3 is the lowest performance; school needs “intensive intervention” directed by the district.
- Level 2 is low performance; school needs “intensive intervention” directed by the district.
- Level 2+ is average performance – Additional support from the network team is needed to implement interventions.
- Level 1 is high performance – this is a good school choice with many positive qualities. Minimal support is needed.
- Level 1+ is the highest performance – this is a nationally competitive school with the opportunity to share best practices with others.

A school’s status determined who had decision-making power at the school level.
• Good Standing is a school that has met or exceeded the district’s minimum performance standards. These schools must follow district policies and mandates, but the Local School Council (LSC) retains all normal autonomy.

• Provisional Support means that the school needs increased support. The network and CEO may require the school to revise its Continuous Improvement Work Plan (CIWP) and/or budget and may require specific professional development.

• Intensive Support means the school needs a high level of support. In addition to the interventions listed for Provisional Support, the Board of Education may – in extreme cases – take actions such as a turnaround or principal removal.

Schools that fell under the Provisional Support and Intensive support could be subject to management by OST.

   Federal policies, from No Child Left Behind to Race to the Top, have placed more emphasis on market tools, incentives, and punishments to drive gains in test scores than on closing opportunity gaps, including opportunities for teachers to share good ideas and practices” (Berry, 2013, p. 182).

   There were no mandates or even suggestions from CPSD, that OST had to incorporate any systems that would close the opportunity gap. OST’s only responsibility was to raise scores, and they received the money and resources from the district to do so.

Judgements:

   When trying to answer the question what structures have successfully been put in place to close the opportunity gap for low-income urban minority student, I have concluded that OST has been very deliberate, and intentional around closing the achievement gap, and their results prove this point. They have continued to show increases in major metrics such as the following:
The number of schools in good standing (81% of schools were in good standing compared to 41% three years previously)

- Attendance (+1.3%)
- Freshmen on-Track (+15%)
- The number of students performing at or above grade level in eighth grade (+11% in ELA and +16% in Math)

It is also clear how OST has accomplished this. It placed a huge emphasis on curriculum, personalized learning, and professional development of both teachers and school leaders. Being able to give students access to grade level instruction as well as working diligently to help fill skill gaps has worked well in helping to close the achievement gap. Also, supporting teachers and school leaders with incorporating data driven practices into their daily routine has helped close feedback loops and allowed teachers to fix a student’s learning gap before it was too late.

These strategies have helped, but they are not enough. Beginning to close the achievement gap lays the foundation for closing the opportunity gap. For example, we cannot begin to close the opportunity gap if students do not have access to high quality instruction. TNTP conducted a research project titled “The Opportunity Myth.” In it, they challenged all educators to make two commitments to students and families. One of those commitments is,

Every student should have access to grade-appropriate assignments, strong instruction, deep engagement, and teachers with high expectations, every day, in every class—regardless of their race, ethnicity, or any other part of their identity (TNTP, 2018).

OST has been set up to successfully close the opportunity gap because the network has focused heavily on ensuring students are regularly given enriched learning experiences that are
responsive to the learning characteristics of a diverse student population (Beecher & Sweeny, 2008). Moreover, the network provides professional development designed to ensure teachers, principals and principal coaches all have the training and skills and tools needed to ensure student outcomes are being met and achievement gaps are being closed. More still needs to be done.

Even with these structures in place, the data (percentage of students college ready by 11th grade, the number of students receiving early college credit, and the number of students enrolled in a post-secondary program) was still low or not even accounted for when it comes to metrics (number of students persisting through their first year of a post-secondary program, or the number of students who graduate college within 6 years) that close the opportunity gap.

Recommendations:

With a comprehensive change plan in place, OST adopted a guaranteed and viable curriculum in both Math and ELA, created personalized learning structures to help fill gaps for students who are behind, and invested heavily in professional development to better prepare teachers, principals and school staff the opportunity to support students. These actions all led to school improvement and ultimately helped OST close the achievement gap. However, closing the achievement is just the beginning. In order to overcome obstacles and create sound systems for equality, school districts should look to adopt some, if not all, of the strategies outlined by Barnett Berry:

- **Strategy 1:** Seriously prepare teachers for the realities of teaching;
- **Strategy 2:** Develop standards for new teachers, moving away from the long-standing policy of allowing underprepared teachers to teach independently, often in disadvantaged communities;
• Strategy 3: Pay teachers as professionals, with a premium for spreading their expertise to their colleagues;

• Strategy 4: Create school conditions that allow for effective teaching and learning;

• Strategy 5: Connect teacher teams to other support providers that serve students and families (Berry, 2013, 186-190).

These five strategies are key drivers in both the To-Be Framework and Policy Recommendations.
CHAPTER FIVE: TO-BE FRAMEWORK

Introduction:

An **opportunity gap** can be defined as “the unequal or inequitable distribution of resources and opportunities” (The Glossary of Education Reform, 2013). As I was crafting the To-Be Framework, I wanted to ensure that in the framework I answered the question “How do we close both the achievement gap and the opportunity gap?” When approached with this same question, Pitre (2014) states that in order to close the opportunity gap, schools must focus on:

1. attracting top talent to the teaching profession
2. supporting and retaining effective teachers
3. ensuring students have access to high-quality curriculum and learning opportunities.

While Pitre is correct, if we have not solidified a curriculum that focuses on all subjects, not just math and ELA, and one that forces students to practice and sharpen, daily, their seven survival skills of critical thinking and problem solving; collaboration across networks and leading by influence; agility and adaptability; initiative and entrepreneurialism; effective oral and written communication; accessing and analyzing information; and curiosity and imagination, students will never be able to take advantage of the opportunities granted, thus only widening the opportunity gap. Therefore, the biggest difference between the As Is stated above and the To Be explained in the next section is this idea that school leaders and district leaders are ensuring that every day, students are getting rigorous, personalized learning experiences, **both inside and outside the classroom**, that provide opportunities for students to practice and sharpen their seven survival skills in a strategic and vertically aligned manner. Because, “Students who only know how to perform well in today’s education system—get good grades and test scores, and
earn degrees—will no longer be those who are most likely to succeed. Thriving in the twenty-first century will require real competencies, far more than academic credentials” (Wagner, 2015).

Envisioning the To-Be Success

Figure #6: To-Be Framework:

**CONTEXT**

**Community Partners:**
The Office of School Turnaround has an external affairs department that focuses on school and community partnerships for all 31 schools. These partnerships include internships and apprenticeships that allow students to apply the seven survival skills in a real-world atmosphere.

OST partners with personalized learning companies in order to train teachers how to incorporate personalized learning structures in their classrooms. All personalized learning structures align to the seven survival skills.

**To be Statement:**

Turnaround schools are effective at closing both the achievement gap and opportunity gap for their students through a personalized learning program that builds students’ seven survival skills.

**CONDITIONS**

There is time built into professional development to coach principals and school leaders around creating sustainable structures that allow for this type of learning to take place. This PD includes:

- How to build a master schedule
- How to coach and support teachers when it comes to personalized learning

Students have been explicitly taught how to advocate for themselves and how to work together as team members and are rewarded positively when they exemplify these behaviors. They are coached in real time, when their behavior needs to be corrected.

**COMPETENCIES**

Ensuring that Professional Development for Network leaders, school leaders, and classroom leaders all focus on a personalized learning experiences that embeds tasks and activities that force students to practice and sharpen their seven survival skills daily.

The skills used from implementing the curricular resource and learning the standards would then drive the work of building units of studies that align to specific competencies and force students to improve upon the seven survival skills.

All district external partners are in alignment with this approach to teaching and can provide external support to help the network better support schools in their personalized learning approach and allowing for students to practice their skills outside of the classroom and in real life situations.
**Figure #7: To-Be Analysis**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4 C’s</th>
<th>Professional Development</th>
<th>Curriculum</th>
<th>Community Partners:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Context:** | The school management, curriculum and development, and external affairs teams are responsible for all professional development for teachers and school administrators. These professional development opportunities consist of both internal and external opportunities to learn more about personalized learning and ways for district and school leaders to support and coach teachers. The network professional development serves as a model for what school professional development and teaching and learning should look like. There are personalized structures in place that help school leaders master the leadership competencies laid out by the network. Teachers and teacher leaders come together to problem solve around personalized learning. | Students receive personalized learning that allows them to build on the seven survival skills of:  
- Critical Thinking and Problem-solving  
- Collaboration Across Networks and Leading by Influence  
- Agility and Adaptability  
- Initiative and Entrepreneurism  
- Effective Oral and Written Communication  
- Accessing and Analyzing Information  
- Curiosity and Imagination  
There is a curricular resource in place that spans from grades Pre-K-11th grade. There is also time built in for students to work at their own pace in receiving both intervention and enrichment. There are opportunities for students to receive instruction and complete tasks based on their ability, not just their respective grade levels. | The Office of School Turnaround has an external affairs department that focuses on school and community partnerships for all thirty-one schools. These partnerships include internships and apprenticeships that allow students to apply the seven survival skills in a real-world atmosphere. OST partners with personalized learning companies in order to train teachers how to incorporate personalized learning structures in their classrooms. All personalized learning structures align to the seven survival skills. |
There are online platforms that are competency based and allow for student ownership.

Students are aware of what they are learning, why they are learning it and how they learn best. They become self-directed learners and develop the behaviors and mindsets for success.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competencies</th>
<th>Sharpening and Practicing Survival Skills Daily</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>There are five Directors of School Leadership that manage all thirty-one of the schools. Three directors that solely focus on elementary and two directors that support high school. Each Director is responsible for providing professional development for his/her collaborative. Professional development for network leaders, school leaders and classroom leaders all focuses on personalized learning experiences that embed tasks and activities that force students to practice and sharpen their seven survival skills daily. There are on-site coaches along with a</td>
<td>The skills used from implementing the curricular resource and learning the standards would drive the work of building units of studies with other subject areas that align to specific competencies and force students to improve upon the seven survival skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All district external partners are in alignment with this approach to teaching and provide external support to help the network better support schools in their personalized learning approach and allowing for students to practice their skills outside of the classroom in real life situations.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| Conditions: Setting our students up for success: | There is time built into professional development to coach principals and school leaders around creating sustainable structures that allow for this type of learning to take place. This PD includes:
  - How to build a master schedule
  - How to coach and support teachers when it comes to personalized learning
  - There is professional development that happens quarterly that allows for all associated parties to collaborate. There is also a larger PD over the summer that allows all the teams problem solve around common issues.  |
<p>| | Classroom environments are equipped with the necessary resources, tools and technology to allow students to partake in deeper learning. Students have been explicitly taught how to advocate for themselves and how to work together as team members and are rewarded positively when they exemplify those behaviors. They are coached in real time, when their behavior needs to be corrected.  |
| | LEAP Innovations and Summit Learning provide on-site coaching for schools to help best implement strong personalized learning structures throughout the school year. These coaches work within the fabric of the organization, not as a separate entity. OST intentionally partners schools with nonprofits such as Academy Group and Link Unlimited, who specialize in creating these apprenticeships for students and who can connect schools with businesses that are aligned to a specific unit of study. This allows students to double down on their learning and application around specific topics. They learn about the theory, they see get chances to see and practice skills associated with this topic in real-life career fields.  |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Culture: Everybody succeeds regardless of circumstance</th>
<th>Network Professional Development consists of the following:</th>
<th>Students build content knowledge by working at their own pace.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>● Principals and Assistant Principals meet monthly in their respective Principal Collaboratives to receive professional development around the personalized learning strategies, best practices and various leadership strategies.</td>
<td>Teachers help students set short-term and long-term goals and connect these back to their daily actions.</td>
<td>Students engage with projects that connect the classroom to the real world. When students work in teams to apply what they're learning to projects that mimic and solve real-world problems, they develop strong collaboration, communication and critical thinking skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Teacher Leaders meet quarterly to receive professional development around the personalized learning and basic leadership and facilitation strategies that build student advocacy and strengthen students’ skillset</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Teachers meet quarterly to share best practices around implementation and curriculum design</td>
<td></td>
<td>The culture is now a culture of truly preparing students for post-secondary and post collegiate success with metrics, practices, and progress monitoring tools that all align to how, throughout their K-12 experiences, students has been prepared for a successful career path.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The goal of the To-Be Success is to implement change that allows for students to experience personalized learning experiences that allow them to sharpen and practice the seven survival skills daily. By sharpening these skills, we are essentially equipping our low-income urban minority students to take advantage of similar opportunities afforded to their affluent, majority counterparts. Below is a high-level overview of recommendations for the 4C in the To-Be State, accompanied by a chart that gives a description of the three programs-professional development, curriculum, and community partnerships-being evaluated. Each program has been analyzed through the lens of Wagner’s 4 C To-Be framework.

Context

In order to foster strong learning climates, the context has to be one that ensures strong alignment between what each student is expected to learn and how they will demonstrate mastery. It has to be clear to all what students are learning, how they are applying their learning and practices in the real world during their apprenticeships and community partnerships. Moreover, professional development for teachers, principals and staff needs to be set up so that they have the skills and tools needed to best support students in unpacking what they are learning (both inside and outside the classroom) in a meaningful, productive way that gives them access to opportunity and prepares them to take advantage of those opportunities across all disciplines, not just math and ELA.

Competencies:

In order to sharpen the survival skills, students need to be exposed to curriculum at their respective grade level. This curricular resource must force students to consistently utilize the seven survival skills. From my interviews, I found that in most cases, curriculum is not written with low-income urban minority students in mind. Curriculum teams should be tasked with
finding culturally relevant books and resources that are rigorous. Curriculum teams also should be working hard to create units of study alongside teachers that incorporates some of these seven survival skills. In the units, where students are not equipped with the skills to meet the rigor of these units and performance tasks, curriculum teams, teachers and principals should use personalized learning frameworks like the ones designed by LEAP Innovations and Summit Learning as a means to help students build skills and fill the learning gaps students have.

The goal is to double-down, ensuring that students are practicing these skills both in the classroom and all disciplines and in their apprenticeship, with teachers, principals, school staff and mentors supporting and progress monitoring along the way. In essence, we are intentionally creating learning experiences in every walk of life, and the traditional school structure and its curriculum work to re-enforce those principles.

**Conditions**

In order for students to be set up for success, there are so many conditions that need to be in place. The logistics associated with trying to align the curriculum, professional development and community partners and apprenticeships is very cumbersome, but necessary. One bad link can ruin the entire experience for students. It takes a lot of collaboration between the curriculum team, the school teams, the various community partners and mentors to ensure students are set up for their optimal learning experiences.

**Culture**

Ultimately, OST will be working to create a culture designed to close the opportunity gap for low-income urban minority students who attend turnaround schools. This culture will have clear evidence to support and develop a strong curriculum, to strengthen student-centered professional development designed to help students sharpen their seven survival skills combined
with personalized learning structures, and to align community partnerships and apprenticeships with the learning that students are engaging in inside of their respective classrooms.

Conclusion:

The result of these deliberate and intentional practices and action steps will lead to closing the opportunity gap. In order to do so, OST must continue to build on many of the systems they have put in place to successfully close the achievement gap.
CHAPTER SIX: STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS

Introduction:

John Kotter (1996) states, “Leadership is about setting a direction. It's about creating a vision, empowering and inspiring people to want to achieve the vision, and enabling them to do so with energy and speed through an effective strategy. In its most basic sense, leadership is about mobilizing a group of people to jump into a better future” (p. 60). In order to bridge the gap from the As Is to the To Be, we will enact a very complex change process that strategically and intentionally infuses adaptive practices to prepare and support all stakeholders to effectively enact change.

Kotter believes that in order to effectively manage change there is an eight-step process that needs to take place. However, if there are missteps in any of the steps, organizations will fall short of their desired results. Kotter believes that in order to be effective, a method designed to alter strategies, reengineer processes, or improve quality must address all barriers and address them well (Kotter, 1996). To ensure that turnaround schools are effective at closing both the achievement and opportunity gaps for their students through personalized learning practices, strong curriculum and community partnerships and apprenticeships that all work to build students’ seven survival skills, two key drivers for success are strong leadership practices and Kotters’ framework for change.

Strategies and Actions

The chart below describes the eight steps in the change process and the adaptive leadership actions that I would enact in order to accomplish the To-Be Statement:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Adaptive Leadership Actions:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I will work with an outside consultant group to:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Establishing a sense of Urgency

- Find relevant data to tell the story of why the opportunity gap exists and the impact that it is having on our students. This data includes:
  - the percentage of our elementary school students accepted into high quality (rated a 1+ or 1 by district ratings) public high schools in the city;
  - the number of elementary students who are on grade level;
  - our high school freshmen who have more than two core class failures at the end of their freshman year (this metric is a key indicator for high school graduation);
  - the number of our high school graduates who persist through their first year in college;
  - the number of our students who graduate college in six years;
  - the total number of apprenticeships a student completes during his/her educational career.
- I will utilize the research of Tony Wagner, Pedro Noguera, Michael Fullan, and Gloria Ladson-Billings to explain both the theory behind the opportunity gap and practical and tangible solutions we can employ to ultimately close the opportunity gap for the district.

Measuring Effectiveness:
At the end of every year, we will have a data day which will allow these senior leadership teams from the district and apprenticeship programs to review data with our principals in the same format we want them to review the data with their teachers. We will also outline some of our overarching priorities based on the data and work with school leaders to devise a strategy.

We will then use the summer to develop our strategic plan and with the help of our principals we will roll out our priorities, our goals and our theory of action for the school year. This theory of action will detail how as a district we plan on supporting schools reaching their individual goals.

2 Forming a Powerful Guiding Coalition

In this stage, Kotter believes, “You need to show people something that addresses their anxieties, that accepts their anger, that is credible in a very gut-level sense, and that evokes faith in the vision” (Kotter and Cohen, 2014, p. 70). This step is a two-step process.

I will go on a listening tour to see how people react to the idea of closing the opportunity gap and the data and research that supports this idea. I will use TNTP’s Recommendations in the “Opportunity Myth” as the research to help drive these conversations. Ultimately, I want to hear the concerns of parents, board members, teachers and coaches, school leaders, and community leaders in order to detect hopes and fears as these pertain to closing the opportunity gap. In doing so, I will:
- Create an open forum and communications program for the various stakeholder groups to give input and pushback on ideas
- Meet with the most progressive group of formal and informal leaders in order to get feedback and build buy in.

**Measuring Effectiveness:**
In the second step of this process, I am will determine and identify the champions for change. These champions for change are the mid-level or informal leaders on the front line helping to enact change. In selecting these change champions, I need to be sure that they are passionate about closing the opportunity gap and are well equipped to handle the pressures that may come with this change. In order to gauge their level of commitment, I will need to meet one on one with members of this team to see how I can best support them and to truly understand how passionate they are about closing the opportunity gap.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>3</th>
<th>Creating a Vision</th>
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<tr>
<td>From the data, stories, and anecdotes received during my listening tour, combined with the data from the network and relevant research, I will need to create a clear vision and theory of action that outlines both why closing the opportunity gap is a priority for the network and how we plan on doing so.</td>
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**Measuring Effectiveness:**
Once I have strategically created both the vision and theory of action, I will vet these through the change champions and my guided coalition. In other words, I will take the plan back to small, diverse groups of people from the listening tour and allow them to give feedback on the plan that their ideas essentially helped create.

In getting this plan vetted, I will be sure to ask questions such as:
- What is missing from this plan?
- What might our least represented groups of people say about this plan?
- What might our most represented groups of people say about this plan?
- What are the controversial parts of this plan?
- What might people misinterpret?

These questions will better prepare us to handle opposition that could potentially derail our plan.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>4</th>
<th>Communicating the Vision</th>
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<tr>
<td>With a strong, clear, vision and theory of action that has now been vetted through multiple sources, I will create a strong communication plan. This communication plan will be presented and rolled out to all of our stakeholders.</td>
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More importantly, I will embed opportunities for the communities and stakeholders to ask questions and respond to the new vision. During this time, I will also have my change champions present to help answer questions as well.

I will do this because I want the stakeholders to see that their voices helped shape the plan. Moreover, I want to show that in order for us to close the opportunity gap, we all have to play a role.
**Measuring Effectiveness:**
In this step I will have to be really transparent in my messaging, making sure to commit to only what I can deliver. I think it is important to have different dipsticks to tell you along the way how you are doing. These dipsticks can be:

- Quarterly surveys to all stakeholders to see how well we are living out our theory of action;
- Quarterly Step-back meetings with partners to check progress on apprenticeships;
- Monthly board meetings;
- Town Hall meetings with the community that happen twice a year.

This will allow me to keep a pulse on what is happening with each stakeholder group and allow me to be flexible when addressing the group’s needs.

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<tr>
<th>5</th>
<th>Empowering Others to Act on the Vision</th>
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<tr>
<td>In communicating the vision, I will strategically ask my change champions to co-present different portions of the plan so that they can help answer any questions. In doing this, I will explain to them that they are essentially owning certain parts of the plan. I will not present this plan by myself because I want to assert that this is our plan, not my plan.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In empowering others to act, I am responsible for helping team members remove barriers that could derail their plans. I will have meetings with my change champions in order to coach the team in handling difficulties of change.</td>
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**Measuring Effectiveness:**
We will role-play specific situations to help the team effectively act on the vision. Change as well as leadership is a team game. In doing so, I have to set the team up to be successful by moving strategically from the balcony to the dance floor and vice versa. In doing so, I’ll be able to better support and remove potential barriers so that we can continue to move our plan forward. These coaching conversations are an integral step in ensuring success and empowering others to act on the vision.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>6</th>
<th>Planning for and Creating Short-Term Wins</th>
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<tr>
<td>Because change is hard, I will have to continually help our team and stakeholders see that we are progressing and celebrate the small wins.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Therefore, I plan to keep all stakeholders abreast of our progress by sending mid-year and end of year newsletters that outline the steps we have taken and how we have progressed toward our goals.</td>
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</table>

**Measuring Effectiveness:**
I also plan on doing a state of the district address at the beginning of every year that outlines our key metrics and what specifically we plan on addressing and how we plan on operating as pertains to closing the opportunity gap.
Once we have solidified some strong practices that are helping us move the lever, I want to make sure we are strategic with taking these practices to scale and ensuring that these are practices we are seeing in every school and classroom across our network.

**Measuring Effectiveness:**
This step also allows for us to take some innovative practices and pilot them across our network on a smaller scale. So, as we think about personalization and all the different ways it can take form, it is going to be important for us to utilize many of the structures we already have in place to allow those best practices to take hold across our network.

As we continue to grow and expand, I will work with our change champion team to help create a playbook of best practices to help new leaders, struggling schools, principals and teachers, and new schools better implement best practice strategies.

In doing this, I want to simplify, identify, and prioritize the most important structures needed at the school and community level to best close the opportunity gap.

**Measuring Effectiveness:**
This step also means that my team will need to set up organizational accountability structures that will ensure that all of our stakeholders are exceeding our expectations. The positive thing about this is that most of these structures already exist because we have leveraged them to help us close the achievement gap. However, we will still need to be diligent and innovative in our thinking to help us close the opportunity gap.

By using Kotter’s Eight Step Change Process as a planning template, I can effectively prepare my team and our communities for the change that we are proposing in order to close the opportunity gap. By placing a larger focus on how we personalize instruction for our students, we will create learning opportunities for our students to sharpen and practice the seven survival skills daily through a robust, vertically aligned curriculum and high quality, real life learning opportunities. In doing so, we need to ensure that our professional development and community supports are streamlined, aligned and focused on advancing our personalized learning initiative.
Conclusion:

When district and school leaders foster strong learning climates where students are set up for success and all the resources and opportunities are aligned to this philosophy, districts are taking the first steps to closing the opportunity gap. Moreover, when students are allowed to sharpen and practice the seven survival skills daily through a robust, vertically aligned curriculum and high quality, real life learning opportunities districts will simultaneously close both the achievement gap and the opportunity gap.

Milner argues that standardization is antithetical to this type of responsive classroom because it suggests that all students live and operate in homogeneous environments with equality and equity of opportunity afforded to them (Milner, 2015). Therefore, in order to truly change our As-Is practices to our To-Be practices, we will have to focus on creating personalized experiences for all of our stakeholders and effectively leading them through the change process.
CHAPTER SEVEN: IMPLICATIONS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

In speaking with various stakeholders and in my observation analysis, I noticed that having a highly effective curriculum, highly trained, skilled and culturally competent teachers, and effective instructional leaders all play a critical role in turning around some of the most challenging schools across the country. In addition, the educational policies of NCLB that focus on Annual Yearly Progress for sub groups of students have really held schools and districts accountable for closing the achievement gap. However, the over emphasis on testing two core subjects forces these high-poverty turnaround schools to make important, but controversial decisions. These decisions are made in order for schools to sustain an acceptable level of progress on meeting yearly benchmarks in math and ELA for their students so that their schools will not face a state takeover or, even worse, closure. The controversial decisions that school leaders are facing consist of cutting extracurricular programming, arts, and in some cases sciences—all critical and crucial parts of the full educational experience. In the end, these decisions prevent turnaround students from having a well-balanced, rich, and educationally diverse educational experience that allows students to sharpen and develop their Seven Survival Skills (Wagner, 2014). The exposure and opportunity, along with a rich, well-balanced educational experience, is what will help close the opportunity gap facing our turnaround students.

Contributing to the cutting of many of these classes to focus on math and ELA is the lack of quality Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Math (STEAM) teachers equipped and prepared to teach and serve in turnaround schools. From what I gathered during interviews and observations, science, arts, and elective teachers in turnaround schools are inexperienced
teachers, who have not been properly trained to handle the rigors of poverty in our classrooms. This in turn leads to many teacher vacancies in these classrooms, with substitute teachers filling in.

With math and ELA intervention eating into STEAM time and the lack of qualified teachers in STEAM classes, the perfect storm is created, ultimately eliminating opportunities for turnaround students who have passions in other subject areas besides math and ELA. Having to power through the drill and kill teaching of daily math and ELA instruction and intervention coupled with the poaching of minutes away from the arts, sciences, and social studies, students begin to believe that school is not for them. More importantly, students are not receiving the opportunity to practice and sharpen their survival skills in other disciplines. So, while school leaders are working diligently to ensure that students have access to culturally relevant and rigorous curriculum in their math and ELA classes, students are missing opportunities to build their survival skills in other STEAM courses.

Not only are there are not many opportunities for students to explore or tap into their talents or interests outside of their math and ELA classes during the school day, there are not many opportunities for students to tap into their talents outside of the classroom. In more traditional school settings, students have opportunities to take foreign languages, and a multitude of course electives, that grant students learning opportunities that relating and aligning to real world experiences.

The turnaround schools and their community are not equipped with the resources to provide electives, let alone outside experiences and opportunities for students to learn more about the various careers available to them. In speaking to three of the area superintendents, they all spoke about combatting this issue by tying the curriculum to real-world experiences to help
students connect the dots between what they are doing in school, or should be doing in school, to a career or personal passion/interest. While important, they all agreed that it’s not nearly enough.

Because the parents, schools and communities lack the resources to expose students to different opportunities, students are stuck trying to figure out how math and ELA will benefit them in the long run. These lack of experiences and exposure limit students in their thinking of what is possible and ultimately widens the opportunity gap for students in turnaround schools, because they see school as a dead end, especially when the fall behind grade level in math and ELA. The approach to addressing the opportunity gap has to be more comprehensive than finding strong teachers to help fill gaps and provide a high-quality education for our students. High-quality teaching is only one piece to the puzzle, not the final piece. “Researchers are still searching, more than ten years after No Child Left Behind, for a nonselective school or a district where every student, regardless of his or her starting point, has achieved proficiency on state tests because that school or district has only effective teachers,” (Ravich, 2013, p. 103).

Policy Statement

Because I firmly believe that given the appropriate resources, opportunity, and support, all students can be successful and have a positive impact on their community and society as a whole, there are two policies that I am recommending in order to help close the opportunity gap for turnaround students.

The first policy is to invest in recruiting, training, and developing strong STEAM teachers so that they are prepared to teach in turnaround schools. We will call it the Opportunity Initiative. The Opportunity Initiative will focus on providing turnaround schools with highly skilled and trained teachers who work collectively to provide students rigorous, interdisciplinary STEAM aligned instruction with the sole purpose of closing the opportunity gap. The model will
follow successful teacher residency programs like the Chicago Teacher Residency and the Denver Teacher Residency, giving these teachers in training a year of training and planning where they will work during the day, learning from a master teacher. They will also take a course to gain their endorsement in teaching. Following this year of residency, they will then commit to teach in a turnaround school for at least six years. In return for their commitment, they will be paid a $30,000 stipend during the yearlong residency, receive their teaching certification and a master’s degree. Moreover, they will be guaranteed a job in a turnaround school upon completion of their first year. We will also make grants available for already certified teachers who are interested in getting endorsed in STEAM courses.

As stated previously, these candidates will have to commit to teach and serve and in a turnaround school. In addition, they will be responsible for intentionally creating a curriculum, with the help of other teacher professionals, that connects outside experiences with the learning happening in the school. For example, an art teacher will partner with the music and literacy teachers to put on two musicals a year. The students will spend five days at the Goodman Theater learning about set design, acting, and instruments. They would then take that learning and apply it by performing musicals for the school and the entire community.

Policy 1: The Opportunity Initiative:

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<th>Policy Recommended:</th>
<th>Why is it Recommended:</th>
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<td>The Opportunity Initiative:</td>
<td>This initiative is designed to train teachers to effectively teach in turnaround schools subjects that are often hard to hire for and often replaced for more math and ELA intervention.</td>
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<td>Candidates will commit to seven years, one of those years being a year-long residency. During this year long residency, teachers in the program will learn how to write and</td>
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design a curriculum that incorporates with other disciplines to promote innovation and creativity and connects the learning in the classroom with real life scenarios. “Breakthrough innovation occurs when we bring down boundaries and encourage disciplines to learn from each other” (Nagpal, 2013). After the residency, candidates will become certified teachers of record working in turnaround schools.

### Desired Impact:

By investing in STEAM teachers to teach in turnaround schools, we look to shift the focus from learning to show proficiency on a test, to learning to sharpen the Seven Survival Skills that will prepare all students for global success. In order to sharpen these Seven Survival Skills, students need more real-world experiences that align to what is being learned in the classroom, coupled with a comprehensive assessment that assesses more than just what they can regurgitate. Students would be asked to write an extended take-home essay about what it means to be an American-- and they would know from the first day of class that this was the final exam question. The second part of the final exam would require students to present and defend their papers in a public exhibition where parents would observe and ask questions. The students’ oral and written work would be assessed on their ability to display a range of evidence to make their points. “They will have to meet a performance standard to get a Merit Badge in American Studies -- this is the essence of the digital portfolio” (Wagner, 2014, p. 139).

The second policy would incentivize businesses and nonprofits to partner with turnaround schools to offer apprenticeships and internships for students starting in third grade through graduation from high school. The businesses could partner with groups like the Academy Group and Link Unlimited, both nonprofits with a curriculum to help support and prepare students for these internships. We will call it The Opportunity for Post-Secondary Success Initiative.

The Opportunity for Post-Secondary Success Initiative will place a huge emphasis on providing strategic, additional support needed for students who attend turnaround schools to be successful. For example, continuing with the example above, imagine if six students interned one to three days a week at the Steppenwolf Theater and interned alongside a stage coach or set
designer helping professionals prepare for their show. These experiences keep students connected to what they are learning in school and provide experiences and exposure that further help develop both cognitive and non-cognitive skills, really leaving no child behind.

Policy #2: The Opportunity for Post-Secondary Success Initiative

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<tr>
<td>The Opportunity for Post-Secondary Success Initiative</td>
<td>This policy is designed to incentivize businesses and nonprofits to partner with turnaround schools and students by giving students internships and apprenticeships that allow students real world practice in developing and sharpening the Seven Survival Skills. During this partnership, students will enter the program as early as third grade, allowing students to apply what they learn in school to real world situations. This would give students practice sharpening and developing some, if not all of, the Seven Survival Skills on a regular basis.</td>
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Desired Impact:

By investing in these partnerships, we are essentially following a model that Switzerland has used for years. According to Singmaster of Education Weekly, “Rather than viewing this as a corporate social responsibility, businesses lead the effort to develop future talent. The employers know that if they don't help train the workforce, they will be caught in a cycle of training them much later in life when it is more expensive or spending considerable money to poach workers from others while also managing low worker engagement. Training young Swiss workers has been shown to have positive returns on investment for businesses” *Why We Need Apprenticeship Programs for High School Students* (Singmaster, 2015)

While it is beneficial for companies, it is even more critical for schools. We run the risk of widening the opportunity gap when for turnaround students when they are not given educational exposure and educational experiences that all help to sharpen the Seven Survival Skills.

In essence, we are preparing students for their careers as early as third grade. This way, when it is time for students to join the workforce, the education that they have received in school is now a supplement to helping them become successful as opposed to a prerequisite. The goal is to ensure that every student who attends a turnaround school has access to at least five
different apprenticeships each in a different career field, with the school, businesses and nonprofits all working together to ensure that no student falls through the cracks.

Analysis of Needs:

The conclusions drawn from this research suggests comprehensive funding and a shift in paradigm to ensure that every school has the appropriate number of high-quality STEAM teachers and course offerings along with purposeful and meaningful apprenticeships and internships to help students understand how school can lead to purposeful careers. In order to do so, I have included consideration of the policy from six distinct disciplinary areas for a richer understanding of the problems involved. The six areas addressed and analyzed are the:

- Education Analysis
- Economic Analysis
- Social Analysis
- Political Analysis
- Legal Analysis
- Moral and Ethical Analysis

**Education Analysis**

*The Opportunity Initiative:*

In order to continue to improve student outcomes so that turnaround students are closing both achievement and opportunity gaps, there needs to be an emphasis on properly recruiting and training a diverse group of STEAM teachers, not just math and ELA teachers. The heavy lifting of planning and creating lessons that embed real world connections to students who are often grade levels behind is very difficult for experienced teachers, let alone novice teachers. However, if we can identify and address these potential silos in disciplines early in the teacher residency, it can help as districts shift the way teaching and learning happens (NCTR, 2019).
This shift can focus on teachers not only learning the nuances of teaching in poverty, but also how to intentionally create curriculum across disciplines that help students sharpen and develop their Seven Survival Skills (Wagner, 2014), and prepares students for success in their apprenticeships and internships.

*The Opportunity for Post-Secondary Success Initiative:*

Incorporating real world connections into a lesson plan helps students understand why what they are learning at school is useful beyond school and university, especially for students who do not necessarily see themselves with successful postsecondary pathways. It is an approach that works to increase engagement in the learning process as students gain valuable insights into real life applications of the skills they are being taught. To optimize the learning experience, planning and matching for these apprenticeships and internships should inspire creativity, imagination and the pursuit of knowledge. By connecting classrooms to the real world, teachers can demonstrate the relevance of subjects and give students a vision of what is possible – providing a meaningful framework for both academic and personal development (NCTR, 2019). For students, being exposed at such an early age to the different career paths that are available, and having the opportunity to hone and develop these skills and learnings as early as eight years old helps students find their hidden genius.

**Economic Analysis**

*The Opportunity Initiative:*

According to the Learning Policy Institute, it costs between $60,000 - $75,000 to train a resident for one year. However, research shows that urban districts can, on average, spend more than $20,000 on each new hire, including school and district expenses related to separation, recruitment, hiring, and training (“What’s the Cost of Teacher Turnover,” 2017). These
investments do not pay their full dividend when teachers leave within one or two years after being hired. Therefore, if the residency requires teachers to fulfill seven years of service, the investment in the teacher resident could potentially save the district close to $80,000 over the life of the teacher’s contract.

In addition, the district is getting a highly trained teacher who has committed to spending the next seven years providing students with a rigorous, real world learning who will be able to form relationships and support students through the trials and successes of their commitment.

It would be beneficial to get the teachers involved as this is a great strategy to increase teacher retention and quality. It will also serve as a way to get federal funding to back and cover much of the cost for the residency. “Labor unions also influence how resources get used within a district. Education is a labor-intensive business; a large portion of the district’s operating expenses goes directly to paying and supporting school employees and teacher contracts” (Roza, 2010, p. 29). It makes sense from the district perspective and the teachers union perspective to buy into this model of teacher training because it puts a higher quality of teacher in front of students for longer periods of time. By aligning the synergy of the district and the teachers’ union, we could work to get some federal funding and local funding to strategically help pay for the program.

*The Opportunity for Post-Secondary Success Initiative:*

In studying the Academy Group Model, CEO Knowles states that it cost $15,000 per year over the fourteen-year journey. This equates to $210,000 per student over a fourteen-year period. According to figures from the U.S. Census Bureau, the United States spends, on average, $11,392 per student every year. So, if we were able to get state or local government to contribute some of their per pupil funding, along with philanthropic donations, and have the
businesses pay for it, we would be able to afford it. Moreover, when you look at it from the taxpayer’s perspective, the investment makes even more sense. “Were a high school dropout to graduate from high school, the fiscal savings would be at least $129,230. If that high school graduate then goes on to college, the taxpayer would save at least $200,000. (Belfield and Levin, 2013, p. 202)

Also, from a talent perspective, if a business can work with and develop a strong talent pipeline that is invested in and knows the company, they save money in the long run with hiring, recruiting, and onboarding new staff. The money saved from this effort could be applied to their apprenticeship.

Social Analysis:

The Opportunity Initiative:

At this point, turnover rates vary by school and district, with areas that serve high percentages of students in poverty experiencing the highest rates (What’s the Cost of Teacher Turnover, 2017). Also, if turnaround schools continue to just focus on helping students make benchmarks, they will fail in creating well rounded individuals who are inspired and excited about choosing challenging career paths, further perpetuating this cycle of poverty and widening the opportunity gap. By putting an emphasis on STEAM, which directly aligns to the Seven Survival Skills, and training teachers who can align and connect curriculum to real world experiences, we are working to create a profile of a student who is proficient in all Seven Survival Skills by the time they graduate from high school.

The goal here is to create more pathways to post-secondary completion. When the arts and sciences are cut, we decrease the different pathways students have to post-secondary success. For example, colleges give scholarships to students for band and theater, but if these
courses and opportunities are poor in quality or, even worse, do not exist in our elementary, middle and high schools, our students are automatically eliminated from these opportunities.

*The Opportunity for Post-Secondary Success Initiative:*

At the current pace, our school system is preparing our poor students for warehouse jobs that no longer exist and minimum wages. It is time for us to shift this paradigm to one where turnaround students are applying what they learn in real-world situations requiring communication, problem-solving, and teamwork skills. Jennifer Gonzalez, in “How Khan Academy Is Bringing Mastery Learning to the Masses” states “A rich, robust, empowering education gives students regular opportunities to talk with each other, actively problem-solve with real-world tasks, collaborate on multifaceted projects, impact their communities, and wrestle with life’s big questions.” Moreover, in the case of Academy Group, there are also prominent business people and companies who are looking to invest in our communities and students. It is time for us to get creative and make this work at scale for all turnaround students.

**Political Analysis**

*The Opportunity Initiative:*

Politically, this is a lot of money to invest in teachers that do not directly impact testing subjects. Current challenges to teacher recruitment and preparation include: (1) privatization, such as the proliferation of for-profit teacher training and staffing programs, charter schools, and vouchers; (2) fragmentation of control and oversight of schools; (3) use of standardized tests to determine teacher quality and effectiveness; and (4) the weakening of teacher unions as a leader in the dialogue on teacher quality. Sleeter (2008) also sees the influence of the neoliberal agenda in the ways that teacher education has become redefined as solely a means to increase student test scores. But what happens when turnaround students are not performing well in either testing
subject? In most cases, the student shuts down and begin to believe that school is not for them.

“When students who cannot do homework are placed in a situation of being judged every day on something they were unable to do, they often shut down. Learning under these conditions is difficult at best, impossible at worst. In addition, teachers are irritated at students’ failure to do homework, adding to the negative classroom climate” (Ptak, 2010, p. 349). We have a growing generation of students who are giving up on school, and a generation of teachers who are growing frustrated, because they can no longer teach students who do not want to be in school.

Another con is that it is going to take a lot to revamp this system in order to truly do this correctly. Everyone needs to be aligned: university partners, businesses, school systems, teachers, nonprofits, parents and community. Trying to get these many stakeholders on board can be very cumbersome, as each begins to develop their own agenda. The positive to this, though, is that it has been done and is currently being done in Switzerland.

The Swiss took a very direct approach to this, revamping their entire VET (vocational education and training) curriculum to a competence- and project-based learning approach in 2004. This was a major undertaking, yet they felt it was necessary in order to modernize the industries and include "soft" (21st century) skills for every vocation. High expectations are set for all students, no matter their job. All stakeholders were involved in the process of creating these skills frameworks, including the teacher trainers, businesses, government, and educators. (Singmaster, 2015)

*The Opportunity for Post-Secondary Success Initiative:*
One con revolves around this idea of Opportunity Hoarding. The school desegregation efforts and many other education policies have typically been implemented within fairly autonomous local school districts, but segregation is increasingly located between districts. If larger-scale segregation contributes to inequality, then broader approaches to equalizing opportunity are required. “The cold, hard fact,” says Pondiscio, “is that everything in education can and will be gamed by the affluent and privileged. That’s what privilege is. Utopian fantasies to dismantle it by persuasion, public shaming, and technocratic manipulation are naïve, unworkable, or illegal. You can’t eliminate or embarrass privilege; you can only limit its influence” (Hanselman and Fiel, 2017). Many people may view this as taking opportunities from people who are more deserving or more prepared to take advantage of these types of partnerships and opportunities.

The pro is that there are examples of success for both policies. The Denver and Chicago teacher residencies have successfully trained teachers for close to twenty years. The Academy Group and Link Unlimited have models that others can replicate and follow.

**Legal Analysis**

*The Opportunity Initiative:*

My first thought is the ramifications of having the residents sign an agreement to teach in a turnaround school for seven years. Much of what residency programs are running into is legal language around what to do when teachers breach their contract, after already acquiring the appropriate certification. In most cases, when contracts are not fulfilled, these candidates are asked to pay back money based on their years of service.

*The Opportunity for Post-Secondary Success Initiative:*
The program would call for the students to be paid a stipend or have the opportunity to use their skills as an entrepreneur to make money that they could keep upon completion of their apprenticeship or internship. Coming from low income households, this could afford students the opportunity to make more money that could be used to potentially set up a savings account to cover college expenses such as college fly-overs, college visits, college applications, and transportation to college for summer enrichment programs.

**Moral and Ethical Analysis**

Continuing to allow turnaround students to not have access to high quality STEAM classes that help build students’ survival skills is ethically immoral. More importantly, putting untrained teachers with low expectations in front of turnaround students year after year does not allow students to build the relationships needed to experience strong, rigorous educational experiences. By implementing a teacher residency clearly designed at combating both issues, we put students in a much better situation to be successful in school and in their careers. For example, there is one very clear metric where Denver Teacher Residency (DTR) outperforms all other pathways: teacher retention. For DTR residents, retention rates are stronger over a three-year period and many stay four or more years. Teacher retention is critical in hard-to-staff buildings as it builds stability for students and their families. This is just one example of a metric that is not captured in standard student achievement or teacher evaluation data but is important for school climate and culture over the long term (*Building Systems of Innovation at Scale*, 2019).

Again, I want to reiterate the importance of equity in our turnaround schools and why both a residency that gives students the high-quality STEAM teachers they deserve and an
apprenticeship are necessary in order to close the opportunity gap for students who attend turnaround schools. Secada explains equity further:

The essence of equity lies in our ability to acknowledge that even though our actions are in accord with a set of rules, the results of those actions may still be unjust. Equity goes beyond following the rules...equity gauges the results of actions directly against standards of justice. (Milner, 2015, p. 35)

*The Opportunity for Post-Secondary Success Initiative:*

Mark Walter, CEO of Guggenheim Financial, talked with people in Chicago education circles about inventing a financially self-sustaining organization to mentor at-risk youth from third grade through college. He grew sick of sitting on the sidelines hearing about how communities were being destroyed, mainly because no one was investing in low income communities. This level of compassion and courage led to the creation of the Academy Group. Their mission is clear: “Fueled by the belief that that talent is ubiquitous, the Academy Group unlocks opportunity from the most resilient communities to realize their full potential” (The Academy Group, 2019). The experiences that students gain and the skills that students learn are quintessential in helping them build confidence and learn. While there are not direct ties to math and ELA, there is no doubt that the experiences and opportunities that students are receiving in their apprenticeships and professional development sessions are helping build skills that can help students unlock their genius.

*Implications for Staff and Community Relationships:*

Having worked in and observed in turnaround schools, I can attest that creativity, innovation, and bold leadership are needed to defeat poverty in our schools. These two policies, The Opportunity Initiative and The Opportunity for Post-Secondary Success Initiative, build on
this bold leadership, philanthropy and student accomplishments that are already happening in schools by strategically and intentionally training teachers to teach STEAM classes and partnering this learning to real world apprenticeships designed to help sharpen students’ survival skills. If we are going to have any hope of truly educating turnaround students, we have to remove the rote, disconnected, repetitious drill and kill teaching and be more innovative and creative. “To have good prospects in life—to be most likely to succeed—young adults now need to be creative and innovative problem-solvers” (Wagner, 2008, p. 84).

In order for these policies to work, it is important for school leaders to create the conditions for this type of learning for both students and adults. Creative scheduling must allow for students to learn outside of the classroom, create spaces for teachers to collaborate with other disciplines, allow for spaces for businesses to come into schools and run entrepreneurial clinics for students designed to develop and sharpen the Seven Survival Skills, force schools to redesign and repurpose career day to multiple opportunities where students reflect on their apprenticeships to inform and motivate others to look into different careers.

In addition, it forces district leadership to rethink what summer and out of school time should look like for students and staff. Students can maximize learning by participating in apprenticeships and working side by side by with business professionals. Teachers can create curriculum and plan more real-world units based on what students are experiencing in other classes and in their apprenticeships.

Conclusion

In Why School Integration Matters, Pedro Noguera discusses how experiences and exposure “provided me with a valuable form of social capital that made it possible for me to advocate for myself and others, navigate rules and barriers to pursue my goals, and form
strategic alliances with mentors, friends, and associates based on recognition of our common interests.” Because turnaround students are not afforded the same opportunity, we have to work to continue to enhance the educational experience by providing students with high quality teachers in a diverse, wide range of STEAM options. And, we have to engage our businesses and community partners in an authentic, intentional way to provide students with the experience and opportunities that many of our turnaround students miss out on. Noguera also talks about the role a mentor played in opening doors that he never knew existed.

There is a world out that that our turnaround students do not even know exists because they are not able to see past their math and ELA deficiencies that have plagued them and closed doors for them before their 10th birthday. Think about the possibilities if we could provide our students clear career pathways as early as third grade with an ambitious, well rounded educational experience and real-world apprenticeships to help make those pathways a real option for students.

I remember reading a journal article by Yasuko Kanno in *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk*, where he chronicled two students, Eddie and Carlos, and how they dropped out of school because they felt education was not for them. They failed to recognize the relevance of academic work and consistently felt that school was not for them. How many future CEOs, community activists, great leaders, have we failed because we have not provided them a well-rounded educational experience and a strong apprenticeship that allows them to find their true genius and share it with their communities and the rest of the world? This is a question that continues to drive me as a leader and advocate.
CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSION:

Introduction

As previously stated, it is not enough to just focus in on closing the achievement gap; we must also be vigilant about closing the opportunity gap to ensure turnaround students have access to the same opportunities as their more affluent counterparts and have the skills to adequately take advantage of those opportunities. In the turnaround district that I evaluated, there is an urgent need for students to have high quality instruction every day, in every class combined with internship and apprenticeship opportunities designed to help our turnaround students practice and sharpen their Seven Survival Skills. This way, when opportunities become available that can help break the cycles of poverty, our students are equipped to take advantage of those opportunities, ultimately beginning to close the opportunity gap. I have dedicated and will continue to dedicate my career ensuring that these two policies, the Opportunity Initiative and the Opportunity for Post-Secondary Success Initiative strategically and systemically live and have a direct impact on all students, especially students who attend high-poverty, turnaround schools.

Barriers

In evaluating the Office of School Turnaround, the goal was to see how effective it was in closing the opportunity gap that exists for its students. In my research analysis, I was able to unpack many of the barriers that prevent turnaround schools from closing the opportunity gap.

One barrier revolves around the evidence that students who are performing at or above grade level based on their NWEA scores, were not sufficiently getting their needs met. Because many of the students in OST schools were performing below grade level, most if not all of the instructional time was spent catering to the students who were performing below grade level.
One interviewee stated: “We spend so much time remediating that our high performing students are staying stagnant or regressing because we aren’t providing them the enrichment they need.” Therefore, students performing above grade level rarely had the opportunity to sharpen and practice their Seven Survival Skills inside the classroom. In many cases, they never had the chance to do so outside of the classroom. Had OST been able to partner students who are performing at or above grade level with an outside company or a local business to do an apprenticeship or internship over the summer and during the course of the school year, these higher performing students would have been able to sharpen and practice their Seven Survival skills in a safe environment other than school.

This would have given them ample opportunities to be agile and adapt and think like an entrepreneur. At the school level, OST should work to find a curriculum that is rigorous and accommodating to the various levels of students in the classroom. In doing so, students who perform at or above grade level have the opportunity to sharpen their survival skills by actively displaying what they have in a culminating project, what they have learned in their internships and apprenticeships. This project should be something that students are passionate about and that involves their using their skills to enact positive change in their school. An example of a passion project could be the fifth graders reading texts about the role community service projects plan in creating a community. In essence, a team of fifth graders will be responsible for working with the second and third grade teachers in order to bring the second and third grade classes together for different types of service projects.

The type of synergy and engagement would allow OST to not only begin to close the opportunity gap, it will also allow enable the district to engage students, at such an early age, in having a positive impact on their community and school. “It enables students to absorb and retain
content, that is crucial for their success—not just in school, but also on whatever path they take after graduation” (Jensen, 2013, p. 25). It is awesome the impact they could be having as eighth graders with six more years of opportunities like this to sharpen and practice their Seven Survival Skills.

Another barrier is that high-poverty turnaround schools often have a difficult time staffing their schools. In Crystal Pond, teachers are paid based on their degrees and years in the district. There is no incentive for teachers to work in high-poverty schools. Because this is the case, the high-poverty turnaround schools often start the year with substitute teachers filling in for regular classroom teachers, especially in elective and high needs areas. In addition, “Too many teachers leave the classroom within the first five years, especially in high-poverty schools” (Ravitch, 2014, p. 91). So, not only is it difficult to find quality teachers, it is even harder to retain them. In some cases, teachers leave in the middle of the year or take an extended period of time off.

In one OST school, there was a group of students who had gone four years without receiving a full year of teaching from the same teacher. Now imagine a situation where that school was a school that trained STEAM teacher residents and these teacher residents spent a full year learning from highly skilled teachers. After their year of training, these STEAM teachers would become full time teachers in those same schools or schools with similar demographics in the district. This program will help mitigate a couple of issues that many turnaround students face. First, the school will have extra adults, although teachers in training, to help pull small groups and in dire circumstances actually serve as a constant substitute in a class. While this is not ideal, it is much better than the alternative of having students run through twenty to twenty-five different substitute teachers, piling forty-five to fifty-five students in a classroom with a
teacher or having random classes covered by parent volunteers who do not have the training to
deliver any type of instruction.

Most importantly, these STEAM residents would become teachers of record the
following school year, filling high-need, hard to find positions with highly qualified, trained and
skilled teachers in these respective schools. By flooding schools with these trained STEAM
teachers, we now have replaced classrooms that have been taught by substitute teachers and
parent volunteers with teachers who have spent a full year learning how to teach low-income
students rigorous instruction while building relationships with students, parents and other
teachers, and learning the nuances and skills of highly-effective teachers. No more teacher
shortages, no more burdening other teachers because they are carrying the load of two,
sometimes three teachers. What you now have is a team of teachers who are trained to handle the
rigors of poverty in the classroom while still providing low income students with rigorous, high
quality instruction and holding them to very high expectations every day of the year.

The purpose of my project was to shine a light on some of the many systemic issues
facing students who attend high-poverty, turnaround schools. Most importantly, I wanted to
provide systemic solutions and policies that could highlight the amazing talent that these students
all possess. In all honesty, students who attend high-poverty turnaround schools need much more
support, and as constructed, districts and teachers are just not equipped to provide that level of
intense support.

Leadership Lessons

What this process has revealed is that the difference between students who attend high-
poverty, turnaround schools and their more affluent counterparts is that their more affluent
counterparts will have opportunities like apprenticeships and high-quality teachers and tutors
strategically embedded in their lives because their parents can pay for private tutoring or just have a friend who could grant their child the opportunity for a free summer internship. So, while the Opportunity Initiative and The Opportunity for Post-Secondary Success Initiative policies have the potential to be great policies that are important steps in getting us closer to closing the opportunity, they are only a small step.

I have learned a lot in my research and analysis in trying to figure out the best ways to close the opportunity gap for urban, minority students who attend high-poverty, turnaround schools. One of my biggest learnings is that it is not enough to just focus on the achievement gap. While districts have to work very hard to close the achievement gap, the work just cannot stop there. Districts have to continue to push the envelope to ensure that students are learning how to develop, practice, and utilize their survival skills in a meaningful way.

Another learning I have had during this process is recognizing how previous policies designed to help have in some ways been counterproductive. For example, many of the technical solutions that schools have employed revolve around how districts and states are holding schools accountable. Much of the accountability process focuses on test scores. This is positive because we can track how well we are closing the achievement gap. However, in working to close the achievement gap, schools are making decisions to stay off a school closure list instead of thinking long term about the success of all students. Districts need to create accountability systems that are not so dependent on test scores.

For the past two decades, even before No Child Left Behind, the U.S. educational system has had an unhealthy focus on testing and accountability-unhealthy because it has driven public policy to concentrate on standardized tests of uneven quality at the expense of the more important goals of education like character and
love of learning goals...When overused and misused, when attached to high stakes, the tests stifle the very creativity and ingenuity that our society needs most (Ravitch, 2014, p. 313).

However, my biggest learning revolves around the intended and unintended impact poverty has on a school and school community. During my research, I saw too many examples how poverty has paved the road to high school dropout for students. For example, in some cases, students could not afford to make it school; in other cases, students had to attend up to five schools in one year. Poverty has had a strong impact widening the opportunity gap. Linda Darling-Hammond states,

- The opportunity to learn - the necessary resources, the curriculum opportunities, the quality teachers - that affluent students have, is what determines what people can do in life (as quoted in Coutts and LaFleur, 2011, para. 8)

My purpose is to ensure that every student regardless where they live, regardless of what their parents do for a living, has access to high-quality educational experiences by ensuring that principals, district and state leaders are all held accountable to keeping that promise to all of their students. Moreover, I promise to support school leaders and districts by advocating for policies like the Opportunity Initiative and The Opportunity for Post-Secondary Success Initiative. The goal is to shatter this Opportunity Myth and make educational opportunities a real possibility for ALL of the students right in their own neighborhoods.
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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW INFORMED CONSENT

My name is Cleophas Rodgers, and I am currently a doctoral student at National Louis University. I am asking you to participate in this study, “Closing the Opportunity Gap for Urban, Minority Students in Turnaround Schools,” occurring from January 2015 to June 2018. I intend to evaluate how AUSL supports their turnaround schools when it comes to closing the opportunity gap for urban, minority students. By gathering data on the strengths and growth areas of your organization, my research will inform a cycle of reflection or continuous improvement to help better support our urban, minority students. Ultimately, this program evaluation will guide the work of the network staff development committee and provide a strong vehicle to help continue to close the opportunity gap for students in turnaround schools. This form outlines the purpose of the evaluation and provides a description of your involvement and rights as a participant in the focus group interview.

By signing below, you are providing consent to participate in a research project conducted by Cleophas Rodgers, doctoral student at National Louis University.

Please understand that the goal of this program is to evaluate how effective AUSL is in supporting their turnaround schools when it comes to closing the opportunity gap. This particular turnaround organization has produced student achievement gains in a short period of time due to their increased focus on climate and culture, instructional practices, and behavior management. However, in evaluating this program, I would like to do a deep study into the curricular resources, the professional development and the community partnerships that are in place to see what impact, if any, all of these have on closing the opportunity gap for poor, minority students enrolled in turnaround schools. For the purpose of protecting confidentiality,
all participants, the one turnaround organization, and the school district mentioned in this study have been assigned pseudonyms.

Participation in this study will include an interview of 5 to 7 network leaders. The interview will be conducted in a semi-structured format in a conference room of your school building. It is estimated that the interview will last approximately 45 minutes. While an audio-recording of the interview will be done to assist with the analysis of transcripts, your identity will remain anonymous. Your responses will be coded by T1, T2, etc. Any other identifying information will not be connected to your interview responses.

Only I will have access to the digital interview recordings and transcript notes. They will be physically safeguarded on my password protected hard drive. Upon completion of the research, I will delete/destroy all recordings and notes from the interview.

Your participation is voluntary and can be discontinued at any time without penalty or bias. The results of this study may be published or otherwise reported at conferences, and used to inform professional learning practices, but participants’ identities will in no way be revealed (data will be reported anonymously and bear no identifiers that could connect data to individual participants).

There are no anticipated risks, no greater than those encountered in daily life. Further, the information gained from this study could be useful to our school district and other districts looking to evaluate ways to close the opportunity gap.

Upon request you may receive summary results from this program evaluation and copies of any publications that may occur. Please email the researcher, Cleophas Rodgers, at cleophas.rodgers@gmail.com to request results from this evaluation.
In the event that you have questions or require additional information, please contact the researcher, Cleophas Rodgers at cleophas.rodgers@gmail.com or 773-220-0238.

If you have any concerns or questions before or during participation that have not been addressed by the researcher, you may contact:

- Dr. Harrington Gibson, Assistant Professor/NLU Director for Educational Leadership Doctoral Program, by email at harrington.gibson@nl.edu or by phone at 224-233-2290;
  or
- Shaunti Knauth, Chair of NLU’s Institutional Research Review Board, by email at shaunti.knauth@nl.edu; or by phone at 312-261-3526;

- The IRRB chair is located at National Louis University, 122 South Michigan Avenue, Chicago, IL.

Thank you for your consideration.

____________________________________  ____________________________________
Participant’s Signature                      Date

____________________________________  ____________________________________
Researcher’s Signature                      Date
APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW EMAIL

Dear District Leaders,

Your input is needed! I am conducting a program evaluation of the network’s effectiveness in closing the opportunity gap with turnaround students. I would like to add some additional qualitative data to provide greater context and depth to the data that’s available to the public.

You are invited to participate in an interview. It should last approximately 45-60 minutes. I am interested in documenting diverse perspectives on how your network is closing the opportunity gap for its students and identifying important gap closing practices across the network.

Please indicate your willingness to participate using this online form. If you are selected, I will provide you with an informed consent form and a meeting date/time. Please be assured that your identity and interview responses will remain anonymous. Alphanumeric labels will be used on all transcripts. Recordings and transcript will be held my password-protected laptop and destroyed at the conclusion of my study. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Thank you for your consideration,
Cleophas Rodgers Jr
Principal, Dewey School of Excellence
cleophas.rodgers@gmail.com
773-220-0238
APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Thank you for agreeing to meet with me. The purpose of this interview is to add context and detail to the public data available to the public regarding your network. I hope to gain ideas for how the network can continue to close the opportunity gap for students who attend turnaround schools. Before we begin, I would like to review a few ground rules for the interview.

a. I am going to ask you several questions; we do not have to go in any particular order but I do want you to think of this as a discussion.

b. I am interested in your opinions and whatever you have to say is fine. There are no right or wrong answers. I am just asking for your opinions based on your own personal experience. I am here to learn from you.

c. Don’t worry about having an opinion that might offend someone. Remember all responses are confidential.

d. Do not feel that you need to answer every question.

e. I am recording the interview today and also taking notes because I don’t want to miss any of your comments. I will treat your answers as confidential. I will not include your names or any other information that could identify you in any reports I write. I will destroy the notes and recordings after I complete my evaluation. In the meantime, the recordings and notes will be kept on my password-protected hard drive.

f. Finally, this interview is going to take about 45 minutes. Do you have any questions before we start?
APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Setting the context:
1. What is your educational theory of action?
2. What is your educational theory of action regarding urban education?
3. Is urban education important to you? Why/Why not?
4. How would you define the opportunity gap that exists for students who attend urban schools?
5. In what areas as an educational community do you feel we have made some real progress in closing the opportunity gap for urban, minority students education over the last 5 years?
6. How has your organization taken steps to close the opportunity gap for urban, minority students?
7. For the sake of this interview and the research being conducted, I’d like to ask more follow up questions about some of the areas you have brought up

Professional Development:
1. In the work that you do, do you feel as if you are closing the opportunity gap for students who attend turnaround schools? Why or why not?
2. What are some key leadership moves that you have made, in your positions as (fill in position) in order to close the opportunity gap for students who attend turnaround schools?
3. How has the turnaround organization supported you in these areas?
4. Has professional development for teachers changed in the last 5 years to better help with closing the opportunity gap? How? What impact do you think it has had in helping to close the opportunity gap?
5. Has professional development for assistant principals changed in the last 5 years to better help with closing the opportunity gap? How? What impact do you think it has had in helping to close the opportunity gap?
6. Has professional development for principals changed in the last 5 years to better help with closing the opportunity gap? How? What impact do you think it has had in helping to close the opportunity gap?
7. Has professional development for you changed in the last 5 years to better help with closing the opportunity gap? How? What impact do you think it has had in helping to close the opportunity gap?
8. How would you like to see professional development change for teachers over the next 5 years in order to continue to close the opportunity gap for students who attend turnaround schools? What issue would this address?
9. How would you like to see professional development change for assistant principals over the next 5 years in order to continue to close the opportunity gap for students who attend turnaround schools? What issue would this address?
10. How would you like to see professional development change for principals over the next 5 years in order to continue to close the opportunity gap for students who attend turnaround schools? What issue would this address?
11. How would you like to see professional development change for you over the next 5 years in order to continue to close the opportunity gap for students who attend turnaround schools? What issue would this address?
**Curricular Resources**

1. Do curricular resources play a role at schools in closing the opportunity gap?
2. What curricular resources do you have at your school?
3. How have the different curricular resources changed over the last 5 years?
4. Which of those curricular resources has had an impact on closing the opportunity gap at your schools?
5. Why have those resources been more successful?
6. Why were some of the other resources not as successful?
7. How are teachers and school leaders maximizing these resources in order to close the opportunity gap?
8. What organizational systems are in place at the school level that ensures these resources are closing the opportunity gap?
9. What support has the turnaround network given in determining the curricular resources used at a given school?
10. What do you think is the turnaround network’s philosophy on curricular resources?
11. What criteria are schools using to select the different curricular resources? Does this help close the opportunity gap?
12. Do your leaders rely on you to determine the curricular resources are they adept and well versed on them to do so on their own?
13. What qualitative or quantitative data is being used to select curricular resources?
14. Do schools use technology based curricular resources? What impact do you think these technology-based curricular resources have on closing the opportunity gap?
15. How does the school support teachers in implementing these curricular resources? Are these leadership moves designed to help close the opportunity gap?
16. How does the turnaround network support, principals, and teachers in implementing these curricular resources? Does this support help close the opportunity gap?
17. What more needs to be done to ensure that the correct curricular resources are in front of students and being used appropriately for schools to close the opportunity gap for students in turnaround schools?

**Community Partnerships:**

1. Do community partnerships play a role at schools in closing the opportunity gap?
2. What community partnerships do you have at your schools?
3. How have the different community partnerships and the role they’ve played in schools changed over the last 5 years?
4. Which of those community partnerships has had an impact on closing the opportunity gap at your schools?
5. Why have those partnerships been more successful?
6. Why were some of the other community partnerships not as successful?
7. How are teachers and school leaders maximizing these partnerships in order to close the opportunity gap?
8. What organizational systems are in place at the school level that ensures these partnerships are closing the opportunity gap?
9. What support has the turnaround network given in determining the community partnerships used at a given school to help schools close the opportunity gap?
10. What do you think is the turnaround network’s philosophy on community partnerships?
11. What criteria are schools using to determine which community partnerships to pursue? Does this help close the opportunity gap?
12. Do your leaders rely on you to determine the community partnerships needed are they adept and well versed on them to do so on their own?
13. What qualitative or quantitative data is being used to select community partners?
14. How does the school support teachers in fully taking advantage of these community partnerships? Are these leadership moves designed to help close the opportunity gap?
15. How does the turnaround network support, principals, and teachers in working with these community partnerships? Does this support help close the opportunity gap?
16. What more needs to be done so that schools can effectively utilize community partnerships to help close the opportunity gap for students in turnaround schools?

**Miscellaneous Questions:**
1. How do you know when your schools are closing the opportunity gap for their students?
2. What metrics do you use to determine whether or not schools are closing or widening the opportunity gap?
3. What are some practices that are happening in schools that you would consider opportunity gap closing practices?
4. When you were hired, was there anything in your job description that mentioned closing the opportunity gap? What was the language that was used?
5. How often do you and your team reference closing the opportunity gap when you meet?
APPENDIX E: THEMES:

**Theme 1:** There was a huge focus on closing the achievement gap and raising test scores.

**Theme 2:** Community Partnerships existed, but they were not an extension of the material students were learning in school.

**Theme 3:** Students were not receiving a comprehensive educational experience that forced them to use or practice the seven survival skills in any other discipline besides math and ELA.

**Theme 4:** The goals and metrics that the OST and CPSD used to hold their schools accountable focused only on closing the achievement gap and relied heavily on student test scores and student attendance. There were not any metrics that focused on *closing the opportunity gap.*
APPENDIX F: AS-IS ANALYSIS

CULTURE

OST is a results driven organization that has implemented some great data driven practices that have decreased the achievement gap for students in the turnaround network.

The curricular resource has been an emphasis in the network for the last three years. School Leadership Teams, teachers, and teacher leaders have been receiving professional development that revolve around the curricular resource.

The curricular resource has been an emphasis in the network for the last three years. School Leadership Teams, teachers, and teacher leaders have been receiving professional development that revolve around the curricular resource.

OST has put a stake in the ground around a Guaranteed and Visible curriculum for the whole network. However, in the past five years, schools were free to create their own resources to address students gaps.

CONDITIONS

Problem Statement:

Turnaround schools are effective at closing achievement gaps, but not at closing the opportunity gap.

Professional Development happens monthly for all principals and is 90% input but no time for application or process. Also, professional development is a one size fits all regardless of the experience or talent level of the people receiving it.

The curricular resource addresses our need to teach students their on grade level standards. However, over half of our students perform under grade level.

All schools currently have time embedded in their schedules for Multi Tiered systems of support. This time is designed for teachers to use personalized learning and small group structures best support students.

COMPETENCIES

Roughly 5 quarters of the professional development for school leaders and teacher leaders is used as a vehicle to support teachers in implementing the curriculum resources.

The current curriculum that we use has scripted lesson plans for teachers to use to help better guide students to their respective outcomes. As a network, we have created various planning tools to best assist teachers and school leaders in delivering the lessons with fidelity.

CONTEXT

Curriculum:

Schools administer quarterly interim assessments that are aligned to the CCSS in grades 3-8.

Each curricular resource has an end of unit assessment or performance tasks that teachers administer.

Each school takes the NWEA MAP test at least twice a year in reading and math. The spring score is used to determine school ratings.

Currently the network does not offer any professional development to teachers.
APPENDIX G: TO-BE ANALYSIS

CONTEXT

Community Partners:
The Office of School Turnaround has an external affairs department that focuses on school and community partnerships for all 33 schools. These partnerships include internships and apprenticeships that allow students to apply the seven survival skills in a meaningful atmosphere.

CST partners with personalized learning companies in order to train teachers how to incorporate personalized learning structures in their classrooms. All personalized learning structures align to the seven survival skills.

CULTURE

Network Professional Development consists of:

- Principals and Assistant Principals must monthly in their respective Principal Collaboratives to review professional development around the personalized learning strategies and best practices, and various leadership strategies.
- Teacher Leaders must quarterly receive professional development around the personalized learning and leadership strategies that build student advocacy and strengthen students skills.
- Teachers must quarterly share best practices around implementation and curriculum design.

Students build current knowledge by working in their own pace and take assessments on demand. Teachers help students set short-term and long-term goals and connect these back to their daily actions.

Students engage with projects that connect the classroom to the real world. When students work in teams, they apply what they're learning to process that mixing and solving real-world problems, they develop strong collaboration, communication, and critical thinking skills.

COMPETENCIES

Ensuring Professional Development for Network leaders, school leaders, and classroom leaders all focus on a personalized learning experience that embodies tasks and activities that force students to practice and sharpen their seven survival skills daily.

The skills used in implementing the curricular resource and learning the standards would then drive the work of building units of studies that align to specific competencies and force students to improve upon the seven survival skills.

All district-external partners are in alignment with this approach to teaching and can provide external support to help the network better support schools in their personalized learning approach and allowing for students to practice those skills outside of the classroom and in real-life situations.

CONDITIONS

There is time built into professional development to coach principals and school leaders around creating sustainable structures that allow for this type of learning to take place. This PD includes:

- How to build a master schedule
- How to coach and support teachers when it comes to personalized learning

Station have been explicitly taught how to advocate for themselves and how to work together as team members and are rewarded positively when they exemplify those behaviors. They are coached in real time, when their behavior needs to be corrected.

EAP and Summit provide on site coaching for schools to help best implement personalized learning structures throughout the school year. These coaches work with the entire team of the organization and not as a separate entity.

CONTEXT

Curriculum Development:

Students receive personalized learning that allows them to build on the seven survival skills of:

- Critical Thinking and Problem-solving
- Collaboration Across Networks and LEAs
- Agility and Adaptable
- Initiative and Entrepreneurialism
- Effective Oral and Written Communication
- Accessing and Analyzing Information
- Creativity and Imagination

There is a curricular resource in place that spans from Pre-K to 12th grade. There is also time built in for students to work on their own pace and receive both intervention and enrichment.

There are opportunities for student to receive instruction and complete tasks based on their ability, not just their respective grade levels.

There are online platforms that are competency-based and allow for student ownership.

Students are aware of what they are learning, why they are learning it, and how they learn best. They become self-directed learners and develop the behaviors and attributes for success.

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