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# Transformative Leadership: A Case Study of Schools in a Network Designed to Improve Turnaround Schools

## Abstract

This summary presents the findings of professional research conducted over one year by a doctoral student working in an urban school district. The purpose of this research was to examine the perceptions of school leaders and teachers in two turnaround school networks that used different approaches to improving student learning outcomes. The goal was to compare one network's approach with the other network's approach to assess what factors leaders and teachers perceived to make a difference in improving student achievement in turnaround schools. One network focused on addressing the turnaround challenge through transformative leadership theory, which includes the following tenets: ( a) a call to action; (b) a demand for social justice; (c) serving ethically; (d) creating praxis; and (e) seeking new solutions. The other network used recommendations from an external consulting group to focus on: (a) more time in school; (b) small group tutoring; ( c) a focus on excellence in leadership and teaching; ( d) the use of data to drive achievement; and (e) a college going culture and high expectations. The research questions in this study were, "What are leaders' perceptions of factors that make a difference in improving student learning outcomes in turnaround schools?" and "What are teachers' perceptions of factors that make a difference in improving student learning outcomes in turnaround schools?"

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Transformative Leadership: A Case Study of Schools in Two Networks  
Designed to Improve Turnaround Schools

Ivan J. Duran

Technical Report

University of Denver  
Morgridge School of Education

Spring 2016

## Table of Contents

List of Tables .....	3
Technical Report Overview .....	4
Review of the Literature .....	8
School Turnaround.....	8
Critique of Turnaround Efforts .....	10
Leadership is Vital .....	11
Transformative Leadership .....	12
Call to Action.....	13
Demand Social Justice .....	14
Serve Ethically .....	16
Create Praxis .....	17
Seek New Solutions .....	18
Description of the Networks .....	19
Cybertron Network .....	19
Chelsea.....	20
Forest.....	21
Marigold.....	21
Chavez.....	22
Innovation Network .....	22
Crusader .....	24
Mustang.....	25
Soaring Wind .....	25
Timber.....	26
Data Sources .....	27
Participants.....	28
Methods of Analysis .....	29
Findings.....	30
Discussion .....	34
Recommendations .....	34
Future Practice .....	34
Future Research .....	36
Summary .....	39
References.....	39
APPENDIX A.....	45
APPENDIX B .....	54
APPENDIX C .....	57

### List of Tables

Table 1 - School Demographic Information for Cybertron Network.....	20
Table 2 - State Scores by Grade Level and Subject for Chelsea Elementary School.....	20
Table 3 - State Scores by Grade Level and Subject for Forest Elementary School.....	21
Table 4 - State Scores by Grade Level and Subject for Marigold Elementary School.....	21
Table 5 - State Scores by Grade Level and Subject for Chavez Elementary School.....	22
Table 6 - School Demographic Information for Innovation Network.....	23
Table 7 - State Scores by Grade Level and Subject for Crusader Elementary School.....	24
Table 8 - State Scores by Grade Level and Subject for Mustang Elementary School.....	25
Table 9 - State Scores by Grade Level and Subject for Soaring Wind Elementary School.....	26
Table 10 - State Scores by Grade Level and Subject for Timber Elementary School.....	26
Table 11 – Leader Experience by Network, Years and Number of Schools.....	28
Table 12 – Teachers Experience by Network, Years and Number of Schools.....	29
Table 13 – Leaders and Teachers Beliefs about the Factors that Make a Difference.....	30
Table 14 – Perceptions of Leaders’ Activities.....	32
Table 15 - Interventions When Students are not Meeting Expectations.....	33

### **Technical Report Overview**

This report presents a summary of professional research conducted over one year by a doctoral student who works in the High Plains Public Schools (HPPS), an urban district in the United States. The purpose of this research was to examine what factors school leaders and teachers in two school networks believed were making a difference in student learning outcomes. Educators in both networks had a commitment to social justice, which guided their work of addressing the problem of consistently low academic achievement.

HPPS enrolls more than 90,000 students with the following demographics: 57 percent Hispanic, 22 percent White, 14 percent African American, 2 percent Multiracial, 3 percent Asian/Pacific Islander, and 1 percent American Indian. Thirty-nine percent of the students are English Language Learners and 70 percent of students are eligible to receive free or reduced lunch.

As in many districts throughout the nation, educators in HPPS are struggling to solve the complex problem of perpetually low student achievement for disadvantaged students. These students live in communities that are racially and ethnically diverse, where the first language is often not English and where poverty significantly affects them. Unfortunately, despite the availability of numerous resources and proposed solutions, there have been few successful attempts to improve schools that have been labeled as failing, also known as “turnaround schools,” due to consistently low student achievement (Calkins, Guenther, Belfiore, & Lash, 2007; Knudson, Shambaugh, & O’Day, 2011; Trujillo & Renee, 2012). This study included elementary schools in two school networks, the Cybertron Network and the Innovation Network, that were designed to solve the problem of low student achievement by creating equitable learning outcomes for all students. In HPPS, networks are comprised of schools that share

geography, grades level or common academic programs. The Cybertron and Innovation networks exemplified a strategic grouping strategy that was based on the commonality of low academic performance and the district's commitment to create social justice by increasing student learning outcomes. However, the networks were organized with different approaches to reform. HPPS is a district where the state education department rates elementary schools based on a combination of academic achievement and growth on the state assessments. According to these criteria, the state rated the schools in the network with the lowest accreditation rating possible, "turnaround." Schools placed in turnaround status are on an accountability clock and have five years to reach higher levels of performance. Schools that do not dramatically increase the achievement necessary to move out of turnaround status within the deadline face additional sanctions by the district and the state (Colorado Department of Education, 2014).

Leaders in the two networks examined strategies for school improvement, and they committed to new turnaround approaches that offered the potential of increasing student outcomes for all students, including students who were achieving below grade level. As the groups reflected on existing practices in low performing schools, leaders recognized the need to change the overall approach to school turnaround, and create new models for improving persistently low performing schools. Although they took different approaches to creating reform, leaders in both networks reflected a commitment to Shields' (2013) theory of transformative leadership because they recognized the "unfilled promises of the world in which our students live, and of working to ensure more equitable and inclusive opportunities for all" (p. 5). Schools in both networks reflected the unfilled promise of academic success for the low diverse students, and district and school leaders were committed to creating more equitable and inclusive educational experiences for their students.

District and school leaders created the Cybertron Network as a new model for school turnaround, so it was in its first year of development. In this network, leaders learned about Shields' (2013) theory of transformative leadership as a guide for educators who want to affect both educational and social change. Leaders selected this approach because of their shared commitment to educational equity and social justice. What appealed to them is that “transformative leadership begins with questions of justice and democracy; it critiques inequitable practices and offers the promise not only of greater individual achievement but of a better life lived in common with others” (Shields, 2010, p. 573). The use of transformative leadership was a starting point for reversing declining achievement trends in four turnaround schools and addressing the inequity students faced. The Cybertron Network focused on the theory of transformative leadership and five key tenets that emerged in literature: (a) call to action; (b) demand social justice; (c) serve ethically; (d) create praxis; and (e) seek new solutions (Shields, 2010; 2013). The goal of leaders in the Cybertron Network was to create a research-based model for systemic improvement in order to increase student learning outcomes. Rather than focusing only on the teaching and learning factors, this group also wanted to consider how student-learning outcomes related to larger systemic issues of social justice (Shield, 2013).

The Innovation Network had been in place for four years with mixed achievement results. District and school leaders created the Improvement Network as a regional feeder pattern solution for schools the state department of education had rated “turnaround.” Staff in the Innovation Network was directed to increase learning outcomes for all students through a partnership with an outside consulting firm, Redwrite, which specialized in reform for schools with low student achievement. School leaders focused on practices identified by the consulting organization as vital to improving achievement (Redwrite, 2011). The Innovation Network



focused on five practices the Redwrite consulting firm identified for addressing the turnaround challenge: (a) more time in school; (b) small group tutoring; (c) focus on excellence in leadership and teaching; (d) use of data to drive achievement; and (e) college going culture and high expectations (Redwrite, 2011).

This study focused on the role of the school leaders in the two networks because there are decades of research that prove that principal leadership has a significant impact on student learning (Klar and Brewer, 2013). In fact, according to Leithwood, Seashore, Anderson and Wahlstrom (2004), leadership contributes 25 percent to a school's student achievement—second only to classroom instruction—among all school-based factors (p. 23). Hess and Gift (2009) argued that effective turnaround leaders have a great deal to accomplish in their roles as principals and estimate that leader performance disparities are to blame for the significant differences in student performance. “While every successful principal is, to some extent, unique, they often share common characteristics, such as how they choose to spend their time and the manner in which they enact their role” (Duke, 2005, p. 7).

Two research questions guided this study. The first question was: What do leaders believe are factors that make a difference in improving student-learning outcomes in turnaround schools? Because leaders do not operate in isolation, the second question focused on the teachers they serve: What do teachers believe are factors that make a difference in improving student-learning outcomes in turnaround schools? To ensure confidentiality of the participants and for purposes of this study, pseudonyms for the networks were used.

## **Review of the Literature**

There are many approaches for improving low performing schools. First, there are many views in the literature about the turnaround challenge and the multiple approaches to solving the challenge (Calkins et al., 2007; Knudson et al., 2011; Trujillo & Renee, 2012). There is also research that argues that the theory of transformative leadership is the way to create systemic change that leads to educational equity and dramatically changing outcomes for students and communities (Eisler & Carter, 2010; Theoharis, 2007; Shields & Warke, 2010; Shields, 2013).

### **School Turnaround**

HPPS is not unique in its failure to improve consistently low performing schools. Calkins, Guenther, Belfiore, and Lash (2007) identify that the majority of reform efforts that were presumably successful and widely promoted in numerous news and education reports were actually not working.

Despite steadily increasing urgency about the nation's lowest-performing schools – those in the bottom five percent – efforts to turn these schools around have largely failed. Marginal change has led to marginal (or no) improvement. These schools, the systems supporting them, and our management of the change process require fundamental rethinking, not more tinkering. We will not make the difference we need to make if we continue with current strategies. That much is clear (Calkins et al., 2007, p. 4).

As a result, it became clear that educators must develop new approaches to improve low performing schools as current turnaround efforts were not working.

In 2009, the United States Department of Education (DOE) revamped reform policies to reverse low academic performance by identifying intensive supports and interventions needed in the 5,000 lowest achieving schools in the country (Knudson et al., 2011). When addressing low performing schools, the transformation model is the most common school reform strategy (Trujillo & Renee, 2012). This model includes the option to replace the school principal, introduces significant instructional reforms, increases learning time and provides flexibility and

support for staff. Despite its name, this model has no direct link to the transformational model of Leadership. The turnaround model is the second most frequently used reform strategy, and the only difference is that district leaders must replace at least 50 percent of the staff and replacing the school leader is optional (Hurlburt, LeFloch, Therriault, & Cole, 2011). A third model, the restart model, requires that school districts hire new leaders and staff to run the school (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). With this model, educators bring in existing or new charter schools to meet the model's requirements (Johnson, 2014). The closure model is self-explanatory. Schools are closed, and students are forced to attend other schools. None of these models has had unilateral success (Calkins et al., 2007; Hess & Gift, 2009; Klar & Brewer, 2013; Trujillo & Renee, 2012). Peck and Reitzug (2012) agree that turnaround strategies have not worked because they are grounded in old corporate management models and business techniques rather than innovative strategies for change. In other words, what educators are adopting as innovative reform practices are strategies that private sector leaders consider outdated and ineffective. Even with the turnaround model of closing a school completely, there is little evidence of positive, sustainable improvements in student achievement. This is likely because students who have to deal with their schools closing are then forced to attend new schools (De la Torre & Gwynne, 2009). Further, "when a school closes, 75 percent of parents won't send their child to a school that is beyond three miles, thus often limiting their options to equally low performing nearby schools" (De la Torre & Gwynne, 2009, p. 27).

The need to solve the complex problem of persistent low achievement is critically important because the majority of struggling schools serve high numbers of students of color, families who meet federal poverty qualifications and families that do not speak English as a native language. Knudson, Shambaugh, and O'Day (2011) emphasize the impact of this

ineffectiveness: “Our collective failure to educate these students results in a cycle of low academic performance, limited skills, and poor career prospects” (p. 2). The bottom line is that when educators fail to help any student master grade-level content, they diminish the opportunity for students to achieve high school graduation, pursue higher education, and establish a career (Hernandez, 2012; Knudson et al., 2011). In fact, over thirty years ago, researchers found that these adverse outcomes were predictable early in a child’s education based on reading data alone (Lloyd, 1978).

### **Critique of Turnaround Efforts**

According to Murphy (2010), there is limited empirical research on turnaround initiatives in education. Improving these schools is urgent and substantial, but to date, existing turnaround approaches have yielded mixed results (Knudson et al., 2011). Further, few turnaround efforts have led to long-term improvements (Klar & Brewer, 2013). These findings align with Thompson, Brown, Townsend, Henry and Fortner (2011) who assert that turnaround efforts require sustained support for three or more years. Research indicates that few turnaround efforts work. Out of 1,098 schools in the United States engaged in turnaround reform in 2009, only 262 were able to significantly improve achievement in the first year, and only 12 of these schools could sustain improvements for more than a single year (Birman, Aladjem, & Orland, 2010). Since 2009, the federal government has been working rapidly to turn around 5,000 of the nation’s lowest performing schools through the School Improvement Grant program (Trujillo & Renee, 2012). Eligible schools could receive up to \$2 million a year. However, the grants do not provide funding for more than three years, nor do they change the inadequate funding structures that exist for American public education. Past research indicates that the grant reforms

are based on weak data, unproven assumptions, and they do not address contradictory evidence of what ultimately drives increases in school performance (Trujillo & Renee, 2012).

Peck and Reitzug (2012) agree that turnaround strategies have not worked because they are grounded in old corporate management models and business techniques rather than innovative strategies for change. In other words, what educators are adopting as innovative reform practices are strategies that private sector leaders consider outdated and ineffective.

When researching past turnaround efforts in contrast to turnaround successes, Finn and Winkler (2010) doubt “whether the billions of federal dollars being channeled into weak schools may be largely wasted, and whether the many would-be turnaround experts and consulting firms springing up around the land to help states and districts spend those dollars are little more than dream merchants” (p. 4). This finding supports the notion that merely increasing funding or allocating additional resources to struggling schools is not a viable solution.

### **Leadership is Vital**

A plethora of research exists on school leadership and its relationship to student and staff learning (Leithwood, Harris, & Strauss, 2010; Shields, 2004, 2013; Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003). Klar and Brewer (2013) identified four key areas that were critical for school leadership, including “setting direction, developing people, redesigning the organization, and managing the instructional program” (p. 771). Turning a failing school into a productive learning environment requires practices, skills and strategies that a school leader must implement and distribute among all staff to affect positive learning and growth outcomes in a school (Leithwood, Patten, & Jantzi, 2010). Leadership is important in any school. However, leadership in low performing schools serving at-risk students is even more critical. These leaders must continually improve school culture, develop staff competence, redesign the organization and

improve the quality of instruction while raising student achievement (Leithwood et al., 2010).

Researchers at the University of Virginia have created a school turnaround program that identifies conditions that build transformative leadership and result in sustainable improvement.

When discussing this work, Duke (2005) states, “One person may not be able to turn a low-performing school around singlehandedly, but my colleagues and I are finding that one person with the right talents, temperament, and training can mobilize the energies of many people to accomplish the task” (p. 35). Duke (2005) describes three essential actions that facilitate turnaround school leaders’ success. For example, “Principals were credited with developing highly focused missions to guide improvement efforts” (p. 7). The missions ranged from an emphasis on reading and literacy to order and safety. “While every successful principal is, to some extent, unique, they often share common characteristics, such as how they choose to spend their time and the manner in which they enact their role” (Duke, 2005, p. 7). When working with successful turnaround leaders, Duke found that the most common use of principal time was observing in classrooms. Further, he found that successful principals distribute leadership among school staff (p. 8). Duke and Salmonowicz (2010) establish that effective turnaround leaders demonstrate strong decision-making skills that create infrastructures to support students’ learning needs. They also emphasized that, because “some of the most difficult decisions a principal must make concern personnel” (p. 52), effective leaders must be able to tactfully deal with incompetence and resistance so they move ineffective staff out while engaging and retaining returning and new staff members.

### **Transformative Leadership**

In HPPS, there are many turnaround practices in place, but the data demonstrates that the existing models are not working to create consistent success, and that district leaders are not

providing principals with supports necessary to be successful in light of the urgent need for change. After examining various leadership models, district leaders identified transformative leadership as an approach that could reverse the failing trends in turnaround schools. One of the key factors that influenced the decision to adopt this model is that, unlike the four federal models, transformative leadership theory has sound research to support its success (Bennis and Nanus, 2007; Foster, 1986; Shields, 2010; Shields, 2013; Shields & Warke, 2010). Another key factor is that transformative leadership is not just about leadership for change in schools alone. It is a theory that requires a commitment by all stakeholders to social justice in the community as well.

Many educational leaders and philosophers, such as Freire (2000), Burns (1978), Theoharis (2007), Eisler and Carter (2010), and Shields (2013), have contributed to the theory of transformative leadership. Transformative leadership practices inspire and motivate people to seek higher levels of collective success. In her book on transformative leadership, Shields (2013) argues that educational leaders must “truly educate all students for individual intellectual excellence and for global citizenship” (p. 9). If educators are to meet the needs of all students, then we must facilitate school cultures that are supportive of learning for all students (Shields & Warke, 2010). At its core, transformative leadership aims to support the success of all students by involving all stakeholders, including the community. Leaders in the Cybertron Network focused on the following tenets of transformative leadership.

**Call to Action.** “Transformative leadership calls for action—action to redress wrongs and to ensure that every child who enters a school has an equal opportunity to participate fully, to be treated with respect, and to develop his or her capabilities” (Shields, 2013, p. 11). Despite findings from contemporary research on this challenge, school district leaders have been unable

to determine what is most effective in serving students who are most at-risk in public education in general, and at HPPS in particular. Bennis and Nanus (2007) purport that a new transformative leader is needed, and this type of leader is one “who commits people to action, who converts followers into leaders, and who may convert leaders into agents of change” (p. 3). To do this, Skrla (2009) recommends using equity audits at the school and district levels to identify where inequities and equities exist. However, this is not enough. Leaders for equity must “sharpen our focus on the beliefs, attitudes, and actions that are necessary to respond to the challenges for change created by the equity audit” (Skrla, 2009, p. 69).

**Demand Social Justice.** Transformative leaders understand that the inequities perpetuated in schools are a result of the inequities perpetuated in society. These inequities adversely affect students’ learning and success (Shields & Warke, 2010). Change agent leaders do not accept the status quo of low achievement for students, and advocate for traditionally marginalized students. As socially just leaders, they conscientiously and proactively challenge the social and political factors in schools that perpetuate the inequities (McWhinney & Markos 2003; Dantley, 2005; Eisler & Carter, 2010; Shields & Warke, 2010). Transformative leadership requires a focus on social justice, and educators throughout the system must be committed to ensuring that every student succeeds. Burns (1978) is one of the seminal researchers of this leadership theory. He argues that leaders should not ignore the influence of enacting values, such as justice and respect to create positive change. However, Burns (1978) emphasizes the need for leaders to go beyond simple surface values to bring forth actions that revolutionize the entire social system, including education. Foster (1986) also makes connections between transformative leadership and education by emphasizing the need for leaders to change existing norms. He calls for leadership that is “critically educative; it can not only look at the conditions



in which we live, but it must also decide how to change them” (p. 185). Transformative leadership “begins with questions of justice and democracy; it reviews inequitable practices and offers the promise not only of greater individual achievement but also of a better life lived in common with others,” and it requires action (Shields, 2010, p. 559).

According to Garcia and Guerra (2004), leaders who are committed to social justice must learn how to move away from deficit thinking in order to create culturally responsive learning opportunities that increase academic outcomes for students in school, at home, and in the community. These leaders must also encourage staff to become aware of their assumptions of poor and culturally diverse families, and ensure that educators do not alienate parents unintentionally (Biag, 2014). Transformative educators must eliminate deficit-based practices that cause reform efforts to fail because the focus is on what students and families cannot do, which prevents real and meaningful change (Garcia & Guerra, 2004, p. 151).

“Social justice in schools has not happened by chance. It takes more than what traditionally has been understood as good leadership to achieve greater equity” (Theoharis, 2007, p. 253). In his study comparing *good* school leaders to *great* school leaders, Theoharis (2007) argues that good leadership is what has perpetuated today’s system of inequitable schools. Good leaders have not spent sufficient time or focused efforts to ensure that there are more just and equitable schools for marginalized students. In contrast, only great leaders have created more equitable and just schools for all students, guided by the leaders’ unwavering commitment to issues of social justice (Theoharis, 2007). These leaders are willing to address and respond to challenges for necessary structural and cultural changes to take place. They create collaborative ways to engage staff in professional learning that focuses on improving the learning outcomes of each student (Duke & Salmonowicz, 2006; Theoharis, 2007). Wilson, Douglas and Nganga

(2013) argue that, unlike traditional models of leadership, transformative leaders demonstrate moral courage in the ways they address misconceptions about marginalized students. Shields and Warke (2010) found that transformative leaders courageously challenge existing social and political norms that have historically led to inequity in schools.

**Serve Ethically.** Many employees—and stakeholders in general—do not trust leaders, and they lack faith in the ethics of leaders (Maritz, 2010; Perucci, 2009; Ujifusa, 2014). According to Maritz (2010), only seven percent of employees trust that their leaders or co-workers have their best interests in mind, and only one in four employees believe and trust their leaders to make the right decisions for themselves and the companies they lead. Many leaders appear incapable of earning the trust of their employees or gaining the support of society in general (Perucci, 2009). This is particularly true in school districts, as many people doubt that public education is effective based on the high number of dropout rates for many students, and they attribute this trend to ineffective leadership (Orfield, Losen, Wald, and Swanson, 2004). Critics further question educational decisions, such as adopting the Common Core Standards, the use of national assessments and the role of teachers' unions (Ujifusa, 2014).

Transformative leaders have high ethical standards and earn the respect of staff and other stakeholders because of their focus on equity (Perucci, 2009). Transformative leaders are committed to the welfare of all the people they serve, and they seek to improve the quality of life for everyone (Caldwell, Dixon, Floyd, Chaudoin, Post, & Cheokas, 2011). These leaders do not focus on their own self-interests; rather, they focus on the long-term interests of stakeholders and society (Caldwell et al., 2011). Transformative leaders are committed to creating results that benefit others rather than maintaining their own power and comfort (Quinn, 2005). Transformative leaders encourage followers to support change. According to Northouse (2010),

ethical leaders are able to do this because they raise the self-awareness of those they serve so they too can move beyond their own self-interests to create change that benefits others. Despite the fact that leaders may not reach their goals of change by creating equity for all, they are committed to improving situations for the students they serve (Dantley, 2005).

**Create Praxis.** The roots of transformative leadership are based on the work of Freire (2000). Shields (2013) describes transformative leadership as a “critical approach to leadership that is grounded in Freire’s fourfold call for critical awareness or conscientization, followed by critical reflection, critical analysis, and finally for activism or critical action against the injustices of which one has become aware” (p. 11). Freire (2000) argues that people must not merely become aware of issues; they must also become critically reflective and be willing to take action. Freire (2000) calls this combination “praxis”. The individual must first recognize injustice, and then experience some type of reflection that eventually motivates one to action that will correct the inequity. It is important to note that critical awareness and reflection, as well as actions, are necessary for praxis to occur. Freire (2000) emphasizes that words without action lead to “idle chatter, into verbalism, into an alienated and alienating blah” (p. 87). With regard to action, Freire (2000) highlights that it cannot “be limited to mere activism but must include serious reflection: only then will it be a praxis” (p.65). Shields (2010) stresses the need “to begin with critical reflection and analysis and to move through enlightened understanding to action—action to redress wrongs and to ensure that all members of the organization are provided with as level a playing field as possible” (p. 572).

Burns (1978) suggests that leaders create authentic and sustainable change when they, as well as their employees, engage in dialogue that raises thinking to higher levels, based on ethical goals. Freire and Macedo (1998) call for dialogue about individual experiences and the

experiences of others. Shields (2004) suggests that dialogue with others is necessary for people to make sense of the world they experience, as well as to learn how to accept others' perceptions and realities. Taylor (1997) asserts that if educators are to create success for every student, including those marginalized by our public schools, they must be concerned with social justice, and developing praxis through reflection, dialogue, and action about the existing inequities and injustices.

**Seek New Solutions.** Because of their commitment to social justice, transformative leaders seek change. They challenge the status quo. Giroux (1992) argues that educational leaders have to become engaged and transformative to challenge existing actions in school systems, or they will simply support the norms of inequity, where some students have privilege while others do not. According to Christensen and Raynor (2013), the most effective leaders seek new solutions to traditional problems. Transformative leaders seek new solutions that lead people to reconsider their assumptions about others, inequity, and how to avoid falling back on old solutions for new issues (Jones, Harris, & Santana, 2008). It is important to note that there are well-known practices for improving academic outcomes for students; however, there is inconsistent implementation of these practices (Brinson & Rhim, 2009). We know the importance of “highly qualified and effective teachers, knowledge and flexible instructional leadership, high expectations for students, staff, and the community, engaging and safe learning, and data driven instructional practices which includes collaborative planning and learning” but applying this “knowledge to transform schools’ success is not an easy or clear task” (Brinson & Rhim, 2009, pp 4-5). Shields (2010) highlights the important role transformative leaders play in creating new solutions to educational challenges:

It is not simply the task of educational leaders to ensure that all students succeed in tasks associated with learning the formal curriculum and demonstrating that learning on norm

referenced standardized tests; it is the essential work of the educational leader to create learning contexts or communities in which social, political, and cultural capital is enhanced to provide equity of opportunity for students as they take their place as contributing members of society. Shields, 2010, p. 572

### **Description of the Networks**

For the purpose of this report, pseudonyms are used for the district, networks and schools. The research includes eight schools in the Cybertron and Innovative Networks, including a combination of official turnaround schools and schools nearing turnaround status due to consistently poor performance. Schools not officially rated as “turnaround” (which was the lowest academic rating possible), but who were low performing, were identified by the district and included in the Cybertron and Innovative Networks. Data was collected from school leaders and teachers in both networks in an effort to determine what school leaders and teachers perceived as factors that are improving student outcomes in turnaround schools.

The four schools in the Cybertron Network are Chelsea Elementary, Forest Elementary, Marigold Elementary and Chavez Elementary. The four schools in the Innovative Network are Crusader Elementary, Mustang Elementary, Soaring Hills Elementary and Timber Elementary. Students attend the schools because they live in the neighborhood. They can also “choice in,” which means they can apply to attend a school in a different neighborhood.

### **Cybertron Network**

All of the elementary schools in the Cybertron Network are HPPS district-run schools. Three of the four schools are currently receiving federal funds administered by grants to support their program improvements. One of the schools, Marigold, was eligible and applied for the federal funds last year. However, the school did not receive this grant funding because the state reduced the funding allotment, and did not select Marigold for a grant. Regardless, HPPS utilized district general fund dollars to provide the school with the additional funds staff

requested in their grant proposal. Table 1 includes the four schools' demographics including enrollment, attendance rates, and percentages of special education students, English language learners, free and reduced lunch rates, and racial/ethnic subgroup information.

Table 1											
<i>School Demographic Information – Cybertron Network</i>											
	<i>Enrollment</i>	FRL	ELL	SpEd	Attendance	Hispanic	AA	White	A/PI	NA	MR
Chelsea	528	98.8%	41.1%	12%	89.9%	83%	8%	5%	1%	1%	2%
Marigold	239	91.2%	24%	16%	92.1%	46%	43%	7%	1%	0	3%
Forest	281	97.5%	37%	21%	93.7%	43%	6%	38%	10%	1%	2%
Chavez	603	98.8%	76%	11%	93.5%	90%	2%	2%	14%	2%	1%

*Note:* FRL = Free and reduced lunch ELL = English language learners. SpEd – Special education students. AA = African American students. A/PI – Asian/Pacific Islander. NA = American Indian students. MR – Multiple race students.

**Chelsea.** Chelsea Elementary School is a neighborhood school with approximately 500 students enrolled in early childhood through fifth grade. The school's enrollment has remained constant over the last five years. Students who choice in to the school represent 40% of the school enrollment, and the majority of these students come from other schools in the district. The 2013-14 Great Plains Academic Assessment (GPAA) scores were below the district averages, as indicated in Table 2.

Table 2			
GPAA Scores by grade level and subject for Chelsea Elementary School. District performance levels are in parentheses.			
Grade Level	Reading/Lectura Scores	Writing/Escritura Scores	Math Scores
3 <sup>rd</sup>	34% (61%)	18% (52%)	30% (55%)
4 <sup>th</sup>	32% (59%)	31% (58%)	59% (52%)

5 <sup>th</sup>	31% (40)	22% (42%)	25% (45%)
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**Forest.** Forest Elementary School is a neighborhood school with students enrolled in early childhood through fifth grade. The school's enrollment has declined over the last five years. In 2010-11, over 300 students were enrolled in the school. Currently, enrollment is at 281 students. Declining enrollment may be attributable to industrial development near the school that has replaced family housing. Students who choice in to the school represent 40% of the school enrollment, and the majority of these students come from other district schools. The 2013-14 Great Plains Academic Assessment (GPAA) scores in all subject areas were below the district averages in most subject areas, as indicated in Table 3.

Table 3 GPAA Scores by grade level and subject for Forest Elementary School. District performance levels are in parentheses.			
Grade Level	Reading/Lectura Scores	Writing/Escritura Scores	Math Scores
3 <sup>rd</sup>	32% (61%)	22% (52%)	35% (55%)
4 <sup>th</sup>	26% (59%)	32% (58%)	50% (52%)
5 <sup>th</sup>	22% (40)	26% (42%)	34% (45%)

**Marigold.** Marigold Elementary School is a neighborhood school with approximately 500 students enrolled in early childhood through fifth grade. The school's enrollment has remained constant over the last five years. Students who choice in to the school represent 40% of the school enrollment, and the majority of these students come from other district schools. The 2013-14 Great Plains Academic Assessment (GPAA) scores in all subject areas, with the exception of fifth grade reading/lectura scores, were below the district averages as indicated in Table 4.

Table 4 GPAA Scores by grade level and subject for Marigold Elementary School. District performance levels are in parentheses.			
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Grade Level	Reading/Lectura Scores	Writing/Escritura Scores	Math Scores
3 <sup>rd</sup>	46% (61%)	28% (52%)	28% (55%)
4 <sup>th</sup>	45% (59%)	17% (58%)	41% (52%)
5 <sup>th</sup>	40% (40)	28% (42%)	15% (45%)

**Chavez.** Chavez Elementary School is the largest school in the sample. It is a neighborhood school with approximately 600 students enrolled in early childhood through fifth grade. The school's enrollment has declined over the last two years, when the enrollment surpassed 700 students. Recent real estate studies revealed that home costs in this area have increased by 20% over the last year, and gentrification is pushing current families out of this neighborhood (Trulia, 2014). Students who choice in to the school represent 37 percent of the school enrollment, and all choice in students come from other district schools. The 2013-14 Great Plains Academic Assessment (GPAA) scores in all subject areas were below the district averages in all subject areas, as indicated in Table 5.

Table 5 GPAA Scores by grade level and subject for Chavez Elementary School. District performance levels are in parentheses.			
Grade Level	Reading/Lectura Scores	Writing/Escritura Scores	Math Scores
3 <sup>rd</sup>	30% (61%)	7% (52%)	39% (55%)
4 <sup>th</sup>	33% (59%)	21% (58%)	49% (52%)
5 <sup>th</sup>	33% (40)	22% (42%)	33% (45%)

### **Innovation Network**

All of the elementary schools in the Innovation Network are HPPS district-run schools. One of the four schools is currently receiving a Turnaround Incentive Grant, administered by the state education department to support program improvements. Similar to the Cybertron Network, HPPS utilized district general funds dollars to provide schools with additional resources that support the school leaders and teachers' turnaround efforts. The schools in this



network were persistently low performing and are generally more geographically isolated and economically disadvantaged than other schools in the district. The schools in the Innovation Network had received innovation status from the district and the state department of education, which involves a formal application process. The Innovation Schools Act of 2008, which still exists, allows schools to have greater school autonomy and flexibility (Colorado Department of Education, 2016). The Act also allows schools to develop innovation plans with more flexibility over staffing, personnel selection, evaluation, scheduling, curriculum, instruction and assessment. Schools can seek waivers from many state and local regulations, including collective bargaining agreements that may interfere with the overall reform practices. School staff and communities in the network were required to write improvement plans, which created more flexibility, including longer school days, a longer school year, and at-will employment for teachers.

Table 6 includes the student demographics at the four schools in the Improvement Network, including enrollment, attendance rates, and percentages of special education students, English language learners, free and reduced lunch eligible students, and racial/ethnic demographic subgroup information.

Table 6											
<i>School Demographic Information – Innovation Network</i>											
	<i>Enrollment</i>	FRL	ELL	SpEd	Attendance	Hispanic	AA	White	A/P	N	M
										A	R
Crusader	506	85%	47%	12%	94%	70%	23%	4%	2%	0	1%
Mustang	566	92.4%	55%	9%	94%	75%	20%	3%	1%	0	1%

Soaring Wind	764	73.6 %	39%	14%	94%	52%	30 %	10%	3%	1	4%
Timber	716	94.5 %	61.5 %	8%	94%	76%	15 %	3%	1%	3 %	2%
<i>Note:</i> FRL = free and reduced lunch. ELL = English language learners. SpEd – Special education students. AA = African American students. A/PI – Asian/Pacific Islander. NA = American Indian students. MR – Multiple race students.											

**Crusader.** Crusader Elementary School is a restart school, because the school re-opened in its current design after a local charter school network voluntarily relinquished its charter due to continued low performance. When the school reopened as a district-run school, a new leader and staff were hired. Crusader is a neighborhood school with approximately 500 students enrolled in early childhood through fifth grade. The school's enrollment has declined over the last two years, and many students who enrolled in the previous charter school remained students at the new version of the school. Students who choice in to the school from outside of the neighborhood represent 28 percent of the school enrollment and all these students come from other district schools. The 2013-14 Great Plains Academic Assessment (GPAA) scores in all subject areas were below the district averages in all subject areas, as indicated in Table 7.

Table 7 GPAA Scores by grade level and subject for Crusader Elementary School. District performance levels are in parentheses.			
Grade Level	Reading/Lectura Scores	Writing/Escritura Scores	Math Scores
3 <sup>rd</sup>	28% (61%)	8% (52%)	19% (55%)
4 <sup>th</sup>	23% (59%)	10% (58%)	23% (52%)
5 <sup>th</sup>	21% (40)	16% (42%)	14% (45%)

**Mustang.** Mustang Elementary School is the only school in this network that received a Tiered Intervention Grant from the state, beginning in the 2012-13 school year. Mustang is a neighborhood school with nearly 600 students enrolled in early childhood through fifth grade. The school's enrollment has declined over the last four years. Students who choice in to the school from outside the neighborhood represent 20 percent of the school enrollment, and the majority of the students come from other district schools. The 2013-14 Great Plains Academic Assessment (GPAA) scores in all subject areas were below the district averages in all subject areas, as indicated in Table 8.

Table 8 GPAA Scores by grade level and subject for Mustang Elementary School. District performance levels are in parentheses.			
Grade Level	Reading/Lectura Scores	Writing/Escritura Scores	Math Scores
3 <sup>rd</sup>	24% (61%)	12% (52%)	18% (55%)
4 <sup>th</sup>	32% (59%)	25% (58%)	49% (52%)
5 <sup>th</sup>	24% (40)	19% (42%)	34% (45%)

**Soaring Wind.** Soaring Wind Elementary School was the only school in this network that had not been identified for turnaround intervention. Due to its relatively greater success, Soaring Wind was included in this network to serve as a model for the other schools. Soaring Wind is a neighborhood school with approximately 700 students enrolled in early childhood through fifth grade. The school's enrollment has increased over the last four years, and it has become one the most popular schools in the region for families due to higher levels of academic

performance and improvement. Students who choice in to the school from outside of the neighborhood represent 30 percent of the school enrollment, and all these students come from other district schools. The 2013-14 Great Plains Academic Assessment (GPAA) scores in all subject areas varied by content and grade level when compared to the district averages, as indicated in Table 9. In some cases, the school is considerably outperforming the district average.

Table 9 GPAA Scores by grade level and subject for Soaring Wind Elementary School. District performance levels are in parentheses.			
Grade Level	Reading/Lectura Scores	Writing/Escritura Scores	Math Scores
3 <sup>rd</sup>	64% (61%)	46% (52%)	66% (55%)
4 <sup>th</sup>	58% (59%)	49% (58%)	74% (52%)
5 <sup>th</sup>	60% (40%)	50% (42%)	62% (45%)

**Timber.** Timber Elementary School has made significant growth in student achievement. Timber is a neighborhood school with over 700 students enrolled in early childhood through fifth grade. The school's enrollment has increased over the last four years by 100 students. Students who choice in to the school from outside of the neighborhood represent 17 percent of the school enrollment, and all these students come from other district schools. The 2013-14 Great Plains Academic Assessment (GPAA) scores in all subject areas were below the district averages in most subject areas, as indicated in Table 10.

Table 10 GPAA Scores by grade level and subject for Timber Elementary School. District performance levels are in parentheses.			
Grade Level	Reading/Lectura Scores	Writing/Escritura Scores	Math Scores
3 <sup>rd</sup>	47% (61%)	16% (52%)	51% (55%)
4 <sup>th</sup>	43% (59%)	23% (58%)	53% (52%)
5 <sup>th</sup>	42% (40)	25% (42%)	37% (45%)

### **Data Sources**

The first stage of data collection involved administering a survey, originally designed by Shields (2010), to learn about the beliefs and actions of school leaders. With Shields' (2015) permission, there were changes made to the original survey questions (C. Shields, personal communication, January 16, 2015). First, this survey did not include specific questions about the school or student demographics because this information was readily available and it could have created the opportunity to identify the respondents; thus adversely impacting confidentiality and anonymity. Second, a question that referred to principal learning that may have taken place at the university where Shields serves on the faculty was changed to reference possible learning opportunities in HPPS. Because Shields did not want to "beg the question" or create bias in survey results, she purposely did not use the term "transformative leadership" in the survey (C. Shields, personal communication, January 16, 2015). Following this same approach, the survey used in this research project did not include the term "transformative leadership" and focused on gathering the perceptions of leadership factors that make a difference in improving student-learning outcomes in turnaround schools.

Too often in turnaround efforts, reformers leave out key stakeholders from the process of determining what is best for the school (Bennett, 2012). Because the researcher was aware that a leader's perceptions of his or her own work may differ from those he or she serves, the second stage of data collection involved learning about the experiences of teachers. The researcher used a version of a survey that Shields designed to understand how teachers view their principals' beliefs about leadership and how principals' actions influence the work of teachers (C. Shields, personal communication, January 16, 2015). Shields' survey included 15 questions about teachers' experiences, instructional practices and perceptions of their principals. With Shields'

(2015) permission, questions about the teachers' current assignments and experiences were not included because this information could identify individual respondents. As with the school leader survey questions, and because Shields did not want to "beg the question" or create bias in survey results, she purposely did not use the term "transformative leadership" in the survey, which this survey also excluded (C. Shields, personal communication, January 16, 2015).

Participants who responded to both surveys shared their perceptions using Techtrics ([www.qualtrics.com](http://www.qualtrics.com)), an online survey program for collecting information from stakeholders. Principals and teachers received a preliminary email at the start of the data collection window, informing them about the project. They also received a request to complete the survey via email. The email included information about confidentiality, start and end dates of the survey, and a link to the survey. Data collected from these participants were aggregated, and there was no way to connect the data directly to any individual. In the Findings Section, there will be discussion about leaders and teachers in each network. However, some of the findings will group leaders and teachers in general and not identify their specific network affiliations due to the aggregation of the data to ensure confidentiality.

### **Participants**

The focus of this research is on school leaders and teachers involved in the Cybertron Network and the Innovation Network. Eight school leaders were included in this research, and seven participated in the survey. Table 11 provides a breakdown of the school leadership experience of respondents.

Table 11 Leader experience by network, years and number of schools.			
Network	Number of years principals have been at the current school	Number of schools where they have served as principal	Total years as a principal
Cybertron A	1	3	15
Cybertron B	2	2	6
Cybertron C	2	1	2
Innovation A	1	2	5
Innovation B	2	3	5
Innovation C	2	1	2
Innovation D	2	1	2

Teachers included instructional staff that provides direct support to students in the classroom, through interventions, or through special services including special education, art and English language acquisition. Out of 284 teachers at schools in the two networks, 174 teachers responded to the survey. In other words, 87 percent of the school leaders responded to the survey and 61 percent of teachers responded to the survey. Table 12 provides a breakdown of the range of teaching experience of respondents.

Table 12 Teacher experience by network, years of experience and number of schools.				
Network where teachers work	Range of years teaching	Average years of teaching	Range of number of schools where teachers have worked	Average number of schools where teachers have worked
Cybertron	1-30	9	1-10	3
Innovation	1-28	7	1-12	3

### Methods of Analysis

To analyze the data and address the research questions, the online mixed methods software program Dedoose ([www.dedoose.com](http://www.dedoose.com)) was used to identify patterns, themes, and

trends that informed the analysis of survey outcomes. First, the researcher uploaded the survey results into the Dedoose software program. Four sets of data were loaded in Dedoose for each set of survey questions. Two sets were from the leader survey results and two sets were from the teacher survey results. Data was coded based on the patterns, themes and trends that emerged in the data.

### Findings

Table 13 identifies the factors that leaders and teachers believe are making a difference in increasing student outcomes.

Table 13 Leaders and Teachers beliefs about the factors that make a difference.				
Factors leaders and teachers believe that make a difference in improving student learning outcomes in Turnaround Schools	Innovation Leaders	Cybertron Leaders	Innovation Teachers	Cybertron Teachers
School culture	X	X	X	X
Systems	X	X	X	X
Performance of educators	X	X	X	X
Empowerment		X	X	X
Vision and beliefs		X		
Supports				X
Feeling valued and trusted			X	X
Communication			X	X



Leaders and teachers in both networks identified school culture, systems, and performance of educators as top factors that make a difference in improving student learning outcomes. This quote best sums up what Cybertron Network respondents said about school culture, “The culture and climate throughout the building for students and staff improves through an increase in building relationships, increasing fun, and implementing work to support equity, crucial thinking amongst students and opportunities to learn.” Innovation Network respondents discussed school culture in terms of addressing affective and behavioral needs of students that could interfere with learning.

When discussing systems, there were similar responses among leaders and teachers in both networks, and their focus was on the importance of data and assessments. Respondents discussed the importance of backwards planning, observing student work, teaching to the standards, and re-teaching when students needed additional support.

When discussing the performance of educators, there was a difference between respondents in the two networks. Those in the Innovation Network focused on the leaders’ role in observation and providing feedback. The Cybertron Network teachers and leaders focused on how to create new ways for collaboration, planning, and developing both individually and collectively.

Table 14 identifies the activities that leaders and teachers believe leaders participate in on a daily, week, monthly or rare basis. Teachers had similar assessments of leaders’ activities despite the different focus areas of leaders in both networks. Despite the focus on transformative leadership as a strategy for improving student outcomes, Cybertron leaders did not believe they engaged in dialogue about student achievement as frequently as Cybertron teachers thought they did. In addition, Innovation teachers and leaders believed this dialogue happened on a regular

basis. It is also interesting to note that Innovation leaders thought they addressed discrimination more frequently than Cybertron leaders did. This was also similar with regard to rejecting deficit thinking. Teachers in both networks thought leaders did this daily. Innovation leaders thought they did this daily or weekly, while Cybertron leaders thought they did this only monthly or rarely. Only Cybertron teachers believed their leaders engaged in dialogue about equity and social justice on a daily basis. Perhaps Cybertron leaders did not realize that they were engaging in these conversations.

Table 14 Perceptions of leaders' activities.				
	Cybertron leaders	Innovation leaders	Cybertron teachers	Innovation teachers
Meetings with teaching teams or groups	D/W	D/W	W	W
Meetings parents or members of the community	D/W	D/W	--	D
Engaging in dialogue about student achievement	M/R	D/W	D	D
Addressing discrimination issues of race, gender, sexual orientation, etc.	M/R	D/W	--	--
Discussing curricular issues with teachers	M/R	D/W	W	W
Rejecting deficit thinking	M/R	D/W	D	D
Observing classrooms	M/R	D/W	W	W
Met with individual teachers	D/W	W/M	W	W

Talking about goals and purposes of education	--	--	D	D
Engaging in dialogue about equity and social justice	--	--	D	--

Table 15 identifies what leaders and teachers believe the leaders did when students were not meeting expectations. All respondents believed leaders discussed the matter with parents, modified instruction, and provided teacher coaching and support cycles. Leaders in both networks thought they had dialogues with teachers, after school classes and provided interventions, but teachers did not identify these factors. Teachers in both networks had dialogue with the principal or other teachers, but leaders did not indicate this.

Table 15 Interventions when students are not meeting expectations				
	Cybertron leaders	Innovation leaders	Cybertron teachers	Innovation teachers
Discussions with parents	X	X	X	X
Modifying instruction	X	X	X	X
Dialogue with teachers	X	X		
Teacher coaching and support cycles	X	X	X	X
After school classes	X	X	--	--
Providing interventions or accelerations	X	X	--	--
Dialogue with the principal or other teachers	--	--	X	X

## **Discussion**

Although the two networks were created with a different focus and existed for different lengths of time, the results of this study found more similarities in leader and teacher responses than differences. Perhaps this is because both networks were working toward creating social justice through improved student achievement in turnaround schools. As a result, elements of transformative leadership and effective practices emerged in results of teachers and leaders in both networks. Because the Innovation Network achievement results have been mixed, and the preliminary achievement data from the Cybertron Network is inconclusive, the focus of the recommendations is based on what district leadership must do to address key findings from this study and ensure they create a clear vision, strategies, and a multi-year plan in place to support schools in turnaround.

## **Recommendations**

The findings in this study indicate that the Cybertron Network, which had expressed a commitment to transformative leadership, did not have significant differences from the Innovation Network. As a result, future practice and future research in Turnaround schools must be more explicit, strategic and unified at the district level.

## **Future Practice**

To start, district leaders as a whole, as well as those who are responsible for improving our lowest performing schools, must begin the work with a clear vision about what they are doing to support turnaround schools. There must be explicit conversations and learning about transformative leadership and an agreement that the approach will, if implemented overtly and consistently, create equitable learning outcomes for students, schools and communities.

In addition, district leaders and the entire central office team must have clear and ongoing conversations about which schools are in turnaround and what the expectations are about the supports they must provide to the schools in an effective and consistent manner. One way to ensure this occurs is for central office support teams to create service agreements with each school so the services provided to these schools are explicit and clear.

To ensure that district leaders and central office staff remain focused on transformative leadership and explicit turnaround support, school districts need to create a senior-level position and hire a proven expert in turnaround and transformative leadership. This person should be a member of the superintendent's leadership team and identified as the advocate who ensures that district policy, strategies and resources are in alignment. This person must be the champion of transformative leadership as the district's turnaround strategy. As needed, this person should also be provided with the authority to remove obstacles and distractions from the work at the school level. Next, any leader who serves in a turnaround school must also become a turnaround and transformative leadership expert. These leaders must also be able to build relationships with central office staff, school staff, students, parents and community members. They must be able to help others understand the tenets of transformative leadership, and create open and ongoing dialogue that addresses social justice, equity and inclusivity.

For true change to occur, professional learning on transformative leadership must occur at every level of the organization. From parents to the superintendent, there must be ongoing discussions about a theory of action focused on transformative leadership and a clear commitment to social justice. As a start, every staff member should read Shields' (2013) book on transformative leadership. The book study should include explicit and public discussions about the content. A district would benefit from participating in the reflection and action

sections at the end of every chapter, as well as the many online examples included in the book support resources. Based on the findings in this study, Appendix C provides an example of the type of dialogue, reflection and action that must occur if educators are truly going to change the predictable outcomes of low achievement for our most marginalized students. Conversations and agreements must be created with students and parents, as Freire (2000) reminds us: “The oppressed must be active in their own liberation or they will simply be objects that must be saved from a burning building (p. 65).

This study also identified effective practices that leaders and teachers believe are making a difference in improving student outcomes. District and school staff must have clear conversations about what practices and agreements they will put in place. This includes addressing the school culture, systems and the performance of educators. In addition, teachers in this study shared that they wanted to be empowered in decision-making, what leaders could do to help teachers feel valued and trusted, and the communication practices leaders used. School leaders and teachers must reach agreements about the frequency that leaders will offer key supports, and they must identify clear and tangible interventions they will use if a student is not reaching learning outcomes.

Change does not happen by chance, so district and school staff also must create explicit strategies for progress monitoring, including measurable benchmarks, check-in strategies and annual expectations so schools know exactly how they will be measured each year.

### **Future Research**

Leaders and teachers in one network adopted the theory of transformative leadership as their focus for creating change; however, the data did not reveal how they went about learning about the theory and the key tenets, or how they applied it in their work. The data also did not

reveal how they shared it with students, parents and community members. Future research should include survey or interview questions that seek to understand how leaders and teachers learned about the tenets of transformative leaders and how they identified key factors for improving student outcomes. This study collected feedback only through surveys of leaders and teachers in the two networks. Future research would benefit from conducting interviews and focus groups to gather more information from respondents. In addition, future research could examine the educational practice and impact that transformative leadership has on a school correlating findings with student achievement outcomes and efficacy.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this research was to examine the factors that school leaders and teachers believed were making a difference in student learning outcomes. Data was collected from educators in two networks that had commitments to social justice, but used different approaches to address the problem of consistently low academic achievement. Results revealed that teachers and leaders identified many similarities in the factors they believed were increasing student learning outcomes despite the fact that the networks used different reform approaches.

Recommendations include the commitment of district and school level educators to transformative leadership as the strategy for improving student learning outcomes. By creating explicit professional learning, conversations and changes in practices, educators will answer Shields' (2013) call for a "new and more comprehensive approach to educational leadership, one that requires leaders to take a stand, embrace the chaos and ambiguity, focus on information sharing and relationships, and develop a strong sense of the core organizational vision (p. 11). This new approach is vital because "the essential work of the educational leader is to create learning contexts or communities in which social, political and cultural capital is enhanced in

such a way as to provide equity of opportunity for students as they take their place as contributing members of society” (Shields, 2010, p. 572).



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## APPENDIX A

### School Leader Survey

We respect your right to choose not to answer any questions that may make you feel uncomfortable. Refusal to participate or withdrawal from participation will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you came to this page by mistake and would like to complete the survey, you may contact Ivan Duran at [iduran@du.edu](mailto:iduran@du.edu).

We invite you to complete the Transformative Leadership in Turnaround Schools - School Leader Survey. This survey includes questions related to your current leadership practices as school leader/your school leaders' leadership practices. The goal of the study is to understand the perceptions and practices of leadership practices in Turnaround Schools and Networks. The benefits of being involved in this study include being able to learn more about leadership practices in turnaround schools in order to improve the training and conditions for current and future schools and leaders. This study is being conducted in partial fulfillment of requirements for doctoral dissertation research. The study is conducted by Ivan Duran. Ivan Duran can be reached at 720-480-9573 or [iduran@du.edu](mailto:iduran@du.edu). This project is supervised by the dissertation advisor and program chair, Dr. Kristina Hesbol, Morgridge College of Education, University of Denver, Denver, CO 80208, 303-871-2496 / [kristina.hesbol@du.edu](mailto:kristina.hesbol@du.edu).

All information gathered for this study is confidential. This means that only my dissertation advisor Kristina Hesbol and I will have access to the information you provide. In addition, when I report information about the survey results, data will be presented for the entire

group of research participants, never for any one individual. Your participation is voluntary, but it is very important. You may choose not to participate in the study and are free to withdraw from the study at any time. Refusal to participate or withdrawal from participation involves no penalty.

Participation in this study should take about 15-30 minutes of your time.

The risks associated with this project are minimal. If, however, you experience discomfort you may discontinue the survey at any time. We respect your right to choose not to answer any questions that may make you feel uncomfortable. Refusal to participate or withdrawal from participation will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Your responses will be identified by code number only and will be kept separate from information that could identify you. This is done to protect the confidentiality and anonymity of your responses. Only the researcher will have access to your individual data and any reports generated as a result of this study will use only group averages and paraphrased wording. However, should any information contained in this study be the subject of a court order or lawful subpoena, the University of Denver might not be able to avoid compliance with the order or subpoena. Although no questions in this interview address it, we are required by law to tell you that if information is revealed concerning suicide, homicide, or child abuse and neglect, it is required by law that this be reported to the proper authorities.



There are two exceptions to the promise of confidentiality. Any information you reveal concerning suicide, homicide, or child abuse and neglect is required by law to be reported to the proper authorities. In addition, should any information contained in this study be the subject of a court order, the University of Denver might not be able to avoid compliance with the order or subpoena.

By beginning the survey, you acknowledge that you have read this information and agree to participate in this research, with the knowledge that you are free to withdraw your participation at any time without penalty.

Decline: If you choose not to participate in the School Leadership Preparation and Practice Survey -School Leader Edition, please mark so below.

I choose to participate       choose not to participate

Please describe your principal assignment.

How many years have you been the principal in this school?

How many schools have you been a principal in?

How many years have you been a principal overall?

Please select the answer the answer that best represents your perspective.

	Not at all	Not Very	Quite	Extremely
How successful do you feel as a principal?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

How do you describe your level of job satisfaction?      ○                      ○                      ○                      ○

1. If you had to describe your current leadership style, what words would you choose?

(Check as many that apply)

Bureaucratic

Distributed/distributive

Hierarchical

Authoritarian

Transactional

Laissez-faire

Transformative

Collaborative

What factors led to the persistently low performance of your school that made it a turnaround school?

What is your vision for the school you lead?

What values and beliefs guide your leadership work?

Name the factors that allow you to feel successful as a turnaround school leader.

Think about the leadership practices and actions you have taken in the following area:

Support and Empowerment for Change

What supports have been instrumental and pivotal in your success and ability to enact change as a school leader?

What observable changes have taken place in your school’s organizational context?

What outcomes do you anticipate as a result of your leadership actions?

What additional supports would facilitate your success as a turnaround school leader?

How often do you engage in the following activities?

	Never	Rarely	Daily	Weekly	Monthly
Meeting					
with individual teachers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Meeting					
with teaching teams or groups	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Engaging					
in dialogue about student achievement	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Meeting  
with parents or  
members of the  
community

<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------

Observing  
in classrooms

<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------

Rejecting  
deficit thinking

<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------

Talking  
about the goals  
and purposes of  
education

<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------

Engaging  
in dialogue about  
equity and social  
justice

<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------

Helping  
you address  
discrimination  
(issues of race,  
gender, sexual  
orientation, and  
so forth)

<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------

Discussin

g curricular issues           ○           ○           ○           ○           ○

with teachers

Discussin

g issues related to  
citizenship and           ○           ○           ○           ○           ○

democratic

education

Participati

on on committees           ○           ○           ○           ○           ○

you think are

important

Overall, how successful do you feel you are with....

	Not at all	Somewhat	Quite a lot	Extremely	I'm not sure
Supporting teachers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Making teachers feel valued	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Creating an inclusive environment in the school ensuring that all students learn	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Preventing teachers from feeling overwhelmed	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Preventing the overemphasis on curriculum	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Engaging in dialogue with	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

teachers about

students' success

Focusing on

student learning

Working

with the

instructional

superintendent

Working

with parents

Communicat

ing with all

stakeholders in the

school community

Including all

voices in decisions

Explaining

decisions and

policies that are

made

When students are not meeting expectations, what strategies do you and teachers engage in? Check as many as apply and add your own comment please.

Noon-hour remediation	Test preparation classes
Saturday activities	After school classes
Modifying instruction	Providing interventions for acceleration
Dialogue with teachers	Discussion with parents
Coaching/support cycles	

What are the most successful activities/strategies used in your school to support student learning?

Please identify three major challenges or frustrations you face in your daily work.

Challenge 1                      Challenge 2                      Challenge 3

What are the three most critical actions you take to help teachers be more successful?

Action 1                      Action 2                      Action 3

What are the three most critical actions you take to make teachers feel valued?

We appreciate your time in completing the survey and providing information that can be used for improving leadership practice and policies related to the turnaround leadership development and practice. If you are happy with your responses, click "Submit" below.

## **APPENDIX B**

### **Teacher Survey**

1. I understand that responding to this survey comprises my assent to participate in this research.



1. Introduction Teachers' Perceptions of School Leadership

Yes          No

Please describe your teaching assignment.

1. 2.

How many years have you taught in this school?

How many schools have you taught in?

How many years have you taught overall?

What grade(s) do you teach?

What subject(s) do you teach?

2. How successful do you feel as a teacher?

Not at all          Not very          Quite          Extremely

3. How do you describe your level of job satisfaction?

Not at all          Not very          Quite          Extremely

4. If you had to describe your principal's leadership, what words would you choose?

Check as many as apply.

Bureaucratic

Distributed/distributive

Hierarchical

Authoritarian

Transactional

Laissez-faire

Transformative

Collaborative

Please explain:

5. What other words might you use to describe your principal's leadership?

Check as many as apply.

Trustworthy          Inconsistent          Predictable          Unpredictable

Volatile          Humorous          Charismatic          Authentic

Unassuming          Hierarchical          Ethical          Approachable

Unapproachable          Focused          Grounded          Belligerent

6. How often does your principal engage in the following activities?

	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Rarely	Never
Meeting with individual teachers					
Meeting with teaching teams or groups					

Engaging in dialogue about student achievement					
Meeting with parents or members of the community					
Observing in classrooms					
Rejecting deficit thinking					
Talking about the goals and purposes of education					
Engaging in dialogue about equity and social justice					
Helping you address discrimination (issues of race, gender, sexual orientation, and so forth)					
Discussing curricular issues with teachers					
Discussing issues related to citizenship and democratic education					
Involving you on committees you think are important					

7. Overall, how successful do you believe your principal is with...?

	Not at all	Somewhat	Quite a lot	Excellent
Supporting teachers				
Making teachers feel valued				
Creating an inclusive environment in the school ensuring that all students learn				

Preventing you from feeling overwhelmed				
Preventing the narrowing of the curriculum				
Engaging in dialogue with teachers				
Focusing on student learning				
Working with the instructional superintendent				
Working with parents				
Communicating with the wider community				
Focusing on important matters				
Including all voices in decisions				
Explaining decisions and policies that are made				
Developing a sense of community in the school				

8. When students are not meeting expectations, what strategies do teachers in your school engage in? Check as many as apply and add your own comment please.

- Noon-hour remediation
- Saturday activities
- Modifying your instruction
- Dialogue with the principal and/or other teachers
- Coaching/support cycles
- Other (please specify)
- Test preparation classes
- After school classes
- Changing their class level
- Discussion with parents

9. What are the most successful activities/strategies used by your principal to support student learning?

10. Please identify three major challenges or frustrations you face in your daily work.

- a.
- b.
- c.

11. How do you attempt to overcome the challenges you have identified above?
12. What, if anything, does your principal do to help you be more successful in your position?
13. What, if anything, does your principal do that makes you feel valued?
14. Are there any ways in which your principal makes your job more difficult or less satisfying?
15. How does your principal spend most of his or her time?

**Prioritize the following in order of what you perceive to be most important to the principal of your school. (1 being the most important and 15 the least).**

Planning for meetings	Disciplinary issues	Examining data
Avoiding conflict	Observing in classrooms	Developing good citizens
Meeting with groups of teachers	Focusing on student learning	Focusing on equity/social justice
Preparing state/board reports	Developing positive staff relations	Engaging in dialogue about difficult issues
Working on community relations	Developing a rich and challenging curriculum	

## APPENDIX C

### Dialogue

Survey respondents gave numerous examples of the need to create “a culture of excellence where students have access to high quality instruction,” to develop “innovative ways to support students with instruction” and creating culture that allows “staying connected with kids.” To do this, district and school leaders who want to create inclusive and equitable learning outcomes, must create space for dialogue that is open and ongoing. Below is a list of guiding practices to start the conversations.

- Staff must discuss what it means to have a school culture that demands high quality instruction that is enjoyable and discuss this with students and parents to reach mutual agreement and commitment.
- Staff, students and parents must discuss what makes a school culture of excellence and how they can work together to create it.
- Staff, students and parents must have conversations about what it means to believe in students and how they can work together to help students succeed.
- Staff must have conversations about what they expect and need from professional development that helps them analyze data to drive student learning.
- Staff, students and parents must discuss what it means to believe in equity and how they can eliminate deficit thinking.
- Staff, students and parents must create space to discuss what it means to have positive and collaborative relations with each other.
- Staff must talk with students to learn what they are interested in and who they are.

### Reflection

As Freire (2000) and Shields (2010) remind us, for true change to take place, there must be time for critical reflection about how we move from the current state to the ideal. Leaders and teachers in both networks discussed the importance of using data and assessments to reflect upon what is needed for students. Although they did not use the term “reflection” explicitly, the data did indicate time for “serving as a sounding board after examining data” and the need for “coaching” that identified “next steps” or “areas for improvement.” It is imperative that educators collaborate to create space and time for reflection about teaching, learning and creating truly equitable schools. Below are examples of the areas that are a starting point for reflection.

- There must be ongoing time for staff, parents and students to reflect on how to build engaging and trusting relationships with each other.
- Teachers must have time to reflect on their teaching based on prompt feedback from leaders and observers.
- There must be space for staff to think about what may interfere with their belief that every student can learn and succeed.
- Students and parents must also be invited to reflect on their own expectations of student success and potential.
- There must be opportunities for staff to contemplate if they are truly being student centered.
- Staff must have the opportunity to consider the best ways to collaborate with each other, students and parents to create positive relationships.
- There must be ways for staff, students, and parents to think about what it means to have a true culture of excellence.

### **Action**

To avoid “idle chatter or the blah” of perpetually low achievement, school communities must ensure that they commit to action that result in more equitable schools and a more just society (Shields, 2010). Respondents in this study identified many actions for increasing student outcomes. For example, one teacher stated, “My coaching/feedback sessions have been invaluable to my students’ learning. The coaching has been positive and small realistic next steps were always identified.” District and school leaders who want to create true educational reform that results in successful for all students must:

- Express joy and happiness about the opportunities to collaborate, serve students and improve communities.
- Change the culture so there is trust among staff, students, and parents.
- Create opportunities for shared decision-making that allows teachers to be leaders and students to be engaged in and excited about learning.
- Ensure that professional development on data driven instructional practices allows teachers to individualize instruction and re-teach as needed, students to learn where they are and how to get where they are going, and parents to understand how students are learning and growing.
- Create school wide asset-based rituals and procedures that provide students with social emotional supports and restorative practices.
- Ensure that teachers, students and parents learn from each other and celebrate this collaboration.
- Create communication practices that are engaging, prompt, and where asking questions about how teachers, students and parents are doing is accepted and valued.
- Extend learning opportunities for students that are academic and enriching.

- Provide leaders and coaches who are supportive and positive and who provide job embedded professional development for teachers.