Turnaround Schools: A Comparative Case Study

of Two Small Schools

by

Consuelo S. Manriquez

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The Undersigned Faculty Committee Approves the

Dissertation of

Dr. Consuelo S. Manriquez

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of Two Small Schools

Joseph Johnson, Chair
Educational Leadership Department

George Cameron
Educational Leadership Department

Euz M. Chung
Education Studies Department, University of California at San Diego

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Approval Date
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Consuelo S. Manríquez
ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the phenomenon of turnaround schools. This study deepened the understanding of how low-performing high schools, with large percentages of Latino students, turn around and become high-performing high schools where student achievement improvements are sustained. The study examined the context in which a turnaround effort began and the various catalysts for change and impediments to change. As well, the study described the practices, policies, and procedures that influenced dramatic improvements in learning results for Latino students. Also, the study explored the systems and structures that have helped sustain improved learning results. More importantly, the study compared and contrasted the factors that have influenced and inhibited change in a similar school that started with many similar contextual problems and opportunities, yet failed to gain momentum for change.

In particular, this study analyzed the principals’ role in initiating, supporting, and sustaining change in a turnaround school. This study sought to identify the attributes and actions of educational leaders in the turnaround high school. In particular, the researcher examined how leaders’ behavior differed in these two schools and how those differences influenced the achievement of Latino students.

This study examined the literature that might inform a study of turnaround schools. In particular, this study explored the historical context of educational reform movements intended to improve teaching and learning for students in underperforming schools. This historical context included the studies commonly referred to as effective schools research. Also, because the study of turnaround schools is fundamentally a study of organizational change, this chapter described the literature concerning organizational
change and school change. The review would be incomplete without attention to the literature that addresses potential levers of dramatic change in school. For example, some researchers have suggested that culturally proficient leadership and culturally responsive teaching may be means to promote equity for Latino students in schools. Finally, this study examined recent literature concerning successful and unsuccessful efforts to turn around chronically low-performing schools that have a large population of English Language Learners students.
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CHAPTER 1—INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

The achievement gap between Whites and other racial/ethnic groups is a critical issue facing U.S. public schools. Historically, Latino and African American students have had the lowest achievement rates in American public schools (M. H. López, 2009). Latinos, around two-thirds of whom are of Mexican descent, have become the fastest growing minority group in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001) and the most educationally at-risk population (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). The continuous underachievement of Latino students is of grave policy concern in the United States and particularly in California (Grogger & Trejo, 2002). The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2004) reported that 86% of Latino eighth graders read below grade level. Bridgeland, Dilulio, and Balfanz (2009) reported that one-third of public high school students, and almost one-half of Latino students, fail to graduate every year.

Demographic trends reflect a rapid growth of Latinos in the United States. According to the 2000 Census records, the population growth rate for Latinos is 61%, compared to 3% for Whites and 21% for Blacks (Zhou, 2003). Latinos are the largest and fastest growing racial/ethnic minority group in the United States (Yosso, 2006). Among the Latino groups, there are several subgroups. Chicanos, people of Mexican descent, comprise an estimated 66% of the total Latino population. Chicanos represent the youngest and fastest growing population subgroup in the United States (Yosso, 2006). In the present study, the term Chicano is used interchangeably with Mexican-American. The term Latino is used when it refers to a variety of ethnic subgroups from different countries in Latin American, including Mexico.
Additionally, in the Western region of the United States, native non-Hispanic Whites were the minorities among students enrolled in kindergarten through 12th grade (Davis & Bauman, 2008). The number of Latino students in the nation’s public schools nearly doubled from 1990 to 2006, accounting for 60% of the total growth in public school enrollments over that period. Strong growth in Latino enrollment is expected to continue for decades (NCES, 2004).

California students fall well below national achievement averages (Baker, Griffin, & Choi, 2008). In particular, the achievement of California’s growing Latino student population is substantially below the overall average for the State. Furthermore, in California, the Academic Performance Index (which reports aggregate achievement on a scale from 200 to 1,000) reveals a harsh 145-point gap between Latino students and their White counterparts (O’Connell, 2007). The numerous achievement gaps in California are problems with long histories and complex causes that cannot be easily fixed.

Clearly, progress in closing achievement gaps has been slow. Across the nation, the demographics of urban schools continue to change, as minority populations continue to grow. According to U.S. Census data, Latino students are one fifth of the total K-12 student population (A. Perez, 2009). Recent data suggest that Latino students face major barriers in schools. For instance, 35% of Latino students attend intensely segregated schools where minority students comprise at least 90% of the student population (Alliance for Excellent Education [AEE], 2009). The NCES (2004) reported that 86% of Latino 8th graders read below grade level. In 2005, only 58% of all Latino students graduated from high school on time, compared to 79% of White students (A. Perez, 2009).
For the past 15 years, educational reforms have sought to improve academic achievement in the nation’s lowest performing schools. In 1994, the Improving America’s Schools Act introduced the concept of holding schools accountable for student performance on state assessments. Most recently, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) aimed to improve student performance and close the achievement gaps between low-income students, students of color, and English language learners (ELLs) and their upper-income, White, native-English-speaking counterparts. No Child Left Behind has attempted to address the issue of improving achievement for Latino students, as well as other racial/ethnic groups.

In spite of these reforms, Latinos continue to be at higher risk than students from all other racial/ethnic groups for failing to complete high school and going to college (Gándara, 2005). According to the 2000 U.S. Census (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001), 84% of the White population of 18- to 24-year-olds completed high school compared to only 60% of Latinos. Just about one-half of young adult Latinos did not graduate from high school with their incoming freshman class (Bridgeland et al., 2009). Moreover, only 53% of this age group of Latino students had enrolled in any type of college for 1 year or more (Harvey, 2002). According to a national survey of Latinos conducted by the Pew Hispanic Center, 89% of Latino young adults said that college education is vital for their success in life, yet less than half stated that they themselves planned to get a college degree (M. H. López, 2009).

Clearly, progress has been slow in meeting NCLB’s annual measurable objectives for student proficiency. In 2006-2007, 70% of 98,905 schools nationwide (64,546) made adequate yearly progress; 10,676 schools were labeled as schools in need of
improvement; and 2,302 schools were designated as schools in need of restructuring (U.S. Department of Education [USDOE], 2009). All over the nation, districts are working to turn around their lowest performing schools in order to meet the requirements of NCLB. These underperforming schools face district, state, and federal sanctions of takeover, restructure, or closure.

Recently, the USDOE has emphasized the importance of promoting turnaround schools. United States Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, called upon districts to turn around 5,000 of the nation’s worst-performing schools. The goal is to dramatically reduce the drop-out rate, improve high school graduation rates, and increase the number of students who graduate prepared for success in college and the workplace. Duncan promised federal monies to support turn around efforts (Viadero, 2009).

High school reform has been a priority in educational policy agendas across the nation due to the high drop-out rate and consistently low academic achievement among high school students (Quint, 2006). Educational reforms have not had major impact in most of these low-performing secondary schools. Today’s low-performing high schools face systematic challenges that cannot be addressed by single interventions or after-school programs (Herman et al., 2008).

Throughout the past decade, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation invested millions to help eliminate low-performing large urban high schools by replacing them with small, high-quality high schools or transforming them into smaller learning communities (Miner, 2005). The ultimate objective of this reform was to increase graduation rates and prepare students for college (Miner, 2005). While evidence about small schools’ effects on academic achievement is mixed, studies have shown that school
size has had a larger impact on the learning of disadvantaged and/or low socioeconomic students (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2009).

Unfortunately, public schools in the United States have not been successful in increasing the academic achievement and graduation rates of ELL students. According to the USDOE, there are over 4 million ELL students attending public schools in this country. By 2020, more than half of the public school system population in the United States will be from families whose first language is not English (NCES, 2004). In California, the population of ELL students consists of 34% alone, and one of every four students is categorized as an ELL (California Department of Education [CDE], 2009).

“Helping ELLs succeed in academic contexts is no doubt the most challenging goal and most likely the greatest need to emerge in recent EL research” (Saunders & Goldenberg, 2010, p. 23). English language learner students face many challenges in schools. One is acquiring English proficiency comparable to that of native speakers of English of the same age and grade level in addition to grade-level standards and graduation requirements (Aguila, 2010).

Although there has been minimal evidence of systemic success at turning around the academic performance of high schools that serve Latino students, there are several compelling stories of individual school turn around efforts. Ballona High School, located outside of Los Angeles, serves around 2,400 students, mostly Latinos from low-income families. The principal at Ballona High School turned around the school within 3 years. In 2006, the growth in the school’s Academic Performance Index (API) score was among the highest in California (Wilms, 2009). At Granger High School in Washington State, nearly 80% of 10th grade students met state standards in reading in comparison to 20% in
previous years (Parrett & Budge, 2009). At Kearny High School of International Business in San Diego, California, 100% of seniors complete at least one college course. In 2008, 95% of 10th graders passed the math part of the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) and 91% passed the English part (National Center for Urban School Transformation [NCUST], 2008). Much more work has to be done to understand how leaders initiate, support, and sustain these turnaround efforts.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the phenomenon of turnaround schools. This study was designed to deepen understanding of how low-performing schools, with large percentages of Latino students, turn around and become high-performing schools where student achievement improvements are sustained. The study examined the context in which a turnaround effort began and the various catalysts for change and impediments to change. As well, the study described the practices, policies, and procedures that influenced dramatic improvements in learning results for Latino students. Also, the study explored the systems and structures that have helped sustain improved learning results. More importantly, the study compared and contrasted the factors that have influenced and inhibited change in a similar school that started with many similar contextual problems and opportunities, yet failed to gain momentum for change. In particular, this study analyzed the principals’ role in initiating, supporting, and sustaining change in a turnaround school.

This study sought to identify the attributes and actions of educational leaders in the turnaround school. In particular, the researcher examined how leader behavior
differed in these two schools and how those differences influenced the achievement of Latino students.

This study focused on identifying factors that facilitated the change that occurred in the school. More specifically, the main research questions were as follows:

1. In what ways were the turnaround school and the comparison school similar 5 years ago when they were both initiated? In what ways were the two schools different? In what ways are the turnaround school and the comparison school similar and different today?

2. What factors have influenced or inhibited improvement at both schools? Among the two schools, how are those factors similar and/or different? In particular, what factors might have helped initiate change, prevent change from starting, support change, slow change, sustain change, and/or derail change?

3. What differences in leadership behavior might have influenced the differences in learning results between the turnaround school and the comparison school? In particular, what leadership behaviors might have helped initiate change, prevent change from starting, support change, slow change, sustain change, and/or derail change?

4. What has been the impact of changes at these two schools on students (in particular Latino students), families, teachers, and the school community?

**Relevant Research and Scholarship**

This study examined the literature that might inform a study of turnaround schools. In particular, this study explored the historical context of educational reform movements intended to improve teaching and learning for students in underperforming
schools. This historical context includes the studies commonly referred to as effective schools research. Also, because the study of turnaround schools is fundamentally a study of organizational change, this chapter describes the literature concerning organizational change and school change. The review would be incomplete without attention to the literature that addresses potential levers of dramatic change in school. For example, some researchers have suggested that culturally proficient leadership and culturally responsive teaching may be the means to promote equity for Latino students in schools (Jewett, 2006). Finally, this study examined recent literature concerning successful and unsuccessful efforts to turn around chronically low-performing schools that have a large population of ELL students.

**Methodology**

In order to investigate how two high schools attempted to improve student achievement, this study used a qualitative, comparative case study approach. Case study methodology allows for the investigation of a current issue in a real-life setting to explore a deeper understanding of the processes within specific contexts (Yin, 2009). The collection of qualitative data such as observations and interviews provided the researcher an opportunity to examine context specific phenomena and generate a profound understanding of the processes each school implements (Nunan, 1992).

This specific study examined in depth two cases: a turnaround high school and a high school with similar demographics that had not shown substantial improvement. Both schools are small high schools in the same urban district. Both high schools serve similar large percentages of Latino students, large percentages of English learners, and large percentages of students who meet free or reduced-price lunch criteria. While both
small high schools were initiated because of similar dramatic need for better learning results, one small school “turned around” and the other did not. I describe one of the schools as a “turnaround school” because it was chronically underperforming with a high percentage of students who failed to meet state proficiency standards in mathematics and/or reading; however, the school increased the percentage of students achieving at proficient or advanced levels on state mathematics and English Language Arts.

A case usually refers to a person, a learner, a teacher, or an entity such as a school. This comparative case study will bring to the forefront the voices of an array of stakeholders in two schools. Qualitative case studies explore the details and meanings of experience and provide a concrete illustration of the findings (Nunan, 1992). In addition, in case studies the researcher attempts to identify important patterns and themes in the data (Creswell, 2009). The objective of this comparative case study was to examine two schools and try to explain their differences. The comparative approach allows one to explore possible patterns without many limitations. Furthermore, the case study model provides a compelling and engaging profile of the case with specific examples and linkages to broader issues (Stake, 1995). This methodology allowed this researcher to investigate factors at work in each school, as well as to study similarities and differences in each school.

**Limitations of the Study**

There were several limitations in this study. Even though many schools attempt to transform themselves from low to high-performing schools, this study only examined one turnaround high school and one low-performing school in Southern California. The findings may only apply to schools that serve similar populations, in similar contexts and
geographic areas. The findings may not apply to comprehensive high schools because small school settings differ in many ways from comprehensive schools.

This study paid particular attention to the performance of Latino high school students. As a result, another limitation is that findings may not be similar in schools that serve other demographic groups.

The research was conducted over a period of a few months involving several visits to both schools. So, the findings may not reflect the nuances that might have emerged in a study that took place over a longer period of time with greater time at each school. Also, the researcher interviewed a small number of students, teachers, parents, staff, and administrators from the two specific small schools. As a result, the accuracy of the findings might be limited by the ability and willingness of the individuals interviewed to provide accurate and complete information.

**Significance of the Research to Theory, Practice, and Policy**

In today’s educational political environment, the concept of turnaround schools has become popular, yet little is known about how turnaround actually happens or what factors might impede or facilitate turnaround efforts. This study was intended to deepen understanding of what makes a low-performing high school become an exemplary turnaround high-performing high school. At the same time, this study examined the issues and barriers that might impede turnaround efforts.

This study analyzed in detail the factors that turned around one school and the factors that continue to frustrate a similar school that has achieved lower academic gains. Finally, this study was designed to provide school and district leaders with more in-depth
information that might help them understand some of the challenges and opportunities involved in efforts to turn low-performing schools into high-performing ones.
CHAPTER 2—LITERATURE REVIEW

In August 2009, U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan called for turning around 5,000 of the nation’s lowest performing schools. This study investigated how underperforming schools can improve performance quickly and dramatically and be categorized as turnaround schools. As well, the study examined the issues that might hinder and frustrate turnaround efforts.

This chapter examines the literature that might inform a study of turnaround schools. In particular, this chapter explores the historical context of educational reform movements intended to improve teaching and learning for students in underperforming schools. Often these reform movements were spurred by public concern about severe gaps between the academic achievement of White, middle class students and that of Latino, African American, Native American, and low-income students. Therefore, this review examines literature concerning academic gaps across the United States. As schools and districts have endeavored to reduce or eliminate these achievement gaps, they have grappled with the difficulties of generating substantive change in schooling, so this chapter will describe the literature concerning organizational change and school change. The review would be incomplete without attention to the literature that addresses potential levers of dramatic change in school. For example, some researchers have suggested that culturally proficient leadership and culturally responsive teaching may be the means to promote equity for Latino students in schools (Jewett, 2006). Also, some researchers have concluded that English language development programs and strategies are crucial in promoting higher levels of academic success for English learners. Finally, this review will examine recent literature concerning successful and unsuccessful efforts
to turn around chronically low-performing schools that have a large populations of students who meet low-income criteria, are Latino, and/or are English language learners (ELLs). Many of these studies are considered part of the body of effective schools research from the 1970s and 1980s or are among more recent studies of high-performing schools serving diverse populations.

**Historical Context of Efforts to Improve Achievement in Underperforming Schools**

Over the past several decades, several reform efforts have sought to improve student achievement in underperforming schools. For example, from the 1950s to the 1970s, reforms stemmed from the civil rights movement with the goal of ending racial segregation and creating greater equity in educational opportunities. In the 1980s, this focus shifted to address issues of educational excellence. The report, *A Nation at Risk*, emphasized the “rising tide of mediocrity” in U.S. schools (National Commission on Excellence in Education [NCEE], 1983). In the 1990s, the standards-based reform movement was introduced with the promise of high academic standards for all students: equity and excellence. In the 2000s, school accountability was emphasized, in association with standards-based reform, through the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2001). Each of these reform movements are addressed as subsections of this chapter.

Since the 1960s, some California schools have offered specialized programs for ELLs. In 1972, California’s Assembly Bill AB 2284 was a major program that targeted ELL students. Under NCLB, Title 1 addressed special support for Limited English Proficient (LEP) students in low-achieving and poverty schools, as well as migrant children, children with disabilities, Native Americans, and underserved students.
Additional support for LEP students falls under the Title III. Even though support has been provided for ELL, the alarming achievement gap continues to exist for various reasons as the ELL population increases.

**Civil Rights Era Reforms**

In 1954, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Brown v. Board of Education Topeka* that “separate was unequal” (The Oyez Project, 2002). The court required states to desegregate public schools. In the decade following, the case *Brown v. Board of Education* progress in implementation for the changes was not rapid. As of 1964, only 2.14% of black children in 7 of the 11 southern states attended desegregated schools (Horowitz & Karst, 1969). Between 1958 and 1963, the Supreme Court accepted only one school desegregation case from the South, of the dozens that went to them on appeal. In June 1963, it decided *Goss v. Board of Education of the City of Knoxville*. In its decision, the Court struck down a “freedom of choice” plan, in which Black students could choose to transfer to a White school. The Court reasoned that under these circumstances very few Black children would even apply and that little desegregation would occur (Holland, 2004).

In 1964, Congress passed the Civil Rights Act that outlawed discrimination in any public institution in the United States. From the 1960s to the 1970s, most reforms in U.S. education stemmed from this Act and the civil rights movement (Rumberger & Palardy, 2005).

During this era, the role of the federal government in school reform changed drastically. For example, Sunderman (2004) explained that “traditionally, the federal government had played a limited role and federal legislation had, normally, contained
prohibitions against federal control of education” (p. 6). In contrast, the federal government’s role during the 1960s was more active in ending discrimination in the public school system. At the same time, the programs funded by the federal government during the 1960s and 1970s allocated funds for students who had historically been victims of discrimination (Sunderman, 2004).

One of the largest infusions of federal funds for schools was the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965. This was the first federal comprehensive education law that addressed the needs of students living in poverty. Title I of this Act provided schools supplemental funding for low-income students (Schugurensky, 2002). One of the longest-running programs to tackle systemic poverty in the United States is the Head Start program. The program began in 1965 and was revised by the Head Start Act of 1981. This Act was designed to help end poverty by providing for preschool students from low-income families. The Act provided support for emotional, social, health, nutritional, and psychological needs for the children (Schugurensky, 2002). Also, in 1968, Congress passed the Bilingual Education Act to offer bilingual education for the growing number of linguistically diverse students that were not getting an education equal to that of native English speakers (Cummins, 2000). In the 1974 revision of the Bilingual Education Act, the federal law stated:

Where inability to speak and understand the English language excludes national origin minority group children from effective participation in the educational program offered by a school district, the district must take affirmative steps to rectify the language deficiency in order to open its instructional program to these students. (USDOE, 2000b, para. 8)
As Sunderman (2004) stated, however, the federal role in this reform era was not limited to providing funds. The federal government also attempted to address issues of discrimination. For example, in 1974, the class suit *Lau v. Nichols* was brought by non-English speaking Chinese students against the San Francisco school system. The district failed to provide English language instruction to approximately 1,800 students of Chinese ancestry who did not speak English (Sugarman & Widess, 1974). The Court of Appeals reasoned that “every student brings to the starting line of his educational career different advantages and disadvantages caused in part by social, economic, and cultural background, created and continued completely apart from any contribution by the school system” (USDOE, 1974, para. 5). On January 21, 1974, the U.S. Supreme Court unanimously ruled that the San Francisco school system illegally discriminated against these non-English speaking Chinese American students by failing to help them overcome their language issue. This was a landmark decision that had major impact for future generations of bilingual students, including many Latino students.

Bilingual education programs seek to use a student’s native language to teach core academic content classes while simultaneously providing English language instruction. Such programs have existed in the United States since the late eighteenth century, when several states passed legislation allowing and promoting bilingual education in response to the influx of immigrants into the United States (Thomas & Collier, 1997). Programs were created to instruct students in German, French, Dutch, Swedish, and Greek. Unfortunately, bilingual education has suffered many setbacks, and it still generates controversy. Cummins (2000) stated that the academic debate on bilingual education in the United States has to do with how the media interprets the issue. Cummins explained,
“Media articles on bilingual education have tended to be overwhelming negative in the assessment of the merits of bilingual education” (p. 201).

The controversy still exists, as critics of bilingual education have claimed that it is costly to maintain this type of program. Also, bilingual education has come under attack through California’s Proposition 227 and other state laws that promote “English first” or “English only” policies and practices (Cummins, 1999).

The Shift to “Excellence”

Another wave of educational reforms appeared in 1983 with the publication of the Nation at Risk: The Imperative For Educational Reform report (NCEE, 1983). This document summarized major issues in the public school system, including the low reading comprehension rates and high dropout rates in the K-12 setting. In addition, Nation at Risk introduced the notion of standardized instruction. The main concern of Secretary of Education T. H. Bell was the “widespread public perception that something is seriously remiss in our educational system” (NCEE, 1983, p. 3). The National Commission on Excellence in Education included 38 recommendations from their findings to improve public school education. The Commission issued an urgent call to action to educational leaders across the nation. The Nation at Risk report focused several aspects of the educational process specifically on content, expectations, time, and teaching (NCEE, 1983).

In 1987, under the leadership of California State Superintendent Bill Honig, the Middle Grade Task Force developed the publication Caught in the Middle: Educational Reform for Young Adolescents in California Public Schools (as cited CDE, 2001). This publication encapsulated the spirit of a new kind of school for young adolescents. Caught
in the Middle addressed five crucial concerns: curriculum and instruction, student potential, organization and structure, teaching and administration, and leading and partnership. This report promoted changes from the traditional junior high school to a middle school model.

In 1992, the CDE published Second to None: A Vision of the New California High School report. This report focused on reform issues for high schools. In addition, this report developed curricular paths for success, an assessment and accountability system, and provided support for all students, including language-minority and students deemed at risk of not graduating. The major findings of this report were that improvement was already underway in high schools, the components of comprehensive reform must be integrated, initiating change is difficult, and radical reform requires investment (CDE, 1992).

Standards-Based Reform

In the late 1980s, education reformers concentrated efforts on the quality of education, specifically curriculum and instruction, and not how long students spent inside the classroom (National Academy of Education, 1995). In 1989, a group of state governors concerned with the nation’s public education system suggested a set of solutions, which they named Goals 2000.

Underlying these solutions was an expectation that states would establish clear, measurable standards for measuring the academic success of all school students. This meant that student achievement would be measured against the concrete standard, in contrast to norm-referenced practices in which students were compared to other students.
In 1994, Goals 2000: Educate America Act was signed into law by President Bill Clinton. Goals 2000 stated that by the year 2000:

1. All children in America will start school ready to learn.
2. The high school graduation rate will increase to at least 90%.
3. Students at Grades 4, 8, and 12 will demonstrate competency in all subject matters.
4. United States students will be first in the world in mathematics and science achievement.
5. Every school in the United States will be free of drugs, violence, and firearms.
6. Every school will promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting social, emotional, and academic growth of children.

The Act provided resources to states and communities to ensure all students reach their full potential. Goals 2000 established a framework in which to identify world-class academic standards, to measure student progress, and to provide the support for students who may need assistance to meet the standards.

Many states and school district had been introduced to the concept of establishing standards through their experiences with outcome-based education (OBE). Outcome-based education is a student-centered learning philosophy that focuses on empirically measuring student performances, called outcomes. Controversy over the nature of outcomes specified in some school districts led policymakers to recast their efforts as standards-based education reforms. These reforms set clear standards that define what all children should know and be able to demonstrate. Content standards were designed to
encourage the highest achievement of every student, by defining the knowledge, concepts, and skills that students should acquire at each grade level.

Standards-based reforms (SBR) spread across the United States to focus on academic expectations for students. The key issues included: alignment of the key elements of the educational system to promote attainment of these expectations, the use of assessments of student achievement to monitor performance, decentralization of responsibility for decisions relating to curriculum and instruction to schools, and accountability provisions that reward or sanction schools by measuring student performance (Hamilton, Stecher, & Yuan, 2008).

Over the past two decades, SBR has been studied to determine its impact on school quality and student achievement, and, like many other reforms, there are positive and negative findings (Hamilton et al., 2008). One of the key findings was the attempt to create sustainable accountability system. At the same time, many encountered the significant turnover of top leadership that changed the directions of these policies (Hamilton et al., 2008).

The Improving America’s Schools Act of 1994 (IASA) was a key component to President Clinton’s efforts to reform education. The signing of IASA reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (CDE, 1999). Congress declared that a high-quality education for all individuals and a fair and equal opportunity to attain that education are a societal good and improve the life of every student. The IASA required states to set up challenging academic content and performance standards in conjunction with assessments. Furthermore, IASA required the development of accountability
systems that schools would demonstrate adequate yearly progress. These major provisions of the IASA came into play by the implementation of NCLB.

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 was proposed by President George W. Bush immediately after taking office. In January 2002, President Bush signed the Act into law, as a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. No Child Left Behind endorsed the educational theories of standards-based education reforms and is based on the principle that setting high standards and establishing measurable goals can improve educational outcomes for all students (Dillon, 2009). No Child Left Behind required all states to administer standardized tests to students at every grade level from Grades 3 through 8 and at least one high school grade. The Act’s ultimate goals were closing the achievement gap by increasing accountability, paying close attention to minority populations, increasing educational quality, giving options to students enrolled at low-performing schools, and increasing funding for schools, especially Title 1 schools.

No Child Left Behind called for every student to be proficient in reading and math by 2014. School districts issued reports indicating whether schools were making adequate yearly progress (AYP) toward that goal. Also, districts reported the test scores of specific student groups such as racial/ethnic minorities and special education students. Schools had to demonstrate AYP for each demographic group considered by the state to be statistically significant. Schools that were unsuccessful in achieving AYP for all groups faced escalating sanctions, including ultimately threats of state takeovers or school closings (Mantel, 2005).

Since its inception, NCLB was unpopular with teacher’s groups, whose major concern was the stress that was placed on preparation for crucial exams (Dillon, 2009).
According to Tyack and Cuban (1995), the general consensus on NCLB among educators is that it is a “colossal failure” in terms of accomplishing its main goal (closing the achievement gap) and is in need of serious reform.

According to Gage Kingsbury, a testing expert who is a director at the Northwest Evaluation Association, there is not much indication that NCLB is causing the kind of change we were expecting (Petrelli, 2009). In reality, the achievement gap between White and minority students has not narrowed in recent years (Dillon, 2009). Even though test results show minority students’ scores increased, so did those of White students (Tough, 2006). The achievement gap continues to exist in many schools. The key question is how do we close the education achievement gap?

Achievement Gaps

Researchers have long sought to grasp and explicate the racial and ethnic disparities in achievement that have always been present in the United States (Coleman, 1966). The achievement gap in education refers to the inequality in academic performance between groups. The achievement gap is apparent in standardized test scores, course selection, dropout rates, graduation rates, and college completion rates. For the most part, the achievement gap describes the performance gaps between African American and Latino students and their non-Hispanic White peers (Education Commission of States, 2009). In addition, there is a clear gap between students from low-income and moderate-income families. Education Secretary Arne Duncan stated that “the achievement gaps are still too wide, and overall achievement is too slow” (USDOE, 2009, para. 4).
Across the nation, a small percentage of Latinos are proficient in reading and in math. According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) results, 14% of Latino fourth graders reach proficient or advanced levels in reading. In math, only 9% of Latino eighth graders reach the proficient level or above on the NAEP tests (The Education Trust, 2008).

**Racial, Ethnic, and Socioeconomic Factors**

**Influencing Achievement Gaps**

Research has identified a variety of factors that appear connected to the achievement gap. These range from student’s racial and/or economic background, their parents’ educational level, their access to high-quality preschool instruction, school funding, teacher’s expectations, and curricular and instructional quality (Miners, 2009).

Socioeconomic status is considered by many to be a major factor. According to the Census Bureau, 27% of Latino children and 30% of African American children live in poverty compared to 13% of White children (Proctor & Dalaker, 2003). Also, dropout rates tend to be higher for children who live in poverty (USDOE, 2000a).

Researchers have attempted to identify why race and class are such strong predictors of students’ educational achievement (Viadero, 2006). A large number of students leave school, with and without high school diplomas, with low skills in reading, writing, and math. Unfortunately, the failures of the schools are not evenly distributed and they fall disproportionately on students of color (Berlak, 2001). The landmark Coleman Report in 1966, reported that schools only accounted for 5% to 38% of the total variation of student test scores among grade levels, ethnic groups, and parts of the country (Coleman, 1966). The authors reported, “The social composition of the student body is
more highly related to achievement, independent of the student’s own social background, than is any school factor” (Coleman, 1966, p. 325).

While Coleman (1966) believed that achievement gaps were related to socioeconomic status, some researchers have contended that differences in achievement are due primarily to race. In the 1990s, the controversial book, *The Bell Curve* (Herrnstein, as cited in Lee & Burkam, 2002) suggested that student achievement gaps were the natural result of student’s genetic makeup and natural ability. This assumption drew severe criticism, yet it was not a new claim. In 1969, an article published in the *Harvard Educational Review* by Arthur Jensen (as cited in Berlak, 2001) stated that African Americans were genetically inferior to Whites in general intelligence. Many researchers including geneticists and biologists have discredited all of these arguments (Berlak, 2001). Yet, the question remains, how is the ever-present gap in academic performance to be explained?

**School Factors Influencing Achievement Gaps**

Studies have identified a range of factors that influence student achievement and have tried to determine the degree to which these factors explain differences in achievement (Rumberger & Palardy, 2005). Although student achievement is clearly the product of individual approaches, behaviors, and experiences, these individual attributes are shaped by institutional settings. Rumberger and Palardy (2005) found that schools serving mostly low-socioeconomic students tend to be organized and operated differently than those serving more affluent students.

Other studies point directly to factors within a school like student tracking, negative stereotyping, test bias, and peer pressure, as causes of achievement gaps.
Myers, Kim, and Mandala (2004) conducted a statistical study to determine if poverty was the primary cause of the low performance of Black students on the state Basic Standards Test. The researchers discovered that test scores were not statistically related to school and neighborhood poverty, racial concentration, or ranking of schools. The findings showed that Blacks, Native Americans, and Latinos were underrepresented in the top ranked schools. This study suggested that tracking and the quality of the academic opportunities available in the schools affect test score and academic performance gap (Berlak, 2001).

Tracking in public schools has roots at the beginning of the 20th century when there was a demand for students who would fill the factories or farms. In contrast, students who were identified as being geared toward college were tracked into college preparatory courses (Romo & Falbo, 1996). Tracking has been a controversial issue for many years, in part because minorities are disproportionately represented in the lower tracks (Reglin, 1992). The tracking system perpetuates the inequities of race, gender, and socioeconomic status in our society. According to Romo and Falbo (1996), labeling students has a major impact on how teachers, counselors, and peers treat students that are tracked. The effects of tracking have a direct impact on the ever-growing achievement gap because “the practice of tracking contributes to the mediocre schooling for most secondary students” (Oakes, 1986, p. 13). According to Oakes (1986), no student achieves when schools use tracking in their schools and a majority of all schools track students. There are several underlying assumptions on tracking: “Administrators generally assume that tracking promotes overall student achievement” (Oakes, 1986, p. 15). The belief of grouping students with similar academic abilities learn better defeats
the purpose of addressing each student’s needs. Oakes states, “The net effect of tracking is to exaggerate the initial differences among students rather than provide the means to better accommodate them” (p. 15). Another assumption Oakes presented is that low-achieving students may be harmed if placed with high-achieving students and promotes negative attitudes toward learning.

Change Theory

Change theory might inform understanding of why some schools turn around and others do not. There are many change theories, and some are more widely recognized than others. Lewin (as cited in Kritsonis, 2005) introduced the three-step change model. This model of change is known as the unfreezing-change-freezing model that requires previous learning to be refused and replaced. Lewin views behavior as a dynamic balance of forces working together in opposing directions (Schein, 2006). Lewin’s change model draws attention to the right kinds of variables that need to be conceptualized and observed (Kritsonis, 2005).

According to Lewin (as cited in Kritsonis, 2005), the first step is the unfreezing phase in which individuals or groups become motivated to change. This part of the theory is based upon the belief that prior observational learning and cultural influences establish human behavior. Change involves adding new forces for eliminating some existing factors that are at play in perpetuating the behavior. This phase has three subprocesses, the first being disconfirmation where present conditions lead to disappointment (for example, not meeting personal goals). The second subprocess occurs as previous beliefs are seen as invalid, leading to what Lewin called “survival anxiety” (Kritsonis, 2005). This anxiety triggers defensiveness and resistance due to the pain of
having to unlearn what had been previously accepted. According to Lewin, it is necessary to move past the possible anxieties for change to progress (Kritsonis, 2005).

The second step is the changing of what needs to be changed. Lewin referred to this as being unfrozen and moving to a new state. When there is enough dissatisfaction with the current conditions, and a true longing to make some change exists, it is vital to identify what needs to be transformed. Lewin stated that the three possible impacts from processing new information are that concepts are construed within a broader context, words take on a new meaning, and there is an adjustment in the level used in assessing new input (Schein, 2006).

The third step is making the change permanent, what Lewin calls refreezing. Refreezing is the concluding stage where new behavior becomes consistent. This requires developing a new self-concept and identity and creating new interpersonal relationships. This step needs to take place after the change has been applied and sustained. According to Lewin, the purpose of refreezing is to stabilize the new equilibrium in order to reinforce new patterns and institutionalize them through formal and informal mechanisms including policies and procedures (Schein, 2006).

Lewin’s model demonstrates the effects of forces that encourage or hinder change. Therefore, change will occur when the combined strength of one force is superior to the combined strength of the opposing set of forces (Robbins, 2007).

Change theorists argue that chronically failing schools can be turned around only if they experience a systemic change that turns around profoundly entrenched patterns of dysfunction (Argyris, 1985). Underperforming schools tend to revert unless they reach a tipping point. Many times, providing a small amount of help yields the same results as
offering no help. Therefore, change theorists suggest that whatever is done for failing schools must be sufficient to help them reach a threshold that allows them to sustain success (Schein, 2005). In this case, the solution for failing schools is to turn them around completely.

Another model for examining change in organizations is the Concerns-Based Adoption Model (CBAM), developed in the early 1970s (Hall, 1987). The CBAM tackles three key components: the concerns of individuals about change, the level of use of a particular innovation, and a method of clearly and precisely describing the change. In the CBAM approach, stakeholders are made aware of seven stages of concern, including awareness, informational, personal, management, consequences, collaboration, and refocusing. In all the stages, the participants focus on implementing an improvement (Hall, 1987). The CBAM approach provides several ways for understanding, managing, and promoting change. This model holds that people considering and experiencing change evolve in the kinds of questions they ask. For example, self-oriented questions are: What is it? How will it affect me? And how do I do it? The CBAM approach addresses where people are and where they need to go. In schools, leaders want to focus on student achievement before teachers are comfortable with the materials and strategies being used to address that need. One key factor of this model is that it pays close attention to implementation and ongoing monitoring of the concerns of teachers. This stage is very important, since this model underlines the fact that it takes at least 3 years to see significant results; without this many schools do not see changes and move to another type of program.
Potential Levers for School Improvement

Efforts to turn around patterns of low achievement in schools that serve large percentages of students who are Latino, English learners, and who meet low-income criteria may be enhanced through several improvement efforts. Specifically, considerable attention has been given to issues of English language development, culturally responsive teaching, and culturally proficient leadership.

English Language Development (ELD)

The field of education English Language Development (ELD) refers to improving the English skills of students who are learning English as a second language. English Language Development instruction focuses specifically to improve ELs’ knowledge and use of English in a systematic way. “Helping ELs succeed in academic contexts is no doubt the most challenging goal and most likely the greatest need to emerge in recent EL research.” (Saunders & Goldenberg, 2010, p. 23). One of the main issues with ELD instruction is comparing it to sheltered instruction or Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English (SDAIE, Echevarria, Short, & Powers, 2006). Both of these types of instruction, sheltered and/or SDAIE, if implemented inconsistently, are many times ineffective and different than ELD instruction. Systematic ELD instruction is a comprehensive approach for developing English proficiency that is essential to ensure the academic achievement of ELs. In addition, it is driven by students’ assessed English proficiency level and builds a solid foundation in English (Goldenberg, 2008).

According to the ELD guidelines, ELD instruction includes interactive activities for students that are organized with a specific purpose. Ideally, there should be a block of time, dedicated daily to ELD where listening, speaking, writing, and reading are
interwoven in the instruction including vocabulary, syntax, grammar, functions, and conventions (Saunders & Goldenberg, 2010). Unfortunately, the research for ELD instruction is small and very few studies examine the impact that it has on language instruction.

The ELD challenge in the public schools is learning all parts of the English language, while concurrently learning grade-level subject matter taught in English with students that have different academic levels. Echevarría et al. (2006) state that “the English learner population in California’s schools, indeed in U.S. schools in general, come with complex mosaic of languages, native countries and cultures, familial circumstances, and educational experiences” (p. 88).

Regardless the diversity of English learners’ identities and experiences, they share one important common variable: a tendency towards low academic achievement (Goldenberg, 2008). “On the 2007 NAEP, fourth-grade level ELLs scored 36 points below non-ELLs in reading and 25 points below non-ELLs in math. The gaps among eighth-graders were even larger—42 in reading and 37 points in math” (Goldenberg, 2008, p. 10). Goldenberg (2008) states that 80% of the ELL population is Spanish speakers, and it is a fact school for leaders must keep in mind, since historically the majority of Spanish speakers in the United States come from a lower-economic and educational backgrounds. Another key factor is the political arena of the ELL population of Spanish speakers and the English-only movement in different states. One of Goldenberg’s key findings in his research is that primary language reading instruction promotes reading achievement in English. Another key factor is that providing ELLs with an organized focused ELD instruction is critically important (Goldenberg, 2008).
Teaching both content and language is a major challenge teachers face in the schools and Goldenberg adds that this is the area of current active research.

**Culturally Responsive Teaching**

The Multicultural Education movement of the 1980s has permeated schools in the United States as a conscious effort to make the classroom experience more culturally relevant to backgrounds and experiences of students who are not White or middle class (Nieto, 2000). Gay (2000) defined culturally responsive teaching as using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them. It teaches to and through the strengths of these students. It is culturally validating and affirming. (p. 29)

Culturally responsive teaching incorporates the distinctive cultural heritages of each student in the curriculum. In addition, it maintains meaningful connections between the home and school experiences of students. Culturally responsive teaching uses a variety of instructional strategies that connect with the students’ different learning styles. Culturally responsive teaching uses interdisciplinary approaches by incorporating multicultural information, resources, and materials across all subjects regularly (Gay, 2000).

The rapid demographics and cultural diversity of students has changed dramatically in the past 25 years, yet the majority of teachers are still White, middle-class, monolingual, and unaware of the cultural and linguistic diversity of their students (Applebome, 1996). Delpit’s (1995) research shows that the United States is currently facing a shortage of well-prepared teachers. Even though Spanish-speaking students
comprise the largest number of language minority students in the United States, there is
an existent shortage of teachers coming from Hispanic backgrounds. Unfortunately,
teachers in the 21st century will find themselves more culturally alienated than ever
before from their students (Applebome, 1996).

B. Perez and Torres-Guzman (1996) demonstrated in their research that
communication between home and school is valid for language minority students’
success; teaching parents to promote native language helps students to learn English more
quickly; and encouraging parents to understand bilingualism is important and an asset for
student success. The challenges ELL students experience can be connected to the
disparity between the home life and the classroom life (Trueba, 2001).

“Native American educator Cornel Pewewardy asserts that one reason Indian
children experience difficulty in schools is that educators traditionally have attempted to
insert culture into education, instead of inserting education into culture” (Ladson-Billings
& Tate, 1995, p. 159). Cultural proficiency permeates the policies and practices, values,
and behaviors at the organizational level in ways that allow effective cross-cultural
interactions among stakeholders. Put simply, instead of tolerating diversity, culturally
proficient leaders transform for equity (Lindsey, Robins, Lindsey, & Terrell, 2009). By
valuing diversity and preserving the cultural dignity of students, cultural proficiency
enables educators to construct an inclusive and relevant learning environment for all
students.

Much of the research shows that academic achievement of students from
culturally diverse backgrounds improves as schools and teachers ensure that classroom
instruction is inclusive of the students’ home culture (Andrews, 2006). Culturally
responsive teaching involves a set of behaviors that exhibit knowledge, understanding, affirmation, and appreciation of the various characteristics of a particular cultural community (MacPhee & Whitecotton, 2009). At the same time, culturally responsive leadership transforms schools’ and teachers’ beliefs and values systems (Gay, 2000). Culturally responsive leaders deconstruct and recreate the current educational system where students are not performing. Leaders and teachers create a culturally responsive climate that addresses the needs of a diverse student population and reflects the belief that every student is intelligent, able to learn, and worthy of success.

Culturally responsive pedagogy is a way of teaching to empower students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically through the use of cultural references that impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Santamaria, 2009). Some schools have been able to confront barriers through change. These schools stand out because they beat the odds. This study will examine the practices, the policies, and procedures that facilitated the change from an underperforming school to a high-performing school.

Teaching in urban schools presents significant challenges for many educators. In the current high-stakes accountability context, NCLB data continues to inform schools about the persistent and pervasive achievement gap. Skrla and Scheurich (2004) noted,

We come to our classroom, we teach, we get paid. But somewhere along the line we have lost the strong belief that we could successfully teach those that Lisa Delpit . . . has referred to as ‘the other people’s children.’ And this solidified belief that low-income children and children of color are not likely to do well academically. (p. 14)
Educators who prepare future educational leaders have a duty to raise questions about race and racism in American schools, to questions systems, policies, educational frameworks, and educational challenges, including the need of a diverse teaching population (G. López, 2003). Researchers have shown that commonly teachers have lower level of expectations for minority and low-income students (Rothstein, 1999). Steele (2000) studied the detrimental effects of low teacher expectations. He asserted that “if by word or deed educators tell students they are part of a group that cannot succeed, they won’t” (p. 105).

**Culturally Proficient Leadership**

The student population in the United States has become increasingly diverse. On the other hand, the characteristics of teachers and educational leaders have remained largely homogenous. Classroom teachers and school principals remain predominantly White (Andrews, 2006). In 2004, 83.1% of teachers were White, 7.9% were Black, and 6% Latino (NCES, 2004). This phenomenon represents a significant challenge to the educational system in the United States, where the student population continues to diversify rapidly.

Culturally proficient educational leaders are committed to educating all students to high levels through knowing, valuing, and employing students’ cultural backgrounds, languages, and learning styles within the curriculum and instructional contexts (Lindsey et al., 2009). Culturally proficient leaders address key questions such as: What is my reaction to people who are culturally different from me? How aware am I of how people who are culturally different from me react to my presence? What do I need to do to be
Administrators and teachers at Tahoe Elementary in Sacramento, California asked themselves these tough questions. They became culturally proficient educators through specialized professional development on culturally proficient leadership. All stakeholders in that school engaged in and benefitted from difficult conversations over a 3-year period. The school has realized improved results as educators are trained to look at their students through a different lens. Currently, the school’s Academic Performance Index (API) score has increased from 556 to 765, and the school is no longer a Program Improvement School (PI), a label designated for schools that fail to achieve AYP (Lindsey et al., 2009).

In the past, administrators and teachers at Tahoe Elementary blamed students, their parents, and their community for their lack of performance and motivation. Now, the administrators and teachers do not see students’ living environment or cultures as a handicap. Teachers utilize and embrace students’ culture and background knowledge as assets (Lindsey et al., 2009.)

Conversations around cultural proficiency focus on how people work together. Lindsey et al. (2009) delineated the key elements of cultural proficiency as assessing cultural knowledge, valuing diversity, managing the dynamics of difference, adapting to difference, and institutionalizing cultural knowledge. The guiding principles of cultural proficiency framework are as follows:

Culture is a predominant force in society; people are served in varying degrees by the dominant culture; people have individual and group identities; diversity within
cultures is vast and significant; each cultural group has unique cultural needs; and the best of both worlds enhances the capacity of all. (Lindsey et al., 2009, p. 74)

**Studies of Effective or High-Performing Schools**

The term “turnarounds” may be relatively new to education, but the term is widely used in other sectors to describe dramatic improvements in organizations that were failing (The Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement, 2005). While the term may be new, researchers have been studying turnaround efforts for many years. In particular, in the 1970s many researchers began studying effective schools: schools that achieved substantially better than typical learning results for students in low-income communities (often African American and Latino students). Some (not all) of these effective schools had turned around from patterns of low academic achievement. Later in the 1990s, with the advent of state accountability systems, researchers conducted studies of schools in which all demographic groups of students achieved strong academic results. Many (but not all) of these schools were turnaround schools because they improved performance dramatically over a short period of time.

In the study, *Can Failing Schools Be Fixed?* (Brady, 2003), the researcher concluded that, “No one strategy can be counted upon to succeed in all contexts” (p. 3). Brady (2003) added that interventions for failing schools are expensive, difficult, arbitrary, and hard to maintain. There are vast studies on how effective schools work, but it is far less clear how to move a failing school from failure to success (Smarick, 2010).

There are different ways of defining turnaround schools. In the report *Turning Around Chronically Low-Performing Schools* (Herman et al., 2008), turnaround schools are defined as schools that have demonstrated dramatic improvement in student
achievement in a short time. In addition, turnaround schools are those schools that meet two main criteria. First, these schools began as chronically low-performing with 20% or more of the student population failing to meet state proficiency in mathematics and reading as outlined in NCLB over 2 or more consecutive years. Second, these schools demonstrated significant gains in student achievement within 3 years. Significant gains refer to reducing by 10 percentage points the number of students failing to meet proficiency in mathematics or reading. Also, these schools are considered to have made significant gains if they lowered the dropout rate by 10% or more.

In NCLB (2001), turnaround was described as a strategy for restructuring schools that fail to make AYP toward state-defined proficiency goals over 5 or more years. According to NCLB, districts have five options for restructuring: chartering, implementing turnarounds, contracting, state takeovers, and other forms of major restructuring that makes fundamentals changes. Under this context, in a turnaround, the district replaces the principal and school’s staff relevant to the failure of the school, among other actions. This concept of a turnaround strategy is very different from the concept of successful turnaround schools. In this study, I will explore the nature of successful turnaround schools.

Unfortunately, efforts to turn around failing schools have consistently fallen short of expectations (Smarick, 2010). California’s Public Schools Accountability Act of 1999 introduced the API to measure the academic performance and growth of schools in a range of academic measures. During the first year of API, California concentrated its efforts in the lowest-performing 20% schools for direct interventions. After 3 years, the results were discouraging. One hundred nine of 968 elementary schools were able to
make exemplary progress. Middle and high schools were worse: only one school of 394 made a positive change.

Why is it difficult to turnaround failing schools? For the past decades of reforms, researchers have not yet honed on what practices turns around a struggling school into an effective school (Smarick, 2010). Throughout the past decade, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation invested millions to help eliminate low-performing large urban high schools by replacing them with small, high-quality high schools or transforming them into smaller learning communities (Miner, 2005). The ultimate objective of this reform was to increase graduation rates and prepare students for college (Miner, 2005). While evidence about small schools’ effects on academic achievement is mixed, studies have shown that school size has had a larger impact on the learning of disadvantaged and/or low-socioeconomic students (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2009).

Although there has been minimal evidence of systemic success at turning around the academic performance of high schools that serve Latino students, there are several compelling stories of individual school turnaround efforts. Ballona High School, located outside of Los Angeles, serves around 2,400 students, mostly Latinos from low-income families. The principal at Ballona High School turned around the school within 3 years. In 2006, the growth in the school’s API score was among the highest in California (Wilms, 2009). At Granger High School in Washington State, 10th grade students are meeting 80% of the state standards in reading, in comparison to 20% in previous years (Parrett & Budge, 2009). At Kearny High School of International Business in San Diego, California, 100% of seniors complete at least one college course. In 2008, 95% of 10th graders passed the math part of the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) and
91% passed the English part (NCUST, 2008). Much more work has to be done to understand how leaders initiate, support, and sustain these turnaround efforts. And despite all of these efforts, failing schools are still prevalent, and Latino students populate a great number of these schools.

O’Donnell and White (2005) have studied the relationship between an effective instructional leader and student achievement. The research shows that successful principals can significantly have an influence in student performance. Effective principals are strong educators focusing on key issues of learning and teaching (O’Donnell & White, 2005). Principals have the power to build relationships that create a positive learning environment. According to Schmoker (2006), effective principals promote collaborative problem solving and open communication, collect and analyze data to identify school needs, and have clear, measurable goals.

In contrast, however, there are some schools, districts, and states where Latinos are excelling. Some Latinos students in low-income neighborhoods are reaching proficiency in math and reading. For example, in the Aldine Independent School District in Texas, Hambrick Middle School students score in the top fifth of all middle schools in Texas in reading and math. Hambrick has a population of 71% Latino students, and 85% of their students are low-income (The Education Trust, 2008). Many of these schools face the same challenges associated with language, and low-socioeconomic status, yet they have provided an educational environment that is leading Latino students to be successful. Clearly, some schools turn around and generate strong academic results for Latino students, while many schools do not. The present study was motivated by the lack
of clarity about how some schools overcome barriers and eliminate achievement gaps, while others do not.
CHAPTER 3—RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study attempted to identify how leader behavior differed in two schools: one school that turned around academic achievement for a small urban high school serving predominantly Latino students and one small urban high school that has made minimal progress in improving achievement results for Latino students.

In order to investigate how leaders from these two high schools address student achievement, this study used a qualitative, comparative case study approach. Case study methodology allows for the investigation of a current issue in a real-life setting to develop a deeper understanding of the processes within specific contexts (Yin, 2009). The collection of qualitative data such as observations and interviews provides the researcher an opportunity to examine context specific phenomena and generate a profound understanding of the processes each school implements (Nunan, 1992).

The purpose of this study was to investigate the phenomenon of turnaround schools. This study was designed to deepen understanding of how low-performing schools, with large percentages of Latino students, turn around and become high-performing schools where student achievement improvements are sustained. The study examined the context in which a turnaround effort began and the various catalysts for change and impediments to change. As well, the study described the practices, policies, and procedures that influenced dramatic improvements in learning results for Latino students. Also, the study explored the systems and structures that have helped sustain improved learning results. More importantly, the study compared and contrasted the factors that have influenced and inhibited change in a similar school that started with many similar contextual problems and opportunities, yet failed to gain sufficient
momentum to generate change. In particular, this study analyzed the principals’ role in initiating, supporting, and sustaining change in a turnaround school.

**Research Design**

This research study is a qualitative comparative case study. A case usually refers to a person, a learner, a teacher, or an entity such as a school. This comparative case study brings to the forefront the voices of an array of stakeholders in two schools. Qualitative case studies explore the details and meanings of experience and provide a concrete illustration of the findings (Nunan, 1992). In addition in case studies, the researcher attempts to identify important patterns and themes in the data (Creswell, 2009). The richness of case studies is related to the amount of detail and contextualization that is possible when one case is analyzed in detail. Furthermore, the case study model provides a compelling and engaging profile of the case with specific examples and linkages to broader issues (Stake, 1995). This methodology allowed this researcher to investigate factors at work in each school, as well as to study similarities and differences in each school. Merriam (1998) identified case studies as the primary design when researchers are interested in insight, discovery, and interpretation, rather than hypothesis testing. Yin (2009) suggested that a case study is the most appropriate approach when the researcher does not have any control over events, but rather wants to focus on contemporary experiences by asking questions in the form of how and/or why? This qualitative case study design was selected because of the nature of the research problem and the questions related to the actions school leaders used to implement, promote, and lead systemic change and a commitment to improve student achievement.
Research Questions

The study was designed to address the following research questions:

1. In what ways were the turnaround school and the comparison school similar 5 years ago when they were both initiated? In what ways were the two schools different? In what ways are the turnaround school and the comparison school similar and different today?

2. What factors have influenced or inhibited improvement at both schools?
   Among the two schools, how are those factors similar and/or different? In particular, what factors might have helped initiate change, prevent change from starting, support change, slow change, sustain change, and/or derail change?

3. What differences in leadership behavior might have influenced the differences in learning results between the turnaround school and the comparison school?
   In particular, what leadership behaviors might have helped initiate change, prevent change from starting, support change, slow change, sustain change, and/or derail change?

4. What has been the impact of changes at these two schools on students (in particular Latino students), families, teachers, and the school community?

Criteria for Sample Selection

This study utilized a purposive sample of two small high schools from the same district. One school was selected because it represented a successful turn around. The second school was selected because it shared similar demographics, challenges, and opportunities as the turn around school; however, it only achieved minimal improvements in academic achievement. Purposive sampling has been used through the years as a form
of nonprobability sampling where the population is “hand-picked” (Yin, 2009). An advantage of this type of sampling is that it allows the researcher to focus on people or events that will be critical for the research (Creswell, 2009). In addition, this allows the researcher to illuminate the research question in hand (Yin, 2009). To help students achieve higher levels of academic achievement and personal success, major changes took place in the school district where the two high schools are located. These efforts were part of the district’s High School Renewal initiative. The district redesigned three traditional, large high schools into small schools. The small school model focuses on enhancing student engagement to improve student achievement. These three large high schools officially closed as comprehensive schools on June 30, 2004. On July 1, 2004, these schools were transformed into educational complexes that represented a total of 14 small schools. The two schools in this study were part of this effort.

The new, small schools had the authority to implement their curriculum and create school structures, as long as they worked within district policies and aligned their efforts to ensure student attainment of state academic standards. The small schools were expected to establish more challenging and relevant coursework, reverse the rising dropout rate, and better prepare students for life in a global society.

The two schools selected for this study produced similar programs and served student bodies with similar demographics. Both schools were partially funded by a grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to support the lowest-achieving comprehensive schools in one district.

The Academic Performance Index (API) measures the performance and growth of California schools based on the test scores of all students. The API is a single number on
a scale of 200 to 1,000 that indicates how well the students in a school or district performed on the previous spring’s tests. An API is calculated for the whole school; also, an API is calculated for every demographic group the state defines as numerically significant. In these two schools, the numerically significant groups included Latino students, students who met low-income criteria, and English learners (ELs). Academic Performance Index scores of schools of the same type (elementary, middle, high) are ranked into “deciles,” with 1 as the lowest and 10 as the highest. Schools have two rankings: (a) a statewide ranking that compares each school to all other schools in the state of the same type, and (b) a similar schools ranking that compares each school with 100 others that have similar student populations and other characteristics (California Department of Education, 2007).

**Data Collection and Instrumentation**

Qualitative data were collected including observations, interviews, and document analysis. I interviewed individuals from all stakeholder groups at both schools, including the principals, vice-principals, counselors, staff developers, deans, and a representative sample of teachers, staff, and parents. I used a structured interview protocol to guide each interview, yet I endeavored to be attentive to the need to modify questions in ways that allowed me to better understand the answers to the research questions. Using structured interview protocols provided opportunities to compare and contrast participant responses as I investigated research questions (see Appendices A-F).

In addition, I collected relevant documents and artifacts from each school. These included materials produced by each school and the school district. Materials collected
related to the curriculum offered, programs and services, professional development activities, planning meetings, newsletters, and other public correspondence.

Through these interviews, observations, and document collections, a qualitative profile was established for each school. The purpose of a qualitative profile of one or more cases is to describe and illustrate what is typical to those unfamiliar with the setting (Patton, 2002). These multiple data sources provided rich opportunities to understand the complexities and nuances of each case. Also, Bogdan and Biklen (2003) explained that multiple data sources allow greater opportunities to triangulate perceptions and validate the data.

**Data Analysis**

The data were analyzed with Creswell’s (2009) six-step method. The steps included:

1. Organizing and preparing the data for analysis.
2. Reading through all the data.
3. Beginning detailed analysis with a coding process.
4. Using the coding process to generate a description of the setting or people, as well as categories or themes of analysis.
5. Advancing how the description and themes will be represented in the narrative.
6. Making an interpretation or making meaning of the data.

The research questions and Lewin’s conceptual framework guided the data analysis. It was important to investigate what both schools did or did not do to improve learning results for Latino students.
CHAPTER 4—RESULTS AND FINDINGS

This chapter presents the results and findings of the data collection and analysis of the study of the two small high schools. The previous chapters described the nature of this study, the literature review pertaining to this study, the research design and methodology, and the theoretical framework that directed this study. The purpose of this chapter is to report and analyze the data, clarify the findings, and organize results in light of the research questions posed.

This study investigated the phenomenon of turnaround schools through a comparative case study of two small high schools. This study deepened the understanding of how low-performing schools with large percentages of Latino students turn around and become high-performing schools where student achievement gains are sustained. The study examined the context in which turnaround efforts took root at one high school and made less impact in another. Further, this study compared and contrasted the factors that influenced and inhibited change in two schools that started with many similar contextual problems and opportunities, yet failed to produce similar momentum for change. In particular, this study examined the principals’ role in initiating, supporting, and sustaining change in a turnaround school.

Chapter 4 describes the two schools selected for this study. The profiles of both schools are presented in detail, including demographic and student achievement data for each of the schools. Next, the themes obtained from the analysis of interviews, observations, and archival documents are presented. The following section presents data derived from responses to research questions that guided this study. These research questions were:
1. In what ways were the turnaround school and the comparison school similar 5 years ago when they were both initiated? In what ways were the two schools different? In what ways are the turnaround school and the comparison school similar and different today?

2. What factors have influenced or inhibited improvement at both schools? Among the two schools, how are those factors similar and/or different? In particular, what factors might have helped initiate change, prevent change from starting, support change, slow change, sustain change, and/or derail change?

3. What differences in leadership behavior might have influenced the differences in learning results between the turnaround school and the comparison school? In particular, what leadership behaviors might have helped initiate change, prevent change from starting, support change, slow change, sustain change, and/or derail change?

4. What has been the impact of changes at these two schools on students (in particular Latino students), families, teachers, and the school community?

This study concentrated on two small high schools in an urban district in Southern California. This qualitative case study utilized a purposive sample of two small high schools from the same district. One school was selected because it represented a successful turnaround. The second school was selected because it shared similar demographics, challenges, and opportunities as the turnaround school; however, it only achieved minimal improvements in academic achievement.

By design, the researcher planned and carried out a comparative case study through a process that included continual reflection about the data (Creswell, 2009). The
researcher conducted observations and interviews and gathered relevant documents in the small high schools. Field notes were taken during observations of meetings, award ceremonies, and school site and district professional development meetings. The notes included descriptions of people, settings, and key activities. The document review process included exploring relevant artifacts from each of the schools, including reports and presentations found on district websites. These documents and artifacts included student achievement data reports, fact sheets, professional development materials, and a variety of published plans and reports.

In addition, the researcher acquired relevant archival documents from both schools. These documents included School Accountability Report Card (SARC), California Standard Tests (CST), and Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) documents from the previous 5 years. The researcher analyzed demographic data for the two small high schools including enrollment, ethnic composition, attendance, and graduation rates.

Also, the researcher conducted one-on-one interviews with key members of each small high school. In each school the following people were interviewed: the principals (2), teachers (6), parents (2), and students (2). The interviews took place in different places depending on the interviewee availability. The principals were interviewed in their schools. The teachers were interviewed in their schools, in a district office, and in a coffee shop. One of the parents was interviewed at work and the other parent met the researcher at the school. One student was interviewed in the school, and the other student’s interview took place over the phone. Majority of the interviews were recorded and transcribed professionally. Some of the teachers’ interviews were done without a recorder, and the researcher took notes of the interview. The names of the district and
schools have been changed to preserve anonymity. In addition, all the names of the interviewees are coded to preserve their anonymity.

**Innovation High School (IHS)**

Innovation High School is part of the Loma Verde Unified School District (LVUSD), one of the largest school districts in California and among the 25 largest districts in the United States. Almost 75% of the district’s students are racial minorities, more than 50% qualify for free- or reduced-price lunch, and one in three students are English language learners (ELLs). Since 2000, LVUSD implemented new programs in an attempt to address the issues associated with the achievement gap. Under the auspices of the American Institutes for Research and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, plans were laid during the 2003-2004 school year to redesign three large comprehensive high schools in the district and divide them into small high schools of approximately 500 students each.

In June 2004, IHS closed as a comprehensive high school and re-opened as one of four campuses in one educational complex. In 2003-2004, IHS, as a comprehensive school, served approximately 1,800 students from three ethnically diverse neighboring communities. The ethnic breakdown was: 33% Hispanic, 20.2% African American, 18.7% White, 17.6% Indochinese, 5% Filipino, 3.1% Asian, 1.9% Pacific Islander, and .6% Native American (see Figure 1).

Innovation High School student achievement data in 2003-2004 garnered an Academic Performance Index (API) score of 626. The school’s API is a number that ranges from 200 to 1,000 and is calculated from the results for each school’s students on statewide tests. The state has set 800 as the API target for all schools to meet. The
schools that do not meet 800 are required to meet annual growth targets until that goal is met (CDE, 2010). Among the various racial/ethnic groups, African American students scored the lowest, with an API of 581 and Hispanic students scored 588 (see Figure 2).

Through the California Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) program, students in Grades 2-11 were tested annually in different subject areas. In 2003, IHS student proficiency levels ranged from less than 1% proficient in 9th grade science to less than 32% proficient in 9th grade English (see Table 1).

For the 2003-2004 school year, the California Department of Education reported disaggregated achievement results for English learners (ELs), non-English learners, socioeconomically disadvantaged students, and students with disabilities at IHS. As depicted in Table 2, non-English learners scored substantially better than did ELs.
Figure 2. Innovation High School Academic Performance Index, 2003-2004.

Table 1

Innovation High School California Standard Tests Proficient or Advanced Percentage, 2003-2004

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade level</th>
<th>ELA (%)</th>
<th>Math (%)</th>
<th>Science (%)</th>
<th>Social studies (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>31.6</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>30.0</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>16.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>25.6</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>21.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2

*California Standard Tests, 2003-2004: Percentage of Students Proficient in English Language Arts at Innovation High School*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade level</th>
<th>English learner (%)</th>
<th>Non-English learner (%)</th>
<th>Socioeconomically disadvantaged (%)</th>
<th>Nonsocio-economically disadvantaged (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>37.6</td>
<td>24.3</td>
<td>39.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>37.6</td>
<td>24.4</td>
<td>35.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>31.5</td>
<td>21.2</td>
<td>30.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Nonsocioeconomically disadvantaged students scored better than socioeconomically disadvantaged students.

In 2003-2004, there were important differences in the English language arts (ELA) performance of students from the various racial/ethnic groups at IHS. The percentage of students achieving at proficient or advanced levels are shown in Table 3. The performance of racial/ethnic groups at IHS did not vary as much in other subjects such as math, science, and social studies.

Table 3


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade level</th>
<th>African American (%)</th>
<th>Asian (%)</th>
<th>Filipino (%)</th>
<th>Hispanic (%)</th>
<th>Indo-chinese (%)</th>
<th>Native American (%)</th>
<th>Pacific Islander (%)</th>
<th>White (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>24.7</td>
<td>23.5</td>
<td>30.0</td>
<td>26.8</td>
<td>43.4</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>40.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>20.9</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>66.7</td>
<td>18.9</td>
<td>21.2</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>52.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>20.7</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>38.1</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>19.7</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>43.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In 2003-2004, IHS had 88 teachers. All but 10 were fully credentialed and teaching in their subject area; these 10 teachers had emergency credentials through district internships, university internships, preinterns, and emergency permits. The class size average for English was 22 students, math 27 students, science 32, and social science 32. There were four counselors with an average of 412 students per caseload, one librarian, one psychologist, one nurse, and one resource specialist.

**The New Innovation High School Small High School**

In the fall of 2004, IHS opened as a small school with 458 students. The student population reflected similar racial/ethnic composition as the comprehensive high school had, except for a slightly higher Hispanic population (see Figure 3).

![Student Enrollment by group at IHS](image)

*Figure 3. Innovation High School student enrollment by group, 2004.*

The redesigned IHS small school featured implementation of new programs focused on improving student achievement through new learning opportunities for all
students. The School Accountability Report Card (SARC) for IHS states that the following practices were implemented in 2004-2005:

- Implementation of Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program in all grade levels.
- Grade-level advisory courses.
- School-wide behavior, decorum, and attendance policies.
- Partnership with a neighboring community college.
- Homework resource online.
- Online tool for parents, ParentConnection, to monitor their student’s education.
- Before and after-school academic tutoring in all content areas.
- Focused individualized educational planning conferences for teachers and parents.
- Academic counseling for all students starting 9th grade.
- Professional development on program evaluation for teachers.

The 2003-2004 school year was the last year IHS students tested as a comprehensive high school. In 2005, the new small school IHS students took the CST in all subjects. Figure 4 shows the percentages of students who were proficient at each grade level (9th-11th) in ELA. Figure 5 shows the percentages of students who were proficient in math. Students at IHS continued to demonstrate higher proficiency attainment in ELA than in math, yet there was significant growth in math throughout the 6 school years. English Language Arts more than doubled in some grades. For example, 9th graders increased in proficiency from 32% to 65%; 10th graders increased from 30%
to 69%; and 11th graders moved from 26% to 69%. Eleventh graders made the highest gains in ELA proficiency.

The students’ growth in math proficiency was significant. At IHS, 9th graders increased proficiency from 8% to 28%. In the 10th grade, the proficiency growth was 22 percentage points during the 6-year period. Eleventh graders made gains throughout the 6-year span, but not to the level achieved at other grade levels.

Figure 6 shows the growth in ELA proficiency for ELs from Grade 9 through 11. In 2004, only 3% of ELs achieved proficiency in ELA by the 11th grade. In 2007, 26% of 11th grade ELs achieved proficiency in ELA.
**Figure 6.** English learners’ California Standard Tests English Language Arts proficiency.

Figure 7 shows the results of Hispanics CST-ELA proficiency over 4 years 2004-2007. Every year, ELs in 9th and 11th grades demonstrated growth in proficiency. In all three grades, proficiency rates were substantially higher in 2007 than they were in 2004.

**Figure 7.** Hispanics’ California Standard Tests English Language Arts proficiency.

**California High School Exit Exam**

In California, all high school students must pass the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) to earn a high school diploma. California created the test as a means of raising student achievement in high schools. The test helps to ensure that students graduate from high school with grade level skills in reading, writing, and math. Students
first take this test in the 10th grade. If they do not pass the test in the 10th grade, they have several additional chances to take the test in subsequent years. In Grade 11, they can take the test two times. In Grade 12, they have up to five opportunities to take the test. The CAHSEE has two parts: English-language arts (ELA), and mathematics (CDE, 2010).

All students in California public schools must satisfy the CAHSEE requirement, as well as all other state and local graduation requirements, to receive a high school diploma. The primary purpose of the CAHSEE is to: (a) significantly improve student achievement in public high schools, and (b) to ensure that students who graduate from public high schools can demonstrate grade level competency in reading, writing, and mathematics (CDE, 2010). Figure 8 depicts upward movement of proficiency in the CAHSEE for 5 years at IHS.

![Figure 8. Innovation High School California High School Exit Exam scores, 2005-2010.](image)
Figure 9 shows the growth in the API for IHS. School wide, IHS increased 153 points from 651 to 804 within a span of 5 years.

Figure 9. Academic Performance Index (API) for Innovation High School.

Soledad High School

Soledad High School is also part of the Loma Verde Unified School District (LVUSD). As described earlier, beginning in 2000, LVUSD implemented new programs to address issues associated with the achievement gap. In 2003-2004, the American Institutes for Research and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation led the effort to break up three large comprehensive schools and redesign them to include several small high schools of approximately 500 students each. Soledad High School was one of these.

In June 2004, SHS closed as a comprehensive high school and re-opened as one of four campuses in an educational complex. In 2003-2004, SHS, as a comprehensive school, served approximately 1,700 students. Soledad High School served an ethnically
diverse community including families classified as middle class, as well as a significant portion receiving some form of federal or state aid. Their ethnic breakdown was 38.4% Hispanic, 29.4% African American, 6.9% White, 22% Indochinese, 1% Filipino, 1.6% Asian, .4% Pacific Islander, and .3% Native American (see Figure 10).

![Student Enrollment by group](image)

**Figure 10.** Soledad High School student enrollment by group, 2003-2004.

In 2003-2004, SHS student achievement scores garnered an API of 570. As indicated in Figure 11, the lowest performing ethnic groups were African American students (520 API) and Hispanic students (536 API).

Through the California Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) program, students in Grades 2-11 are tested annually in different subject areas. In 2003-2004, SHS student proficiency levels ranged from as low as 3.0% proficient in 9th grade science to as high as 21.5% proficient in 11th grade social studies (see Table 4).
Table 4

Soledad High School California Standard Tests Proficient or Advanced Percentage, 2003-2004

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade level</th>
<th>ELA (%)</th>
<th>Math (%)</th>
<th>Science (%)</th>
<th>Social studies (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>19.3</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>17.3</td>
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<td>14.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>20.8</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>21.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Proficiency rates in English language arts were particularly low for ELs. Table 5 shows that non-English learners at SHS were much more likely to be proficient in English language arts than were ELs. Similarly, nonsocioeconomically disadvantaged students were more likely to be proficient than were socioeconomically disadvantaged students.

Table 6 shows the percentages of students from each racial/ethnic group who achieved at the proficient or advanced level in English language arts in 2003-2004. The table indicates that White students were far more likely to achieve proficiency than were
Table 5

California Standard Tests, 2003-2004: Percentage of Students Proficient in English Language Arts at Soledad High School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade level</th>
<th>English learner (%)</th>
<th>Non-English learner (%)</th>
<th>Socioeconomically disadvantaged (%)</th>
<th>Nonsocio-economically disadvantaged (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>31.6</td>
<td>16.9</td>
<td>27.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>30.2</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>25.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>28.1</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>24.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade level</th>
<th>African American (%)</th>
<th>Asian (%)</th>
<th>Filipino (%)</th>
<th>Hispanic (%)</th>
<th>Indo-chinese (%)</th>
<th>Native American (%)</th>
<th>Pacific Islander (%)</th>
<th>White (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>17.9</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>21.4</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>53.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>24.8</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>26.8</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>13.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

students in other ethnic groups. The other subjects, math, science, and social studies, did not have a major disparity from 1 year to another.

During the 2003-2004 school year, there were 82 teachers at SHS. Seventy-two of them were fully-credentialed and teaching in subject area. Ten of the teachers were on emergency credentials including district internships, university internships, preinterns, and emergency permits. The class size average for English was 26 students. There were four counselors with an average of 430 students per caseload, one librarian, one psychologist, one nurse, and no resource specialist.
The New Soledad High School Small High School

In the fall of 2004, SHS opened as a small school with 428 students and a similar student demographic in terms of racial/ethnic composition (see Figure 12). The newly redesigned SHS included the implementation of new philosophies that focused on improving student achievement and providing new learning opportunities for all students. The mission of the new SHS was to learn through experience, lead by example, and succeed with excellence. Soledad High School staff believed in personalization and knowing their students, adapting their teaching styles to their students’ learning styles, and involving their students in their educational choices.

![Student Enrollment by group](image)

*Figure 12.* Soledad High School student enrollment by group, 2004.

In 2004-2005, SHS students took the California Standard Tests in all subjects. In 2005, the API for the new school was 554 and their ranking statewide was in the 2nd
decile. Figure 13 depicts CST ELA proficiency results for 9th to 11th students. There was sporadic growth within the grade levels and there was not a consistent upward trend.

**Figure 13.** Soledad High School California Standard Tests English Language Arts proficiency results, 2004-2009.

The results for mathematics were lower than results for ELA. Figure 14 shows that there was no significant growth in mathematics within the 5 years (2004-2009). Figures 15 and 16 show the percentages of ELs and Hispanics at SHS who achieved proficiency in ELA. English learners did not increase proficiency levels; however, by 2007 Hispanic students made large gains compared to their performance in 2004.

**Figure 14.** Soledad High School California Standard Tests mathematics proficiency results, 2004-2009.
Figure 15. Soledad High School California Standards Test English learners’ English Language Arts proficiency.

Figure 16. Soledad High School California Standards Test Hispanics’ English Language Arts proficiency.

Figure 17 illustrates the CAHSEE results for 5 years at SHS. The percentage of SHS students who passed each subject increased by nine percentage points over a 5-year period. It should, however, be noted that even in 2010, almost two-thirds of SHS students did not pass this exit examination on the first administration.
Figure 17. Soledad High School’s CAHSEE results, 2005-2010.

Figure 18 shows the change in API from 570 to 563 between 2004-2009. During this 6-year period, the API fluctuated from a low of 547 to a high of 594.

Qualitative Data

In each of the small high schools, selected individuals participated in interviews ranging from 20-60 minutes. These included the principal, three teachers, a parent, and a student at each school. The researcher contacted the administrator and conducted the first interview. With the help of the principals, the researcher selected key teachers, parents, and students. The researcher contacted a pool of participants and then interviewed them in the schools, in their work location, by phone, and in a coffee shop. Using an interview protocol, the researcher interviewed six individuals from each school. Table 7 shows the interview sample and provides the codes utilized to identify the interviewees in the sections of the findings.
Figure 18. Soledad High School Academic Performance Index, 2005-2009.

Table 7

Interview Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Small high school</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Years in school</th>
<th>Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Innovation High School (INS)</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>IP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Innovation High School (INS)</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>IT1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Innovation High School (INS)</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>IT2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Innovation High School (INS)</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>IT3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Innovation High School (INS)</td>
<td>Parent</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>IPR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Innovation High School (INS)</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>IS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soledad High School (SHS)</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>SP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soledad High School (SHS)</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>ST1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soledad High School (SHS)</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>ST2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soledad High School (SHS)</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>ST3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soledad High School (SHS)</td>
<td>Parent</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>SPR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soledad High School (SHS)</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>SS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
After conducting these interviews, the researcher sent all digital interviews to a transcriber. All interviews were transcribed and returned electronically to the researcher. The interviews were coded and divided by themes and subcategories.

The following two sections of the study are the findings and responses to the research questions. The findings brought to light three main themes: leadership, personalization, and systemic change. Within the three main categories, there are several subcategories that emerged during the study. Table 8 lists the themes and subthemes culled from data collected in response to research questions.

Table 8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes and Subcategories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buy-in by all stakeholders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building capacity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Innovation High School**

The following is a synopsis of the findings from the interviews at Innovation High School.

**Leadership**

Leadership on the part of the principal and teachers at the school site level emerged as a major theme throughout the study. The principal’s leadership at IHS had a clear impact on the staff. One teacher described the principal by saying, “She is innovative and inclusive in all of her decisions. Our opinion and... our expertise is
taken into consideration in a majority of the decisions in the school” (IT1). A parent
noted, “I think she really has high expectations for the students and believes that kids rise
to the occasion” (IPR). In addition, one of the teachers mentioned, “She has certain goals
that need to be done and she follows through until the end and she holds everyone
accountable” (IT2).

There are several subcategories tied to leadership: access to information; buy-in
by all stakeholders; professional development; and building capacity on the site. In IHS,
the principal was a math administrator 2 years prior to the high school redesign into a
small school. The principal had a good handle of the school’s instructional curriculum
and well-understood the school’s educational needs.

When asked to describe her leadership team, the principal of IHS responded,
“What is really unique I think is that I have more of a core set of teachers in my
instructional team. They are the ones that really want to be involved and like to lead the
charge” (IP). The principal further explained how she utilized her leadership team by
stating:

I make the ultimate call but I refuse to make decisions on my own. It is pointless.
When I sit around a table with a small group—not a large . . . group . . .—it
changes sometimes what I am thinking. Just what I say might trigger something
or it may also create better ideas. (IP)

**Access to information.** One of the subcategories under leadership that emerged
from this study is access to information for all students. The principal of IHS explained
that all students had the capacity to learn. The main barrier she saw was that the students
were not able to decipher the information in the texts; hence students did not have access
to the curriculum. She believed that textbooks had too much information on the page. Teachers began to “chunk” the information that was relevant for their lessons.

At the beginning, we really did not understand the importance of information and literacy and how it applies to core content. And I think now they [teachers] understand how critical that piece is, especially for English Learners [ELs]: the ability to be able to decipher the text, to be able to read for information. To be able to attack prompts. And I think it is a huge piece that has increased our ability to help students. (IP)

A staff member commented on a program IHS implemented specifically for ELs: “There were two teachers who worked closely on how to teach teachers how to deliver the information in a more effective way” (IT2). Innovation High School obtained and implemented the Striving Readers’ grant from the district to help with literacy, and one teacher was added to their roster for the express purpose of improving literacy programs and delivery of literacy content and coaching.

The principal at IHS noted:

One of the things that I saw as a math administrator in this school, even when we first broke up into small schools, was that teachers really had no idea how to differentiate or provide strategies for ELs. They were really delivering information, rather than making the content or the information accessible to the students. That is a big difference. (IP)

Two teachers took the ELs and English as a Second Language (ESL) students and started to teach them how to access the information from the text. “It was a totally different approach to teaching, and it worked,” one teacher remarked (IT1). This same
teacher said that they spent hours preparing for the class by making copies of the actual textbook in large print: “We spent our money on supplies for students. We bought a lot of highlighters, and students learned how to access information from the textbook” (IT1).

Another teacher stated, “I saw a change in the student’s confidence when they opened the textbook. I taught English and social studies to far below [basic] students, mostly ELs and to the ESL 3/4 and ESL 5/6 to students” (IT2).

The principal believed that this focus on ensuring student access to curricular information was among the most important changes in the school and one which made a tremendous impact. She explained:

We tried to do everything—all these different things, and we found out the first year is that we weren’t doing any of them well. We were doing too much. There was too much going on, and that’s when we started thinking, what are we doing well? Now let’s pick those things that we are really good at and make them phenomenal. And that is where we started seeing the results. Our EL program with the Striving Readers’ grant, let’s do that really well. (IP)

**Buy-in by all stakeholders.** Another subcategory that emerged as a key to the success of IHS was buy-in by all stakeholders. “Well, I think that I was very fortunate, because when we broke up [into small schools] many of the people who philosophically were aligned with me joined me,” explained the principal (IP). This theme emerged clearly as teachers were interviewed. There was a spirit of collaboration and almost all of the teachers wanted to change the school. One staff member explained:
We felt we had won the battle since we formed a really good team. There were a few teachers who were not as enthusiastic as others but, aside from one, we all believed we had an opportunity to transform this school. (IT1)

Another teacher recalled:

The first year we were not all together, but we did have the majority of teachers on board. This is really important because we wanted all students to experience similar things in all the classrooms. We stressed this a lot in our first year as a small school. (IT2)

The principal articulated an intentional strategy for developing buy-in at the new small high school:

In my thought process I had thought, I am going to get together the best core group of teachers I possibly can, so that whoever comes in will be successful. And I started with about, I would say about half and half that were aligned with me, and half were placed here and had rights. But the ones I was able to get on board were very vocal, passionate, and really understood what we were trying to do as a small school. (IP)

As noted above, the principal and teachers viewed the “buy-in” issue as crucial in the development of the school culture. An example of this was described by the principal in a discussion of one of her early meetings:

I remember it was our second meeting during a school year, and a teacher that was placed here because she was displaced [from another school] started complaining about the reading scores and how low our kids were reading. And [she complained about] how the parents weren’t participating, and blah, blah, blah.
And you know, the typical . . . everything is horrible. And one of my teachers, just in the middle of the meeting (and there are like 25 of us) stands up and looks at her and says, “You know what, we are not a culture of complaint. We are not doing this. We are not going backward.” And I did not have to say anything. (IP)

Innovation High School had a core of teachers who kept everyone accountable. The teachers with the leadership of the principal had an agreement that they were a team, and all of them would uphold the high expectations for all students.

After the first year, several teachers moved to other schools, and the principal was strategic in selecting and placing new teachers. The principal dealt with this situation with aplomb:

The first year, I lost the teachers who did not want to be in our school, and I had vacancies. So then, I was very particular about whom I would bring on board. And I would put them through hell to try to apply here. If they applied here, it is because they wanted to work here. Not only did they have to interview preliminarily with me, but then they had to do an interview with teachers and staff. Then they had to do a demo lesson over the summer in front of students who were struggling ELs. Because I thought, “If they really want to do it, they are going to do everything.” You’d be surprised how many teachers declined because they did not want to do a demo lesson. And so consequently, every year we got stronger and stronger teachers. And then the teachers who did not buy-in in the whole process started leaving. (IP)

One of the teachers stated that she gave up time to be part of the interview process in order to assure they would get a good fit, adding that she “was impressed how many of
us were willing to hold the line and give up summer days to interview future teachers” (IT1). “For me, I liked working and learning from other teachers so I looked for that when I interviewed teachers,” said a colleague (IT2).

**Professional development and building capacity.** Professional development (PD) was less strategic and more of an accidental event at IHS, and it came via their Striving Readers’ grant. This grant is aimed to raise high school students’ literacy levels and build a strong scientific research base for identifying strategies that improve literacy skills. A coach came with the grant, and the professional development was focused on literacy and access to information. The principal noted:

> We started doing tons of literary support in all of the content areas. So her job [the coach’s job] was to teach teachers how to teach their students how to access information in biology, statistics, chemistry, and other core subjects. (IP)

The school implemented the Strategies for Literacy Instruction in Content (SLIC) curriculum in every single classroom, and the professional development was focused on using this curriculum correctly. The principal arranged for teachers to be pulled out for a day as a department, and they would develop strategies they could use in the classroom. At the end, the principal reported that the majority of the teachers knew the SLIC curriculum very well.

In the interviews, professional development was not mentioned frequently, yet teachers were pulled out in an average of 3 days a semester, and a group of teachers would do a lot of the PD in the summer. One teacher mentioned:
PD for me was important, but I did not like being out of the classroom, so I preferred to do it in the summer. But the reality is, we had on-going PD throughout the year since we had a coach all year. (IT2)

It is important to note that the professional development at IHS was not simply intended to provide teachers with enrichment. Instead, it was intended to build the capacity of teachers to meet the learning needs of IHS students. Professional development became an important leadership tool for changing instruction at IHS.

In an anecdote noted above, the principal described a situation where a teacher stood up and talked about not going backwards. Clearly, the principal at IHS built capacity within her staff and little by little instilled in them leadership skills. She gave them responsibilities and support. The principal further explained:

My core teachers, the department chairs, or whatever you want to call them like ILT, Instructional Leadership Team, all of them are the leaders. They took ownership of the learning at our school and made my job less stressful and [more] fun because we all shared the responsibilities of the school. (IP)

In describing the principal’s leadership, one teacher said:

She had her own plan in mind, but at the end we all looked up to her for the final answer, and it was almost the same as ours, all the time. She really believed in us making the right decision and empowered us at our school. (IT1)

**Personalization at Innovation High School**

The second theme to emerge in this study is personalization. Personalization is a crucial component in the small school concept. In this study, several subcategories emerged: a culture of high expectations, parent involvement, and, collaboration. A
student mentioned, “I feel like I matter in this school. I was in another school where I was only a number. Here everyone knows me and my mother and that I am a good kid” (IS). The culture of IHS changed as the comprehensive school broke into small schools. The principal explained, “I would have to say kids are in class and kids are on time, which was very nonapparent when they started small schools” (IP). Similarly, a parent mentioned, “My son came from a comprehensive school, and when we got to this school, he liked the individualized attention that he was getting” (IPR). Parents reported that teachers felt responsible for the future of the students. For example, a parent explained:

One teacher was helping a group of students with the college application just before Thanksgiving break, and she noticed that several students were not close to finishing, and she told the students, I am not leaving this classroom until everybody has submitted their application. (IPR)

**Culture of high expectations.** Educators at IHS personalized the learning experience by demonstrating high expectations for student behavior and achievement. The principal described her faculties’ efforts to build in students an expectation that they would be in class on time every day, ready to learn.

After the second year as a small school, IHS students had the opportunity to take community college classes. At first, only the top students were given the option to take these classes. The principal reported that later she thought:

Wait a minute, how about offering this opportunity to all the students? Let’s give up some seats to them. And now every student at IHS has to take a [college-level] class. Why? Because it is an expectation. And it should be a culture that is
offered to everybody, not just what you typically see in schools, where the smart kids get everything. (IP)

The principal at IHS shared a story about a student who arrived from a rough neighborhood and who was described as a “wanna be,” a student who wanted to be a gang member. The principal reported:

I told him, “Prepare yourself, you are going to take a community college [course] in the 11th grade.” He told me, “No I am not. I am not going to do that.” I am like, “Yes you are.” Two months later, I told him again, “Prepare yourself.” He is like, ”Oh, okay, I guess I will.” (IP)

The principal mentioned that she had to follow up with the student regarding everything that needed to be done in order for him to attend community college. This type of individual attention to students was not unusual. One teacher mentioned, “The principal does not give up on the kids. She follows up with things we cannot do. She has high expectations for all the students” (IT3). Additionally, the principal explained that this type of attention was part of her expectations for all students. She emphasized:

All of my seniors graduate early, and they are all enrolled in college second semester. It is the culture of the school. When you enter in the ninth grade, you learn about community college, and you know that seniors [at IHS] graduate early. (IP)

The expectation for students to take high school classes has influenced the perspectives of students and teachers. A student said, “We cannot believe we are going to college while we are in high school. Even the students in college cannot believe we are high school students” (IS). Similarly, a teacher reported, “It is incredible to see students
taking the professional growth, psychology, and language classes in college. I am surprised students do well there. I know they are scared at first, but they like the liberty they get” (IT3). The same teacher concluded, “This was new to all of us. This school has changed dramatically” (IT3).

The dramatic change in expectations was referenced by the principal. She recalled the first time she observed the IHS classrooms before the school became a small high school:

It was so bad. It was the way the kids dressed, the way the kids behaved, the lack of instruction, the lack of discipline, the sheer racism. I did not understand it existed. As I visited the classrooms, I have never seen it so blatant. You know, the kids can be loud. They are Black or Hispanic. They sit in the back of the room with nothing but graffiti in their notebook or on the desk. And the teacher would tell me, “It is okay, as long as they are quiet and do not disrupt.” And then you would see all the White and Asian students in the front, and it is was perfectly okay. So you can imagine the ESL and special needs classrooms. There was a whole lot of nothing going on. (IP)

Later, at the school board meeting, when the board announced the names of the principals selected to lead the small schools, the new IHS principal thought to herself, “I do not think we can fix that” (IP), and then she resolved to try.

“It is like night and day” was one of the most repeated statements from the principal, teachers, students, and parents as they described the differences between the former school and the small IHS. Often, they attributed the “night and day” transformation to different expectations. For example, participants reported, “The
classroom environment changed drastically. The students behave very different, they care now for their education.” Other participants explained, “Students started following the dress code at the school, and discipline was important and the principal followed up.” Still others emphasized changes in expectations for educators at IHS. For example, one participant explained, “The teachers were teaching, and teachers started working together” (IP, IT2, IT3).

**Parent involvement.** One of the factors that contributed to the personalized learning environment at IHS was the relationship between parents and educators. When asked about parent involvement in the school, the principal responded:

I don’t have that much parent participation other than their involvement in the School Site Council or Open House. I know it is weird because we think it makes a big difference, but our parents are very happy with the results of the school and I don’t see them that much. (IP)

The principal’s comment suggested that there were minimal levels of conventional parental involvement at IHS; however, other comments indicated that parents were supportive in other ways. For example, a teacher explained:

My parents are supportive when needed. People think we have a lot parent involvement in the school, but we only see them when we have activities for them. We don’t even have a PTA, but to tell you the truth I don’t think it would make a difference. We have great parents. (IT3)

In the absence of conventional organizations and volunteer activities, parents reported that they enjoyed a positive relationship with IHS educators. For instance, a parent said:
I am very happy with this school. I go to work, and I know my son is safe in the school. And whenever I have an issue, the principal, I mean the principal, calls me. I like that parents are taken into account. (IPR)

Nonetheless, the interview data proved to be rather disconfirming evidence of the importance of traditional parent involvement in raising student achievement and ran counter to evidence found in the research literature (Coulombe, 1995). Even though the principal stated that the school did not have a strong parental involvement, parents felt very comfortable coming to school for any help or advice regarding their students. The principal shared that parent participation was normal when it came to School Site Council (SSC), Financial Aid Night, Awards Ceremonies, and Curriculum Nights. In the interview with one of the parents, she mentioned that she felt welcomed at school and they knew her name. This is one of the key components of Small Schools.

**Collaboration.** The personalization component in the small school had an effect on students and on teachers. At some small schools, there are around 20 to 30 teachers. Potentially, the principal can get to know the teachers better and teachers can interact with each other more. Interview data suggest that educator collaboration at IHS helped create a personalized working environment, in which teachers learned to help each other improve instruction.

At IHS, the principal observed:

The teachers started to become friends, and they started to share best practices. My job was to get them all at the same pace and place. It was difficult at the beginning, but now it is part of our culture. (IP)
The quality of the collaboration helped create a climate in which teachers trusted each other and the principal. One teacher explained:

I was a new teacher at IHS, it was my third year teaching, but I learned so much more from my colleagues than from my credential program. I had the opportunity to observe other teachers, and they would observe me and give me feedback. My principal would also videotape us and the students, and it was hard to see yourself on video, but I am glad I did it because I learned a lot about my approach to teaching (IT3).

The personalized nature of working relationships at IHS seemed to create an atmosphere of trust and safety. For example, another teacher mentioned that she felt like she was working with family and she felt safe to express her frustration. She explained, “The majority of the teachers want to be better and in this school. We feel safe to voice our frustration, but in a positive and constructive way, not in a complaining manner” (IT2).

This atmosphere of trust and safety might have been particularly important, as the principal endeavored to institute changes at the new IHS. The principal shared, “Everything was hard at the beginning, the dress code, discipline, the lanyards, the professional development, the alignment of curriculum, etc., but as we moved along, it was part of a system that got better every year” (IP). In the absence of a trusting, safe environment in which faculty felt like family, one might wonder if changes at IHS could have occurred with such success and if new systems could have been successfully implemented.
Systemic Change

When asked to describe the biggest challenge in turning around IHS, the principal pointed to the importance of systemic change. She explained that the former school’s core mechanisms (systems) were counterproductive to the goal of improving learning results. She emphasized that those systems needed to change if the school was likely to succeed. For example, the principal explained:

There were two major challenges. The instructional program was atrocious. There was no continuum; the teachers did not talk to each other. They were used to closing their doors, and even the good ones did not interact with others. And the other problem was a lack of high expectations. (IP)

The principal emphasized that more modest changes to procedures or programs would have been insufficient. She underscored, “We had to start from scratch and make a change that we could uphold” (IP). As the principal and teachers discussed their pursuit of systemic changes, they emphasized a focus on accountability, the use of data, and changes to curriculum, instruction, and student engagement.

Accountability. At IHS, accountability was present in different forms. Teachers reported that they felt accountable to their principal and to each other. Specifically, teachers felt accountable for improving the rigor of the content they taught. As well, they felt accountable for teaching in ways that would lead more students to learn. As one teacher explained, “A few of us were the stronger teachers in our group, and we were so tired of teachers getting away with stuff. We liked that our principal believed in holding all of us, including herself accountable” (IT2).
The principal held specific ideas about what needed to change in IHS classrooms. She mentioned:

There was a notable shift in how we did things after the first year. We needed to do things in a consistent and systematic way, starting with the classroom environment to how we structured the daily lesson. I wanted to see exceptional teaching in every classroom. (IP)

Regular collaboration and professional development sessions helped strengthen the culture of accountability at IHS. During the first 5 years of the small schools initiative, the school received funding for professional development and for collaboration. At IHS, teachers were constantly getting together to plan and align the curriculum. In addition, at the end of each academic year, teachers met for 3 weeks to examine what they accomplished during the year.

As the principal and teachers came to agreements about changes that would be enacted, several teachers held the principal accountable for holding teachers accountable for the changes. The principal explained:

My teachers held me accountable for everything I would say. I remember one time I had forgotten to bring up in our faculty meeting the “No Movies in Class” policy, and my teachers reminded me right away. [Similarly,] I would be asked if I had dealt with a discipline problem or if I had learned how to do a report on DataDirector. It all starts with me. (IP)

Teachers learned how to teach better and how to differentiate instruction in their classrooms through professional development led by the teachers themselves. One teacher said:
We were meeting all the time, before, during, and after school. We would get excited when things would go well in a lesson. A majority of the departments met and we would do this across the curriculum. We were/are like a family. (IT1)

**Use of data.** The use of data helped generate systemic change at IHS. Regularly and systematically, the principal shared data in a way that built a culture of accountability. The principal and teachers analyzed many different types of data in their school. “There was one teacher who looked at data differently than others. He was looking not only at trends but also sub-strands in benchmarks and end-of-year course exams,” recalled one of the founding teachers (IT2).

The principal led IHS teachers in using data to look at practices that were working and expand their use. The regular analysis of data led to improved classroom instruction. For example, one teacher explained, “After the first year, we looked at data but it did not make sense. I remember the color bars and beautiful reports, but we could not apply it to our every day teaching” (IT1). However, another teacher continued:

After the second year, we got better at analyzing the data for CAHSEE and CSTs. We looked at data all the time and it was almost every week. Now, it is like putting on your shoes, it is part of our daily life. (IT3)

The same teacher added, “We loved getting our results because then we could see what we needed to do for next year. That is how we learned to become better teachers” (IT3).

One specific change prompted by data use related to the instruction of ELs at IHS. Teachers noted that heavy reliance on textbooks in some classrooms led to lower learning gains for ELs. One teacher explained:
One of the things we needed to improve is how we taught our ELL and ESL population. One teacher was the lead trainer for the school, and she helped all teachers understand how students can learn better and access the information in the textbooks. This may seem simple, but the majority of the information in the textbooks is way above the reading level of our students. For some of us, this was a true revelation. I could see the difference in my English class. In one year, the students made significant gains. (IT1)

**Curriculum, instruction, and student engagement.** At IHS, there was widespread, systemic change in what teachers taught, how teachers delivered instruction and in how teachers engaged students. The principal made it clear, “I do not expect classrooms to be quiet. When I walk into the classroom, I expect students interacting with the information and sharing ideas with each other” (IP).

Physical classroom changes helped promote systemic changes in the way teachers engaged students in learning. A teacher remarked:

The principal changed the physical environment in classrooms. If you walk in our school, you will not find a single desk. We have tables in order for students to work better in pairs. Many of the activities are in groups. (IT2)

In addition to the physical classroom changes, the principal encouraged systemic changes in levels of student engagement through her frequent classroom visits and her regular comments to teachers about student engagement in their classrooms. Teachers had to change their way of delivering information to students. The principal explained:

I think there is a pretty high expectation too for kids to be engaged in conversation. And that would be at all levels across the curriculum, whereas
before I used to notice there was not a lot of talking. Now, teachers do a lot of Socratic seminars, even in ESL classes. [There are] a lot of presentations by students and in math a lot of justifying answers. This was a great change. (IP)

In addition to changing instructional delivery, the principal and teachers at IHS changed the content of instruction. Specifically, they focused on teaching fewer concepts, while striving for deeper levels of understanding. “[Initially,] we tried to do all of the features of small schools and all the interdisciplinary units, and at the end of the year we started thinking we need to do less and we need to do it extremely well,” stated the principal (IP).

In summary, many changes may have contributed to the transformation of Innovation High School. As one teacher explained, “Classrooms look totally different, teachers are teaching different, we are talking and sharing so much more, and we are looking at the results and analyzing where are the holes” (IT3). Leadership has brought about a culture in which information is shared, stakeholders feel that they have ownership, and educators are learning to improve their teaching. There is a personalized culture in which there are high expectations for everyone (including students, teachers, and the administrator), yet there is also strong collaboration designed to help people succeed at meeting expectations. These changes are systemic, rather than episodic. The principal and teachers have made systemic changes in how data are used, how educators hold each other accountable, how instruction is delivered, and how students are engaged. The principal explained, “Every year our school improves. The bottom line is good teaching brings great results” (IP). The Gates funding is no longer supporting small schools in the district; yet, IHS continues to implement their program and continues to
improve learning results. The following year will be challenging due to budget cuts; however, the principal argued, “We have a system that is sustainable. Good teaching does not cost money” (IP).

Soledad High School

The following is a summary of the themes and subcategories of the findings from Soledad High School.

Leadership

Soledad High School (SHS) shared a similar development timeline as IHS, as they changed from a comprehensive high school to a small high school. The principal at SHS was a teacher, and (like the principal at IHS), a math administrator in the comprehensive school. As the newly-selected principal for the small high school, he had a good understanding of the issues facing the student population in this urban small school. A teacher stated, “At small schools, the principal has to do a lot. [He] even directs traffic. [It’s] not like in the comprehensive high school where they are always in the office” (ST1). The principal concurred:

I realized really soon that I was in charge of everything in this school. Then, [I realized] that I had a group of teachers who selected this small school because they did not want to move classrooms. I knew I needed to start building capacity within my staff. As you can see, I had a monumental job ahead of me. (SP)

Whereas the new principal at the other school under study, IHS, embarked on her career with a staff that largely shared her focus and vision, at SHS such was not the case.
A teacher reflected on the past 5 years and said, “I wonder if a stronger leadership would help guide us better in terms of designing stronger programs in the school” (ST2). A colleague agreed, noting:

The first few years, our principal was trying to get consensus between all the teachers, and some teachers did whatever they wanted to do. After 6 years, I think we finally have a strong group of teachers who are committed to transform this school and the frustration is that it might be too late. (ST1)

As was noted in the literature review for this study, leadership matters in improving schools. Interview data from SHS underscored this point by suggesting that a perceived lack of leadership matters as well. For example, one teacher explained:

The principal worked hard trying to get consensus and build budgets. He was very personable with the students, but in my opinion, he did not address the issues about the instructional program from the start. He tried really hard for everyone to get along. (ST2)

A variety of issues emerged as respondents at SHS discussed concerns related to leadership. In particular, subthemes regarding access to information/professional development and buy-in from stakeholders surfaced as issues that influenced how the faculty perceived leadership at SHS.

**Access to information/professional development.** Some SHS teachers acknowledged that they did not know how to get a significant portion of their student body to achieve state standards. Soledad High School had a large student population categorized as ELLs. Some teachers believed that their major barrier was the students’ low reading level and the language barrier. A veteran teacher explained:
We have a group of struggling students who come to us with third grade reading levels. The main problem with small schools is that we have students in all classes with different levels. Even though we have the New Arrival Center (NAC) where students are placed that have been in the district less than a year, it seems that they come out with very low skills and they are mixed with the rest of the student population. (ST2)

This same teacher described the principal’s attempts to provide access to information, noting, “Our principal was very supportive of teachers, and he tried to build strong collaborative networks and strong collaboration between teachers” (ST2).

Similarly, the principal pointed at his attempts to use professional development to move the school’s agenda forward. He also revealed challenges that the school faced (i.e., time to conduct professional development and teacher mobility), as he stated:

We had to do a lot of professional development [PD] to learn how to differentiate instruction in the classroom. Our master schedule limits how many interventions we could use during the year. Also, some teachers were used to teaching in another way and we would invest in PD, then they would go to another school.

The teacher movement was a major problem in our school. (SP)

Initially Gates funding provided resources to support professional development, the principal explained:

We had for the first 5 years the Gates funding, but some people have some misunderstanding about the funds. The funds were limited, and it could only be used for school improvement. We could not pay for teachers, but we could pay teachers for professional development. (SP)
There seems to be some question, however, about whether or not professional development was focused in a manner that helped teachers have access to the most critical information they needed to improve learning results for their students. For example, a teacher noted, “Many of our teachers went to specific conferences in Sacramento and other places about the small school initiative, but many times it did not address the needs of our school” (ST3).

Professional development was a key component for all the small schools, and the principal had to prioritize the school’s professional development needs. The principal said:

The vast majority of this money went to PD. For instance, I invested a humongous amount of money in developing an advisory curriculum that made sense to us. I trained all my teachers in AVID [Advancement Via Individual Determination] and QTEL [Quality Teaching for English Learners] and I paid for all that. Then we visited some small schools in New York and then the money ran out. (SP)

The lack of coherent information about how to meet student needs may have left some teachers feeling disillusioned. For instance, one teacher explained, “When we started with small schools, our directive was to create a small school and create personalization, create that atmosphere. And [we were told] that the scores would follow along with it, which just was not true” (ST2).

**Buy-in by all stakeholders.** Another leadership related issue concerned the principal’s ability to get teachers to “buy-in” and commit effort to improving SHS. A teacher contended:
The biggest issue is the teacher selection. There are definitely a group of teachers who should not have stayed here. They stayed here because they were here from the comprehensive school and did not want to switch rooms and did not want to switch schools. That is sad, and you know I am kind of angry and feel pity for those people because they just don’t quite get it. (ST1)

The principal described the difficulties associated with building a common sense of commit among the school’s stakeholders. He shared, “I know that getting everyone on the same page was very important, but we have a union, and it is hard to do things when we have veteran teachers that do not want to change their way” (SP).

In spite of the frustrations, the SHS principal had some successes in building teaching commitment to the new small school. The principal explained that after a few years, teachers started looking at their small school differently and started taking leadership roles. He explained, “All of a sudden, teachers were looking at the small schools that were being successful and that had similar challenges like us” (SP). One teacher recalled, “Our principal started giving us projects within our departments, and we started selecting chairs and representatives in our schools. This happened after a few years, and I see that we should have started earlier” (ST3). Budget cuts posed major challenges for this small school, and the district considered consolidating some of the small schools. The principal said “We did not know what was going to happen to us. Unfortunately, we lost really good trained teachers because of this uncertainty” (SP). The high mobility rate made building capacity more difficult.
**Personalization**

Personalization is an important element in the development of small schools. At SHS, personalization is one of the strongest components. A parent commented:

I had my oldest son in the comprehensive school, and he finished his last year in the small high school. He saw a major difference from one year to another. He believed that small schools saved him and guided him straight to the university.

(SPR)

One student said, “I am somebody in this school and I feel like everyone knows me. One thing I really like is that I have had the same math teacher for the last 2 years, and she really knows me well. She knows my strengths and weaknesses” (SS). The principal added:

I really get to know the students now. I know most of them by first names, and I am able to build relationships with them. The other part is that I get to know my teachers, not like before [when] I only dealt with the math teachers. (SP)

A teacher reaffirmed this by stating:

The thing that changed for me as a teacher in the small school was that I knew I would see these students again, and again, and again. In fact most students, or at least the majority of them, I see from 9th grade to the 12th grade. So all of a sudden, I as a teacher have a much different investment in my students. (ST1)

All of the stakeholders mentioned that, before it was a small school, the school “had a bad reputation.” This teacher continued, “We were known all over the district about our race riots. There was a lot of racial tension in our school” (ST2). A student
said, “There are still fights, but we have not had any riots” (SS). A teacher described the scene thus:

It was a bizarre situation in our school. Sometimes the riots would be Somalis against African American, and then the next time would be Blacks against Latinos. Now we don’t have that anymore because students get to know each other better. (ST1)

A parent said, “My son graduated 4 years ago and he still feels connected to his teachers. He comes to his brother’s open house and other activities. This is what I like the most about small schools” (SPR).

Culture of high expectations. At SHS many things changed, as it became a small school. Teachers got to know the students better and started expecting more from their students. Personalization led to a culture of higher expectations for students. One teacher explained, “I felt that small schools gave teachers the opportunity to do more than touch the surface with students. One of the major things was that we could teach higher-level classes because we identify those students” (ST1). The principal added, “Due to our population, we could not offer advanced classes like the other schools, but we started to look at cohorts of students and placed them in an advanced track” (SP). One teacher pointed to perhaps the school’s greatest achievement:

After a few years, our students started doing really well in math. Now, I think we have one of the biggest number of students taking higher-level math classes. It caught us off guard, but a teacher from another small school started working with all the math teachers in the complex, and now math is one of the classes that is very successful. (IT2)
A student mentioned that his favorite class is AVID. He explained, “I think this class really got me on track to go to college, and everyone that was part of this class shares the same feeling” (SS). The principal said, “We are getting there, but once again the district is changing the rules, and we do not know what is going to happen next year” (SP).

**Parent involvement.** While personalization may have generated several benefits, it did not necessarily result in increased parental involvement. The principal at SHS mentioned that, as was the case at IHS, the active participation of parents was difficult to achieve:

Parent involvement is always difficult in this type of school. In this school, we have parents who are very diverse, and they do not all speak English. It is hard to get parents to Open House or to serve in our School Site Council. We do have a small group of parents who are active, but for the most part this is the most challenging thing that we have not been able to solve. (SP)

A teacher said, “I think we are the school that has the most languages spoken in the district. This is a major barrier for me, because I cannot communicate with the parents. I have learned to live with that frustration” (ST1). A parent said:

I am part of the SSC, and the principal can count on me. Also, I work for this district in another school, and parent involvement is very low in these schools. I am very active in my student’s education, so the teachers know me and I see that as a major advantage. Somehow we have to communicate that to all the parents. (SPR)
Collaboration. The more personalized nature of the small school also resulted in more relationships among teachers. Teacher collaboration increased when the school became a small school. When asked about teacher collaboration, a teacher explained that, “It was virtually impossible to collaborate as a giant comprehensive school. Teachers were very much departmentalized. And I think that is one of the things teachers still complained about” (ST1). At this small schools, teachers started to work on Project Based Learning (PBL) that involves all teachers across curricular areas. A teacher noted:

[Project Based Learning] brought teachers together for many reasons. One was that we had to get our students ready for the showcase, and then we noticed that we started to learn from each other. Then we won first place in the district showcase and that gave us a reason to work even closer. (ST2)

Another teacher said:

As an English teacher I started to work with the history teachers, but then a math teacher asked me to collaborate with an activity, and all of a sudden the math, science, and history teachers were meeting in my classroom. We recognize the need for that. (ST3)

The principal was very supportive when teachers wanted to work together. He explained, “I made sure we always had money for curriculum writing for teachers. Teachers took ownership of PBL and they started to look at the curriculum differently” (SP).

Systemic Change

Issues related to systemic change emerged in the interviews with SHS stakeholders. Cuban (1990) discussed the importance of systemic change in generating lasting, meaningful school improvements. At SHS, systemic change proved elusive,
perhaps, in part because of difficulties building a sense of accountability for improvement. Another impediment to systemic change might have been the school’s capacity to use data well. Finally, systemic change at SHS required changes in what teachers taught (curriculum) and how teachers provided instruction and engaged students. These changes did not occur in all the ways intended.

**Accountability.** The principal mentioned, “We needed to evaluate our instructional program more frequently, but due to the high teacher mobility it was hard to do this, and it seemed that sometimes we had to start from scratch” (SP). Another teacher added:

> It was hard to make everyone accountable. It becomes extremely difficult to get an adult on track when they do not believe in the small schools concept. That is one of the things the Gates Foundation did not take into consideration. We have no control of the post and bid, and that was a problem in our school. (ST1)

At least one teacher felt that a sense of accountability was beginning to emerge. This teacher pointed out:

> I think after 5 years, we are almost all on board. I guess we realized that we are stronger if we work together. Also, we started working with other small schools, and we were able to visit the schools that were making progress. (ST3)

**Use of data.** Previous to his position as a principal at SHS, SP was a math teacher and then a math administrator. He stated:

> I was all about data and analyzing benchmarks results and CST [California Standards Test] trends. Then, we had to wait a year to see the results because we
were a new school. The one thing I would do different, that we are doing now, is that we are segregating the data and looking at the things that really matter. (SP)

Teachers explained that they were receiving data reports they did not understand. In particular, one teacher claimed, “We would get all these reports from everyone, but we could not understand what it meant. I remember sitting in a meeting with colorful charts but with no meanings. Turns out, all the small schools would get this” (ST3). Similarly, another teacher concluded, “I think at first one of the mistakes that we made was that we were not looking at the data closely.” (ST2). A colleague noted:

The math department started to work together on the data and then they would share out their findings, but this happened during our fourth year. The math teachers in the four small schools would get together and look at everything and we could see the effect on it. Even the district recognized their work. We know how important it was to look at the data frequently, not once a year. (ST1)

**Curriculum, instruction, and student engagement.** The principal mentioned an important part of his strategy for improving curriculum and instruction involved the AVID and QTEL programs. In particular, QTEL was intended to change the way teachers provided instruction to ELLs. The principal explained:

Our biggest challenge was moving our ELLs out of the far below basic quartile. QTEL was a district training for English teachers but that was only the start. QTEL is great on paper but implementing it in a classroom with six languages and several [academic] levels is very challenging. We are getting better and the district is offering QTEL for other core subjects. (SP)
A teacher said:

Our student engagement has gotten better because we have the same students more frequently. I know I am trying to add activities like Socratic seminars in my class, but not all the students are ready for that, but we are working on it. (ST3)

There are, however, some areas of curricular change that are reaping more benefits. Another teacher spoke with pride about the school’s banner math program:

Well, I look at the math department and then I see that our math club has 130 members, and we have the largest student population in calculus in the district. So I know that this happened because the teachers started working together and planning their curriculum and then analyzing everything. I know we [other teachers at SHS] are learning from them and we are very proud of their accomplishments. (ST2)

**Triangulation and Summary Findings**

The data collected in this study were derived from interviews and archival documents from two small high schools. The researcher interviewed principals, teachers, parents, and students from the two small high schools. Due to the nature of the study, where multiple sources of information contributed to the findings, the process of triangulation was utilized to interpret the data. This type of methodology supports reliability and validity of research findings (Creswell, 2009). In this section, the findings and analysis of the data are presented.

The following questions were utilized for the collection of data for this study:

1. In what ways were the turnaround school and the comparison school similar 5 years ago when they were both initiated? In what ways were the two schools
different? In what ways are the turnaround school and the comparison school similar and different today?

2. What factors have influenced or inhibited improvement at both schools?

Among the two schools, how are those factors similar and/or different? In particular, what factors might have helped initiate change, prevent change from starting, support change, slow change, sustain change, and/or derail change?

3. What differences in leadership behavior might have influenced the differences in learning results between the turnaround school and the comparison school?

In particular, what leadership behaviors might have helped initiate change, prevent change from starting, support change, slow change, sustain change, and/or derail change?

4. What has been the impact of changes at these two schools on students (in particular Latino students), families, teachers, and the school community?

The researcher gathered evidence by analyzing data obtained from interviews, from a collection of artifacts, and presentations from the small high schools. Outcomes of the findings in the data fell into three main categories: leadership, personalization, and systemic change. From these three categories, there were several themes that emerged from the interviews. Under leadership, the themes were: access to information, buy-in by all stakeholders, professional development, and building capacity. Under personalization, the themes were: culture of high expectations, parent involvement, and collaboration. The last category was systemic change, and its themes were: accountability, use of data, curriculum and instruction, and student engagement.
Question 1

There were clear changes in both schools. One of the schools had more academic gains than the other, yet there were some similarities in the findings. One of the similar findings was that all stakeholders believed the schools improved and thrived as small schools compared to the previous large comprehensive high school model. The academic performance (API) grew in the first few years for both schools (see Figure 19). Both schools demonstrated growth from the comprehensive school model (2004) to the small school model (2005). Throughout the 5 years after the change to small schools, one of the small schools made significant gains in comparison to the other.

Figure 19. Academic Performance Index scores for Innovation High School and Soledad High School, 2004 and 2005.
One of the most frequently mentioned themes was personalization. These data indicated that all stakeholders believed it made a major difference in building relationships with students, parents, and within the school staff. Personalization was crucial in creating a culture of high expectations and collaboration among the teachers in both schools. This theme was mentioned repeatedly during the interviews. One of the most common statements was that as a student, parent, and teacher, one was lost in a comprehensive high school setting. In contrast, interviewees indicated that in their small schools, everyone knew each other, and teachers got to know the students throughout the high school years. In both schools, teachers felt that they worked better and collaborated in higher degrees in a small high school model. Previously, in the comprehensive model, teachers would only meet during department meetings and for the majority of the time they did not work together on projects. Overall, everything seemed to work more smoothly in the small high school settings.

Figure 20 illustrates the changes in API after 2005. It is clear that IHS made significant academic gains throughout the 5 years starting in 2005, while growth at SHS was minimal. At IHS, the API increased from 651 to 805. In contrast, the API for SHS went from 594 in 2005 to 563 in 2009.

The difference between the two schools was that one of the schools improved academically at a faster pace than the other school. There are several possible reasons this occurred when both schools shared similar demographics and they both had the same funding from the Small Schools Initiative. Leadership and systemic change were two major factors that may have contributed to the comparatively higher academic growth of
Figure 20. Academic Performance Index scores for Innovation High School and Soledad High School, 2005-2009.

one of the schools. These two factors are discussed in greater detail in response to the subsequent research questions.

Innovation High School made significant gains within the first years as a small school (see Figure 21). Soledad High School made some gains in ELA from 2005-2006 in the 9th and 11th grade. In the 9th grade there was a two point increase from one year to the other. In the 11th grade there was a six point increase in ELA (see Figure 22). In comparison to IHS, there were significant gains in all grade levels (see Figure 21).

Question 2

There were several factors that initiated change in both schools. As mentioned before, personalization was very apparent and important, yet there were other factors that contributed to the academic growth. Personalization was important for the social
Figure 21. California Standard Tests and English Language Arts percent proficiency at Innovation High School, 2005 and 2006.

Figure 22. California Standard Tests and English Language Arts percent proficiency at Soledad High School, 2005 and 2006.
environment of each school. The relationships among teachers and students improved, resulting in fewer fights and conflicts school-wide. Prior to becoming small schools, both schools had racially motivated fights that would take place during and after school hours, yet these types of incidents stopped as the comprehensive schools became small schools.

Issues related to leadership and systemic change also influenced the rate of improvement. In IHS, leadership and systemic change were focused and consistent. In SHS, the same factors were not implemented with fidelity and consistency. For example, IHS teachers commented on how they all needed to be “on the same page,” and as soon as one teacher started to complain, the teachers would stand up and push back on that type of behavior. The principal commented that the staff kept each other accountable.

At IHS, the principal was able to help teachers keep focused on a few critical issues. The IHS principal noted, “We concentrated on what we were good at it and did it well” (IP). The principal commented that the first year the staff wanted to do everything, and at the end of the year they looked at the things they knew were working. At IHS focus was channeled toward issues that would generate systemic change in how teachers taught. Innovation High School teachers had access to information (professional development) that helped them change how they taught their students. They started with ELA and ESL classes and they extended the professional development to math, science, and social studies classes. Teachers stated that they were teaching in a different way to a point that the physical environment of a classroom changed in order to increase student engagement.

Soledad High School faced several challenges from its inception as a small school. The principal had to deal with the lack of buy-in from all the teachers. In
addition, there was a large percentage of teacher turnover every year. At SHS, the professional development was less focused on data, and at the end it did not generate as much systemic change as possible. The principal was active in school, and as one teacher mentioned, “he was now directing traffic.” These were significant factors as to why SHS did not show changes. Now, the principal was in charge of the daily operations of the school, in addition to curriculum and instruction.

At IHS, the buy-in from all stakeholders was a major factor that contributed to the overall improvement of the school. The teachers and principal believed that getting everybody on board was the beginning of their journey. At the same time, the principal empowered the teachers, and she was able to build capacity within her staff. It was a common practice for teachers to train each other, and this occurred across all subject areas. For example, math teachers were trained by the English teachers on how to teach students to understand the content of the textbook. These common practices allowed teachers to collaborate to a higher degree.

At SHS, the principal sent teachers to professional development and to conferences; however, teachers may have believed that personalization was going to bring big changes in the school. They may not have understood the importance of making systemic changes to their teaching. While teachers at SHS tried several things, there seemed to be a lack of consistent practice. The principal mentioned that he emphasized AVID and QTEL, and the majority of the teachers were trained; however, every year teachers would move to another school, and he had to start all over. He said that it was hard to build capacity, because not everyone believed in the small school concept. At
SHS, it was clear that there was not buy-in within the staff, and there was a lack of collaboration during the first years.

Another major factor that contributed to the success of IHS was the use of data to improve instruction and curriculum. Even though both principals at the small schools were math teachers and math administrators, only one school analyzed data consistently. At IHS, the teachers learned how to analyze data to change their instruction and student placement. The principal at IHS learned and helped teachers learn what students needed to know in order to score well on the CAHSEE and CSTs. For example, math teachers changed the sequence of the math classes to better prepare students for the CSTs. In addition, the principal mentioned that she learned how to produce reports using the data tool from the district, and she was constantly asking questions about how to better utilize this tool to make reports for teachers.

In contrast, at SHS, the principal and teachers noted that they looked at a lot of data but were not making informed decisions. They did not know how to apply the data in ways that improved what they taught or how they taught. A few years later, they started to visit other small schools to look at best practices and they implemented several of those practices. Both schools showed growth on the California High School Exit Exam (CHSEE), yet, as shown in Figures 23 and 24, IHS doubled the gains compared to SHS.
Figure 23. California High School Exit Exam English Language Arts percent proficiency for Innovation High School and Soledad High School, 2006-2010.

Figure 24. California High School Exit Exam math percent proficiency for Innovation High School and Soledad High School, 2006-2010.
Question 3

Leadership and systemic change were two major factors that contributed to the gains in both schools. In IHS, the leader made sure there was systemic change in every component of the school. The principal empowered the teachers to make the necessary changes to drive the curriculum. The principal stated that even though she had ultimate say, she never made a decision by herself. And every change she made was calculated and analyzed. Every year, they perfected what they did the year before. The teachers met consistently, and they had pull-out days every month. During pull-out days, teachers from a specific subject would meet at school and analyze specific data. The principal budgeted those days to pay for substitutes for those teachers participating in pull-out days.

In the summer, teachers worked 3 weeks analyzing their educational program. Since there was buy-in from all the teachers, there was trust within the staff. The principal said that she would walk around in the classrooms with a video camera taping students and teachers, and nobody felt intimidated. Teachers had the urgency to make the school better and, in the end, the school experienced a profound turnaround, and they have successfully sustained the improvement.

At IHS, the principal was the previous math administrator when the school was a comprehensive school, and she knew things had to change. She mentioned that she remembered thinking that it was an impossible task; yet, after 7 years, IHS is one of the top high schools in the district. Her commitment for change was clear from the start, and she was determined to make the school a better place for all students. In addition, the principal learned how to disaggregate data for everything. She stated that she “drove the research department at the district crazy” with all of her questions. She mentioned that
during her second year, she obtained a struggling readers grant by chance, and that made a big impact in the instruction because teachers learned how to utilize better instructional practices in every subject, especially math. Finally, the principal stated that she demonstrated lessons in the classroom for teachers and said “if I can do it, anyone else can,” and she believed that teachers respected her even more.

At SHS, the principal was committed to the school, since previously he was a math teacher, then a math administrator, then he became the principal when the school converted to a small school. He knew the community, the students, and many of the teachers. He knew what needed to change. Several of his teachers stated that getting consensus was very important for him, but not all of the teachers were on board with the changes. The principal shared that some teachers decided to remain at the school simply because they did not want to change classrooms.

Throughout the interviews, the principal and teachers mentioned that, over time, high mobility rate of teachers slowed down the change and prevented the school from making significant gains. At SHS, the principal utilized professional development from the outside to train the teachers. He mentioned that the school devoted significant funds to send teachers to AVID and QTEL training and to conferences to look at other small high schools, but once the funding ended, the professional development diminished. Several of his teachers noted that, even though they liked the principal, that maybe they needed a stricter administrator who would make everyone accountable and not be as concerned about reaching consensus on every issue.
Question 4

The two schools in this study shared similar demographics, and their largest demographic group was Latino students. Throughout the interviews, the principals and teachers did not make reference a specific racial/ethnic group; however, at both schools educators discussed their commitment to improve learning results for all students. At IHS, the principal described how ELL students were allowed to fail or become invisible in the comprehensive school. Once she was in charge, she made sure that all students, including ELL students, had similar opportunities, such as attending community college during their high school years and enrolling in AP courses. The principal mentioned that when IHS was a comprehensive school, some higher level classes were only for the most capable students; now, all students take community college classes starting in the 11th grade, and by the 12th grade the majority of seniors go to the community class during their second semester.

At SHS, Latino students comprise the largest demographic group. As shown in Figure 25, the API scores show there have been gains for Latino students, but not as much as the gains achieved by Latino students at IHS. The SHS principal stated that, even though Latinos were the largest demographic group, their major challenge was the many languages that were spoken in the school. Soledad High School had a large population of African refugees from several countries, and the principal described difficulty finding faculty who spoke those languages. Unlike IHS, SHS did not have a specific program designed to help ELL students access information from the textbooks. Even though both schools showed gains in the Latino population, there is a significant difference in both schools.
Figure 25. Academic Performance Index for Latino students at Innovation High School and Soledad High School, 2005-2009.
CHAPTER 5—DISCUSSION OF RESULTS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter presents a summary of the study and conclusions obtained from the findings presented in Chapter 4. This chapter presents an overview of the first four chapters, including a brief summary of the problem, purpose, and the methodology used in this study. In addition, Chapter 5 includes the major findings, limitations, implications for action, recommendations for future research, and the conclusion of the study.

Overview of the Problem

The achievement gap between Whites and other racial/ethnic groups is a critical issue facing U.S. public schools. Historically, Latino and African American students have had the lowest achievement rates in American public schools (M. H. López, 2009). Latinos, around two-thirds of whom are of Mexican descent, have become the fastest growing minority group in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001) and the most educationally at-risk population (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). The continuous underachievement of Latino students is of grave policy concern in the United States, and particularly in California (Grogger & Trejo, 2002). The NCES (2004) reported that 86% of Latino eighth graders read below grade level. Bridgeland et al. (2009) reported that one-third of public high school students, and almost one-half of Latino students, fail to graduate every year.

California students fall well below national achievement averages (Baker et al., 2008). In particular, the achievement of California's growing Latino student population is substantially below the overall average for the State. Furthermore, in California, the Academic Performance Index (which reports aggregate achievement on a scale from 200
to 1,000) reveals a harsh 145-point gap between Latino students and their White counterparts (O’Connell, 2007). The numerous achievement gaps in California are problems with long histories and complex causes that cannot be easily fixed.

Recently, the U.S. Department of Education has emphasized the importance of promoting turnaround schools. United States Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, called upon districts to turn around 5,000 of the nation’s worst-performing schools. Duncan promised federal monies to support turn-around efforts (Viadero, 2009).

High school reform has been a priority in educational policy agendas across the nation due to the high dropout rate and consistently low academic achievement among high school students (Quint, 2006). Educational reforms have not had major impact in most of these low-performing secondary schools. Today’s low-performing high schools face systematic challenges that cannot be addressed by single interventions or after-school programs (Herman et al., 2008).

Throughout the past decade, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation invested millions to help eliminate low-performing large urban high schools by replacing them with small, high-quality high schools or transforming them into smaller learning communities (Miner, 2005). The ultimate objective of this reform was to increase graduation rates and prepare students for college (Miner, 2005). While evidence about small schools’ effects on academic achievement is mixed, studies have shown that school size has had a larger impact on the learning of disadvantaged and/or low socioeconomic students (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2009).
Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the phenomenon of turnaround schools. This study deepened the understanding of how low-performing schools, with large percentages of Latino students, turn around and become high-performing schools, where student achievement improvements are sustained. The study examined the context in which a turnaround effort began and the various catalysts for change and impediments to change. As well, the study described the practices, policies, and procedures that influenced dramatic improvements in learning results for Latino students. Also, the study explored the systems and structures that have helped sustain improved learning results. Importantly, the study compared and contrasted the factors that have influenced and inhibited change in a similar school that started with many similar contextual problems and opportunities, yet failed to gain momentum for change. In particular, this study analyzed the principals’ role in initiating, supporting, and sustaining change in a turnaround school.

This study sought to identify the attributes and actions of educational leaders in the turnaround school. In particular, the researcher examined how leader behavior differed in these two schools and how those differences influenced the achievement of Latino students.

This study focused on identifying factors that facilitated the change that occurred in the school. More specifically, the main research questions were investigated:

1. In what ways were the turnaround school and the comparison school similar 5 years ago when they were both initiated? In what ways were the two schools
different? In what ways are the turnaround school and the comparison school similar and different today?

2. What factors have influenced or inhibited improvement at both schools?

Among the two schools, how are those factors similar and/or different? In particular, what factors might have helped initiate change, prevent change from starting, support change, slow change, sustain change, and/or derail change?

3. What differences in leadership behavior might have influenced the differences in learning results between the turnaround school and the comparison school?

In particular, what leadership behaviors might have helped initiate change, prevent change from starting, support change, slow change, sustain change, and/or derail change?

4. What has been the impact of changes at these two schools on students (in particular Latino students), families, teachers, and the school community?

Methodology

In order to investigate how two high schools attempted to improve student achievement, this study used a qualitative, comparative case study approach. Case study methodology allows for the investigation of a current issue in a real-life setting to explore a deeper understanding of the processes within specific contexts (Yin, 2009). The collection of qualitative data such as observations and interviews provides the researcher an opportunity to examine context specific phenomena and generate a profound understanding of the processes each school implements (Nunan, 1992).

This specific study examined in depth two cases: a turnaround high school and a high school with similar demographics that had not shown substantial improvement.
Both schools were small high schools in the same urban district. Both high schools served similar large percentages of Latino students, large percentages of English learners, and large percentages of students who met free or reduced-price lunch criteria. While both small high schools were initiated because of similar dramatic need for better learning results, one small school “turned around” and the other did not. I described one of the schools as a “turnaround school” because it was chronically underperforming with a high percentage of students who failed to meet state proficiency standards in mathematics and/or reading; however, the school increased the percentage of students achieving at proficient or advanced levels on state mathematics and English language arts assessments.

**Connections Between Major Findings and the Research Literature**

Why is it difficult to turnaround failing schools? For the past four decades, researchers have not yet honed in on what practices turn a struggling school into an effective school (Smarick, 2010). Throughout the past decade, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation invested millions to help eliminate low-performing large urban high schools by replacing them with small, high-quality high schools or transforming them into smaller learning communities (Miner, 2005). The ultimate objective of this reform was to increase graduation rates and prepare students for college (Miner, 2005). While evidence about small schools’ effects on academic achievement is mixed, studies have shown that school size has had a larger impact on the learning of disadvantaged and/or low socioeconomic students (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2009).

Although there has been minimal evidence of systemic success at turning around the academic performance of high schools that serve Latino students, there are several
compelling stories of individual school turnaround efforts. Innovation High School (IHS) is one those schools. In contrast, Soledad High School (SHS), like many high schools that tried to implement small school reforms, made more modest gains and continued to suffer low academic achievement results. From this comparative case study of these two very similar schools with very different academic achievement profiles, three themes emerged.

Persistently, interviewees raised issues, related events, and discussed concerns that addressed leadership, personalization, and systemic change. These themes may lead to a deeper understanding of the reasons the high-performing small high school improved over a 5-year period and continued to maintain strong academic achievement. As well, the same themes may lead to a deeper understanding of the issues that may have impeded significant growth in the other school.

**Systemic Change**

Systemic change occurred at IHS. The way teachers provided instruction changed, the way students behaved in classes changed, the courses students took changed, the way teachers met and collaborated changed. Almost every major system that defined IHS changed in the first few years of the small schools initiative. In contrast, most of the systems that defined schooling at SHS remained the same long throughout the first 5 years of small schools implementation.

As discussed in Chapter 2, Lewin (as cited in Kritsonis, 2005) introduced a three-step change model known as the unfreezing-change-freezing model that requires previous learning to be refused and replaced. This change model provides perspective that helps explain the findings of this comparative case study.
According to Lewin (as cited in Kritsonis, 2005), the first step is the unfreezing phase in which individuals or groups become motivated to change. This part of the theory is based upon the belief that prior observational learning and cultural influences establish human behavior. Change involves adding new forces for eliminating some existing factors that are at play in perpetuating the behavior. This phase has three subprocesses: disconfirmation where present conditions lead to disappointment (for example, getting low percentages of pass state graduation tests). The second subprocess occurs as previous beliefs are seen as invalid, leading to what Lewin called “survival anxiety” (as cited in Kritsonis, 2005). This anxiety triggers defensiveness and resistance due to the pain of having to unlearn what had been previously accepted, such as the defensiveness that might occur when school leaders insist that English learners can achieve at high academic levels. According to Lewin, it is necessary to move past the possible anxieties for change to progress.

The second step is the changing of what needs to be changed. Lewin (as cited in Kritsonis, 2005) referred to this as being unfrozen and moving to a new state. When there is enough dissatisfaction with the current conditions and a true longing to make some change exists, it is vital to identify what needs to be transformed. For example, in a school setting, leaders might need to be able to identify and describe the major elements that need to be changed in order to ensure that students will have a high likelihood of academic success. Lewin stated that the three possible impacts from processing new information are that concepts are construed within a broader context, words take on a new meaning, and there is an adjustment in the level used in assessing new input (Schein, 2006).
The third step is making the change permanent, what Lewin (as cited in Kritsonis, 2005) called refreezing. Refreezing is the concluding stage where new behavior becomes consistent. This requires developing a new self-concept and identity and creating new interpersonal relationships. This step needs to take place after the change has been applied and sustained. According to Lewin, the purpose of refreezing is to stabilize the new equilibrium in order to reinforce new patterns and institutionalize them through formal and informal mechanisms including policies and procedures. For example, refreezing might occur in a school as systems are established for regularly reviewing student data to ensure that expected results are being attained.

Lewin’s model demonstrates the effects of forces that encourage or hinder change. Therefore, change will occur when the combined strength of one force is superior to the combined strength of the opposing set of forces (Robbins, 2007). Lewin’s change theory can be seen as the model used at IHS.

None of the informants at IHS discussed any change theories, yet the principal and teachers followed the three steps of Lewin’s change theory. First, the IHS staff went through the unfreezing phase in which individuals or groups become motivated to change. A core set of teachers followed the previous math administrator to the new small high school. The teachers were motivated to change, and they believed that they would accomplish their goals under the leadership of the principal. The principal stated, “We were all on the same page, and we wanted to make things work for all students.”

The second step was changing what needed to be changed. Lewin (as cited in Kritsonis, 2005) referred to this as being unfrozen and moving to a new state. At IHS, the principal and teachers knew that things needed to change for ELL students and to raise
expectation for the students and teachers. One of the major advantages at IHS was the fact that the majority of the staff including the principal were part of the underperforming comprehensive high school and knew that the school had to change its past practice of allowing students to continue to fail. The major changes included teaching students how to access the content in their textbooks in all subjects. This meant that teachers had to learn how to do this in an effective way. One of the comments from the principal that captured the essence of this study was when she mentioned that “we analyzed what we knew worked and got really good at it.”

The third step is making the change permanent, what Lewin (as cited in Kritsonis, 2005) calls refreezing. Refreezing is the concluding stage where new behavior becomes consistent. The IHS staff and principal analyzed their practices consistently, and they worked continuously to improve their implementation. Teachers held each other accountable. The IHS teachers and principal implemented programs with fidelity and constantly analyzed student outcomes. “Every year it got better and easier,” as one teacher stated. For example, every student in the 11th grade took a community college class, no exceptions. At IHS, student achievement results on state assessments improved significantly, such that the school achieved national recognition. Like their cross-town colleagues at IHS, none of the SHS informants discussed any change theories; however, the principal and several of the staff were motivated to change. They were eager to see better results for SHS students; however, this first phase of the change model was probably comprised to some extent by changes in school personnel. The principal at SHS stated that several teachers chose to stay at the school because they did not want to move classrooms and the no buy-in. The other challenge was that SHS had a high teacher
turnover due to a young staff, and teachers bid out to other schools when they had the opportunity.

Also, the second step of Lewin’s change model (changing what needs to be changed) might have been truncated at SHS. Soledad High School personnel might have had a more limited perspective of what needed to change in order to generate better learning results for students. At SHS, personalization was perceived as the most important component in the new small high school, according to the interviews from all the stakeholders. One teacher explained, “We were told that change would come as we got to know the students better, but we did build relationship with students. But we lacked [information] on analyzing the correct data.” According to the interviews, teachers started to look at the data more effectively after several years. They started to go and visit other small high schools that were showing growth. The principal mentioned that he put considerable funding into professional development for teachers, yet every year teachers would move to another school, and he started all over again. The school never made curricular changes and instructional changes that had a reasonable chance of improving student learning results. Even though they increased personalization, this change did not prove to be sufficient. Finally, given the lack of implementation of the second step, the school never had the opportunity to pursue the third step in the model, re-freezing.

Change theorists argue that chronically failing schools can be turned around only if they experience a systemic change that turns around profoundly entrenched patterns of dysfunction (Argyris, 1985). Underperforming schools tend to revert unless they reach a tipping point. Therefore, change theorists suggest that whatever is done for failing
schools must be sufficient to help them reach a threshold that allows them to sustain success (Schein, 2005). In this case, the solution for failing schools is to turn them around completely. This is what occurred at IHS, unlike SHS, where there was no significant change in student achievement.

**Leadership**

The literature on school leadership emphasize many attributes and behaviors of leaders; however, two important characteristics and actions are emphasized more frequently. One is the data in instructional decision making to monitor student academic progress and sharing findings to drive instruction (Cotton, 2003). At IHS, the principal mentioned that “we decided to improve in what worked in the school; what is it that we are really good at?” She added that looking at data constantly helped them do better decisions on what teachers were going to teach. For example, the principal mentioned that one of the best resources they received was the struggling readers grant. This grant allowed the teachers to look at the literacy challenges at IHS, and they were able to address these challenges through professional development. All teachers at IHS learned how to teach literacy within their subject matter.

The principal at IHS believed that every year teachers learned new ways in teaching the text to students. In comparison to SHS, one teacher mentioned, “We did not look at data until a few years later. We got the data every year, but we did not take the time to analyze it.” Another teacher mentioned “we were trying all different type of approaches or programs, and we did not take the time to analyze the data.” Another challenge the principal at SHS faced was that he would spend a lot of financial resources
in professional development on teachers, and at the end of the year those teachers would leave, and he would have to train the new teachers.

Researchers (O’Donnell & White, 2005) have studied the relationship between an effective instructional leader and student achievement. The research shows that successful principals can significantly influence student performance. Effective principals are strong educators focusing on key issues of learning and teaching (O’Donnell & White, 2005). Principals have the power to build relationships that create a positive learning environment. According to Schmoker (2006), effective principals promote collaborative problem solving and open communication, collect and analyze data to identify school needs, and have clear, measurable goals.

At IHS, the principal’s leadership style had a significant effect on student and teacher performance. She was able to get the buy-in from her staff, starting with the teachers, all the way to the campus security. The faculty and staff acted as a team. The principal created an environment for teachers to collaborate without any barriers, and this occurred across every subject. One teacher mentioned “English teachers were meeting with math teachers, and science teachers were working with social studies teacher. We all worked together.” The principal stated during her interview, “Even though I had the final say, I never made a decision by myself.” She also was known to demonstrate a lesson any time she was asked to do so by her teachers. The principal motivated teachers to raise expectations for students.

At SHS, teachers liked the principal. Several teachers echoed one teacher’s comment that “the principal was big on consensus.” While teachers appreciated the principals interest in their ideas and perspectives, they also expressed concerns about the
need for more leadership. For example, one teacher commented, “Maybe a stricter principal was needed in that type of school.” One of the main obstacles at SHS was that not all the teachers wanted to be at that school. The principal mentioned that “some teachers selected this school just so they would not move classrooms.” At SHS, teachers mentioned that the “principal did a lot, he was directing traffic and dealing with discipline issues. He did everything.”

**Personalization**

Small schools promote personalized learning environments where all students are known well. In small schools in particular, students develop sustained relationships with teachers and other caring adults. *The Hobbit Effect: Why Small Works in Public Schools* (Jimerson, 2006) identified 10 research-based attributes of small schools that were proven to have an impact on students and their learning. One of these is personalization. Jimerson (2006) found that small schools foster close relationships that not only help students feel connected to the school but also lead to increased student learning.

In the report *Knowing and Being Known*, Lambert and Lowry (2004) include observations from the first year of a 3-year study of seven small high schools in Washington State. The results showed that teachers valued and recognized the need for personalization and designing structures to support personalization. The authors stated that teachers started to talk about the positive effects of personalization and how it affects instructional practices to meet the needs of individual learners. In the article *Between Hope and Despair*, the authors Vander Ark and Wagner (2000) described high schools that work—small high schools designed around relationships—relationships between
students and their work, relationships between the students and teachers, and relationships among the adults in the school.

In IHS and SHS, personalization was one of the characteristics that was clearly present. In addition, when parents and students were interviewed, they all made positive comments on how everyone knew them. At IHS, a parent mentioned “my son was known in the school by his teachers, dean, counselor, and the principal, unlike in the previous schools, he was lost.” At SHS, teachers commented on how they got to know the students well in a small school setting. One parent mentioned that it felt like a family in a small school.

**Limitations of the Study**

There are several limitations in this study. Even though many schools attempt to transform themselves from low- to high-performing schools, this study only examined one turnaround high school and one low-performing school in Southern California. The findings may only apply to schools that serve similar populations, in similar contexts and geographic areas. The findings may not apply to comprehensive high schools because small school settings differ in many ways from comprehensive schools.

The research was conducted over a period of a few months involving several visits to both schools. The researcher interviewed students, teachers, parents, staff, and administrators of only two specific small schools. The accuracy of the findings may have been limited by the ability and willingness of the informants to describe clearly and accurately the issues that influenced change at their schools. As well, the accuracy may have been limited by the experience and knowledge of the researcher. While the
researcher is a veteran school leader, with substantial experience in urban secondary schools, the researcher is a novice researcher.

**Implications for Action**

Although this comparative case study examined only two small schools, there may be implications for other small school principals, districts, and university principal preparation programs. Of course, additional research on similar schools could help strengthen the case for these implications. Finally, this study’s findings could offer implications for policymakers and organizations interested in pursuing broad changes in secondary school education. A brief discussion of each of these implications follows.

Schools that want to raise student achievement need to have an effective leader. The literature and the findings of this study on systematic change suggest that principals cannot expect to generate major changes unless they identify all the key things that need to happen in order to ensure that results will be achieved. Many researchers have supported the need for systematic change as a means of accomplishing school-wide reform (Fullan, 2008). For example, improving relationships is important, but may not be enough if curriculum and instruction continue to not meet student needs. Professional development for teachers focused on learning and analyzing data is vital for achieving systematic change. “Only when we can articulate the ‘why’ behind the data and turn the lens on our own teaching and leadership behaviors can we understand how to move from drowning in data to improving professional practice” (Reeves, 2009, p. 90). Finally, there is no “one size fits all” formula to improve schools. Each school is unique with different challenges and the principal must be able to build capacity within the school to make significant changes.
For districts, a clear implication is that personnel policies matter. Principals need a stable team in order to create a team. Capacity building leads to a condition where two major change forces are unleashed and constantly cultivated, knowledge and commitment (Fullan, 2008). The role of the district in school must be one that helps schools become learning place where collaboration and surge of knowledge is in constant flow. For example, districts must recognize the phenomena and the effect of high teacher turnover in underperforming schools. One major factor in effective schools is a consistent and committed team of teachers.

For administrators’ preparation programs, an implication is the need to do a better job of teaching administrators to bring about change. Principal preparation programs nationwide must look closely in analyzing their curricula and responding to the current challenges through meaningful change. According to a 2006 survey by Public Agenda, a nonprofit research organization that reports public opinion and public policy issues, nearly two-thirds of principals felt that typical graduate leadership programs “are out of touch” with today’s realities (Butler, 2008).

In the case of this comparative case study of these two small high schools, one of them did have great success and continues to this day outperforming similar schools. Superintendents, Area superintendents, and principals need to understand that every school has its unique story. Definitely, there is no set formula to turnaround a school, yet there are various factors that are crucial for a school to turnaround. In the case of IHS, there was specific funding for professional development for teachers in a continuous basis. The principal and teachers were analyzing data to make instructional decisions. There was a sense of community and, at the same time, accountability within the staff.
The principal was very dynamic and was part of the team, and teachers enjoyed the shared-decision practice in the school. Even after the funding ended, this school continued raising the academic achievement for all students.

**Areas for Future Research**

The increase of schools and now districts under Program Improvement (PI) status has become a nationwide issue. Every year, leaders in districts and schools await the results of the state tests scores to see if schools met the requirements to exit PI status or if schools continue to be on the list of PI. One major area of future study is to look at schools that are successful on exiting PI and analyze the factors that contributed to that success. In addition, it is imperative to look at similar schools that are not able to exit PI status and, instead, continue to be underperforming.

Several areas for future research materialized in this current study. Among these are leadership, personalization, and systemic change. These areas were key and instrumental for the success of one of the turnaround schools and, at the same time, the absence of them had a major impact in the other school. The role of the principal was one of the most important components of this study.

Leadership, specifically the role of the principal, has been shown to be an instrumental factor regarding school improvement, including improving the academic achievement in an urban school. According to Fullan (2001):

> Leadership is to the current decade what standards were to the 1990s for those interested in large-scale reform. Standards, even when well implemented, can take us only part way to successful large-scale reform. It is only leadership that can take us all the way. (p. 23)
According to Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005), effective principals possess certain character traits, including honesty, fairness, and integrity. When all individuals feel that they will be treated with fairness and given honest answers to queries, they will be happier and more confident.

Personalization in every way was visible in both schools. This was apparent in the interactions between the principal and the teachers, staff, students, and parents. Everyone interviewed for this study mentioned the personalization that was present in the school. Finally, systemic change was very noticeable in the successful turnaround school. Change occurred in a methodical way. Everything seemed to be interconnected, from the master schedule to the way teachers analyzed data. The teachers mentioned that they got better every year and they concentrated on what worked.

**Conclusion**

The study’s findings give hope that all schools may be able to close the achievement gap and raise academic achievement for all students. The findings illustrate that academic success for Latino youth in urban high schools can be achieved. At the same time, this comparative case study highlights the real challenges urban schools face. While schools like IHS demonstrate that major improvements are possible, schools like SHS show that is possible for well-intentioned, hard-working leaders to experience tremendous frustration. Even though major outside funding for small schools ended, the framework and best practices supported by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation are still being used in many schools.

This study may serve as a starting point for many failing urban schools where the principal and teachers are ready to make fundamental changes on how to educate diverse
student populations. The IHS principal, teachers, staff, students, and parents demonstrated that working toward systemic change, in a personalized environment, with focused leadership can produce great outcomes.
REFERENCES


Appendix A

Research Questions and Interview Protocol Script

Research Questions

1. In what ways were the turnaround school and the comparison school similar 5 years ago when they were both initiated? In what ways were the two schools different? In what ways are the turnaround school and the comparison school similar and different today?

2. What factors have influenced or inhibited improvement at both schools? Between the two schools, how are those factors similar and/or different? In particular, what factors might have helped initiate change, prevent change from starting, support change, slow change, sustain change, and/or derail change?

3. What differences in leadership behavior might have influenced the differences in learning results between the turnaround school and the comparison school? In particular, what leadership behaviors might have helped initiate change, prevent change from starting, support change, slow change, sustain change, and/or derail change?

4. What has been the impact of changes at these two schools on students (in particular Latino students), families, teachers, and the school community?

Protocol Script

Thank you for taking time from your busy schedule to meet with me. In order to understand how low-performing small schools become high-performing small schools, I am conducting research in your small school, as well as another urban small schools in the western United States. I am particularly interested in your experiences and opinions
involving developments over the past 4 or 5 years—during the current principal’s tenure in the small school. The comparative case study that I have undertaken will include interviews with the principal, teachers, counselors, and students to hope to uncover the factors that influenced success or the opposite results. I also hope to discover how the small schools changed the culture of their organizations, constructed systems to ensure coherence and build capacity for improvement.

During the course of the next 45-60 minutes, I’m going to ask you several open-ended questions. With your permission, the interview will be recorded and later transcribed. This will help insure the accuracy of my note-taking and provide more reliable data. Everything you say in the interview, as well as your identity, will be confidential. You are free to ask me to turn off the recorder at any time during our conversation. Here is the consent form. It delineates the nature of the study and your role as a participant in the research. Your signature indicates your willingness to participate in the study.
Appendix B
Principal Consent Form

San Diego State University

Consent to Act as a Research Subject: Principal
Turnaround Schools: A Comparative Case Study of Two Small Schools

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Before you give your consent to become a participant, it is important that you read the following information and ask any questions that come to mind regarding your role in the study.

The purpose of the study is to gain a greater understanding about how low-performing schools, with a significant population of Latino students, turn around and become high-performing schools where student achievement improvements are sustained.

This study is being conducted by me, Consuelo Manriquez, principal at San Diego High School Media, Visual, and Performing Arts in the San Diego Unified School District. I am also a doctoral student of Educational Leadership at San Diego State University (SDSU). During this study I will only be a researcher. This research study will be supervised by Dr. Joseph Johnson, a professor in the School of Education at San Diego State University. Research findings will be reported in my dissertation that I will complete as a requirement of doctoral program in educational leadership at SDSU.

You have been identified for this study because your school is a small school that is categorized as a successful turnaround school. If you choose to participate in this study you will be asked to:
1. Spend approximately 45 minutes answering questions in an interview with me at a mutually agreeable location. I will ask you about your experience on how you implemented change in your school.

2. Allow me to tape record our interviews. The recording will help me more accurately represent your ideas and views. I will be the only individual who has access to the tapes. Comments from the tape used in reporting study results will be shared in a way that protects your confidentiality.

Your participation in this study may lead you to acquire new understandings on turnaround schools. I cannot guarantee, however, that you will receive any benefits from participating in this study. There are no costs to you for participation in this study. You will not be paid to participate in this study.

While the nature of the questions you will be asked is not inherently personal, if at any time during the interview you begin to feel uncomfortable about responding to a question, you may discontinue participation, either temporarily or permanently.

Confidentiality will be maintained to the extent allowed by law. Your name will be coded to match data collected. All names in work published by me will be pseudonyms. Interviews will be audiotaped and transcribed. Quotes from the observations and interviews may be used for publication of findings but no participant will be identified by name. Your participation will remain confidential (this means that I will conceal your identity and only codes will be used on interview forms and notes I take) except as required by law. Research files (including audiotapes) will be stored in the researcher’s
home office in a locked cabinet for the next 3 years. Only the researcher and my advisor will have access to these files.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me, Consuelo Manriquez, at (619) 208-68198 or my faculty sponsor, Dr. Joseph Johnson at jjohnson@mail.sdsu.edu.

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study, you may contact the Division of Research Affairs at San Diego State University (telephone: 619-594-6622; email: irb@mail.sdsu.edu).

The San Diego State University Institutional Review Board has approved this consent form.

Your signature below indicates that you have read the information in this document and have had a chance to ask any questions you have about the study. Your signature also indicates that you agree to be in the study and have been told that you can change your mind and withdraw your consent to participate at any time. You have been given a copy of this consent form. You have been told that by signing this consent form you are not giving up any of your legal rights.

____________________________________
Name of Participant (please print)

_____________________________________ __________________
Signature of Participant Date

_____________________________________ __________________
Signature of Investigator Date
Appendix C

Teacher Consent Form

San Diego State University

Consent to Act as a Research Subject: Teacher

Turnaround Schools: A Comparative Case Study of Two Small Schools

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Before you give your consent to become a participant, it is important that you read the following information and ask any questions that come to mind regarding your role in the study.

The purpose of the study is to gain a greater understanding about how low-performing schools, with a significant population of Latino students, turn around and become high-performing schools where student achievement improvements are sustained.

This study is being conducted by me, Consuelo Manriquez, principal at San Diego High School Media, Visual, and Performing Arts in the San Diego Unified School District. I am also a doctoral student of Educational Leadership at San Diego State University (SDSU). During this study I will only be a researcher. This research study will be supervised by Dr. Joseph Johnson, a professor in the School of Education at San Diego State University. Research findings will be reported in my dissertation that I will complete as a requirement of doctoral program in educational leadership at SDSU.

You have been identified for this study because your school is a small school that is categorized as a successful turnaround school. If you choose to participate in this study you will be asked to:
1. Spend approximately 45 minutes answering questions in an interview with me at a mutually agreeable location. I will ask you about your experience on how you implemented change in your school.

2. Allow me to tape record our interviews. The recording will help me more accurately represent your ideas and views. I will be the only individual who has access to the tapes. Comments from the tape used in reporting study results will be shared in a way that protects your confidentiality.

Your participation in this study may lead you to acquire new understandings on turnaround schools. I cannot guarantee, however, that you will receive any benefits from participating in this study. There are no costs to you for participation in this study. You will not be paid to participate in this study.

While the nature of the questions you will be asked is not inherently personal, if at any time during the interview you begin to feel uncomfortable about responding to a question, you may discontinue participation, either temporarily or permanently.

Confidentiality will be maintained to the extent allowed by law. Your name will be coded to match data collected. All names in work published by me will be pseudonyms. Interviews will be audiotaped and transcribed. Quotes from the observations and interviews may be used for publication of findings but no participant will be identified by name. Your participation will remain confidential (this means that I will conceal your identity and only codes will be used on interview forms and notes I take) except as required by law. Research files (including audiotapes) will be stored in the researcher’s
home office in a locked cabinet for the next 3 years. Only the researcher and my advisor will have access to these files.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me, Consuelo Manriquez, at (619) 208-68198 or my faculty sponsor, Dr. Joseph Johnson at jjohnson@mail.sdsu.edu.

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study, you may contact the Division of Research Affairs at San Diego State University (telephone: 619-594-6622; email: irb@mail.sdsu.edu).

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____________________________________
Name of Participant (please print)

_____________________________________ __________________
Signature of Participant Date

_____________________________________ __________________
Signature of Investigator Date
Appendix D

Parent Consent Form

San Diego State University

Consent to Act as a Research Subject: Parent

Turnaround Schools: A Comparative Case Study of Two Small Schools

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Before you give your consent to become a participant, it is important that you read the following information and ask any questions that come to mind regarding your role in the study.

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This study is being conducted by me, Consuelo Manriquez, principal at San Diego High School Media, Visual, and Performing Arts in the San Diego Unified School District. I am also a doctoral student of Educational Leadership at San Diego State University (SDSU). During this study I will only be a researcher. This research study will be supervised by Dr. Joseph Johnson, a professor in the School of Education at San Diego State University. Research findings will be reported in my dissertation that I will complete as a requirement of doctoral program in educational leadership at SDSU.

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Name of Participant (please print)

_____________________________________ __________________
Signature of Participant Date

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Signature of Investigator Date
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____________________________
Name of Participant (please print)

____________________________  ______________________
Signature of Participant        Date

____________________________  ______________________
Signature of Investigator       Date
## Turnaround Schools: A Comparative Case Study of Two Small Schools

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Schedule</th>
<th>Turnaround Schools: A Comparative Case Study of Two Small Schools</th>
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**Small School 1**

Primary Interviews: 1-4 March 2011

Follow-Up/Re-Scheduled Interviews: 21-25 March 2011

**Small School 2**

Primary Interviews: 7-11 March 2011

Follow-Up/Re-Scheduled Interviews: 28-1 March-April 2011