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Teacher turnover and school reform: how teacher turnover affects urban secondary school improvement

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Dissertation

TEACHER TURNOVER AND SCHOOL REFORM:
HOW TEACHER TURNOVER AFFECTS URBAN
SECONDARY SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

by

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my exceptionally supportive and adoring husband, Brian Zajac, my inspirational and incredibly loving mother, Bernadette Canfield, and to the memory of my ever encouraging and caring grandparents, Bernadette and Peter (PopPop) McDonough. I am forever grateful for your shared commitment to my studies and your unwavering faith in me. Thank you, with all of my heart.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my sincere appreciation to my committee chair, Dr. Don Beaudette, for his consistent encouragement, unyielding support, and generous sharing of expertise. Dr. Beaudette’s deep knowledge of school leadership, education reform and education policy were invaluable to me as I navigated each phase of the dissertation process.

I would also like to thank Dr. Joe Cronin, whose unexpected attendance in my research class one rainy afternoon positively altered the trajectory my dissertation question. Thank goodness! His reflective feedback, robust knowledge on school reform, and perspectives on teacher turnover challenged me to think more critically and creatively about reform work, particularly in urban education.

I would also like to thank Dr. Cathy O’Connor, who carefully and patiently guided me through the development of my research question and proposal. She artfully balanced positive encouragement with essential and tough questions. Her feedback shaped me into a better researcher and helped me to deepen the description of each case.

Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to the committed educators who graciously agreed to share their experiences of whether teacher turnover affects school reform efforts and how, with me. Thank you for allowing me to see through your eyes and to learn from your experiences.
TEACHER TURNOVER AND SCHOOL REFORM:
HOW TEACHER TURNOVER AFFECTS URBAN SECONDARY SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

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ABSTRACT

Teacher turnover in urban public schools has traditionally been associated with school destabilization and is considered adversarial to school improvement and reform efforts. However, the 2009 federal education reform initiative, Race to the Top, endorsed forced teacher turnover at the lowest performing schools as a strategy for recruiting teachers of greater human capital and commitment to student learning. Using qualitative case study methods, this dissertation explored whether teacher turnover affects school reform efforts, and if so, how, by studying teacher turnover at three urban public high schools in New England. The findings revealed that teacher turnover does affect school reform efforts. In two of the three cases studied, teacher turnover contributed to the churn of human capital and to the disruption of social capital. In both of these cases, school reform efforts were negatively affected. In the third case, the potential negative effects of teacher turnover were largely mitigated through advanced planning. The leadership team also demonstrated how carefully controlled internal turnover could be used to advance reform efforts.
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Chapter I: An Introduction

Since the 1983 release of *A Nation At Risk*, American public schools have engaged in multiple iterations of standards-based, accountability-oriented, school reforms (Bacharach, 1990; Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009; Hess, 1999; Munro, 2008; Tyack & Cuban, 1995). These reform endeavors have included school reconstitution (King Rice & Malen, 2013), more rigorous instructional and accountability measures (Darling-Hammond 1999, 2006, 2007; Elmore, 2008; Tyack & Cuban, 1995) and increased teacher credentialing expectations (Darling-Hammond, 2006, 2007). A common theme among the reform trends has been to improve the human capital of schools, or the “experience, subject knowledge, and pedagogical skills” of teachers (Leana, 2011, p. 32). The guiding principle of this focus is a belief that “upgrading the human capital in low-performing schools will improve the performance of those schools” (King Rice & Malen, 2003, p. 635). However, after nearly thirty years of varying centralized and decentralized education reform initiatives, low socio-economic urban schools remain underperforming (Holme & Rangel, 2011; Levin, Mulhern, & Schunck, 2005; Ronfeldt, Loeb & Wyckoff, 2012; Sepe & Roza, 2010).

In an effort to improve the achievement rates of the most underperforming schools, the federal government enacted the 2009 federal education initiative *Race to the Top* (RTT). The RTT agenda presented “an unprecedented shift in the federal government’s involvement in education policy making” (Grissom & Harrington, 2012, p. 3). The 2009 RTT policy promoted school reconstitution as a strategy for improving the lowest performing schools, an idea that first emerged in the mid-1980s (King-Rice,
“[T]wo of the four strategies (the turnaround and transformation models) explicitly require districts to replace the principal and/or teachers in low-performing schools…” (Hansen, 2013, p. 1). This strategy enables schools to hire teachers of higher human capital than those released. Reconstitution can also influence the social capital of a school.

**Social Capital**

According to researcher Moosung Lee (2014), “social capital is conceptualized as certain resources, generated from durable interpersonal social ties or certain group memberships (i.e., social networks), that convey sets of particular values, rules, expectations, or norms (i.e., symbolic meanings)” (Lee, 2014, p. 455; Coleman 1988). Social capital, in part, “comes about through changes in the relations among persons that facilitate action” (Coleman, 1988, p. S100). “When a norm exists and is effective it constitutes a powerful, though sometimes fragile, form of social capital…. Norms in a community that support and provide effective rewards for high achievement in a school greatly facilitate the school’s task” (Coleman, 1988, p. S104).

Educational researcher Carrie Leana states that in schools, “social capital…is not a characteristic of the individual teacher but instead resides in the relationships among teachers” (Leana, 2011). Social capital is considered “an organizational resource that facilitates cooperation, increases efficiency, and fosters knowledge transfer or organizational learning…” (Holme & Rangel, 2011, p. 259; Leana, 2011; Guin, 2004; King Rice & Malen, 2003; Ingersoll, 2001). Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) describe how social capital interacts with human capital.
“Social capital increases your knowledge – it gives you access to other people’s *human capital*. It expands your networks of influence and opportunity. And it develops resilience when you know there are people to go to who can give you advice and be your advocates.” (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012, p. 90).

Social capital, according to Hargreaves and Fullan (2012), is essential for school improvement and “social capital strategies are one of the cornerstones for transforming the profession” (p. 91).

In the event of teacher turnover, social capital and school norms can be significantly altered (Ingersoll, 2001). Teacher turnover inherently forces a change to social capital because of the starting and ending of collegial relationships. These changes can contribute to the destabilization of a school.

**Teacher Turnover**

“Teacher turnover”, or “churn”, has many definitions in the literature. Generally, “[t]eacher turnover refers to major changes in a teacher’s assignment from one school year to the next” (Boe, Cook & Sunderland, 2007, p. 3). “Research on teacher turnover has often focused on those leaving the occupation altogether, here referred to as teacher attrition, and has often de-emphasized those who transfer or move to different teaching jobs in other schools, here referred to as migration” (Ingersoll & May, 2012, p. 439).

Attrition can occur due to district reduction in force (RIF), as an outcome of decreasing student enrollment or budget cuts, last-in first-out (LIFO) layoff policies, teacher retirement, or teacher career change. Teacher turnover also occurs when turnaround schools, under RTT policies, require teachers to re-apply for their jobs. At
turnaround schools, up to 50% of the professional staff is in jeopardy of being released and replaced (Sepe & Roza, 2010; Levin et al., 2005; TNTP, 2010, 2011; NCTQ, 2010; Johnson & Donaldson in Hannaway & Rotherham, 2010).

Teacher migration can be exemplified by intra-district voluntary or involuntary teacher transfers. According to a teacher turnover study by Ingersoll and May, the most common type of teacher turnover occurs when teachers migrate to different schools within the same district (2012, p. 446). A less explored example of migration is teaching area transfer, such as the transfer of a teacher from an assignment in special education to one in general education (Boe, Cook & Sunderland, 2007, p. 3).

**Effect of Teacher Turnover**

The literature is rich with studies showing the impact of teacher turnover on the human capacities of schools and student achievement (TNTP, 2011, 2010; Levin, Mulhern & Schunck, 2005; Levin & Quinn, 2003; Rice-King, Malen, 2003; Darling-Hammond, 1999). There is a developing body of literature exploring the role of social capital in the functioning of schools and student achievement (Ronfeldt, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2012; Leana, 2011).

Teacher turnover is generally considered bad for schools because of its destabilizing effects (Ronfeldt, Loeb & Wyckoff, 2012; TNTP, 2010, 2011; NCTQ, 2010; Sepe & Roza 2010; Levin et al., 2005). Turnover, for example, could disrupt the culture and climate of the school, and correspondingly impact the school’s ability to implement a reform (Ronfeldt, Loeb & Wyckoff, 2012; Leana, 2011).

Ronfeldt, Loeb and Wyckoff (2012), however, suggest that the directionality of
the impact of teacher turnover is not necessarily negative. In some cases turnover could generate positive results in schools. Ronfeldt, Loeb and Wyckoff (2012) describe the “compositional” effect of turnover stating, “when leaving teachers are, on average, worse than the those who replace them, the compositional effect of turnover on student achievement is positive; if leaving teachers are better than the ones who replace them, the compositional effect is negative” (p. 5). From a social capital perspective, “[t]urnover may impact student achievement beyond the relative effectiveness of those who stay as compared to those who leave” (Ronfeldt, Loeb & Wyckoff, 2012, p. 7). Turnover can disrupt relationships and alter support networks for students, as well.

A review of the literature revealed that two factors seem to determine how a teacher may affect school improvement: the teacher’s human capital and the teacher’s influence on social capital. While these factors have been studied individually (i.e.: the role of human capital on school improvement or the role of social capital on school improvement) they have not been studied in combination. This dissertation explored whether and how teacher turnover, both from a human capital and social capital perspective, affects school reform efforts in comprehensive urban public high schools. By exploring whether and how the churn of human and social capital affect high school reform efforts, we can gain insight into why some school reforms succeed while others do not. The findings can inform district and school leaders engaged in school reform or improvement initiatives, as they seek to hire teachers or make teaching assignments.
Theory of Change

Education reform is intended to bring about school improvement and change (Tyack and Cuban, 1995). Teacher turnover “presents significant challenges to the successful and coherent implementation of…instructional programs…” (Ronfeldt, Loeb & Wyckoff, 2012, p. 8). Teacher turnover influences school capacity and may contribute either to organizational stability or instability (Ronfeldt, Loeb & Wyckoff, 2012; Leana, 2011; Guin, 2004; Ingersoll 2001). Literature on school change emphasizes the importance of building both capacity and cohesion among participating constituents and actors in order for change to succeed (Fullan, 2001; Elmore, 2008). Thus the theory of change in this study is as follows: given that teachers enact school reforms, when schools experience teacher turnover, the reform process is affected. It is possible that the effect may be positive or negative, depending upon the human and social capital of the leaving teacher and the replacement teacher.

Significance of the Study

The findings of this study may inform district and school leaders engaged in school reform or improvement initiatives, as they seek to hire teachers or make teaching assignments. The findings may also inform school leaders seeking to develop grade level, content or intervention teacher teams.

Methodology

To investigate whether teacher turnover affects school reform efforts and if so, how, I conducted a qualitative research study from a critical realist perspective (Maxwell, 2012a). I used qualitative case study methods including semi-structured interviews and
document analysis techniques to capture a rich description of primary actors’ experiences. The research took place at three comprehensive urban public high schools in New England. The school sites, here referred to as cases, and the teachers and administrators, here referred to as primary actors, have been provided pseudonyms to ensure anonymity.

**Research Process**

The first step in the research process was to engage in document collection. Document collection and analysis provided background and context as to school initiatives and goals as well as a chronology of events. Examples of the collected documents include the collective bargaining agreement (CBA), the site’s school improvement plan, meeting minutes, and staffing sheets. Document analysis generally began before interviews and continued throughout the interview process. Table 1 identifies what documents were collected, how they were accessed, and why they proved to be important to the study.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Document</th>
<th>Where does it come from?</th>
<th>Why is it important?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The district school improvement agenda</td>
<td>Public Documents: District website and Superintendent website, school administrative files</td>
<td>Identifies district-wide goals for all students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Improvement Plan</td>
<td>The school administrative team and/or instructional leadership may have a copy.</td>
<td>Shows standardized school performance data. It may include data on student subgroups, student performance goals for the school year, and outline how to monitor progress.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School-wide and department goals for English Language Arts and Math.</td>
<td>School improvement plan; department chairs; department meeting agendas or documents</td>
<td>Identifies department-focused reform initiatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site staffing sheets for school years 2012–2013; 2013–14; 2014–15 including, subject matter, grade and level (i.e.: Spanish 10 H, period 3)</td>
<td>School-site registrar</td>
<td>Who taught what? When did they teach it? Who else taught that course? Was there time in the master schedule to collaborate?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master Schedule showing common planning times</td>
<td>School-site registrar</td>
<td>Is there common planning time in departments? Is there common planning time across grade levels? Is there common planning time for interdepartmental collaboration?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description of Common assessments in the English Language Arts department</td>
<td>English Language Arts Program Director</td>
<td>What are they? What are they by grade level? What are the objectives? How are the assessments reviewed? Is there a cycle of inquiry? What does that look like?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description of Common Assessments used in the math department.</td>
<td>Math Program Director</td>
<td>What are they by discipline? (geometry vs. algebra) What are they by grade level? What are the objectives? How are the assessments reviewed? Is there a cycle of inquiry? What does that look like?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Development Agendas for Math</td>
<td>Program Director</td>
<td>What is the department focused on? Looking back over several months – what evidence is there of a continuum or advancement of the work?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Development Agendas for English Language Arts</td>
<td>Program Director</td>
<td>What is the department focused on? Looking back over several months – what evidence is there of a continuum or advancement of the work?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collective Bargaining Agreement</td>
<td>Teachers Union, Central Office, or Human Resources</td>
<td>What is the hiring timeline? How is teacher evaluation described? What are the internal transfer and excess rules, if any?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The second step was to conduct interviews of primary actors through purposeful sampling. Examples of primary actors included the school principal, Instructional Leadership Team members (ILT), the math and English Language Arts program directors, and teachers. The selected school (case) and interview participants (primary actors) were selected to provide the most insightful access to the effect teacher turnover has on school reform efforts, if any. There were approximately 12 interviewees per school site. Table 2 identifies the primary actors interviewed and their importance to the study.

By interviewing teachers and administrators about their reform experiences during periods of teacher turnover, knowledge was gained about whether changes to human capital and social capital affect the reform process.
Table 2. Study Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary Actor</th>
<th>Rationale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>School’s highest ranking instructional leader and ultimate decision maker regarding staffing choice and reform enactment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ILT facilitator</td>
<td>The ILT facilitator and co-facilitator are responsible for steering the instructional leadership team, which is responsible for the construction of the school improvement plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ILT co-facilitator (if applicable)</td>
<td>The ILT facilitator and co-facilitator are responsible for steering the instructional leadership team, which is responsible for the construction of the school improvement plan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Director: Math</td>
<td>The Program Director is responsible for holding teachers accountable for the reform work at the classroom level. This person has an insight into the climate and culture of the department. This person is responsible for monitoring students’ growth toward defined objectives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Director: ELA</td>
<td>The Program Director is responsible for holding teachers accountable for the reform work at the classroom level. This person has an insight into the climate and culture of the department. This person is responsible for monitoring students’ growth toward defined objectives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 teachers from the math department</td>
<td>These teachers are directly involved in preparing students for the state-based standardized tests, usually implemented in 10th grade.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 teachers from the English Language Arts department</td>
<td>These teachers are directly involved in preparing students for the state-based standardized tests, usually implemented in 10th grade.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interview Questions

Interviews of primary actors were conducted using a semi-structured interview guide. The semi-structured interview guide offers the advantage of making “interviewing a number of different people more systematic and comprehensive by delimiting in advance the issues to be explored” (Patton, 2002, p. 343). The interview guide ensured that the “same basic lines of inquiry are pursued with each person...[and]... provides
topics or subject areas within which the interviewer is free to explore, probe, and ask questions that will elucidate and illuminate” my study objectives (Patton, 2002, p. 343).

The interview questions were organized by theme with corresponding sample prompts and questions. Interviews began in early December 2014 and continued through July 2015. Some of the questions were adapted from a study conducted by education researcher, Kacey Guin, from the Center on Reinventing Public Education. Using a mixed methods approach, Guin researched “the characteristics of elementary schools that experience chronic teacher turnover and the impacts of turnover on a school’s working climate and ability to effectively function” (Guin, 2004, p. 1). Some of the interview questions she used with elementary principals and teachers were adapted for this study. Table 3 identifies the themes of “human and social capital” with corresponding questions and primary actors to be interviewed.

In order to learn about the effect teacher turnover had or did not have on the school and school improvement, I inquired about the reforms underway at each school. Table 4 presents the sample questions asked to learn about the improvement agenda of the school.
Table 3: Human and Social Capital Sample Prompts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Sample Prompts/Questions</th>
<th>Primary Actors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Human and Social Capital</td>
<td>Do you think teacher turnover has affected school reform efforts?</td>
<td>Principal, ILT Members, Program Directors, teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human and Social capital</td>
<td>“Tell me about teacher turnover and/or stability at your school. Has this changed over time and if so, why?” (Guin, 2004, Appendix p. 24)</td>
<td>Principal, ILT Members, Program Directors, teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human and Social capital</td>
<td>“How does teacher turnover affect your instructional program?” (Guin, 2004, Appendix p. 24).</td>
<td>Principal, ILT Members, Program Directors, teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social capital</td>
<td>“How does turnover/stability affect your school’s ability to connect with students, parents and your community? (Guin, 2004, Appendix p. 24).</td>
<td>Principal, ILT Members, Program Directors, teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social capital</td>
<td>How does turnover/stability affect your school’s ability to work cohesively?</td>
<td>Principal, ILT Members, Program Directors, teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human and Social capital</td>
<td>“How does this affect your job (what you do in the classroom)” (Guin, 2004, Appendix p. 24).</td>
<td>Principal, ILT Members, Program Directors, teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human and Social capital</td>
<td>“Why did you/do you choose to work in this school” (Guin, 2004, Appendix p. 24).</td>
<td>Teacher of Math/English Language Arts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4: School Improvement Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Sample Prompts/Questions</th>
<th>Primary Actors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School-based reform efforts</td>
<td>What projects or reform efforts are happening at the school this year? What’s going well so far? What’s an example of a project that’s not advancing as you expected?</td>
<td>Teachers &amp; Administrators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student achievement goals</td>
<td>What are the student learning goals in math this year? How is the department working toward those goals?</td>
<td>Teachers &amp; Administrators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(school wide)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student achievement goals</td>
<td>What goals do you have for your students this year? What’s the status of those goals? How are you/the department working toward those goals? What would help your process? Are you experiencing challenges?</td>
<td>Teachers &amp; Administrators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(classroom based)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional development</td>
<td>What professional development are teaching engaging in this year? What is it intended to address? How are you measuring the impact? What support are teachers getting? Are their challenging elements? Do staff collaborate? How?</td>
<td>Teachers &amp; Administrators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staffing Changes</td>
<td>Have there been changes to staffing in the last year? Does the influence how the Math/Science/English department collaborates? Describe your experiences. Have changes influenced the department i.e.: collaboration, support, etc? Please describe.</td>
<td>Teachers &amp; Administrators</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The final question was adapted from Patton’s work on qualitative interviewing (2002). Following his model, it was something to the effect of “That covers the things I wanted to ask. Anything you care to add?” or “What should I have asked you that I didn’t think to ask?” (Patton, 2002, p. 379). After developing rapport with the primary
actor, this question yielded rich data.

To protect the confidentiality of participants and the content of their commentary, interviews took place at a quiet location of the interviewees’ choosing. Interviews lasted between 45-minutes to an hour, at times extending to nearly 2-hours. Interviews were conducted in English and aurally recorded using handheld digital voice recorder.

Pseudonyms were used in all cases in order to protect the identity of primary actors. A master-code was used to log interview meetings with individuals. Data and coding of statements was not linked to individuals.

**Data Analysis**

Figure 1 represents the heuristic device developed to explain whether and how teacher turnover affects school reform efforts. The heuristic is a graph with an x and y-axis. The x-axis represents social capital and the y-axis represents human capital. Each quadrant in Figure 1 represents one of the four possible combinations of positive or negative human capital (HC) with positive or negative social capital (SC).

In the context of school improvement, the heuristic helped to conceptualize the net positive or negative effect of the teacher by their orientation on the graph. For example, an incoming teacher with strong human capital but who contributes to weak social capital would fit into Quadrant II. A teacher with weak human capital and weak social capital would fit into Quadrant III. Theoretically, a Quadrant III teacher would have a negative effect on reform efforts. A teacher with weak human capital but who contributed to strong social capital would fit into Quadrant IV. A teacher with strong human capital and who also contributed to strong social capital would fit into Quadrant I.
A Quadrant I teacher would theoretically have a positive effect on reform efforts. Case-study data collection and analysis presented findings that fit the qualities of Quadrants I and III. A discussion of these findings can be found in Chapter VIII: Review and Recommendations.

The following section reviews the literature relevant to teacher turnover, human and social capital, and school reform.
Figure 1. Human and Social Capital Quadrant Graphic

Y Axis = Human Capital
X Axis = Social Capital

**Y Axis**

+ 

**Quadrant II**

Strong human capital (HC+)
Weak social capital (SC-)

**Quadrant I**

Strong human capital (HC+)
Strong social capital (SC+)

- 

**Quadrant III**

Weak human capital (HC-)
Weak social capital (SC-)

**Quadrant IV**

Weak human capital (HC-)
Strong social capital (SC+)
Chapter II: Review of the Literature

The purpose of this literature review is to orient the reader to the three-dimensional nature of this study: school reform, teacher turnover, and teacher capital, both human and social.

Organization

This chapter provides an overview of the literature addressing recent federal education reform initiatives, reviews the literature about the forms and effects of public school teacher turnover, and presents the literature on human capital and social capital, as they pertain to public school change. The chapter concludes with a reflection by the researcher that presents a working hypothesis about the interaction of human and social capital on school reform efforts.

Definition of Terms

The following section is dedicated to defining key phrases and specific terms to support the reader. Given that different regions of the country and education professionals have come to know these terms in a variety of economic, political and media contexts, the definitions are provided to promote a common understanding between the reader and the researcher. The terms are presented in alphabetical order for ease of reference. The section is followed by a description of how the literature was reviewed.

Achievement Gap: The United States government’s education website defines the achievement gap as, “The difference between how well low-income and minority children perform on standardized tests as compared with their peers. For many years,
low-income and minority children have been falling behind their white peers in terms of academic achievement” (http://www2.ed.gov/nclb/index/az/glossary.html#12).

Attrition: Attrition generally refers to a change in staffing due to a teacher’s retirement, resignation, movement to another school district, a district reduction in force, a layoff, career change or termination.

Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA): A CBA in public education is the teachers’ contract. It is the agreement negotiated between the board of education and superintendent, and the local teachers union.

Education Reform: In the prologue of Tyack and Cuban’s 1995 book, Tinkering Toward Utopia, the writers define education reform as “planned efforts to change schools in order to correct perceived social and educational problems” (p. 4).

Education Reform “Waves”: Education reform periods from 1983 forward have been described as “waves”. Bacharach (1990) suggests, “This wave metaphor probably came from ‘the tidal wave of reform’ that was claimed to be sweeping the nation after the Nation at Risk reform was released in 1983” (p. 7).

Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA): “ESEA, which was first enacted in 1965, is the principal federal law affecting K–12 education. The No Child Left Behind Act is the most recent reauthorization of the ESEA” (http://www2.ed.gov/nclb/index/az/glossary.html#12).

Excessed teachers: “Teachers who… are cut from their school when a position has to be eliminated, and, by contract, typically must be the least senior in the subject area affected by the cuts unless a more senior teacher volunteers to leave” (Levin, Mulhern, &
Schunck, 2005, p. 9). Depending on state and local regulations an excessed, tenured teacher can be recalled.

**Human Capital:** Human capital, as it pertains to teachers, refers to the “experience, subject knowledge, and pedagogical skills” of a teacher (Leana, 2011, p. 32).

**Involuntary Transfer:** Involuntary transfers are teachers who are moved to a different school site within their district by an administrator. Involuntary transfers most often occur because an administrator is unable to “fire” a teacher using the district approved evaluation tools and the administrator is committed to removing the teacher from the school site. A teacher who is moved involuntarily often acquires the position of a probationary teacher or fills a position opened due to attrition.

**Migration:** Migration describes a teacher who transfers, voluntarily or involuntarily, from one school to another within the same district, or who moves within a school to a different content area, grade level, or both.

**No Child Left Behind (NCLB):** Federal education reform legislation passed under the Bush administration in 2001. According to education researcher, Darling-Hammond (2006), in 2001, NCLB was considered:

> [A] step forward in the long battle to improve education…in particular, for students of color and those living in poverty, new English learners, and students with disabilities. The broad goal of NCLB is to raise the achievement levels of all students, especially underperforming groups, and to close the achievement gap that parallels race and class. (p. 642)
Race to the Top (RTT or RTTT): Race to the Top is the “Obama administration’s…competitive grant program…The program has had a significant impact on the national political discourse around education and pushed many states to propose or enact important policy changes, particularly around charter schools and teacher-evaluation processes” (McGuinn, 2012, abstract). It had four main reform areas:
Designing and implementing rigorous standards and high-quality assessments; Attracting and keeping great teachers and leaders in America’s classrooms; Supporting data systems that inform decisions and improve instruction; Using innovation and effective approaches to turn-around struggling schools
Recall: Tenured teachers who receive a layoff notice may have “recall rights”, the right to be called back to a district position months or years after a layoff. It is important to note “a right of recall” is “conferred by locally negotiated contracts or, in some cases, by state law” (NCTQ, 2010, p. 5). Depending on the law or local contract, teachers can be recalled “weeks, months or even years after teachers have been laid off [and] they have the right to be reinstated…” (NCTQ, 2010, p. 5). Recall does not guarantee that a teacher returns to their former school site or grade level.
Reduction-in-Force: A reduction in force is the elimination of teaching jobs.
Social Capital: According to researchers Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) social capital, refers to how the quantity and quality of interactions and social relationships among people affects their access to knowledge and information; their senses of
expectation, obligation and trust; and how far they are likely to adhere to the same
norms or codes of behavior (p. 90).

Research Leana (2011) describes social capital, as it pertains to public schools and
teachers, as the relationships between teachers and among teachers. It includes the
effective use of norms, community trust, and the ability to collaborate meaningfully
(Coleman, 1988; Lee, 2014).

Seniority-Based Layoffs: Seniority-based layoffs occur when a school district has a
budget deficit that requires a reduction in teaching force. Teachers are laid off in reverse
order by hire date, releasing the last-hired teacher first.

Voluntary Transfers: “Voluntary transfers are incumbent teachers who want to move
between schools in a district…” (Levin et al., 2005, p. 4). In some districts, a senior
teacher can claim the position of a probationary teacher by activating their seniority
rights to push a probationary teacher out of their position (Levin et al., 2005).

Literature Review Methodology

The literature review of 20th and 21st century American education reform
movements began in February 2012. Keyword searches for American education reform
yielded broad results in the Boston University library system and Google Scholar.
Subsequent searches using the keywords school accountability, reform waves,
decentralized reforms, and centralized reform yielded publications providing the
historical and political context of federal reform initiatives, their respective influence on
the public education system, and lessons learned from implementation. Keyword
searches for the achievement gap and the federal education initiatives No Child Left
Behind (NCLB) and Race to the Top (RTT) generated publications by Washington, D.C. lobbyists, education think-tanks such as the CALDER Institute and the Center on Reinventing Public Education, and university researchers analyzing state-based implementation successes and challenges.

The review of the teacher turnover literature began in the summer of 2011. An initial search using keywords teacher layoffs brought forth themes and the additional keywords seniority rights, teacher tenure, voluntary transfer and involuntary transfer. Subsequent searches using keywords teacher migration, teacher attrition, effect of teacher turnover and teacher churn, in the fall of 2012 continuing through the fall of 2013, retrieved recent publications about the causes of teacher turnover, the content areas frequently affected by turnover, and school reconstitution.

The literature on teacher turnover and school reform revealed state and national reform agendas targeting the improvement of human capital or teachers’ content knowledge and pedagogical skills. A keyword search of human capital retrieved significant literature from the field of economics. The keywords human capital and education reform retrieved publications on past reform initiatives targeting teacher qualifications, teacher evaluation, and studies evaluating the relationship between teachers’ human capital and student achievement. The economics and sociology literature on human capital also revealed the theme of social capital.

The keywords social capital, education yielded literature about school culture, climate, norms and collaboration for school change. The literature as of November 2013 is limited with regards to social capital and student achievement.
The following section seeks to broadly review the standards-based education reform movement beginning with the 1983 publication of *A Nation at Risk* and continuing through to the 2001-landmark federal education initiative *No Child Left Behind* and the 2008 competitive grant education reform initiative *Race to the Top*.

**Education Reform**

Education reform researchers David Tyack and Larry Cuban (1995) write, “Reforming the public schools has long been a favorite way of improving not just education but society” (p. 1; Viteritti, 2012; Bacharach, 1990). One of the most renowned calls for reform occurred in 1983 when the National Commission on Excellence in Education released the landmark report *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Education Reform*. The report revealed the limitations of the public education system and the projected downfall of American society as an international intellectual and economic competitor (Tyack & Cuban, 1995; Viteritti, 2012). *A Nation at Risk* called for “the strengthening of high school graduation requirements; setting rigorous, measurable performance standards; the more effective use of time in school; a longer school day and school year; and improvements in the preparation, compensation and accountability of teachers” (Viteritti, 2012, p. 2091; The National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). The report is often considered “the beginning of the standards movement, if not the entire modern school reform movement” (Viteritti, 2012, p. 2091). As an outcome, by the mid-1980s, “the states promulgated more educational laws and regulations than they had generated in the previous twenty years” in an attempt to increase student achievement and improve America’s international competitiveness.
Within a year, thirty-five states had set new graduation requirements, twenty-two developed curriculum reforms, and twenty-nine set new policies regarding testing” (Viteritti, 2012, p. 2092).

The reform themes of the 1980s continued through the 1990s (Elmore, 2008; Hess, 1999). In 1989, the nation’s governors met to discuss how to make public education a national priority (Viteritti, 2012). As an outcome of the meeting, “The National Governor’s Association agreed to create the National Education Goals Panel that would develop a national report card for assessing progress towards specific academic goals” (Viteritti, 2012, p. 2092; Ravitch, 1995). In 1994, President Bill Clinton presented “Goals 2000” to Congress, outlining “a set of national education goals” that offered “financial incentives for states to develop improved [education] plans” in the areas of curriculum, instruction and technology (Viteritti, 2012, p. 2093; Superfine, Gottlieb & Smylie, 2012). In spite of Clinton’s efforts to reduce the achievement gap for under-performing, low-income children, at the end of his presidency the results of the grant money provided to states to close the achievement proved to be less effective than intended (Viteritti, 2012).

The next significant change to education reform occurred under the George W. Bush Administration when Congress enacted the 2002 bipartisan federal education initiative No Child Left Behind (NCLB). Interestingly, George W. Bush had been part of the original National Governor’s Association that established the National Education

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1 For additional perspective on the education reform trends of the 1980s and 1990s, see Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009; Elmore, 2008; Hess, 1999; Tyack & Cuban, 1995; and Bacharach, 1990.
Goals of the late 1980s, when he was governor of Texas (Viteritti, 2012). The concepts of NCLB had been percolating for nearly a decade by the time NCLB was approved in Congress.

No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

Similar to the reform initiatives of the 1980s and 1990s, No Child Left Behind (NCLB) focused on standards-based accountability. The NCLB legislation promoted both equity and excellence and garnered both Republican and Democrat support (Viteritti, 2012; Darling-Hammond, 2007). “When Congress passed George W. Bush’s signature education initiative, No Child Left Behind, it was widely hailed as a bipartisan breakthrough – a victory for American children, particularly those traditionally underserved by public schools” (Darling-Hammond, 2007, p. 11). The enactment of NCLB represented “the largest single expansion of federal authority into state and local decisions in the history of the country” (Elmore, 2008, p. 2).

In contrast with previous reform initiatives, NCLB put an “emphasis on improving education for students of color, those living in poverty, new English learners and students with disabilities” (Darling-Hammond, 2007, p. 45). The primary means for measuring students’ improvement was through rigorous, standards-based testing. Under the new law, Elmore (2008) states that NCLB required all states to:

adhere to a relatively narrow set of design criteria of accountability systems –
annual testing of all students between grades three and eight; disaggregation of

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2 For additional perspective on standards-based accountability and reform, see Darling-Hammond, 2004.
3 For additional perspective on the bipartisan development of NCLB, see Hess & Rotherham, 2007, in Munro, 2008.
student scores by demographic groups; progressive oversight and sanctions for poorly performing schools; and provision of parental choice for parents of students in chronically low performing schools… (p. 2; Viteritti, 2012; Congress.gov, n.d., No Child Left Behind Act, 2001).4

A school’s failure to attain performance targets under NCLB could result in school sanctions. “Schools failing to meet state performance objectives for two consecutive years were to be identified as “in need of improvement” at which time students were provided the opportunity to transfer out of the school to another public school (Viteritti, 2012, p. 2096; Darling-Hammond, 2007). After a third consecutive year of “in need of improvement” status, a failing school would be required to make significant staffing changes and after a fourth consecutive year, “a school would be required to undergo a major organizational overhaul, which could involve closing, converting to a charter school, or assumption of control by a private management company (Viteritti, 2012, p. 2097).

NCLB, consistent with the teacher-focused standards-based movement of the 1980s, also required schools to hire highly qualified teachers, most often measured by content-specific state-based testing and university and practicum training (Viteritti, 2012; Darling-Hammond, 2007; Superfine et al.; Johnson & Donaldson, 2007). Some states were engaged in subject-specific standards-based testing before 2001. In Massachusetts, for example, beginning in 1998 public schools were “required to administer English language arts (English Language Arts) and/or mathematics examinations” part of the

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4 NCLB also requires testing of grade 10 students.
current Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS), “to all students in particular grades” (Murnane, City & Singleton, 2007, p. 154).

NCLB also attempted to correct the “long standing problem that schools serving [America’s] neediest students typically have the least experienced and well-qualified teachers, even though such students need our most skilled teachers if they are to learn what they need to know” (Darling-Hammond, 2005, p. 5). It is important to note that NCLB focused on training or re-training current teachers by increasing credentialing requirements and supporting professional development, as well as the recruitment teachers who demonstrated a high degree of content knowledge and pedagogical training. Content knowledge, pedagogical skills and experience fit within the category of human capital, a term adapted to education from the field of economics. The third section of this literature review further explores the literature on human capital as it pertains to education.

The increased performance expectations and consequences for schools and teachers brought forth by NCLB did not yield the increases in student achievement as anticipated. One significant limitation of NCLB was the disparity of “proficiency” scores among states that measured students’ attainment of a standard.5 “States set widely different bars for proficiency. A study completed by the American Institutes for Research…found that the actual proficiency between students in the most and least rigorous states could be as much as four grade levels” (Viteritti, 2012, p. 2098). Richard Elmore, in his 2008 book, School Reform from the Inside Out writes, “High-performing

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5 For additional perspective on correcting the flaws of the accountability system, see Linn, 2005, in Munro 2008; Darling-Hammond, 2007, May 21, The Nation.
classrooms and schools, especially in communities with high proportions of low-income minority children, are still the rare exception rather than the rule” (Elmore, 2008, p. 2).

As President Bush’s eight-year tenure came to a close, confidence in the American public education system again faltered. With the 2008 election of President Obama, a new education agenda was presented and, in 2014, it continues to be the guiding policy in American public education reform. The following section describes the 2008 federal education initiative, *Race to the Top* (RTT).
Race to the Top (RTT)

*Race to the Top* (RTT or RTTT), is the most recent federal reform initiative targeting the achievement gap through performance expectations for teachers and students. The 2009 federal education initiative RTT is a sub-section of the Obama administration’s American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). ARRA, also referred to as the “Stimulus”, was intended to spur the American economy after the financial crisis of 2008 (Superfine et al, 2012, p. 59). ARRA allocated $87 billion to public education. About $77 billion of the $87 billion was targeted at “reforms to enhance elementary and secondary education, including $48.6 billion to bolster state education budgets” that were destabilized by the financial crisis (Viteritti, 2012, p. 2101; Congress.gov, n.d., American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, 2009).

The most significant component of President Obama’s education agenda is *Race to the Top*. “The Obama administration’s…competitive grant program has been heralded for revolutionizing the federal role in education and transforming state school reform efforts” (McGuinn, 2012, p. 137). It dedicated “$4.35 billion…allocated only to states that met specific criteria established by the department of Education to demonstrate that state decision makers would follow the direction set by Secretary Duncan” (Viteritti, 2012, p. 2102; McGuinn, 2012; Kolbe & King Rice, 2012; Superfine et al, 2012).

Secretary of Education Arne Duncan defined four policy objectives for RTT. He called for “adopting internationally benchmarked standards; improving the recruitment, retention, and compensation of teachers and school administrators; improving data
collection; and implementing strategies to turnaround failing schools” (Viteritti, 2012, p. 2102; Bosner, 2012; Kolbe & King Rice, 2012).

Race to the Top and the School Improvement Grant Program (SIG) identified four strategies to improve failing schools (O’Brien & Dervarics, 2013, p.6; Hansen 2013). Once a state was awarded RTT competitive funding, the state was required to choose one of the four strategies and develop a state-based implementation plan (O’Brien & Dervarics, 2013, p.6). The four strategies or models are as follows: (i) school closure; (ii) restart; (iii) transformation; (iv) turnaround.

The Center for Public Education (2013) describes each model below:

- The school closure model…the low-performing school is closed and students move to a higher achieving school.
- The restart model…the school becomes a charter or is taken over by an education management organization.
- The transformation model…the school replaces the principal, provides enhanced professional development to staff, launches a teacher evaluation system, increases learning time and creates new support services for students.
- The turnaround model, which includes many of the same elements as the transformation model with the additional requirement that teachers must reapply for their jobs. A turnaround school must replace at least 50 percent of the staff and grant the new principal greater autonomy to pursue reforms. (O’Brien & Dervarics, 2013, p. 6)
Teachers’ unions across the country aggressively challenged the legitimacy of forced teacher turnover as a strategy for improvement, as described in the turnaround model. The means for determining which teachers would be retained or released challenged union negotiated evaluation practices as well as the longstanding theme that teaching experience served as a proxy for professional expertise. Furthermore, research and literature on teacher turnover demonstrated that turnover was generally harmful to school stability, culture and student learning (Ronfeldt, Loeb & Wyckoff, 2012; TNTP, 2010, 2011; NCTQ, 2010; Sepe & Roza 2010; Levin et al., 2005).

It is well accepted that teachers are…the most important school-level factor affecting students’ learning. A skilled and committed teacher makes an enormous difference in what students know and can do, while having a series of ineffective teachers can have a devastating effect on a student’s progress” (Johnson & Donaldson, 2007, p. 111).

The general argument, however, was that if district leadership was granted greater autonomy in the hiring and retention of teachers for a school’s specific population of students, perhaps student-learning growth would result.

Beginning in 2010, states that could demonstrate plans to enact the RTT objectives as well as “promise to work in key innovation areas, including expanding support for high-performing charter schools and reinvigorating math and science education” would be eligible to receive a share of the grant (Bosner, 2012, p. 1).

The first phase of RTT competitive grant money was announced in March of 2010 and grants were awarded to Tennessee and Delaware. The second phase of RTT
winners was announced in August of 2010 with nine states receiving federal funding. An additional seven states were awarded federal grant money in December 2011, under the third phase of RTT.

As of November 2013, a review of the literature presented state-specific or school district specific studies, documenting the successes and challenges of implementing the RTT agenda. One notable outcome of RTT has been an “unprecedented wave of state-teacher evaluation and tenure reforms” which would ostensibly yield improved teacher quality and student learning experiences (McGuinn, 2012, p. 146). Additionally, RTT would likely be credited for “more robust state student-data systems and the adoption of common academic standards and assessments” (McGuinn, 2012, p. 144).

One contentious aspect of the RTT competitive grant strategy is the possibility that the most needy populations will not get the financial support necessary to improve student achievement. “In July 2010, the NAACP and the National Urban League “argued that relying on competitive funding means that the majority of low income and minority children who live in the states that lose [the competition] will not benefit from the new funds” (Viteritti, 2012, p. 2106). In sum, because the grant is competitive, with inherent losers, whole student populations will not get the necessary federal resources to advance. As for the states that do receive grant money, “[i]t remains to be seen if state enthusiasm for undertaking the difficult and contentious work of reform will persist for states that do not win an RTT grant or once the winners’ grants run out” (McGuinn, 2012, p. 144; Viteritti, 2012).

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6 For studies on the impact of RTT see Hansen, (2013); Hansen & Choi (2012)
Human Capital

The commencement of the standards movement in the 1980s and the increased focus on teacher qualifications, have placed an enduring emphasis on the relationship between teacher quality and student achievement (The New Teacher Project, 2011; Cohen-Vogel, 2011). Both NCLB and RTT have called for a great deal of energy and financial investment dedicated to developing human capital or “changes in persons that bring about skills and capabilities that make them able to act in new ways” (Coleman, 1988, p. S100; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). This is evidenced by the implementation of more rigorous teacher qualification standards, increased requirements for professional development, and ongoing certification updates to meet the needs of English Language Learners all for the purpose of closing the achievement gap. In education, human capital in teachers is characterized by the teacher’s content knowledge and pedagogical skills (Leana, 2011).

Human capital improvement is perceived by reformers to be essential to increasing student performance in low performing schools (King Rice & Malen, 2003). “The knowledge and skills that administrators and teacher-leaders command… represent a form of human capital that is or can be productive in the process of reform” (Spillane & Thomson, 1997, p. 190).

A challenge experienced by schools striving to increase student performance and close the achievement gap is the recruitment and retention of teachers with high human capital. When there are changes to the teaching faculty or turnover of a school, the school may experience the acquisition or loss of human capital that may, in turn,
influence reform efforts. The following section defines and describes teacher turnover literature as it pertains to school reform efforts.

**Teacher Turnover**

Teacher turnover, or churn, is a systemic and organizational constant in public schools. It is often described as attrition or migration. “[A]cross the nation, a large cohort of veteran teachers who started their careers in the late 1960s and early 1970s have begun to retire, creating an increasing demand for new teachers” (Johnson & Donaldson, 2007, p. 113). Research suggests the content areas of “special education, mathematics, and science are typically found to be the fields of highest turnover” (Ingersoll, 2001, p. 502; Boe, Cook, & Sunderland, 2007; Johnson & Donaldson, 2007).

Over the life span of a teacher, young teachers or novices experience a high rate of turnover and then “turnover rates decline through the mid-career period and, finally rise again in the retirement years” (Ingersoll, 2001, p. 502). “Nationally, one-third of novice teachers leave within three years and one-half leave within five” (Johnson & Donaldson, 2007, p. 112). Within the Boston Public Schools, for example, “by 2005, close to half of Boston’s new recruits were leaving within three years” (Johnson & Donaldson, 2007, p. 112). Due to salary schedules that pay novice teachers at a lower rate than more experienced teachers, “[h]igher poverty schools generally contain more novice, lower-paid teachers…” (Sepe & Roza, 2010, p. 2). Additionally, studies indicate that “when given the opportunity teachers will leave low achieving schools to teach in schools with higher achieving students or a higher socio-economic status” (Guin, 2004, p. 4). Thus high rates of turnover tend to be experienced by higher poverty schools, often
where students are most in need of stability and high quality teachers (Ronfeldt, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2012).

There are two different categories of teacher turnover, attrition and migration.

Attrition

Teacher attrition is described by teachers who leave the field of teaching due to a change in career, reduction in force, layoff, poor performance, or retirement. “[I]t is difficult to distinguish between teacher attrition and teacher migration to teaching jobs in other cities or states because the latter “leave” the sampling frame” (Ingersoll, 2001, p. 504). Thus teachers who migrate out of a high school position in one district and into a high school in another district are often recorded as attrition.

Migration

Migration in education refers to the voluntary or involuntary transfer of teachers who move between buildings within the same district, move within a building to another content area or move within a building to another grade level. Education researcher, Richard Ingersoll states, “about half of all the overall turnover of teachers is migration from one school to another” (2001, p. 503).

Teacher Turnover by Subject Matter

Ingersoll and May (2012) completed a study examining “the magnitude, destinations and determinants of mathematics and science teacher turnover” (p. 435). They found that “poor, minority, and urban public schools have among the highest mathematics and science turnover levels, both for those moving to other schools and those leaving teaching all together” (Ingersoll & May, 2012, p. 447). The current national
education agenda emphasizes standards-based accountability measures in the content domains of math, science and English language arts. The findings of elevated turnover in math and science by Ingersoll and May are particularly troubling for low performing high poverty urban public schools.

The Effect of Teacher Turnover

The literature examining the effect of teacher turnover on student achievement and school capacity is rich with qualitative and quantitative studies. This section begins with a brief review of the literature addressing general employee turnover and then presents the findings of recent research on the effect of teacher turnover on student achievement and school capacity.\(^7\)

From a general, organizational perspective, “employee turnover is important because of its link to the performance and effectiveness of organizations” (Ingersoll, 2001, p. 504). “Research findings from organizational theory and business literature suggest that the negative impacts of turnover include a loss of organizational productivity, a decrease in quality of service and an increase in direct economic and other intangible costs” (Guin, 2004, p. 2). The intangible costs can include a strain on organizational cohesiveness, working relationships, trust among colleagues, (Guin, 2004) and loss of collegiality among employees (King Rice & Malen, 2003). These intangibles can be categorized as the organization’s social capital. When an organization’s social capital is weakened, the organization is weakened.

“On the other hand, the organizational management literature has demonstrated that some turnover may in fact be beneficial. Turnover…can result in better person-job matches and infusion of new ideas into organizations” (Ronfeldt, Loeb & Wyckoff, 2012, p. 5). Changes of this nature would, theoretically, improve or strengthen the organization.

“Most existing research on the relationship between teacher turnover and student achievement is correlational revealing negative correlations” (Ronfeldt, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2012, p. 5). “Educational sociologists… have long held that the presence of a sense of community and cohesion among families, teachers, and students is important for the success of schools (Ingersoll, 2001, p. 501). Teacher turnover inherently disrupts the cohesion among these stakeholder groups. If cohesion is not regained, then the turnover may result in the deterioration of social capital that, over time, can detract from the sharing of information and best practices and jeopardize the effectiveness of the school.

Kacey Guin (2004) completed a qualitative study of urban elementary schools experiencing chronic rates of teacher turnover. Among her qualitative findings, she discovered that teacher turnover could have an adverse impact on the pre-existing staff (Ronfeldt, Loeb & Wyckoff, 2012). For example Guin found that teachers’ “time normally spent with…students was spent helping new colleagues acclimate to their new school environment” (2004, p. 10; Ronfeldt, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2012). Several teachers in Guin’s study reported “resentment for having to do their jobs as well as continually having to take on responsibilities for new teachers and their students” (2004, p. 11). Moreover, due to ongoing turnover, there was redundancy to whole-school professional development in an effort to “catch up” the new teacher(s) (Guin, 2004). Additionally,
teacher “turnover was perceived as being detrimental to the school’s instructional program. The continual loss of teachers had a negative impact on the momentum of instruction at the school” because of the need to “start the planning and implementation process over” (Guin, 2004, p. 11 & 13). Conversely, in schools with less chronic teacher turnover, turnover was perceived to be an opportunity to bring in new ideas and energy (Guin, 2004).

Other studies on teacher turnover have sought to investigate the directionality, or positive or negative impact, of teacher turnover on student achievement.

Education researchers Li Feng and Tim Sass conducted a teacher quality and teacher mobility study that also presented data on the directionality (positive or negative impact) of teacher turnover on school quality. Their study was conducted on behalf of the National Center for Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Education Research (CALDER), in the state of Florida. Using “multiple value-added measures of teacher quality” the researchers investigated whether “the best teachers leave teaching and does teacher mobility within the profession exacerbate difference in educational quality across schools?” (Feng & Sass, 2011, p. 1)

In a working paper published in January 2011, Feng and Sass stated that “interschool mobility of teachers could exacerbate the divergence in education quality across schools if schools serving disadvantaged populations lose their best teachers to schools serving more advantaged students (p. 1). Feng and Sass found that “[t]he most effective teachers who transfer tend to go to schools whose faculties are in the top quartile of teacher quality. As a result, teacher mobility exacerbates differences in teacher quality
across schools” (Feng & Sass, 2001, abstract iii). The higher performing schools continue to attract the higher quality teachers leaving the lower quality schools with lesser quality teachers. Moreover, when less effective teachers experience lower job satisfaction, they become motivated to leave the profession. This type of “attrition may have a positive effect on the average quality of teachers if relatively less-effective teachers…voluntarily leave the profession and are replaced by more able teachers” (Feng & Sass, 2011, p. 1; Ronfeldt, Loeb & Wyckoff, 2012).

Educational researchers Ronfeldt, Loeb and Wyckoff (2012) also completed a study analyzing the directionality or “compositional effect” of teacher turnover. They found that “if there is a difference in quality between teachers who leave and those who replace them, then student achievement can change” (2012, p. 5). Student achievement may improve when the “leaving teachers are, on average, worse than those who replace them” (Ronfeldt, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2012, p. 5). Conversely, if the “leaving teachers are better than the ones who replace them, the compositional effect is negative” and student achievement may decline (Ronfeldt, Loeb & Wyckoff, 2012, p. 5).

In some cases, “even when leaving teachers are equally as effective as those who replace them, turnover can still impact students’ achievement” (Ronfeldt, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2012, p. 7). Given that collaboration among teachers contributes to student learning, when there is turnover in the group, the dynamic or social capital among the teachers, changes. The social capital of the group may become more positive and effective or, it may become less collaborative and less effective. Teacher turnover can also disrupt the relationships between families and the school and between community
partners and the school. If the contact person for family engagement or community engagement changes, those external relationships can be jeopardized, which may adversely impact support networks and programs the contribute to student learning.

In a teacher turnover study, Holme and Rangel (2012) found that turnover, or “instability, negatively affected the relational dimension of social capital within schools, particularly the sense of ‘attachment to fellow workers’ or cohesion among group members” (2012, p. 269; Sepe & Roza, 2010). Social capital is defined by Coleman as the “structure of relations between actors and among actors” (1988, p. S98) or, in education, as the “patterns of interactions among teachers” (Leana, 2011, p. 32). It is described in greater detail in the next section of this literature review.

Social Capital

Social capital in education refers to the interactions between and among teachers, including, for example the observation of effective norms (Coleman, 1988; Leana, 2011). A norm “governs how the group functions and how members conduct themselves” (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 193). Coleman states, “When a norm exists and is effective it constitutes a powerful, though sometimes fragile, form of social capital…. Norms in a community that support and provide effective rewards for high achievement in a school greatly facilitate the school’s task” (1988, p. S104). Norms are nurtured and maintained through positive relationships and a culture of trust.

Relationship building is essential to successful change or school reform. Educational change theorist, Michael Fullan (2001) writes, “the single factor common to every successful change initiative is that relationships improve. If relationships improve,
things get better. If they remain the same or get worse, ground is lost” (p. 35). Positive relationships take time to develop. “In order to trust someone, a person must have some experience with another person on which to base trust” (Guin, 2004, p. 3). In schools experiencing teacher turnover, “it is difficult to establish trust because teachers, students and parents are...dealing with strangers, individuals with whom they have no experience” (Guin 2004, p. 3). Coleman (1988) acknowledges the importance of trust when he states, “without a high degree of trustworthiness among the members of the group, the institution could not exist” (p. S103).

Common agreements around norms and values, or effective social capital, contribute to information sharing and the development of human capital (Leana, 2011). Education researchers Spillane and Thompson (1997) explain that school reform requires teachers to learn a great deal about subject matter, learning, and teaching. Such learning consists not merely of acquiring more information or skills, but of transforming or reconstructing a great deal of what most teachers now know, believe, and habitually do (p. 186).

This transformational process is social and requires positive social capital. Fullan (2001) states, “people will not voluntarily share knowledge unless they feel some moral commitment to do so; [and] second, people will not share unless the dynamics of change favor exchange…” (p. 6).

Relative to school reform or school change, Elmore (2008) states,

[S]chools with strong internal accountability – a high level of agreement among members of the organization on the norms, values, and expectations that shape
their work – function more effectively under external accountability pressure.

Likewise, schools with weak internal accountability – low agreement and atomization – tend to not do well (p. 134; Guin, 2004).

Researchers Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) describe how social capital in schools can be a valuable quality that facilitates school improvement. “Every time you increase the purposeful learning of teachers working together, you get both short-term results and longer term benefits as teachers learn the value of their peers and come to appreciate the worth of constructive disagreement (p. 91). Hagreaves and Fullan (2012) give two examples of social capital at work in schools:

Critical friends networks…give teachers constructive and also challenging feedback with the aid of protocols that create a safe environment in which these conversation can occur. Moderated marking similarly enables teachers to learn from each other with expert facilitation as they examine student work according to standards-based criteria. These expressions of social capital are an asset that keeps on giving. They are a kind of “collective capacity” that extend to the whole-system of reform. (91)

Teacher turnover has the capacity to affect the social capital balance of a school because of the void created by the exiting teacher and the effect on the colleagues who stay, and/or because of the positive or negative influence of the incoming teacher. The same is true of human capital. The exiting teacher may create a void in content knowledge, pedagogical skills, and experiential background at the school and the incoming teacher may or may not possess the positive human capital attributes to fill the
void. The most favorable option, theoretically, would be for a school to acquire a teacher of both positive human capital and able to contribute to positive social capital. This teacher would be most likely to positively impact school reform efforts. Realistically, however, not every teacher acquired by a school demonstrates positive human capital and contributes to positive social capital. A teacher may have great credentials but not work well collaboratively. Or, conversely, a teacher may be an effective collaborator and not have strong pedagogical knowledge or experiential background in the field. Does the churn of human capital and on-going re-stabilization of social capital, for better or worse, affect school reform efforts? The following section is a reflection written by the researcher in 2014. It includes a pre-research hypothesis with a corresponding heuristic depicting how teacher turnover may affect school reform efforts. The case studies, conducted in 2015, and chapter eight discuss the interaction of human and social capital and the applicability of the heuristic.

**Reflection**

After reviewing the literature of late-20th century and current public education reform initiatives, teacher turnover, and human and social capital, I began to conceptualize teacher turnover as the churn of human capital and social capital at a school. The churn could create positive human and social capital – or negative. Perhaps the human capital contribution would be positive but the social capital contribution, negative. I began to envision how the various combinations would affect school reform efforts.
If human capital is a collection of attributes (i.e.: pedagogical skill, content knowledge, experiential background) residing within a single teacher and these attributes can be valued as positive or negative and are non-transferable, then if the teacher leaves a school, his or her positive or negative human capital is lost at the school. Similarly, if the teacher migrates within a school or district, the teacher brings his or her positive or negative human capital to the new position.

When a school experiences turnover, there is a change to the human capital of the school and the social capital. The acquired teacher contributes to the pattern of interactions between and among teachers. Ostensibly, the interactions between and among teachers are either positive, meaning they contribute to the advancement of the reform, or negative, they are counter-productive or non-influential toward achieving the objectives of the reform. It may be difficult to measure or label whether the teacher had a definitively negative or positive effect.

A single teacher, then, may become a source of positive or negative human capital as well as a contributor to positive or negative social capital. The literature emphasizes the importance of human capital on school improvement and that positive social capital can further support the advancement of other teachers’ human capital (Spillane & Thompson, 1997, p. 194). Thus, the best possible turnover scenario for a school would be to acquire a teacher who has high human capital (HC+) and contributes to positive social capital (SC+) so that the rest of the department or professional community can continue to develop human capital and advance the agenda of the reform. In Figure 1, this scenario manifests in Quadrant I.
Possibly the next best option for a school would be to acquire a teacher with lower human capital (HC-) but who contributes to positive social capital (SC+). Assuming the rest of the department has high social capital (SC+) and is committed to achieving high human capital (HC+), the research done by Spillane and Thompson (1997) suggests that the incoming teacher would be able to advance their human capital with the other teachers. Theoretically, this would support the advancement of the reform. This incoming teacher would be labeled HC- and SC+, and manifests in Quadrant IV of Figure 1.

A third scenario would be for a school to acquire a teacher of high human capital (HC+), strong in their pedagogy and content, but who demonstrates low social capital (SC-). Applying the lessons in the literature, if this person does not collaborate, threatens the trust within the community or disrupts the effective norms of the community, they could contribute to the deterioration of the reform efforts. This teacher turnover scenario is represented by HC+ and SC-, and would be placed in Quadrant II of Figure 1.

Perhaps the worst-case scenario for a school would be to acquire a teacher with low human capital (HC-) who also contributes to negative social capital (SC-). Theoretically, this teacher would not be a positive contributor to the reform process. In this teacher turnover scenario, the acquired teacher cannot contribute meaningfully to the human capital growth of others. Moreover, because the acquired teacher contributes to the lowering of the group’s social capital, the teacher may interfere with the human capital growth of others and, by extension, contribute to the deterioration of reform efforts. This scenario has far reaching negative effects. A teacher of low human and low
social capital who interferes with the professional advancement of colleagues, and by extension the school’s reform efforts, also jeopardizes the education of the students the reform was intended to target. This turnover scenario is represented by HC- and SC-, and manifests in Quadrant III of Figure 1.

**Significance**

Given the elevated nature of turnover in urban public schools, where there is an emphasis on closing the achievement gap, learning about teacher turnover and its possible effects on school reform efforts could contribute to the improvement of the school reform process. This dissertation explored whether teacher turnover affects school reform efforts and if so, how.

The following section is dedicated to presenting the methodology and methods designed explore this compelling question.
Chapter III: Plan of Inquiry

This study explored whether teacher turnover affected school reform efforts and if so, how, at three urban public high schools in New England. The following section presents the researcher’s theoretical framework behind the design of the study, as well as the methods, data analysis plan, and implementation timeline for the enactment of the study.

Concepts that Guide the Methodology

To explore the question of whether teacher turnover affected school reform efforts and if so, how, I conducted a qualitative methods study from a critical realist perspective (Maxwell, 2012a). Qualitative methods seek to “describe and explain phenomena as accurately and completely as possible so that their descriptions and explanations correspond as closely as possible to the way the world is and actually operates” (Patton, 2002, p. 546). The intent of using a qualitative approach was to capture the experiences of educators engaged in a school reform process and learn about the effect, if any, that teacher turnover had on a reform’s implementation. Qualitative researcher Joseph Maxwell writes that, “educational research desperately needs qualitative approaches and methods if it is to make valid and useful claims about what works” (2012b, p. 655). Maxwell also notes that the “main strength of qualitative research…is its ability to elucidate local processes, meanings and contextual influence in particular settings or cases” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 90). Qualitative research can also include case study. Case study research integrates document and interview-based data collection and involves a detailed investigation of a particular event, person or group, or organization (Patton,
2002). To descriptively capture what was happening within a school, a blend of traditional qualitative interview and case study methods were enacted.

The research orientation within the qualitative domain was ontologically realist and epistemologically constructivist. Critical realism is nested within constructive realism. Qualitative researcher Joseph Maxwell (2012a) states that critical realists retain an ontological realism (there is a real world that exists independently of our perceptions, theories and constructions) while accepting a form of epistemological constructivism and relativism (our understanding of this world is inevitably a construction from our own perspectives and standpoint) (p. 5).

A critical realist approach to qualitative study allows for individual interpretation of observed phenomenon; in this case, teacher turnover as it relates to school reform. Ontologically and epistemologically, critical realists accept that “there are different valid perspectives on reality” (Maxwell, 2012a, p. 9). Maxwell (2012b) states, “Reality is more complex than any belief or theory can fully capture; multiple valid understandings of any phenomenon are possible, and all beliefs and assumptions are tentative and subject to revision” (p. 657). When seeking to determine whether teacher turnover affected reform efforts and how, different “primary actors” (term for select stakeholders) had varying perceptions of the effect of turnover on the school reform process. Validity was not “proven” through corroboration of primary actors’ description. Rather, trustworthiness of the data was developed through intra-interviewee description of events and interactions.
Qualitative critical realist researchers support process theory as a means for developing an explanation for an outcome without relying on the constructivist’s requirement of physical phenomena to establish causation (Maxwell, 2012a). According to Maxwell (2012a),

Process theory deals with events and the processes that connect them;...[It] lends itself to the in-depth study of one or a few cases or a relatively small sample of individuals, and to textual forms of data that retain the chronological and contextual connections between events (p. 36).

Process theory addresses individuals’ “ongoing action/interaction/emotion taken in response to situations, or problems, often with the purpose of reaching a goal or handling a problem” within a particular context (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 96). Corbin and Strauss (2008) state “if one or more persons are acting together to reach a goal or manage a problem, they must bring their actions/emotions into alignment or the flow and continuity will be disrupted (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 97). The application of process theory was appropriate for these case studies because the school reforms studied were intended to solve a particular problem. School reform work is a collaborative endeavor that requires interaction among primary actors.

**Process Theory and Context**

For the purpose of this qualitative study, a school site was referred to as “a case”. Each case provided a unique context within which primary actors engaged in reform work. Sobh and Perry (2006) note that there are “four Ps of context – place (where), period (time), people and process” (p. 1200). The context provided for each case frames
the place and period within which the reform process evolved as well as interactions that occurred among primary actors. In each case study, there is a section titled, Case Description. The Case Description provides the case context for the findings. Patton (2002) cites Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997) who describes the context as

…the setting – physical, geographic, temporal, historical cultural, aesthetic – within which action takes place. Context becomes the framework, the reference point, the map the ecological sphere; it is used to place people and action in time and space and as a resource for understanding what they say and do. [It] is rich in clues for interpreting the experience of actors in the setting. We have no idea how to decipher or decode an action…a conversation…unless we see it embedded in context (p. 63).

Context is important when studying process and explanation in realism research. Maxwell (2012b) writes, “context is intrinsic to causal explanation. Causal processes always operate within a real context and this context is inextricably involved in the outcome of that process” (p. 657; Pawson & Tilley, 1997). The data collection for this study was based on the context of three specific cases. Correspondingly, the findings from the study were local in nature. The internal environment of the school where teacher turnover took place, the chronology of events, primary actors’ perceptions of the events, the relationship among events, as well as between events and individuals, were gathered to inform whether turnover affected reform efforts and if so, how.
Overview of Methods

To learn about teacher turnover and the effect on school reform efforts, three different urban public high schools, referred to as cases, were studied. All three were actively engaged in reform initiatives. The research was conducted in descriptive case study fashion through document collection, semi-structured interviews, and corresponding analysis. The objective of case study was to look within an urban public high school to describe the experiences of primary actors engaged in a particular type of school reform. The findings of each case include a rich description of the context, events and the experiences of primary actors. The findings were not generalizable in terms of demonstrating a direct and absolute causal link between turnover and reform, yet they did provide lessons about the complex nature of school reform, in the schools studied.

To investigate whether teacher turnover affected school reform efforts and if so, how, qualitative case study methods, as well as semi-structured interview and document analysis techniques, were used to capture a rich description of primary actors’ experiences. Petty, Thomson and Stew (2012) write, “methods…refers to techniques used to acquire and analyse data to create knowledge” (p. 378). Case study approaches allow the researcher to “choose from a broad range of methods” including interview and document analysis (Petty, Thomson & Stew, 2012, p. 379). While case study is often associated with the study of extreme cases, qualitative researchers Corbin and Strauss (2009) support case study research for normative or routine cases, as well. Corbin and Strauss (2009) write
Just because an inter/action is routine does not mean that it is not important. Studying routine has broad implications for knowledge development. It enables researchers to identify patterns of inter/action/emotional responses that make it possible to “establish” and “maintain” social and personal stability in the face of contingencies (possible but uncertain or unpredictable happenings), thereby expanding our understanding of everyday life (p. 100).

At the time of the study, low performing urban districts across the country were engaged in school reform endeavors in order to improve student achievement and comply with state reform agendas. The findings from the three cases are not generalizable to other schools, but do provide lessons about how to manage the complexities of implementing reform initiatives while also experiencing changes to teaching staff.

**Case Identification and Context**

For the purpose of learning about whether teacher turnover affects school reform efforts and how, access to low performing schools based on state assessments, was desired. Cases were determined based upon a district and school’s willingness to participate. This study ultimately took place at three low performing high schools in New England, two within a medium-sized urban public school district (District A), one within a small-sized urban public school district (District B).

In order to gain access to Districts A and B, a research request was filed and segments of the dissertation proposal were submitted to a review committee for endorsement. Upon approval, requests were sent to principals requesting an opportunity to meet and discuss conducting the study in their school, consistent with Boston
University Institutional Review Board (IRB) agreements. (Please see Appendix B, School Recruitment Letter.) After repeated attempts and support from university colleagues, approval was granted to conduct my study at both Coolidge High School and Adams Career Technical High School in District A, and Monroe High School in District B. Table 5 shows the case name, the corresponding district, and the findings chapter within the dissertation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case Name</th>
<th>District</th>
<th>Chapter within the Dissertation</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adams Career Technical High School</td>
<td>District A</td>
<td>Chapter V</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coolidge High School</td>
<td>District A</td>
<td>Chapter VI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monroe High School</td>
<td>District B</td>
<td>Chapter VII</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

District names, individual school sites and all identifiable names of people and places were given pseudonyms in the study. All reform efforts, identifiable programs, or published materials that could be identified by the public, were also changed to ensure confidentiality and anonymity.

District A was a large school district comprised of more than a dozen high schools. District B was comparatively smaller with one comprehensive public high school for the entire community. Both schools from District A were Title I schools. All three high schools were identified as “low performing” based on their high school state-based assessment scores. All three high schools were also racially and socioeconomically
heterogeneous and served large English Language Learner populations as well as students with disabilities.

The data collection timeline and sequence for each case was slightly different. The original methods called for a data collection timeframe of January 2014 through late-June 2014. In practice, data collection was delayed by a year and officially began in December of 2014. Data collection concluded on July 1, 2015. Table 6 shows when data collection began and ended, at each site.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Case Name</th>
<th>Start Date</th>
<th>End Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Monroe High School</td>
<td>March 11, 2015</td>
<td>June 8, 2015</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Document Collection**

Once the Districts and school principals approved the research, data collection began. The first step called for the gathering of information-rich school documents in order to lend insight into staffing changes, reform initiatives, and reform implementation plans before interviewing primary actors. The collection of school improvement documents included: professional development plans and agendas; calendars to support event chronology; and staffing sheets, that would disclose which teachers were teaching which subjects compared to the previous year; and a copy of the current master schedule to see common planning time opportunities. Document collection was intended to support two objectives: First, to provide background about what was going on within the
school and second, to provide documentation of chronological events to support process and causal analysis (Maxwell, 2012a). Document analysis was also intended to shape interview questions. Sobh and Perry (2006) state

Having prior knowledge...helps in the selection of interviewees, and allows the opening and probe questions in the first and later interviews to be more effective and efficient. It also helps the researcher to make more believable, some encouraging noises during the “conversation” of the interview, as well as helping the researcher to recognise when something important has been said… (p. 1202).

In practice, however, document collection and interviews occurred in very tight succession. Student academic performance data as well as staffing and student demographic information, available on the state department of education websites and respective district and school websites, were reviewed before interviews. Local press coverage was also retrieved through Google searches. Documents or information relative to primary actors annual evaluations were not pursued; the published literature often describes teacher evaluation as subjective in nature (The National Center on Teacher Quality, 2010; Weisburg, Sexton, Mulhern, & Keeling, 2009). Additionally, evaluations tied to individual teachers would have been difficult, if not impossible, to obtain.

At Monroe High, the documentation of district reforms and school-improvement plans were unavailable. When asked for records or templates outlining Monroe High School’s reform work, the district’s Assistant Superintendent and the Program Director for humanities suggested there might be “a list” of school-wide reform efforts, but not a formal plan using a district template. Monroe High’s principal also referenced an
informal list but as for formal planning documents he said, “You’re not gonna find them [the improvement plans] here” (Principal, Interview, June 3, 2015). Records of master schedules from previous years were also unavailable. According to the principal and the district program director for humanities, the school used an online scheduling program and the system was reportedly unable to retrieve past years’ master schedules. Finally, documentation of leadership meetings, in the form of agendas or records, was not available. While school leaders did describe frequent meetings, the planning documents or agendas were not saved. Consequently, it was not possible to reference these desired sources before conducting interviews or to develop the case.

During interviews for all three cases, primary actors were asked to describe documents or processes that were unavailable in written form. Interviewees provided detailed descriptions of staffing changes, scheduling, reform efforts and professional development. Documents continued to be collected and reviewed throughout the interview process. Interviewees were often asked for copies of original notes or permission to take a picture of a document referenced during an interview. These documents provided context to transcribed statements and served as artifacts of the case, which ultimately informed case analysis.
Identification of Primary Actors

While I gathered available data and descriptive information about each school, I began to identify primary actors to interview at each site, in order to conduct purposeful sampling. Patton (2002) states that “[t]he purpose of purposeful sampling is to select information-rich cases whose study will illuminate the questions under study” (Patton, 2002, p. 46). The information-rich sources identified were referred to as “primary actors”.

It is important to note that the word stakeholder was intentionally avoided, when referencing interviewees. When describing school reform, stakeholder is often used to include teachers, administrators of various levels, and support staff as well as students, parents, and community members. To use the term stakeholder would potentially mislead the target audience of education reform policymakers and school leaders. The alternative term, primary actor, for these three case studies, describes a school administrator, Instructional Leadership Team member, program director, teacher leader or teacher participating in reform work.

In my original methods, I planned to contact primary actors via email using district email addresses available on school websites, as well as via hard copy letters. In practice, I made changes to this plan in an effort to maintain confidentiality and respect principals’ wishes. For example, it became clear that multiple hard copy letters sent to a school with my return address and sorted by the main office or professionals at the school might be an indicator of which primary actors I would interview. Consequently, no letters were sent through the U.S. Post Office; email was used instead. I also found that each
principal had a preference of how to contact teachers. In order to accommodate principals, I honored their process but I refused to reveal whom I emailed, met with, or tried to contact. Subsequent sections reveal the specific methods used in each case and slight variations in processes.

**Interview Process**

The purpose of interviewing primary actors was to “enter the other person’s perspective…to find out what is in and on someone else’s mind [and] to gather their stories” (Patton, 2002, p. 341). “[C]ritical realist social scientists see the meanings, beliefs, values and intentions held by participants in a study as just as real as physical phenomena, and as playing a causal role in individual and social phenomena” (Maxwell, 2012a, p. 40). Manicas writes, “…since persons are the dominant causes of what occurs in society, the first problem for the social scientist is to understand action as it is understood by the actors” (2009, p. 33). By interviewing primary actors, I learned about their experiences with site-based reform initiatives, their perspective on teacher turnover at the site, and whether turnover affected reform initiatives, from their perspective.

A semi-structured interview guide was used to conduct each interview conference. The guide was organized by theme and offered the advantage of “interviewing a number of different people more systematically and comprehensively by delimiting in advance the issues to be explored” (Patton, 2002, p. 343). Patton suggests that a semi-structured interview guide will “ensure that some basic lines of inquiry are pursued with each person…[and]…provide topics or subject areas within which the interviewer is free to explore, probe, and ask questions that will elucidate and illuminate”

Interviews addressed themes of teacher turnover, site-based reform efforts, department-based reform efforts, and student achievement goals across the school and within content areas. The development of my final question was informed by Patton (2002), and intended to “provide an opportunity for the interviewee to have the final say” (p. 379). When each interview felt like it was coming to a close, I said something to effect of “That covers the things I wanted to ask. Anything you care to add?” or “What should I have asked you that I didn’t think to ask?” (Patton, 2002, p. 379). Patton states, “I’ve gotten some of my richest data from this question with interviewees taking me in directions it had never occurred to me to pursue” (2002, p. 379). After conducting forty-eight interviews, the opened ended inquiry toward the end of an interview proved to yield interesting revelations and reflections from primary actors.

Interviews were conducted beginning in December 2014 and continued through July of 2015. The original methods planned for interviews to take place after school due to the busy nature of the instructional day. Principals, however, thought staff would not participate if they needed to stay after school or meet during the weekend. In support of the study, the Coolidge High principal invited me to a full day of on-campus rotating interviews with teachers during their planning periods. Similarly, the principal from Monroe High invited me for a one and a half day interview block, which enabled me to connect with teachers during their work day, rather than after school. To conduct
interviews at Adams Career Technical High School, I met with teachers and school leaders during vacation weeks, after school, before school and in late June.

In each case, teachers’ and school leaders’ busy schedules were taken into account and I did my best to respectfully honor their time and location preferences. Prior to each scheduled interview, a meeting confirmation request was sent via email, followed by an emailed thank you note. Participants did not receive a reward or recognition, as the study was not funded, but it was important to express gratitude for professionals’ time and contributions to the research.

Each case context was different and the size of the case determined the number of primary actors interviewed. On average, twelve primary actors were interviewed per case. Several primary actors were interviewed twice.

Interviews typically lasted between 45-minutes to an hour. Some interviews, however, lasted much longer than an hour. For example, the two interviews with the principal of Coolidge High were nearly two hours each.

Interviews were conducted in English and aurally recorded using a small handheld digital voice recorder protected by a digital password. In an effort to ensure that an interviewee was comfortable with the interview process, each interviewee was informed that he or she could stop the conversation, and the recording, at any time. This was based on a recommendation from Patton (2002) who suggested the following statement be made to an interviewee:

I’d like to take record of what you say so I don’t miss any of it. I don’t want to take the chance of relying on my notes and maybe missing something that you say
or inadvertently changing your words somehow. So, if you don’t mind, I’d like very much to use the recorder. If at anytime during the interview you would like to turn the tape recorder off, all you have to do is press this button on the microphone and the recorder will stop (p. 381).

The opportunity to opt-out was also included in the Consent Form. (Please see Appendix C, IRB Approved Informed Consent Form.) Most interviewees expressed concerns about their commentary being shared with school-site or district-level leadership. In response, I reiterated my commitment to use pseudonyms, maintain confidentiality and do my best to mask school, programs, documents and event names that may be indicators of a particular school district, site, or person. Once interviews began and the primary actor and I developed rapport, the conversations flowed smoothly. During the interview process, I took notes about key phrases, main points, and at what time in the conversation certain ideas were expressed (Patton, 2002). I also took notes about body language, environment, and other non-verbal elements. These notes served to contextualize statements as I analyzed the data for process and explanation. Patton (2002) suggests that taking notes “affects the interview process” because it serves as a form of non-verbal messaging to the interviewee that what they’re saying is significant and needs to be noted (p. 383). Often, a primary actor revealed that they valued the conversation; they found the process and questioning to be interesting and appreciated my interest in learning about their experiences.

At the end of each interview, I requested an opportunity to conduct a follow-up interview. The follow-up interview was intended to validate and verify interpretations of
the data, address any ambiguity, and ensure true interpretation of the primary actor’s words. In practice, it was difficult to coordinate follow-up meetings with busy professionals. Instead, follow-up phone calls and email exchanges were scheduled with primary actors. As more data was collected and analyzed, I looked for redundancy of a primary actor’s statements as well as common themes expressed among primary actors.

After each interview, I listened to the recorded file and took notes. Patton states, “The immediate post interview review is a time to record details about the setting and…observations about the interview” (2002, p. 384). Patton (2002) recommends that interviewers “reflect …and make notes on the interview process while the experience is still fresh in your mind. These process notes will inform the methodological section of your research (p. 384). While listening to the recordings, I made connections between the interviewee’s words and my recollections of the interviewee’s affect and noted themes or concepts that emerged. These notes were helpful during data analysis.

Data Analysis

Petty, Thomson and Stew (2012) state that “[n]o particular method of data analysis is associated with case study methodology” (p. 379). From school documents, I reconstructed teacher-staffing timelines, reform development and implementation chronology, and mined for themes and values represented in the documents. This information contributed to the development of school context, an essential component of process theory. As stated in the previous Interview Process section, in situations where documents were unavailable, the requisite information was gathered from interviewees.
The California-based transcription company, GMR, was hired to transcribe the interviews. Transcribed interviews were uploaded into the qualitative coding software, NVivo. I coded manually and created a hierarchy of codes to organize my data. In NVivo, a hierarchical structure is based off of “parent nodes” and “child nodes”.

Patton (2002) recommends, “Developing some manageable classification or coding scheme is the first step of analysis….Content analysis…involves identifying, coding, categorizing, classifying, and labeling the primary patterns in the data” (Patton, 2002, p. 463).

Throughout the analysis, I looked for evidence of the individual’s, organization’s and group’s ability to give meaning to and respond to problems and/or shape the situations that they find themselves to be in through sequences of action/interaction, taking into account their reading of the situations and emotional responses to them (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 98).

Given my ontological and epistemological orientation as a critical realist, I accepted that there could be more than one perspective that would capture what was happening in a particular case.

After coding for content, Patton recommends, “looking for recurring regularities in the data. These regularities can be sorted into categories” (2002, p. 465). Using NVivo, I was able to efficiently develop codes and develop categories and concepts that ultimately helped to identify process in the data. “Process in data is represented by sequence of action/interaction/emotions changing in response to sets of circumstances, events, or situations” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 98). Corbin and Strauss (2008) state,
“[a]nalyzing the data for process can lead to identification of patterns as one looks for similarities in the way persons define situations and handle them” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 100).

Corbin and Strauss (2008) recommend considering the following questions when analyzing for process: “What is going on here? What are the problems or situations as defined by participants? What are the structural conditions that gave rise to those situations? How are persons responding to these through inter/action and emotional responses?” (p. 100). I followed Corbin and Strauss’ recommendations. On a large reversible white board, I wrote each question and left space underneath for citations from the transcripts. As I identified redundancies, I wrote them on the white board and began to construct graphic representations of the data. By analyzing the data for codes, categories, themes and process, I was able to increase the richness of the description and the trustworthiness of the findings.

After engaging in rich case description, capturing primary actors’ perspectives, engaging in organizational categorization, and process analysis of the data highlighting the holistic context of each case, I generated “lessons learned” for school leaders and policymakers. The “lessons learned” from each case can be found in chapter eight.

It’s important to note that the original study design included an argument and hypothesis asserting that churn of human and social capital may affect school reform efforts. My findings revealed two examples of how human and social capital interact to affect reform efforts. One example, from Coolidge High School, depicts how low human and low social capital adversely affected reform efforts in the humanities program. A
second example, from Monroe High School, depicts how high human and high social
capital positively contributed to the advancement of the English Language Arts program.
My research did not reveal examples of how low human capital interacted with high
social capital; or how high human capital interacted with low social capital. In reflection,
the study design did not call for longitudinal and close tracking of a specific primary
actor or particular groups of primary actors. A longitudinal case study, focused on the
interaction patterns or behaviors among department members while engaged in reform
work over multiple years may have yielded findings aligned to all four quadrants of the
heuristic.

Validity

Many researchers reject qualitative study for its perceived subjectivity (Patton,
2002; Maxwell, 2012a, 2012b). Given that I was the instrument of data collection, I was
mindful that my perspective could bias what I perceived was happening, thereby
manipulating the data (Patton, 2002, p. 14). To guard against researcher bias in the
analysis of others’ perspectives, I included a section describing my background and
values as a researcher (Sobh & Perry, 2006). (Please see Appendix A, About the
Researcher.) I also maintained a reflective journal of brief memos about my interview
experiences and emerging analysis, and bracketed instances where my values or beliefs
potentially colored an interpretation.

Critics assert that qualitative research cannot declare causality and insist “only
experimental research is capable of establishing causal conclusions, with randomized
experiments as ‘the gold standard’ for causal investigation” (Maxwell, 2012a, p. 35).
Their preference is for quantitative, objective, and value-free research. To be clear, this study did not seek to establish causation, in the statistical sense of word, nor did this study embrace a radical constructivist approach to causation, which is premised upon the physical world. Rather, critical realist social scientists rely on the interpretation of events and “see the meanings, beliefs, values, and intentions held by participants in a study as just as real as physical phenomena, and as playing a causal role in individual and social phenomena” (Maxwell, 2012a, p. 40). This is consistent with sociology’s Thomas’ Theorem that states, “what is defined or perceived by people as real is real in its consequence” (Patton, 2002, p. 96).

I sought to establish trustworthiness of my findings by listening and reading for redundancies in the descriptions provided by an individual and among individuals. To guard against questions of interpretive validity, I followed the advice provided by Patton (2002) to “check for the consistency of what people say about the same thing over time; compare the perspectives of people from different points of view…; [and] check interviews against program documents and other written evidence that can corroborate what interview respondents report” (p. 559). Follow-up interviews with primary actors also enabled me to member check and validate my interpretations of their statements.

As evidenced by interview transcripts, follow-up clarifying questions were posed during interviews to verify interviewee’s intended message. For example, I asked: “Are you saying...?” or “Does that relate to...?” When a primary actor described a sequence of events, I would ask the interviewee to repeat the process and then I restated what I heard
the interviewee say. This served to confirm that I understood the intended message of the speaker.

I also engaged in member-checking via follow-up conversations. I inquired about statements made in earlier interviews, asked clarifying questions, asked the same question again and compared answers from the two different sessions. At Adams Career Technical High School, for example, I was able to conduct follow-up meetings with five of the thirteen primary actors. At Coolidge High, I conducted two follow-up meetings and at Monroe High I conducted three. Tables 7, 8 and 9 document initial and secondary meetings.
Table 7: District A, Adams Career Technical High School, List of Primary Actors Interviewed
Total Number of Interviews Conducted: 19
Number of Primary Actors: 13

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Math Teacher</th>
<th>English Language Arts Teacher</th>
<th>Teacher Leader</th>
<th>Instructional Leadership Team Member</th>
<th>Administrator</th>
<th>Date of Interview(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Humanities Program Director</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>January 7, 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>June 15, 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math Program Director</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>February 17, 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interim Principal</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>December 17, 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>June 30, 2015</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>July 1, 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instruction and Assessment Director</td>
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<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>March 18, 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>May 11, 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Support Services Director</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>April 30, 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Language Arts Lead Teacher</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>February 26, 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math Lead Teacher</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>March 3, 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>April 6, 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Language Arts Teacher A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>May 29, 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Language Arts/Special Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>June 15, 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English as a Second Language/Special Education Teacher</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math Teacher B</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>June 19, 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math Teacher C</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>April 15, 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Education Teacher (generalist)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>June 24, 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td><strong>4</strong></td>
<td><strong>5</strong></td>
<td><strong>2</strong></td>
<td><strong>7</strong></td>
<td><strong>5</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 8: District A, Coolidge High School, List of Primary Actors Interviewed
Total Number of Interviews Conducted: 12*
Number of Primary Actors: 9

* One person chose to select out of the study post-interview; none of the data collected was used to inform the development of the case and the interviewee has been removed from the total list of primary actors, below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Math Teacher</th>
<th>English Language Arts Teacher</th>
<th>Teacher Leader</th>
<th>Instructional Leadership Team Member</th>
<th>Administrator</th>
<th>Date of Interview(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Principal                           |              |                               |                | X                                    | X            | January 13, 2015  
January 19, 2015  
April 12, 2015 |
| Assistant Principal for Instruction and Assessment |              |                               |                | X                                    | X            | March 16, 2015  
April 27, 2015 |
| Assistant Principal of Discipline   |              |                               |                | X                                    |              | March 16, 2015 |
| English Language Arts Lead Teacher  | X            |                               | X              | X                                    |              | March 16, 2015 |
| English Language Arts/English as a Second Language | X            |                               |                |                                      |              | March 16, 2015 |
| Math/Special Education A            | X            |                               |                |                                      |              | March 16, 2015 |
| Math/Special Education B            | X            |                               |                |                                      |              | April 16, 2015 |
| English Language Arts               | X            |                               |                |                                      |              | March 16, 2015 |
| Math Teacher                        | X            |                               |                |                                      |              | March 16, 2015 |
| **Totals**                          | 3            | 3                             | 1              | 3                                    | 3            |                          |
Table 9: District B, Monroe High School, List of Primary Actors Interviewed
Total Number of Interviews Conducted: 17
Number of Primary Actors: 14

* Monroe High School did not have an Instructional Leadership Team

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Math Teacher</th>
<th>English Language Arts Teacher</th>
<th>Teacher Leader</th>
<th>Administrator</th>
<th>Date of Interview(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Science Teacher Leader</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>June 3, 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Teacher Leader</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X X</td>
<td></td>
<td>June 2, 2015</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher on Special Assignment</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>June 2, 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House Principal #1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>House Principal #2</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>June 2, 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House Principal #3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X X</td>
<td></td>
<td>June 2, 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House Principal #4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X X</td>
<td></td>
<td>June 2, 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Principal</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X X</td>
<td></td>
<td>March 30, 2015 June 3, 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math Teacher Leader</td>
<td>X X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>June 2, 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Teacher Program Director</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X X</td>
<td></td>
<td>March 24, 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humanities Program Director</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X X</td>
<td></td>
<td>March 24, 2015 June 3, 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Education Program Director</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>June 3, 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Superintendent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X X</td>
<td>March 11, 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-District Program Director</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X X</td>
<td>April 22, 2015 May 14, 2015</td>
</tr>
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<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td>2 1 3 10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When I was unable to follow up with a primary actor, I created a “member check” word document and sent it via email. The member check document included coded segments of the primary actor’s transcript. I requested “confirmation” or “rejection” of
the codes, via email. In the case of code rejection, primary actors were asked to provide an alternative coding label that better represented their intended message. Monroe High primary actors were highly receptive to this approach; seventy-five percent of the primary actors responded. Each respondent provided complete confirmation that the codes associated with their interview segments were accurate. I sent follow-up emails in an attempt to confirm the remaining twenty-five percent, but was unable to connect.

Primary actors at Coolidge High and Adams Career Technical High School were difficult to connect with via email. Of the nine emails sent to primary actors at Coolidge High, only four responded. Three confirmed the codes associated with their comments were accurate. One teacher expressed his concern that the statements he made would be traceable back to him personally. Consistent with the terms of the Confidentiality Agreement, we agreed to discontinue the primary actor’s participation in the study; the respective transcript was removed from the NVivo coded files. No aspect of this primary actor’s interview or data is present in this dissertation. At Adams Career Technical High School, I received member check confirmations from fifty percent of emailed participants, all providing one hundred percent confirmation of the codes. In several cases, I was unable to follow up with primary actors via email because I only had access to their school-based account. Some teachers left the district or retired and their email accounts were disconnected.

When designing the study I noted that, “the data may or may not support cross case analysis” (Canfield, Dissertation Proposal, Methods Section, January 2015). My study was not about case comparison, though the findings from Coolidge High School
and Adams Career Technical High School do have common elements. Rather, I sought to provide “lessons learned” that could inform the decision-making of school and district leaders, as well as policymakers, seeking to conduct reform efforts, while subject to or experiencing teacher turnover.

**Anonymity of Sources and Case Security**

In order to maintain the anonymity of the cases and primary actors, pseudonyms were used throughout the case and all unique identifiable aspects of the case, participants, programs and policies were carefully coded. A master-code, to help log interview meetings with interviewees, was established in a separate password-protected electronic file, as approved by the Boston University Institutional Review Board, in March of 2013.

Chapter four provides an introduction to each case, a corresponding overview of case findings, and previews findings and lessons learned for school leaders and policymakers.
Chapter IV: Introduction to the Cases

During the 2014–15 school year, I investigated whether teacher turnover affected school reform efforts, and if so, how, by conducting qualitative case studies at three urban public heterogeneous high schools in New England. All three schools studied were considered low performing, compared to schools of a similar type. Two of the schools, Adams Career Technical High School and Coolidge High School, were part District A, a medium urban public school district. District A employed over 4,000 teachers, served more than 50,000 students and maintained over 100 school sites. The third school, Monroe High, was part of District B, a comparably smaller-sized urban school community. District B employed fewer than 500 teachers, served approximately 3,500 students and maintained fewer than 10 school sites.\(^8\)

The cases studied were engaged in reform work at the school-wide and department level. In Tyack and Cuban’s 1995 book, *Tinkering Toward Utopia*, the writers define education reform as “planned efforts to change schools in order to correct perceived social and educational problems” (p. 4). This research primarily focused on reform efforts affecting the math and English Language Arts programs, as these two content areas are traditionally assessed on state-based measures. In each case in this study, turnover *did* have a perceived effect on reforms. In certain circumstances the effect was disruptive to reform work, yet in others, the effect was beneficial. The difference

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\(^8\) As per my confidentiality agreement, the actual numbers have been modestly rounded and the websites with specific district and school data are not provided in order to conceal the respective state, district and school names.
appeared to be whether the turnover at the school was sparked by external factors or internal factors.

At both Adams Career Technical High School and Coolidge High teacher turnover coincided with District-level recommendations for school restructuring. Recommendations were made, in large part, due to poor student performance on state-based measures as well as district-level operational needs. Improvement recommendations were also made without collaborative input from the existing principal or professional staff. At both Adams Career Technical High School and Coolidge High these “recommendations” were received by staff as “directives” without strong ties to the realities of the schools’ true challenges and needs. Consequently, the “recommendations” yielded resistance and resentment. The district’s recommendations also created significant job uncertainty for teachers and ultimately contributed to teachers’ opting to leave the school. The uncontrolled loss of human capital and disturbance to social capital contributed to the disruption of reform initiatives at both sites.

In contrast, teacher turnover in District B was due to site-directed changes. The principal of Monroe High, in contrast with the principals at Adams Career Technical High School and Coolidge High, was granted significant professional autonomy to independently direct staffing changes within the high school to meet the needs of students and professional staff. The case of Monroe High depicts how the principal, free from externally imposed bureaucratic restraints, sought to maximize existing human capital and develop social capital by modifying teachers’ course assignments within their certification. In effect, the school principal reorganized existing human capital and
facilitated the advancement of social capital to sustain or advance reform initiatives underway. These changes were directed from *within*. While the principal’s practices were not entirely celebrated by existing staff, they was well understood by educators and generally accepted.

Ultimately, the lessons learned from these cases may be valuable to district-level and site-based urban public school leaders planning for, or responding to, teacher turnover in an era of continuous school improvement.

**The Case of Adams Career Technical High School (District A)**

The case study of Adams Career Technical High School tells the story of a school which struggled to stabilize in the fall of 2014 after significant teacher and leadership turnover in the spring of 2014. The effect, relative to reform efforts, was a de-prioritization of school-wide reform work in favor of stabilization efforts. The development and implementation of department-based reform efforts, targeting improved student performance on state-based assessments in math and English Language Arts, were delayed until mid-November of 2014. Consequently, the amount of time teachers had to enact a change in their instructional practice to improve student learning was significantly reduced.

On a macro level, the case of Adams Career Technical High School promotes reflection about the importance of sustaining clear communication and reducing uncertainty when planning to enact large-scale changes. When the teachers at Adams Career Technical High School felt vulnerable they sought security at other schools. The
timing and scale of turnover was unforeseen and contributed to significant instability at the start of the 2014–15 school year.

On a micro level, the case presents lessons about the repercussions to school reform efforts when challenged by: (i) an insufficiently staffed school; (ii) an incomplete or inappropriate master schedule lacking common planning time; and (iii) the need to provide timely mentoring support to new hires.

**The Case of Coolidge High School (District A)**

The case of Coolidge High School is a tumultuous story told in two phases. Data collection at Coolidge High began in January of 2015 and continued through April. In late February, the District unexpectedly recommended the closure of Coolidge High in June 2015. Phase I data collection focused on reform efforts up through the fall of 2014. Phase II findings reflect teachers’ reactions to the closure recommendation.

Phase I describes how the absence of strong social capital within a department can undermine the advancement of human capital and reform work. Phase I findings also suggest that long-term teacher leaves of absence can destabilize and disrupt school improvement progress.

In the spring of 2015, Coolidge High was nearly dismantled by a District recommendation to close the site. Phase II describes how the uncertain future of the school and teachers’ sense of job insecurity compelled teachers to focus on professional survival rather than school reform initiatives.

The case of Coolidge High School provides lessons to school and district leaders about the complexities of merging two philosophically divergent school communities.
together; and the potentially significant adverse affect of just one teacher’s long-term absence on the ability of a small department to advance reform initiatives. The case findings also revealed that when Coolidge High teachers experienced job uncertainty, many chose to prioritize professional survival over the advancement of reform initiatives.

**The Case of Monroe High School (District B)**

Of the three cases studied, Monroe High School had the greatest level of teacher stability. Teacher turnover at Monroe High manifested in two ways: turnover requiring the hiring of new staff; and school-directed internal movement of teachers in order to maximize current human capital.

Monroe High decreased the risk that teacher turnover would adversely impact reform efforts by enacting two strategies. One strategy called for the careful evaluation of a potential hire by using a school-developed candidate quality assessment screening. This screening helped to ensure the potential hire was a good fit for the school community and was equipped to meet needs of the students. Another strategy sought to recruit and groom student teachers in order to internally develop future candidates for open full-time or long-term substitute positions.

Monroe High school leaders also intentionally planned and enacted internal teacher movement from one grade level to another, within teachers’ content discipline. This was done in an effort to develop and maintain the school’s human capital. For example, no one teacher was enabled to remain the sole Advanced Placement (AP) biology teacher for multiple years. The AP teacher would be intentionally rotated into a different biology section, such as college prep, so that a different biology teacher could
experience teaching the AP curriculum. A teacher moved between course levels would then have the benefit of learning about the full scope and sequence of the curriculum as well as assessment standards.

The case of Monroe High provides district and school leaders with meaningful lessons about planned, well-communicated, internally-directed teacher turnover as a means for developing existing human capital. Also, Monroe High’s strategies to carefully screen candidates and to develop interns for future positions may prove beneficial for other schools that are seeking to reduce the risk of destabilization due to turnover.

A thorough description of Adams Career Technical High School, Coolidge High School and Monroe High School are presented in Chapters V, VI and VII, respectively. Each school case study in the subsequent three chapters begins with the school’s context, the reform work underway at the time of the study, and a description of teacher turnover at the school. The findings sections discuss how the turnover affected the reform work. Chapter VIII presents the essential lessons learned from all three cases studies.
Chapter V: Adams Career Technical High School

Overview

Department-based reform efforts at Adams Career Technical High School, during the 2014–15 school year, were significantly delayed as an outcome of teacher turnover. Between the spring of 2014 and the start of the 2014–15 school year, fifty teaching positions were posted due to uncontrolled teacher migration to other district school sites at the end of the 2014 school year. The migration was largely driven by teachers’ sense of uncertainty regarding the stability of their teaching positions for the 2014-15 school year. Unfortunately, for Adams Career Technical High School, the fifty open postings could not be sufficiently filled with qualified teachers for opening day. While the administrative team sought to recruit, interview and hire teachers, up until the start of the Fall semester, district-level leadership struggled to design an effective school-wide master schedule. The convergence of an incomplete teaching staff and an incomplete and error-filled master schedule generated instability for the start of school. Throughout the months of September and October, school leadership and teachers worked to stabilize the school in order to facilitate meaningful teaching and learning. Consequently, department-based reform efforts targeting improved student performance on state-based assessments were not developed until late November. The implementation of reform efforts was further delayed until mid-December. State-based assessments for Adams Career Technical High School began in March, thus the number of months available to enact the reform work was reduced to a mere three-month span.
Four categories of findings emerged from this case: teacher turnover generated hiring demand; teacher turnover’s effect on scheduling; new hires need support; and, student-teacher connection. Together, these categories generated the thematic finding that teacher turnover destabilized Adams Career Technical High School which contributed to a delay in the development and implementation of department-based reform efforts.

The case of Adams Career Technical High School provides lessons to district leaders considering top-down school-wide teacher turnover, repeated site leadership changes, and the timing and delivery of employee-sensitive messaging. The case also exemplifies what many researchers have previously demonstrated: late-hiring cycles can adversely influence a school’s ability to hire high-caliber teachers (Levin & Quinn, 2003); and teacher turnover disrupts the relationships students have with teachers and the school (Guin, 2004).

**School Description**

Adams Career Technical High School is an urban, public, Title I, 9–12 school located in the northeast corner of a medium sized city in New England. At one time, Adams Career Technical High School was known to be a city gem, graduating students successfully prepared for trade and unionized work, as well as for two-year and four-year colleges. Teachers at Adams Career Technical High School recounted when employment and enrollment at Adams High were perceived to be an honor, and the school was highly regarded by the community. However, in the 2000’s, as the emphasis on academic standards and student achievement expectations on state-based assessments increased, Adams Career Technical High School’s status began to change. The school was
challenged to sustain a high quality career technical training program while also preparing students for increasingly high academic performance expectations. The dual focus contributed to the deterioration of a once vibrant career technical program, and stagnant or declining annual student academic performance.

In a commitment to align the academic and career technical programs and redefine excellence at Adams Career Technical High School, a Master Plan was developed in 2012. The spirit of the Master Plan was to help Adams Career Technical High School improve by granting increased autonomy and flexibility to respond to the needs and interests of the student population without some of the restrictions imposed upon other District A schools. The detailed, 45-paged, single-spaced plan, followed by a 40-paged appendix of graphics and flow-charts, included the following: a mission and a vision statement; school governance; specified student achievement goals; curriculum, instruction and assessment expectations; student disciplinary guidelines; master scheduling guidelines; staffing and hiring protocols; professional development themes; budgeting templates and formulas; student admission procedures; a thorough code of conduct; and various other fundamental organizational documents.

One significant provision of the Master Plan, under “staffing and hiring protocols” called for “flexibility from district policies and procedures around…hiring…” (Master Plan, 2012). In consequence, this “flexibility” granted Adams Career Technical High School and District A the ability to bypass Collective Bargaining Agreements (CBA) regarding staffing policies and hiring procedures. Specifically, Adams Career Technical High School was exempt from accepting teachers through transfer or excessing
processes as described in the CBA. In spirit, this provision permitted the school to “open post” any available teaching position and recruit and hire the most highly qualified teachers to meet the needs of students and goals of a career technical school.

When the Master Plan was released in the spring of 2012, it was intended to be the guiding document of the institution. According to interviewees, some colleagues contested it and chose to leave the school rather than be forced to follow the Master Plan. Interviewees did not describe this turnover as destabilizing; interviewees acknowledged that teachers left but did not describe correlating positive or negative effects. Conversely, interviewees did align the turnover of leadership with the failure to implement the Master Plan.

After the retirement of a long-serving school principal in 2012, the District struggled to retain a leader with sound ethical judgment and proper state-required credentials. Consequently, the school experienced four consecutive years of leadership turnover. The turnover made it difficult for the school to determine, implement and refine academic and vocational improvement initiatives outlined in the Master Plan. By December of 2014, two and half years after its intended implementation, the many of the Master Plan goals remained unachieved.

The school’s instruction and assessment director framed the effect of leadership turnover this way:

Interviewee: …[the school] hasn’t had administrative stability …over the course of the last four years, there have been five different headmasters…it's tough in

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9 Please see Continuation of Leadership and Staffing Turnover at Adams Career Technical High School on the subsequent page.
that kind of climate to find people who are going to champion moving forward as
a – with different curriculum and instructional practices (Interview, Instruction
and Assessment Director, March 18, 2015).

Adams Career Technical High School struggled to generate student success on
state-based achievement measures. For three consecutive years (SY2011–12 through
2013–14) student performance on state-based assessments was among the lowest 20% in
the state. According to the department of education website, in the spring of 2014, less
than 25%10 of students who took the 10th grade state math test, required for graduation,
passed. This was a decline of nine percentage points from the 33% passing rate, the year
before. Less than 50% of students passed the 2014 English Language Arts exam, down
from 55%, in 2013. The rate of decline in student performance, at the time of the study,
placed Adams Career Technical High School at risk for state-based intervention.

The career technical side of Adams Career Technical High School also struggled.
The school had once been a thriving, highly regarded feeder program of young well-
trained workers for local city construction and service providers. Students graduated with
marketable skills, professional contacts, “on the job experience” and, often, a bright
future in a unionized position. According to interviewees, however, the connection
between the school and community networks had decayed. Local employers were
connecting less frequently with the vocational programs at Adams Career Technical High
School and student success stories were less common than in years past.

10 In alignment with my confidentiality agreement, student performance data, enrollment
numbers, and demographic percentages have been “rounded” so as not to provide specific data
that could be used to identify the case.
Figure 2. Continuum of Leadership and Staffing Turnover at Adams Career Technical High School (Spring 2012 – Spring 2015)

1] Adams Career Technical High School is led by Principal McGregor. **Late Spring 2012**, the District announces restructuring plan for Adams; McGregor retires. Principal search begins. Teachers concerned about new leadership and the restructuring plan voluntarily transfer to other schools within the district.

2] **September 2012**: Summer search for principal fails; current internal vice principal appointed as interim principal.

3] **6-months later, February 2013** interim Principal put on leave due to federal criminal investigation.


6] **Spring 2014** Interim Superintendent informs teachers they will re-apply for their jobs for the 2014-15 school year, due to students’ ongoing low performance on state-based assessment measures. **Several weeks later**, the Interim Superintendent rejects the recommendation to remove principal; announces the principal will continue for 2014-15 school year. Between 60 and 70 staff members (teachers and administrators) transfer to other schools within the district, retire, or leave the district entirely.

7] **Late Summer 2014**: Principal investigated for faulty state credentialing. It is determined the principal does not have the required state credentials to serve as a principal. **September 2014**: Principal resigns. **Principal Coach is appointed as the interim principal for the 2014-15 school year**. Teachers were never formally required to reapply for their jobs. Those who did not leave, continue on staff for the 2014-15 school year.

8] **September 2014** School opens. Significant staffing vacancies remain. The master schedule and students’ course selections are incomplete. School is fragile and unstable.

9] **December 2014**: 7-month case study investigating whether teacher turnover affects school reform efforts, and if so how, begins. First interview: **December 17, 2014**.

10] **Final interview July 1, 2015**. The case study captures teachers’ and school leaders’ stories of large scale, uncontrolled turnover and school stabilization.
According to state department of education data, student enrollment declined close to 50% in 10-years time from roughly 1,800 students in 2004–05, to 920 students in 2014–15\(^\text{11}\). In 2012, there were approximately 325 incoming 9\(^{th}\) grade students however, by the fall of 2014, 9\(^{th}\) grade enrollment had dropped to 155. Some interviewees perceived the decline in enrollment to be an indicator of decreased community confidence in the school.

In spite of declining enrollment, student demographics held relatively steady from 2012–13 through 2014–15. At the time of the study, 48% of students were Hispanic, 43% African American, 5% white, and the remaining 4% of students Asian or multi-race. Within the same three-year timeframe, students identified as English Language Learners held at 30%. The percent of students with disabilities however, increased by 5% within the same three years, from roughly 35% to 40%.

Declining enrollment, weakening student performance in academic and vocational programs, leadership turnover and increasing community concern prompted the District to hire an independent audit team to determine the cause(s) of the problems at Adams Career Technical High School. The 2013–14 school-wide review concluded in mid-spring with a detailed report and recommendations for moving the school forward. Replacing the administrative team, including the principal, was among the primary recommendations. The audit team also strongly encouraged a return to the Master Plan and laid out immediate steps for resurrecting and enacting it. However, according to

\(^{11}\) In alignment with my confidentiality agreement, student performance data, enrollment numbers, and demographic percentages have been “rounded” so as not to provide specific data that could be used to identify the case.
interviewees, the District only acknowledged *aspects* of the audit team’s recommendations.

The case study revealed that Adams Career Technical High arrived at its proverbial tipping point shortly after the district’s review and release of the audit team’s report, in the spring of 2014. The findings of the Adams Career Technical High School case demonstrate how uncertainty about job security contributed to teacher turnover and how teacher turnover affected school reform efforts, from August 2014 through June 2015.

**The Tipping Point: Spring 2014**

In the spring of 2014, the superintendent and various members of the Central Office held a staff meeting and disclosed the findings of the audit conducted by the independent team. The findings called for the removal of the principal, full implementation of the 2012 Master Plan and a personal letter from each teacher pledging a commitment to serve the school. The District, however, informed the staff that the principal would continue to serve the school. Teachers were confused and angered by the superintendent’s decision to ignore the independent team’s recommendation.

According to a long-time math teacher and ILT member:

The first [recommendation] was that [the principal] should be replaced. And…the superintendent told us that no, we’re not going to do that. She’s going to stay.

And needless to say, morale was very low from that point on because we knew that our leader was coming back. (Interview, Math Teacher B, June 19, 2015).

The underlying message from the District to staff seemed to suggest that neither teachers’
concerns nor an independent audit’s findings, could generate leadership change at the school. Many interviewees referred to this time period as a particular low point for the school.

The audit also called for all teachers to submit a written letter of intent articulating their commitment to fully serve the school and collaborate for school-wide excellence. The independent team suggested that teachers should personally affirm, in a one-paragraph written statement, their desire and dedication to serve Adams Career Technical High. Though largely symbolic, the independent team did recommend releasing teachers of their position who would not submit their pledge. The superintendent interpreted the recommendation as a call for school-wide teacher turnover. The resulting job uncertainty contributed to a sense of vulnerability among teachers. The interim principal described the superintendent’s actions as direct and the source of teachers’ panic. He said,

Last year… the superintendent instructed the staff that he wanted to get rid of everybody…he advised everybody to leave. [He] took a direct approach, rather than taking another approach that would have been a little bit softer, a little bit calmer that wouldn’t have caused people to panic. But when you're told by the superintendent that you need to leave here, people listen, and [teachers] felt that as long as they were marketable, they were gonna leave. (Interview, Interim Principal, June 30, 2015).

The interim headmaster refers to the Interim Superintendent’s actions as “a direct approach” when he “advised everybody to leave” but he does not explain the motivation
or rationale behind the interim superintendent’s and District’s actions.

Exactly why the interim superintendent took this “direct approach”, remained unclear throughout the interview process. Interviewees hinted that the District was frustrated with the insufficient amount of progress at Adams Career Technical High School. Though the school was cited as low performing, in the spring of 2014 it was not labeled a turnaround school.

An analysis of the Master Plan did not reveal language explicitly empowering the District to require teachers to reapply for their jobs. Moreover, teachers’ evaluations were conducted in accordance with the district wide CBA. In a section about school staffing in the Master Plan there was a provision essentially stating that changes in student interest and student outcomes…may lead [the District] to change course offerings and…adjust staffing (Master Plan, 2012) but adjustments to staffing were not defined as requiring an entire staff to reapply for their positions. The real rationale behind the District’s actions or why the District believed their approach was viable, within the terms of the 2012 Master Plan and CBA, remain unknown.

If teachers wanted to stay at Adams Career Technical High School, they were told they would have to reapply for their jobs. For teachers, the difference between “reapplying” and “affirming one’s commitment” was the difference between having job security or not. An interview with a veteran math teacher revealed how teachers’ uncertainty about their employment and the work environment prompted teachers to take precautionary steps to protect their employment.
Interviewer: …Is it your understanding that people left primarily because they had been told they were going to be reapplying for their jobs?

Interviewee: Yeah, of course. That’s why most of them left. They didn’t – if they didn’t come in and tell people you had to apply they probably would have stayed. Just the unknown of what was gonna happen…Just the unknown. Are they [Central Office] gonna do this every year? The unknown forced people to leave.

Interviewer: I see. (Interview, Math Teacher C, April 15, 2015)

The possibility that teachers would not be rehired after reapplying compelled teachers to take proactive steps to preserve their careers and apply for teaching positions at other District schools. According to the Interim Principal, in the end, “A good number of staff left. The school had to hire more than sixty-two teachers and administrators…. (Interview, Interim Principal, June 30, 2015). The sixty-two staff members included twelve administrators who served in supportive roles to the principal, such as the Program Directors for humanities, math and science.

Interestingly, the District never officially required teachers at Adams Career Technical High School to reapply for their jobs. Why the District enabled such uncertainty only to rescind its requirement to reapply is unknown. As suggested by the interim principal, the distress and disruption could have been averted with a more thoughtful approach or an “approach that would have been a little bit softer, a little bit calmer that wouldn’t have caused people to panic” (Interview, Interim Principal, June 30, 2015).
The total number of staff appeared to be in general decline after the 2011–2012 school year. Staff turnover before the Superintendent’s announcement in the spring of 2014 is represented below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Year</th>
<th>Total Number of Staff</th>
<th># of Staff Retained</th>
<th># of Staff Lost</th>
<th>% of Staff Retained at Adams High</th>
<th>Average % of Staff Retained by Schools Across the State</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2014–2015</td>
<td>not reported</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013–2014</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012–2013</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011–2012</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Data provided by the Department of Education, School and District Profiles, Staff Retention Data\textsuperscript{12})

The staff retention data provided by the department of education show a three-year average turnover rate at Adams Career Technical High School of twenty percent\textsuperscript{13}. When I asked teachers and school leaders to recount turnover in prior years, commentary consistently returned to the superintendent’s directive to reapply for positions in the spring of 2014. The absence of discussion regarding pre-2014 teacher turnover led me to the probable deduction that turnover likely did occur but it did not create a memorable effect. Though the staff retention rate for the 2014–15 school year was not available on the state’s website, teachers and school leaders continuously reported that 62 staff members had to be hired for the 2014–15 school year. Given that the total number of staff\textsuperscript{12}

\textsuperscript{12} As per my confidentiality agreement, the website has not been provided in order to conceal the state, district and school name.

\textsuperscript{13} In alignment with my confidentiality agreement, teacher retention numbers have been “rounded” so as not to provide specific data that could be used to identify the case.
in 2013–14 was 134, then turnover of 62 positions would equate to a 43% turnover rate, more than two times previous years.

The teacher turnover that occurred during the spring and summer of 2014 was compounded by a fourth school leadership failure. In late summer 2014, it became known that the principal had failed to ensure that a master schedule was ready for the start of school. By contract, teachers were supposed to be given a schedule with teaching assignments in June for the subsequent year. The multitude of projected new hires, however, made it impossible to generate a reasonable schedule before summer recess. To remedy the problem before the start of school, Central Office attempted to remotely devise a master schedule. When school started in September, however, the master schedule designed by Central Office, proved inadequate and unsuitable for the Adams Career Technical High School teachers and students.

The first week of school presented additional challenges beyond the absence of an effective master schedule. Many teaching and some administrative positions were still unfilled on opening day. Then, an unexpected development arose: the District determined that the principal was insufficiently qualified according to state credentialing requirements. Within days of the District’s discovery, the principal resigned. A highly respected and successful interim headmaster was appointed. The reform efforts at the center of this case study began under the purposeful and principled leadership of the interim. The findings discussed in the subsequent sections unveil the effects of turnover from spring 2014 through school year 2014–15 on the school’s 2014–15 reform efforts.

School reform efforts are traditionally associated with a change in instructional practice or organizational systems intended to improve student learning (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Often, reform efforts are framed as school improvement goals or student learning goals. Due to the extensive staffing and scheduling turmoil at the start of the 2014–15 school year, specific student learning goals at Adams Career Technical High School were displaced by goals to stabilize, normalize, and provide students with access to quality learning experiences. The interim principal described the goals of the 2014–15 school year this way:

There were a lot of priorities, but the main priority was to stabilize the school; get it moving, get the faculty involved [and] make sure that their voices were heard. And make sure we were on top of getting kids to class. Make sure the kids were in their classrooms being able to have the opportunity to get good teaching and learning. (Interview, Interim Principal, July 1, 2015)

The interim principal’s reference to making sure students were getting to class and in classrooms is a reference to the scheduling problems in September that delayed students access to class and coursework. His statement regarding the importance of providing students “good teaching” refers to the need to replenish the school’s human capital with qualified and quality teachers able to provide “good learning opportunities” to students.

Once students’ schedules were in place and the school day had stabilized, the next leadership step involved, “try[ing] to put in place some immediate actions to [solve] some difficulties [the] staff were having…To get the school to a point where it felt
normal” (Interview, Interim Principal, July 1, 2015).

Examples of the “immediate actions” included providing teachers resources and finding blocks of time during the day for teachers to collaborate. These steps were enacted in mid-October through November. The responsibility of establishing student learning goals and corresponding instructional action plans were distributed to department directors and teacher leaders. Directors began the process of developing department student learning goals with teachers in November.

**Department-based Reform Efforts**

The planning of department-based reform efforts was delayed until mid-November, after the school had stabilized staffing and scheduling. The implementation of department-based reform efforts began in early-December, three months into the school year. Given students’ repeated poor performance on state-based assessments in math, English Language Arts, and science, a primary goal amongst departments was to improve students’ achievement on state-based assessment measures. The directors of English Language Arts, math and science reviewed student test data and identified the greatest leverage points to improve student performance. After reviewing itemized responses and students’ strengths and weaknesses, the department leaders determined that an improvement in the quality of students’ open responses would yield the greatest positive return in students’ scores, across all assessed content areas.

**Reform Efforts in the Humanities and Math Departments**

At Adams Career Technical High School, the English Language Arts and history departments were grouped together under the umbrella title, humanities. By grouping
English Language Arts and history, teachers were able to provide reinforcement of essential skills.

The humanities department, during the 2014–15 school year, focused on improving 9th and 10th grade students’ writing on the open response section of the state-based 10th grade English Language Arts test (Humanities Program Director; English Language Arts Lead Teacher). Correspondingly, a primary instructional focus of the 2014–2015 school year was the development of students’ ability to use text-evidence to support claims in a written response to a prompt. Using previous state test questions, the teachers implemented a series of eight formative writing prompts and provided feedback to students. Ninth and 10th grade students were evaluated using the same writing rubric used by the state. The rationale: if students have practice with test questions and know what is expected of them then the quality of students’ writing will improve and test scores will go up (Interview, English Language Arts Lead Teacher, February 5, 2015; Interview, Humanities Program Director, January 7, 2015; Interview, Humanities Program Director, June 15, 2015).

The math department, like the humanities department, had a primary focus of improving the quality of students’ open responses on the writing section of the 10th grade state-based math test. Interviews with the math program director, math lead teacher and a veteran math teacher revealed that the open response sections in math were historically very challenging for Adams Career Technical High School students.

Humanities and math reform efforts targeting improved student writing on the open response sections of the state-based 10th grade exams were delayed until late-
November and December of 2014. To fully maximize the seven-month continuum of academic learning leading up to the state assessments in March, schools generally strive to initiate improvement initiatives in the first term. In the case of Adams Career Technical High School, however, the timeline to implement the reform initiatives was reduced to a three-month span of mid-December through mid-March. In sum, teachers were confronted with improving students’ math and English Language Arts test performance in a shorter period of time than in years’ past within the higher stakes context of potential state takeover if scores did not show significant improvement.

**Findings Overview**

In the fall of 2014, Adams Career Technical High School was destabilized by teacher turnover. The magnitude of the turnover had implications for recruitment and development of human capital, scheduling, teacher support, and relationships between students and teachers. Stabilization of the school at the start of the school year consumed leadership’s energy and focus. Consequently, the development of department-based reform efforts targeting student learning and performance on state-based assessments was delayed until mid-November 2014. The actual implementation of the reform efforts began in December. Throughout the school year, new hires continued to need instructional and classroom management support. For school leaders, the Adams Career Technical High School case study reveals that uncontrolled large-scale teacher turnover combined with late-hiring practices can have detrimental effects for the recruitment of strong human capital, operations, teacher collaboration, and reform work targeting improved student learning.
The coding structure to support the findings of this case included four categories: human capital; scheduling; teacher support; relationships between teachers and students. These categories all contributed to the conceptual finding that teacher turnover destabilized Adams Career Technical High School, which contributed to a delay in the development and implementation of department-based reform efforts. (Please see Appendix D, Coding Graphic Chapter 5: Adams Career Technical High School.)

**Finding and Analysis: Recruitment and Development of Human Capital**

When teachers at Adams Career Technical High School were told in the spring of 2014 that they would have to re-apply for their jobs, many teachers became concerned about their future at Adams Career Technical High School. To protect their employment prospects, teachers began to apply to open positions at other schools in the district. By mid-summer of 2014, not only had many teachers left the school, but most of the administrative team had left, as well. However, as teachers announced their commitment to a different district school for the 2014–2015 school year, the district blocked Adams Career Technical High School’s ability to hire until the end of July 2014. The interim principal explained the hiring delay, during our interview in June.

Interviewee: Adams should have been able to move forward with hiring staff at the beginning of April like everybody else, but that decision was held and Adams wasn’t given the ‘okay’ to hire staff until the end of July.

Interviewer: This is 2014?

Interviewee: Yes. By that time a number of faculty had jumped ship and took positions at other schools. And [Adams] – in August we had to hire 62 staff and
administrators. There was no administrative team in place when the principal started the hiring process. She was hiring her administrative team, as she was hiring teachers. Trying to hire 62 plus positions was more than anyone could handle. (Interview, Interim Principal, June 30, 2015).

Given that the typical hiring season in New England starts in mid-March, by late summer, the most qualified candidates had already been hired to other districts and school sites.

According to District A’s Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA), hiring should have started mid-spring 2014, once it became clear that certain positions would need to be filled. However, the 2012 Master Plan, which effectively governed the staffing procedures at Adams Career Technical High (in lieu of the CBA), did not include clearly defined hiring timelines. The 2012 Master Plan only referenced the school’s flexibility to fill positions using “open posting” procedures (Master Plan 2012). Consequently, the school was granted the ability “open post” but not until late into the hiring season. Upon reviewing the interview transcripts, it appears that interviewees were either uncertain or uncomfortable stating the rationale behind the District’s decision to delay hiring. Thus, why the District prevented the school from hiring until mid-July remains unknown.

When Adams Career Technical High School officially opened in September 2014, many teaching and school leader positions remained open. The timing meant that it would be more difficult for Adams Career Technical High School to recruit and retain strong human capital. The interim principal expressed how difficult it was to recruit human capital in late summer or early fall. At Adams, he said,
“The school wasn’t fully staffed. The school still had vacancies. The problem about trying to staff a school two weeks before you open, you’re not gonna get everything right. And then there were some positions that couldn’t be filled. (Interview, Interim Principal, June 30, 2015)

The need to hire many staff after the start of September created several challenges. The absence of sufficient teachers contributed to loss of student learning time. Second, the delay in hiring made it more difficult to recruit and retain strong human capital. The interim principal explained, “There were several positions that could not be filled because they were either high level science position, or a career tech position, so those positions became very – extremely difficult to find people who were qualified and could actually be effective teachers in those positions.” (Interview, Interim Principal, June 30, 2015). Third, interviewees reported that students seeking academic and social support, including getting help with college applications, felt like their connection with school had deteriorated due to a broken connection with familiar teachers.

In September and October, the school leaders were consumed with replenishing human capital. The first priority was to find qualified staff for each open teaching and administrative position. The humanities program and math program directors were both hired several days after the start of school. Teaching positions continued to be filled throughout September and October. In several scenarios, teachers who were hired in early fall were not a proper fit for the school and were promptly terminated.

At least three teachers of the science and career technical departments were given unsatisfactory performance evaluations between September and November of 2014. The
interim principal explained:

…we had to evaluate some of the new staff, who we had realized weren’t able to 
 communicate the best practices and teachings for our students. And some of those 
 new staff had to be terminated, creating additional vacancies that we had to try to 
 fill during the time school was open. (Interview, Interim Principal, June 30, 2015)

These positions proved especially difficult to fill. Consequently, “we [the school] had to 
 go with substitutes which is not the best solution…. so some things weren't ideal….There 
 was more educational confusion….“ which further distracted administration from 
 successfully leading instructional reform (Interview, Interim Principal, June 30, 2015).

Each time another teacher was hired, support was required. Each time a student lost a 
 teacher, there was a necessary and subsequent adjustment to the new teacher’s style and 
 expectations, as well as time associated with the development of rapport.

The decision by Central Office to delay Adams Career Technical High School’s 
 ability to hire until late-July had long lasting implications for the school. First and most 
 importantly, students were neither provided qualified nor properly prepared teachers for 
 their courses. Second, the educational confusion imposed significant delays in 
 establishing functioning teacher teams, implementing formative assessments, and 
 establishing student learning goals and professional practice plans. In sum, site leadership 
 and teachers were so busy stabilizing the school throughout September and October that 
 reform work targeting specific student learning outcomes was delayed.

The Effect of Discipline-specific Turnover: Science

Although science was not a focus of the study, when I met with interviewees in
late spring of 2015, the school was *still* struggling to recruit and hire science teachers. In March, the instruction and assessment director acknowledged the urgent nature of finding qualified candidates. Of the open chemistry position, she said:

> …we really need someone in there right away, I mean, because at this point, we've got classes of kids who feel like they've consistently been given up on. And I need someone there to just show up every day and say that, “I'm gonna help you through this.” (Interview, Instruction and Assessment Director, March 18, 2015)

The absence of sufficiently qualified and committed science teachers for the science department was a concern for educators throughout the building. Interviewees voiced questions about students’ collegiate preparation in the sciences, An English teacher said, “…They don’t really have enough science teachers over there right now. So as a result, the students are suffering. They’re not going to be prepared in some ways to take on – if they’re going to college, take on a lot of the college science courses” (Interview, English Language Arts Teacher A, May 29, 2015). The absence of a stable and properly staffed science department not only interrupted students access to meaningful learning, but it also interrupted the department’s ability to collaborate as a cohesive team. Understandably, it’s difficult to develop common goals and strategies without continuity of staff.

**Finding and Analysis: New Teachers Needed Support**

When the school year started in September 2014, school leaders knew that new hires, many of them completely new to the field of teaching, would need support and mentoring. According to teachers and school leaders, most new teachers were provided
mentors. Sometimes the mentors were teachers in the new hire’s content area. However, due to the magnitude of new hires, sometimes it was not possible to match a new hire to a mentor in the same discipline or grade level(s) as the mentee. The interim principal explained that a priority of leadership was to support new teachers, but it was challenging.

Making sure that you are understanding what their [the new teachers] needs are, and making sure, if at all possible, they could be paired with a mentor…. [but] when you have 62, it’s not gonna happen. There are just too many teachers and not enough veteran teachers to mentor that many teachers. There are inherent problems when there's a large turnover in staff. (Interview, Interim Principal, July 1, 2015)

The number of teachers hired that needed to be matched to model mentors, combined with all the stabilization work underway at the school, meant some mentoring relationships were not established until February, six-months into the school year. Administrators largely supported new hires until mentors could be provided. This need further complicated the work of leadership already tasked with stabilizing the school.

A veteran math teacher, who served as a mentor to a beginning history teacher, described his mentoring experience. His mentee was new to Adams and assigned to a group of 9th grade students who were repeating history due to course failure the year before. The math teacher explained:
[We have] a lot of young teachers who worked very hard. And the senior teachers have been wonderful, mentoring those teachers. I was one myself. I mentored a history teacher.

Interviewer: Okay. And what was that like?

Interviewee: That was interesting. It was my first year of being a mentor. And we started halfway through the year because nothing was in place. So we didn’t start until around February.

Interviewer: What are some of the things that you worked on together? What did [the mentee] need?

Interviewee: From setting up a classroom to putting a lesson plan together, working in [the grading and attendance system] uploading artifacts, those kinds of things. Getting ready for observations.

Interviewer: So those things were on delay until February?

Interviewee: Right. Yeah.

(Math Teacher B’s description suggests that a teacher serving students requiring the greatest amount of support, was without support himself for six-months. In February, the history teacher still needed help setting up a classroom, designing and implementing lessons and entering students’ grades. These needs raise questions about the rigor of instructional practice. Furthermore, the history program was working with the English program (humanities) to ensure students were receiving reinforcement of essential skills and knowledge assessed on the state-based tests. If the history teacher was struggling)
with lesson plans, it also raises questions about the capacity of the history teacher to fully implement humanities-driven reform efforts, as intended.

In spite of some delays in establishing mentor-mentee relationships, the program director for humanities believed that the mentor program was able to meaningfully support some of the new teachers. He said,

…we paired up a lot of new teachers with some veteran teachers. I don’t have any concrete data to say whether or not it was effective, but from conversations that I had with teachers, it did help. (Interview, Humanities Program Director, June 15, 2015)

The time and energy required of veteran teachers and administrators to develop human capital was significant. The minutes came from professional development and teachers’ planning periods, originally intended for daily lesson development and the advancement of department and school-based reform efforts. Perhaps if the school had been able to plan a new teacher support program, establish mentors in advance or do new teacher trainings, the mentoring demand would have been less disruptive. The year of the study, the school needed to establish some stability before being able to put a structure, like a mentoring program, in place.

Finding and Analysis: Scheduling Problems

According to the teachers’ contract, before teachers leave for summer vacation in June, teachers are to be provided a schedule for the subsequent school year. Due to leadership and teacher turnover turmoil, the development of the 2014–15 schedule was delayed until late summer 2014.
The school district tried to intercede in August but ultimately made a mess of the complicated process. The initial versions generated by the district were heavily flawed. The interim principal expressed his frustration with the district’s involvement in a site-based matter. He said, “…the school district did not help [the scheduling problem] by having central staff in the building trying to schedule students that they don’t have any idea about, or knowledge of what students’ academic schedules should be.” (Interview, Interim Principal, June 30, 2015).

Why the District took control of the master schedule at Adams Career Technical High School is unclear. Interviewees repeatedly expressed their frustration with the District controlled scheduling process as well as the difficulties caused by having individuals, external to the school, create the internal daily plan for the school. Interestingly, not one interview transcript captured a cohesive explanation of why the master schedule was usurped by the District. The only potential explanation, suggested by several interviewees, was that the District believed the school site was already so far behind in scheduling by late July, that the District could better handle the development of it.

Ultimately, the district and school developed a solution but the implications for the initial failures had long lasting implications including: loss of instructional time, loss of teacher planning time to prepare for their course, and the loss of common planning time within departments.

A veteran English Teacher described what it was like to be a teacher at the start of the school year without a master schedule in place. She said,
In June, every year, when we have our last professional development for the year we’re usually given a mock schedule. That gives us a rough idea of what grades we’ll be teaching and what periods we’ll have off. We didn’t receive that…So, we asked about it and they’re like, “Oh, we’re still working on getting that out. You’ll get it either in August when we,” – usually in August they have us come back for these trainings and stuff like that. So, we came back, not everybody but a few of us came back in August, and we were asking the same question: “Where are the schedules?” “Oh, we’re still working on that because we had,” – they gave us some excuse. So, I’m like, “This doesn’t,” – I was starting to get worried because I’m like, “Well, we need to have an idea of what we’re teaching.” So, then we had those two days before school actually started where we come back to prep and fix our rooms up and all that stuff. So, again, we’re like, “We’re back. School starts in two days. Where are the schedules?” So, still they’re like, “Well, we’re still working on that….We’ll have them for you at the end of the day.” …End of the day, no schedules. “We’ll have them for you tomorrow.” Tomorrow comes. No schedules. So, now the next day is the first day of school and I’m like, “What are we doing?”…But I figured at first that it will just be [unknown] for the first day. They’ll get this all straightened out…So, the first day came and went, the second day came and went; no schedules. And I’m like, “Alright.” So, they said they were still working on it. They’ll work on it over the weekend. I’m like, “Let’s not panic but this is not looking good…They’ve got to have everything
When the district did release the schedules, there were many problems with teacher and room assignments. A veteran math teacher explained how students were assigned to classrooms on floors that did not exist or to non-classrooms, such a bathroom. Interviewee: The first week of school, when schedules were being passed out by the [District], the schedules were horrible. There were kids assigned to rooms that didn’t exist. There were classrooms located on floors that didn’t exist, like the ninth floor of this building. There are only four floors. Teachers [were] assigned classes that didn’t make sense, like a history teacher being assigned a collision repair course. Because these were people…making schedules for teachers that they didn’t know, and they didn’t know the building. They didn’t catch those mistakes. We have kids going to classes, like the bathroom was a room number or the closet was a room number. So it was a big mess. (Interview, Math Teacher B, June 19, 2015)

An English Teacher described how she was improperly assigned. She said, “They did not have the schedules [completed] correctly…they gave me a geometry class, and I'm an English teacher. And I'm looking at the kids like, I don’t teach math” (Interview, English Teacher A, May 29, 2015). Students looked to teachers for help, but teachers were unclear about their teaching and room assignments or colleagues’ teaching and room assignments. “There’s nothing worse than disorganization and chaos….the students come to us and we say we don’t know — we don’t know what you’re doing, we don’t
know where you’re supposed to be at — we don’t know what we’re teaching…”

(Interview, Special Education Teacher, June 24, 2015).

Teachers, uninformed of their teaching assignments, were unable to plan for instruction and students were unable to access learning. A veteran math teacher explained that the chaos was too much for one new hire, and the person quit.

Interviewee: The school year was very chaotic at the beginning. A lot of teachers were moving from place to place. They were finding out last minute, you’re moving to that side of the building, you’re teaching this. Or you’re moving to this side of the building and you’re teaching that. So some teachers were not happy at that moment. That’s when we lost one teacher, during that chaos…” (Interview, Math Teacher B, June 19, 2015).

According to an interview with a different math teacher, several other content teachers also left because of the chaos.

Interviewee: We lost people like during the second and third week. People were just like, I’m just going elsewhere. There are open jobs. I’m out of here.

Interviewer: So they quit. They were hired and then they left because -

Interviewee: Yeah. They were hired and they quit or they transferred. They were like, I’m just done. I can’t do it here. We’ve got to go to some place that’s got some stability. (Interview, Math Lead Teacher, March 4, 2015)

In effect, the instability in scheduling generated greater instability for staffing. It also generated unrest among students. In early fall, students led a protest outside of the school demanding academic schedules and teachers for their classes. The instruction and
assessment director explained the students’ frustration with the absence of structure and normalcy in September.

Interviewee: “But the kids were like, "Listen, we want a schedule." They protested and said, "I'm here for an education. I'm showing up every day. Get me a schedule." And it took a long time to get them back on track and settle things down. (Interview, Instruction and Assessment Director, March 18, 2015)

It took until October. An English Language Arts teacher explained,

“….Three quarters of September was pretty much lost due to scheduling conflicts and just trying to get things situated. So, things didn’t really settle down until I would say towards the very end of September, early October. Once we were fully into October I would say things had stabilized.” (Interview, English Language Arts Lead Teacher, February 5, 2015)

The interim principal confirmed October was when the schedules were functional. He said, “I’d say by the first week in October we started operating with schedules that everybody could live with…” (Interview, Interim Principal, June 30, 2015). Though schedules were in place, school leadership continued to fill teaching positions.

Between the official start of school in the District and the real start of school at Adams Career Technical High, nearly four weeks of teaching and learning were lost due to scheduling problems. October, rather than September, was used to establish routines, build class community, and determine student learning goals. Teachers expressed that the loss of planning time for their assigned course(s), the opportunity to establish rapport
with students and learn about their diverse needs, and the opportunity to plan with colleagues had implications that far exceeded one month.

**Scheduling Problems: Loss of Instructional Minutes**

The mistakes in scheduling contributed to a significant loss of instructional time and teacher planning time. A teacher of English as a Second Language (ESL) and special education teacher explained how the learning opportunity for students was postponed by *two* months. Instruction in September was lost to scheduling errors, and instruction in October was lost to “settling in”. Below is a transcript segment from our interview.

Interviewer: In the fall you mentioned that there was a delay in scheduling; did you lose academic minutes in the fall because of that?

Interviewee: Oh, my God, yes. I mean, we laugh because for us, September was like July, and then you kind of go from there. July, September was like July, October was like August, November was like September… (Interview, English as a Second Language/Special Education Teacher, June 15, 2015)

Teachers described how the multitude of new hires combined and the absence of clarity around schedules, room assignment and the location of teaching and learning resources, like books and paper, increased the difficulty of establishing rhythm in the fall.

“I mean we had no schedules. We had no rooms. So it was like – it was a very – there were so many moving parts and there was no experience. There was no teacher-leadership [to communicate] look, this is where you get this or this is where you get that or this is how we did it last year.” (Interview, Math Lead Teacher, March 4, 2015)
The Leadership team was busy hiring teachers for open positions, fixing the master schedule, and resolving problems with students. Additionally, given that the English Language Arts program director and math program director were new to the school as well, they lacked the institutional memory and knowledge to respond to many of the teachers’ inquiries.

Though scheduling delays reduced the number of instructional minutes for all students in the school, 12th grade students felt particularly disadvantaged. The scheduling turmoil and delayed start to learning reduced the number of days seniors had to demonstrate their skills and earn strong grades to boost their GPA before releasing their fall transcript to colleges. The English Language Arts Lead Teacher explained:

Interviewee: …A lot of kids wanted to get their school year started. They wanted to start the teaching and learning - especially kids in their senior year. They need to start getting their grades in so that they can send out their applications for college. So, they need a teacher. They need to start doing the work so that they can start building up their GPAs and so forth.” Interview, English Language Arts Lead Teacher, February 5, 2015)

Overall, the absence of a functioning schedule at the start of the school year contributed to the significant loss of instructional time that should have been dedicated toward preparing students for the state-based assessments, college, and career readiness (Interview, Math Lead Teacher, March 4, 2015).

It was difficult to know, at the time of the study, the extent to which the loss of instructional time affected students’ academic performance. The interim principal
indicated that one measure would be the state-based tests. He said, “Anytime you lose quality educational instruction [it] does become a setback. How much damage, I'm not sure; when we get our [state] scores that will be one indicator.” (Interview, Interim Principal, June 30, 2015). Arguably, the late start may also have an effect on the subsequent year’s 2016 score report because 9th grade students also lost several weeks of teaching and learning in the fall of 2014 and the tests assess skills developed in 9th and 10th grade. Both sets of results fall outside the scope of the study.

Scheduling Problems: Loss of Common Planning Time

The distractions of teacher turnover and the rush to create a master schedule led to the loss of “common planning time” (CPT) in the master schedule. According to school leaders, common planning time should have been a designated block of time during the instructional day intended for collaborative teacher planning, looking at student work, and creating interventions for students with additional academic needs. Common planning time would have enabled teachers to vertically and horizontally align curriculum, develop common assessments and work as a team, rather than in isolation. The absence of organized common planning time, especially in light of all the new hires, made it difficult for program directors to coordinate their departments and for teachers to get collegial support. As the instruction and assessment director said, “I feel like this year’s schedule didn’t really allow us to mindfully plan for common planning time” (Interview, Instruction and Assessment Director, May 11, 2015).

The math program director explained how she tried to creatively put teachers together so there could be some collaboration. She said,
So because of the scheduling issue, it was really hard, like I had to really look at their [teachers’] schedules, their teaching load and think about, okay, how can I fit Common Planning Time in there? So it’s [CPT] so fragmented because the schedule, again, wasn’t really done by us. (Interview, Math Program Director, February 17, 2015)

The humanities program director also looked at the schedule and creatively generated time for the English Language Arts and history teachers to meet weekly. In our January interview he described that the department started meeting in late-November 2014 and the time was highly productive.

For some teachers, however, the creative scheduling did not fully meet their needs.

An English teacher explained how she wanted to collaborate with colleagues but there was no time in the schedule. She said,

It’s something [collaboration] I want to do, but there are a couple of things that have made it difficult. One is scheduling. Like for example, I might be – like right now I’m off but the other teachers might be teaching. So I can’t talk to them because they’re teaching. Interviewer: I see.

Interviewee: Or they’re off and I’m teaching.

(Interview, English Language Arts Lead Teacher, February 26, 2015)

Though the math and English Language Arts program directors tried to work within the boundaries of the established master schedule to create collaboration time, it took more than two months of school before teachers had small meetings by discipline.
Correspondingly, the opportunity to develop department-based student learning goals and discuss best practices was also delayed. The domino effect included a delay to implementing content-based formative assessments to determine students’ specific needs, as well as the corresponding instructional intervention based on students’ results. Ultimately, teachers’ overall time to affect student-learning outcomes was reduced to a mere 3-month span: Mid-December 2014 to March 2015.

**Findings and Analysis: Disruption to Teachers and Students’ Relationships**

Interviewees repeatedly claimed that the teacher turnover at Adams Career Technical High School affected students. The humanities program director, summarized the effect succinctly when he stated, “Obviously when you have talented teachers leaving, you know, it’s going to have some kind of effect on the students. (Interview, Humanities Program Director, June 15, 2015). The humanities program director also believed the loss of relationships shared between teachers and students affected students’ learning. He said,

Students expected the teachers – especially those that had a good rapport with them, to be here. And then they returned in September to find out that a lot of those teachers weren’t here. And then they’re going to have to [build] the relationships with the new teachers, and that takes some time. Usually when you have a good relationship with your students, it facilitates you teaching them and then you interacting with their parents and things like that. So if that piece is not there, you have to start all over. And because we had such a huge turnover last year, that’s something that
we’re working on right now. (Interview, Humanities Program Director, June 15, 2015)

The humanities program director’s acknowledgement in June 2015 that the school was still focused on developing positive relationships among teachers, students and families, suggests that teacher turnover at Adams Career Technical High School had long-lasting consequences for students and their learning.

An English teacher suggested that the loss of familiar teachers, insufficient staffing, and the absence of a proper schedule collectively upset students in the fall and interfered with students’ learning.

Interviewer: Do you think teacher stability affects the kids?

Interviewee: Yes, yes.

Interviewer: Tell me about that.

Interviewee: Well, when the kids returned in September they were looking for a lot of their teachers. They expected to see a lot of their teachers from the previous year and a lot of those teachers were gone. So, that scared the kids. And then compound the fact that they don’t have their schedules. So, they don’t know who their new teachers are. Compound the fact that we were still hiring for some positions. So, a lot of kids didn’t have a teacher when they walked into the classroom. So, that affected learning.

(Interview, English Language Arts Lead Teacher, February 5, 2015)

Repeatedly, teachers and school leaders alike stated that the turnover affected students. The more time teachers have to develop rapport with students and learn about
their needs, the more able teachers are to differentiate and tailor instruction to meet the needs of their students. The significant teacher turnover at Adams Career Technical High School combined with the late release of a functioning schedule reduced students’ overall learning time as well as students’ opportunity to develop positive rapport with their teachers. Teacher turnover therefore had implications for the successful implementation of department-based reform efforts.

**Conclusion**

The sequence of events presented in the case suggests that the job uncertainty felt by teachers in the spring of 2014 compelled teachers to seek more stable positions and leave Adams Career Technical High School. The subsequent hiring restriction imposed by Central Office inhibiting the school’s ability to replenish human capital served to create greater organizational instability.

The case of Adams Career Technical High School prompts several points of reflection about the role of the superintendent and Central Office in school-based governance. First, when the superintendent called for teachers to reapply for their jobs rather than affirm their commitment to the school, as suggested by the audit, teachers became fearful. The auditing team was intended to help the school. The superintendent’s use of the audit’s findings felt threatening to staff. A modification in the messaging to staff that highlighted staff strengths while also citing areas for growth would have communicated a similar need for whole-school improvement without inducing panic. Second, when Central Office suspended Adams Career Technical High School’s ability to recruit and hire teachers, the probability of replenishing positions with the best human
capital was reduced. As evidenced by the elongated open-postings for science positions, the summer-time hiring delay had long lasting implications for the school year and specifically students’ access to meaningful content-rich learning. Once it became clear that teachers were transferring to other District sites, the district could have granted the same spring hiring provisions afforded to other district schools. While this may not have fully resolved the hiring problems experienced at Adams Career Technical High School it would have prevented the hiring demand from becoming so large so late into the summer. Third, when the district took control of the master schedule, it assumed responsibility for internal school functioning. Though scheduling was exponentially more complicated given the extent of teacher turnover, external control appeared to aggravate the already arduous scheduling process. Unfortunately, external control of the master schedule failed to provide much needed scheduling support and contributed to the delayed start of meaningful learning.

In the final analysis of the findings from the Adams Career Technical High School case study, teacher turnover clearly contributed to school-wide destabilization and impeded the school’s ability to develop traditional school-wide reform efforts. Once the school stabilized enough to identify common planning time opportunities and develop department-based student learning goals, there were only three months of available instructional time to implement the reform until the state-based tests. Student performance on the state-based tests was projected to not meet teachers’ and school leaders’ goals for improvement.
Chapter VI: Coolidge High School

Overview

The case study findings of Coolidge High School are divided into two phases. Phase I captures the first two years of Coolidge High when two formerly independent English Language Arts teams merged together and adopted the controversial ELA-history blended “humanities” platform. Phase I also explores the disruptive effects of just one teacher’s long-term leave on student learning. Phase II recounts how the threat of school closure drove teachers to engage in professional survival tactics which then ultimately decreased teachers’ capacity to sustain reform efforts.

Two conceptual findings surfaced from Phase I. The first concept represents how forced turnover and inauthentic teaming created ideological conflicts which negatively affected school cohesion and reform efforts. The second finding in Phase I exemplifies how the extended medical leave of one history teacher had a disproportionately adverse impact on reform work at a small school.

Phase II findings explore the concept that teachers’ attention was distracted away from reform efforts and toward professional survival due to concerns about job loss. The uncertainty about the future of the school between February 2015 and late-March 2015, motivated teachers to protest and enact job searches. For policy makers and school leaders, the findings of this case offer lessons on the management of human capital relative to the management of facilities; and the recognition that “a plan” to enact change can only be as strong as the acceptance level by those affected.
School Description

Coolidge High School is a medium-sized 9–12 urban public Title-I school located on the eastern outskirts of a populous New England city. It was founded in 2011 as an outcome of a district reorganization that merged together two smaller schools. At the time of the study, Coolidge High was housed within a large 1970’s era multi-floor brick building referred to as the Hillsdale School Complex.

Before the merger that created Coolidge High, the Hillsdale School Complex housed four small, independent, thematically focused schools: Lincoln High, Franklin High, Truman High and Wilson High. Each of the four small schools catered to specific student interests and the faculties therein were philosophically aligned to serve the needs of their particular student population.

In the spring of 2010, the Hillsdale School Complex was restructured and the four small schools were combined into two. Coolidge High was formed by merging the faculties of Lincoln High School and Franklin High School. The principal of Lincoln became the new principal of Coolidge High. Truman High absorbed Wilson High and retained the Truman High School name.

When Coolidge High opened in the fall of 2011, approximately 700 students were enrolled, grades 9–12. By school year 2014–15, student enrollment had declined by nearly 18% to 575 students. Though there were neighborhoods near to the school with

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14 Please see The History and Sequence of School Closings, Openings and Re-organizations at the Hillsdale School Complex (late 1970s to 2015) on the following page.

15 In alignment with my confidentiality agreement, student performance data, enrollment numbers, and demographic percentages have been “rounded” so as not to provide specific data that could be used to identify the case.
Edison High School, housed at the Hillsdale School Complex, serves city students for approximately two and half decades, through the mid-2000s.

District-wide initiative to create smaller thematic high schools enacted. Edison closes; Hillsdale School Complex divided into four independent and smaller high schools.

Hillsdale School Complex is reorganized again, after approximately 7-years. Wilson, Franklin and Lincoln close. Truman High School remains open.

Truman High School absorbs Wilson High School, combining faculties and students.

The faculties and students of Franklin High School and Lincoln High School merge to create Coolidge High School.

Truman High School and Coolidge High School co-exist as independent schools within the Hillsdale School Complex.

January 2015: 4-month case study begins at Coolidge High School investigating whether teacher turnover affects school reform efforts, and if so, how. First interview: January 13, 2015.

February 2015: District announces Coolidge High School will close in June 2015. Truman High School will remain open.

Mid-March 2015: I conduct rotating 40-60 minute interviews with teachers at Coolidge High School.

Late March 2015: District announces Coolidge High School will remain open at least one more year.

Case study data collection continues through May 2015.
high-school aged children, local families generally did not enroll their children at Coolidge High. The socio-economic and racial composition of the local community generally did not reflect the enrolled student population. Consequently, local families did not identify Coolidge High as part of their community and chose to bus their children to other district schools or enroll them in area private schools.

According to state department of education data, at the time of the study, 47%\(^{16}\) of the student population was African American, 40% Hispanic, 10% white and 3% Asian or multi-race. Twenty percent of the student population was classified with disabilities. Between school years 2011–12 and 2014–15, the percentage of non-native English speaking students rose ten percent. Students classified by the state as “low income” also rose, increasing fifteen percentage points over a three-year time frame.

State-based student performance data showing student progress on standardized measures was not available by subgroup for school years 2011–12 through 2014–15. This may be due to insufficient data. According to state-based school profiles and report card information, student growth from one year to the next at Coolidge High was low, compared to the state average. For example, 2013 exam scores in math indicated student achievement growth at Coolidge High was low; 15 percentage points below the state average. English Language Arts growth was more moderate but still 15 percentage points lower than the state. Student growth on English Language Arts and math tests taken in the spring of 2014 remained 15 percentage points below the state average, representing

\(^{16}\) In alignment with my confidentiality agreement, student performance data, enrollment numbers, and demographic percentages have been “rounded” so as not to provide specific data that could be used to identify the case.
lower growth on average than other schools in the district and across the state.

**Reform Efforts**

An initial interview with the school principal revealed the principal had two objectives the first two years: general school-wide stabilization post-merger; and the successful establishment of a humanities department. A humanities department represented the integration of the history and English Language Arts programs. Within the humanities department, English Language Arts teachers and history teachers would collaborate to support and advance students’ skill development in critical reading, reasoning and writing. In this way, students would receive reinforcement of essential skills assessed by the 10th grade state-test. Thus, reform efforts in the first two years included successfully implementing a humanities program and advancing the program through teacher collaboration. School planning documents representing Coolidge High School’s goals and reform efforts for the 2011–12 and 2012–13 school years were unavailable.

Reform efforts at Coolidge High for school years 2013–14 and 2014–15 targeted student performance in four domains: chronic student absenteeism; the academic performance of English Language Learners compared to non-English Language Learners on state-based measures; the academic performance of Special Education students compared to non-Special Education students on state-based measures; and overall student course completion with passing grades for graduation (School Improvement Plan, 2013–2015, p. 8). To address these four domains, the school generated three school-wide student-learning goals with corresponding action steps.
The goals and steps are paragraphed here:

I) In order to improve student achievement as measured by course completion and formative assessments, students will be present more than 87% of the time. We will use targeted interventions to reduce out-of-school suspension and chronic absenteeism\(^\text{17}\) by 10%.

a. Sub-goal: Chronic absenteeism is 6% above the district average, at nearly 25%. Given that state-based standardized assessments are implemented in the 10\(^{th}\) grade, we seek to reduce 10\(^{th}\) grade chronic absenteeism by 25%, each year.

II) In order to improve academic growth, 60% of students with 90% attendance or better will earn a C- or higher in their required courses for graduation; targeted populations: English language learners and students with disabilities.

III) In order to reduce the state-based standardized-test achievement gap between special education students and non-special education students; and English language learners and non-English language learners, Coolidge High will implement formative assessments with corresponding changes to instructional practice as well as increase family engagement, to improve student learning. (School Improvement Plan, 2013–2015, p. 8)

The school wide student-learning goals assume sustained faculty-wide support.

Interviews with teachers and school leaders revealed how teacher turnover, ideological

\(^{17}\) Chronic absenteeism describes a student who misses 10% or more of the academic year
differences among faculty members, and job loss threat adversely impacted and interrupted the school’s ability to enact their planned reforms with unified fidelity.

**Teacher Turnover at Coolidge High**

To determine teacher turnover rates at Coolidge High, I began by gathering teacher retention data from the state’s department of education website. Teacher retention is defined as the “…percent of teachers who remain working in the same position from one year to the next…”, or who stayed versus who left (State Department of Education, Staffing Retention Rates, School). It does *not* refer to internal movement within the school, such as a teacher transitioning from 11th grade English Language Arts to 9th grade English Language Arts.

State retention data for Coolidge High were available for school years 2012–13 and 2013–14. Retention data indicated that 80% of teachers returned after the first year: of the 52 teachers on staff, ten left. The third year, Coolidge High had a similar retention rate of 83%: of the 47 teachers on staff, eight left.

**Table 11. Annual Staff Retention at Coolidge High School from SY2012–SY2014**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Year</th>
<th>Total Number of Staff</th>
<th># of Staff Retained</th>
<th># of Staff lost from prior year</th>
<th>% of Staff Retained at Coolidge High</th>
<th>Average % of Staff Retained by Schools Across the State</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2014–2015</td>
<td>Not reported</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013–2014</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012–2013</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011–2012</td>
<td>Not reported</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Data provided by the Dept. of Education, School and District Profiles, Staff Retention Data\(^{18}\))

\(^{18}\) As per my confidentiality agreement, the website has not been provided in order to conceal the state, district and school name.
A review of 2013–14 and 2014–15 staffing sheets provided by the assistant principal revealed that the humanities department, comprised of English Language Arts teachers and history teachers, experienced the greatest rate of change over the two years. In 2013–14, for example, there were nine humanities teachers. In 2014–15, the department lost three teachers, but added back four teachers, resulting in a total of 10 humanities teachers. Thus, the humanities department experienced a turnover rate of 33%, but a net change of one additional teacher.

Table 12. Teacher Turnover by Department

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Department</th>
<th>Number of teachers in 2013–14</th>
<th>Number of teachers lost</th>
<th>Number of teachers added</th>
<th>Number of teachers in 2014–15</th>
<th>Turnover Rate</th>
<th>Net Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Humanities</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>-3</td>
<td>+4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>+1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>+2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>+1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Education Program</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>-2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>+1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-handicapped/Autism</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total # (of set)</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>-8</td>
<td>+7</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>-1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Turnover percentage calculated only if position was filled.)

The math department in 2013–14 had five teachers and in 2014–15 expanded to six. Of the five teachers in 2013–14, one did not return for the 2014–15 school year. The department added two teachers for the 2014–15 school year, resulting in turnover rate of 20%, but a net change of one additional teacher. The Special Education Program had seven teachers in 2013–14 but was reduced to five in 2014–15, a net loss of 29%. The science department in 2013–14 had five teachers but only four returned for the 2014–15 school year. The one opening was filled, resulting in turnover rate of 20%. The multi-
handicapped/Autism program was also reduced between school years 2013–14 and 2014–15, losing one teacher for a net loss of 20%. Neither the special education program nor the multi-handicapped/Autism program added new faculty members for the 2014–15 school year. Using the data collected from the departments represented above, it appears that between the 2013–14 school year and the 2014–15 school year, Coolidge High lost eight teachers, an overall turnover rate of 26%.

Interviews with faculty and the headmaster provided context to Coolidge High’s turnover numbers. Teacher turnover at Coolidge High occurred in several waves. The first wave occurred when Lincoln and Franklin High merged in 2011. Concerns about the integration of two philosophically divergent faculties into one, plus the perception that the principal favored former-Lincoln staff over former-Franklin staff, compelled some teachers to leave before the start to the school year. This “first wave” falls outside the scope of this study.

A secondary wave of turnover occurred in the spring of 2012 as the faculty revised the school’s mission and purpose. According to interviews with the principal, a handful of teachers in disagreement with the school’s direction did not return for the 2012–13 school year. A third wave of similar turnover ensued at the end of the school’s second year, in the spring of 2013. The principal categorized the first three waves of turnover as growing pains. He said:

…some people made those decisions [to leave] because of the turmoil that comes with transition. Other people made the decision because of personality clashes [among faculty]. They may have wanted someone else to be the principal and not
me. So they left…. As the school has been built, some people have left because they didn't like my direction. So for the first two years, any turnover was because of what I call growing pains. (Principal, Interview, January 19, 2015).

A review of the interviews with the principal also revealed turnover due to medical leave had negative and long-lasting implications for the humanities department.

In the spring of 2015 the district made a formal recommendation to close Coolidge High. Ultimately, the district rescinded its plan to close Coolidge High School in late March 2015. However, in the 6-week timeframe between the closure recommendation and the retraction, four Coolidge High teachers decided to leave for the 2015–16 school year: two 9th grade math teachers and one science teacher applied for and accepted positions at other district schools and one 10th grade math teacher announced plans for retirement (Principal, Interview, April 12, 2015). Thus, three out of four math teachers and one science teacher, all focused on the improvement of students’ math skills for the state-based performance assessment, left as a consequence of the recommendation to close. When I concluded my study in July of 2015, additional information regarding other teachers’ plans to retire, or seek internal district transfer, was unavailable. As of December 2015, state department of education teacher retention data had not yet been posted to show overall teacher retention at Coolidge High School after the school closure and school continuance announcement.

**Phase I Findings: Overview**

There are two categories of findings that emerged from Phase I: The first describes the first two years at Coolidge High and how “growing pains” inhibited the
school’s ability to successfully implement a humanities program and engage in productive common planning time. The second Phase I finding describes how the extended medical leave of just one 9th grade history teacher had adverse reform and student learning implications.

**Phase I Findings and Analysis: “Growing Pains”**

In 2011, the District merged Lincoln High and Franklin High, creating Coolidge High. Teachers from both schools were brought together as the new Coolidge High faculty and the former principal of Lincoln High was appointed as the new principal. During my interviews with the principal, he explained that the transition was difficult. Coolidge High experienced “growing pains” the first several years. (Please see Appendix E, Coding Graphic Chapter 6: Coolidge High School.)

One significant “growing pain” for Coolidge High was the attempted continuation of the humanities platform used at Lincoln High. Former Franklin High teachers did not believe Coolidge High should co-mingle English Language Arts and history. They were firmly in opposition to the humanities platform. On the contrary, former Lincoln teachers, having enacted the humanities platform at Lincoln, were overall, receptive to blending the two curricula. I wanted to understand more about the humanities platform so I asked the principal to talk through how the English Language Arts program and history program could benefit students. The segment below captures part of our conversation from January 2015. He began by describing the organization of the humanities department:

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19 Please see Effect of the Merge on Coolidge High School’s English Language Arts Reform Efforts on the following page.
Figure 4. Effect of Merge on Coolidge High School's English Language Arts Reform Efforts
Principal: …the humanities department…is the history department and English [department] together. What is happening in the English [department] should be supported by what's happening in the history [department] and vice versa....

Interviewer: So all of that [humanities curriculum] drives ELA?

Principal: ELA.

Interviewer: Got it.

Principal: So it [English Language Arts and history] shouldn't be separate….even the electives are supporting the ELA.

Interviewer: So am I hearing you say that one of the ways you're trying to affect the ELA results is by making sure that your history department and your ELA have common goals?

Principal: Yes.

Interviewer: I get it… so they're [the students] getting duplication of skill development and, to some degree, duplication of content if they're using [English Language Arts and history] shared texts for reading.

Principal: Yes.

Interviewer: Okay, so a [hypothetical] kid that goes in [to Coolidge High] as a ninth grader is having a double period [of skill development], in effect, targeting that one goal for ELA.

Principal: Correct.

Interviewer: For [the state-based test].

Principal: Yes.
In my third interview with the principal in April of 2015, he shared with me how he tried to work through the resistance by sending the humanities teachers to workshops in order for them to collectively learn more about integrating the two curricula. The approach was not successful. The principal explained:

…I kept sending them [the teachers] to workshops to figure out how we could do humanities. At first, I contracted with – what is that program – History Alive. And they [the teachers] kept going to History Alive trainings for a year to come back and think about how to marriage [to marry] this. Nothing came out of it.

*Interviewer:* This is school year 2011–2012?

*Principal:* Yeah.

*Interviewer:* Your first year as principal [of Coolidge High]?

*Principal:* Yeah. The next year, I took another stab at it and nothing came out of it….(Interview, Principal, April 14, 2015)

The data suggest that why nothing came out of the professional development trainings was teachers’ resistance to work together. The social capital of the department was weak. Teachers struggled to collaborate in spite of time set-aside during the instructional day for professional learning communities.

Another “growing pain” was the unsuccessful collaboration of humanities teachers in professional learning communities (PLCs). Researcher Richard DuFour (2004) identifies three key principals that govern professional learning communities. Professional learning communities focus on “ensuring that students learn”; that there is
“a culture of collaboration”; and that the community has “a focus on results” (DuFour, 2004, pp. 8-10). Professional learning communities at Coolidge High School were expected to refine curriculum, share best practices, identify student learning goals and design and implement common formative assessments. According to the principal and assistant principal for instruction and assessment, interpersonal conflicts emanating from professional differences and personal clashes inhibited productive meetings. It also inhibited the development of positive culture and collegiality within the department.

The conflicts, according to the assistant principal for assessment and instruction, largely arose from a lack of trust among colleagues. She said, “[In the beginning] people weren’t comfortable with one another. We didn’t really have those trusting relationships that most all schools have” (Interview, Assistant Principal of Instruction and Assessment, March 16, 2015). This lack of trust impeded collaboration and facilitated resistance towards the humanities program. The assistant principal for instruction and assessment explained:

There was a lot of resistance the first year. It was tough. You had folks who had worked together in other schools and moved here, so they were comfortable with one another. But then the fact that we merged - we brought two different cultures, two different schools [together]. It was very tough that first year.

(Interview, Assistant Principal of Instruction and Assessment, March 16, 2015)
Teachers’ comfort working together influenced their willingness to attend PLC time. The principal described the social capital of the humanities department to be so weak that teachers avoided meetings. The transcription below captures part of our conversation:

Principal: ...There was a member of the staff who left who everyone felt was very sarcastic and demeaning. She was good – I thought she was a good teacher in terms of seeing her lessons, but [not] her social skills with the other colleagues. So when they [teachers] were doing their own thing, I didn't realize it was because, “I don't like this person, so I'm not even gonna go to a meeting with them.”….You’ll do the attendance for the Professional Learning Communities, and you find out they did not really meet. And then you'll find pushback saying, "Well, why can't I pick who I'm in this Professional Learning Community with?" What really was behind the pushback was, “I don't wanna meet with X.” So you're trying to get them [teachers] to work together to design units together, and they're not even liking each other as one human being to another human being. That led to a lot of friction, and that's when, as I was talking about [earlier], we had these growing pains. (Interview, Principal, January 19, 2015)

These “growing pains” or ideological and interpersonal fissures between ultimately motivated some teachers to leave after the first and second year. By the third and fourth years (2013–14; 2014–15), virtually all of the former Franklin teachers had transferred-out to other schools in the district. The principal replenished exiting human capital with teachers philosophically receptive to the humanities platform and perceived
to be collaborative. He aspired to develop positive human and social capital. The principal described the functioning of the humanities department at the time of the study:

**Interviewer:** So in your humanities department now, how are they working together?

**Principal:** Yeah. They are working together because it’s a consistent team. So I hired everyone, and I was able to hire for that department this year. That’s strengthening it.

(Interview, Principal, January 19, 2015)

By “consistent team”, the principal was referencing the cohesiveness of the humanities philosophy shared among teachers and the increased stability in the department. Later in our conversation, he explained how years three and four were more productive than the initial two years. “By years three and four, a lot of them [the teachers] were already beginning to work on the same page (Interview, Principal, January 19, 2015).

The absence of strong social capital within the Coolidge High humanities program interfered with the enrichment of human capital. Teachers were unwilling to work together and share knowledge and ideas about English Language Arts and history due to underdeveloped and unproductive interpersonal relationships. The limited time spent to collectively develop curriculum, design and implement formative assessments, and look at student work, impeded teachers’ ability to reflect on and improve the effectiveness of the humanities program. Furthermore, the two years of “growing pains” equated to two years of unrealized learning benefits for Coolidge High students. Not only did students miss out on additional test preparation but also the acquisition of rich and
robust cross-curricular content knowledge. Improved social capital in years three and four enabled the humanities program to “re-boot” and set the stage for improved student learning experiences.

**Phase I Findings and Analysis: The Impact of One**

In an interview with the principal in January 2015, he described how just one teacher’s long-term leave had a lasting adverse impact on the humanities program. Given the small size of Coolidge High, one teacher was generally responsible for teaching all the grade-level sections of a particular content area. Correspondingly, in the event that a single teacher activated maternity or medical leave, 25% of a department’s human capital could be absent and filled by a substitute. The Phase I finding presented here focuses on the effect that just one history teacher’s long-term leave had on the stabilization and progress of the humanities program and student learning.

According to the principal, when the school opened in the fall of 2011, a 9th grade history teacher filed for medical leave. By filing doctor’s notes within the contractual timeframes, the teacher was able to sustain his leave for an entire year which meant the position could not be posted for another full-time hire. The teacher continued to file doctors’ notes through the start of the second year and then filed for retirement in October. The substitute who began the 2012–2013 school year continued to serve through June.

The principal explained:

…the first two years of the school, the History 9 teacher was out on leave of absence. Just imagine that. Two years of having a sub in that position. The
gentleman went out the year before. He was having issues with cancer. He’s never worked with me a day…. [he] would always make sure that his [medical] notes came in on time… so I couldn’t let him go. And he was always saying he was coming back, but you know, the word on the street was that he was never coming back because of his health issues. He retired in October the next year. So I had a sub for two years.  (Interview, Principal, April 12, 2015)

The substitute was neither prepared to deliver content rich instruction nor advance students’ ELA skills as a humanities department team member. Furthermore, the substitute was not equipped to contribute in a productive manner to the development of the fledgling humanities program. Any relationships built with colleagues within the department were temporary and thus agreements were situational and limited. The fall of 2013, or the start of the third year, the district assigned a teacher to the now open history position at Coolidge High. After several weeks, the teacher informed the principal of his intent to retire in October. This teacher, while qualified and experienced, had no intention of continuing through the school year. The principal described what happened:

The district assigned somebody into that [History 9] position the third year. We began the conversations about [evaluation procedures] in September [2013]. The person looks in my face and says, “I’m retiring in October 1, so you don’t even have to worry about evaluating me.” (Interview, Principal, April 12, 2015)

Consequently, another substitute was hired and for the third year, students in 9th grade history lacked a highly qualified, stable teacher. The overall effect was the
continued 3-year destabilization of the humanities program and the loss of learning for at least 3-cohorts of students. The principal saw the loss of history instruction as snowballing into students’ futures. He explained how former 9th grade students who had the history substitute, “…are my seniors now… [and] the kids have a lack of skills because they haven't had consistent instruction” (Interview, Principal, January 2015).

The opportunity to develop 9th grade students’ skills during school years 2011–12, 2012–13 and 2013–14 were further compromised by the absence of a well-developed humanities program that would enable the reinforcement of essential English Language Arts skills in the history course. The principal linked turnover in the history department to students’ performance on state-based assessments.

Interviewer: Okay, so when you say – am I hearing you correctly that….turnover in history… also affected [the achievement scores of] your ELA department?

Principal: [It’s] why I'm still…half “needs improvement” and half “proficient” and “advanced”.

(Interview, Principal, January 19, 2015)

A score of proficient on the state-based English Language Arts test equated to passing. If half the student population scored “needs improvement,” suggests that half of the student population was not on track at the end of 10th grade to graduate.

By the start of the 2014–15 school year, the humanities department had stabilized and the principal anticipated improved student performance.
Interviewer: So [this year] you have a complete 9, 10 [English Language Arts] and a complete 9, 10 [history] so you’re saying you think the scores are going to be better this round?

Principal: Next year, next year.

Interviewer: Next year [2015–16 school year].

Principal: Yeah because they’ll have a consistent ninth grade – and a consistent tenth grade [humanities experience].

Interviewer: – and then they’re tested in the tenth grade [for English Language Arts].

Principal: Yeah.

(Interview, Principal, April 2015)

At the time of our April interview, another round of teacher turnover for the humanities program was just around the bend. In the fall of 2015, a probationary untenured 10th grade English teacher was laid off due to budget reductions and a different teacher was assigned to her role. Given the limited staffing per grade level at Coolidge High this meant that 25% of the English Language Arts instructional team was in flux. The implications for the humanities program and 10th grade performance on the state-based tests during the 2015–16 school year fell outside the scope of the study.

In summation, the loss of just one teacher in a small school adversely impacted program development and student learning. Relative to the humanities department, teachers lost the opportunity to collaborate with a qualified colleague and advance the development of the humanities program. Relative to student performance, three cohorts
of 9th grade history students missed rigorous integrated English Language Arts and history instruction as well as skill development. According to the principal, the academic ramifications for those students included poor performance on standardized measures.

**Phase II Findings**

In February of 2015, the District made a formal recommendation to close Coolidge High at the end of the 2014–15 school year. The findings from Phase II reflect a unique 5-week period between the announcement of the school closure recommendation and the District’s decision to keep the school open. The study revealed that the uncertainty generated by the district’s recommendation distracted teachers’ focus away from reform efforts and toward professional survival. The concept of professional survival is supported by the nodes protest and job search.

The following section includes a descriptive overview of the 5-week timeframe between the recommendation to close Coolidge High and the announcement to remain open.

**Sequence and Descriptive Overview**

At the end of February 2015, the principal of Coolidge High was informed of the district’s recommendation to close the school in June 2015. The School Board was scheduled to make a final decision in late-March. The announcement was unexpected. The principal called an emergency faculty meeting, and informed staff of the district’s intentions. The following afternoon, the principal informed students; an informational, district-prepared letter was sent to parents; and the Superintendent came to the site to
distribute excess letters to teachers. Excess letters informed teachers their position had been eliminated for the subsequent school year.  

The following Tuesday and Thursday evenings, the district hosted “Question and Answer” sessions where families and students expressed their anger and confusion about the school closure rationale. I attended one of the two sessions. As an independent party, I shared the same confusion as the families and students about the rationale to close. The district’s arguments were not apparent.

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20 Please see Sequence of Events: Coolidge High School Closure Threat on the following page.
Figure 5. Sequence of Events: Coolidge High School Closure Threat
Late February 2015 through Late March 2015

- **February Week 1**: Emergency end of the day faculty meeting at Coolidge High to inform staff.
- **Week 2**: District tells Principal: School Will Close (final vote end of March).
- **March Week 2**: Superintendent and Central Office Leaders host Q & A following Tuesday & Thursday.
- **March Week 3**: District distributes “Excess Letters” on site to Staff; Staff unclear on employment status and job security.
- **March Week 4**: Teachers receive email while hosting Parent Open House; Teachers report “disbelief” that the district “offered” substitute positions. Strong sentiment of district disrespect.
- **March Week 5**: Teachers, students, parents and school leaders realize they “won” one more year. Some staff already accepted positions elsewhere.

**KEY**

- **District Actions**
  - District tells Principal: School Will Close (final vote end of March)
  - District distributes “Excess Letters” on site to Staff; Staff unclear on employment status and job security
  - Superintendent and Central Office Leaders host Q & A following Tuesday & Thursday
  - District releases email to Coolidge teachers inviting them to serve as district substitutes
  - District rescinds school closure plan; announces Coolidge High will remain open 2015-16 school year

- **School-site Actions**
  - On-going teacher and student protests against closure.
  - Teachers prepare resumes, search for jobs, attend interviews; some teachers accept positions.
  - Parents, students, teachers, site leaders and community members challenge District leadership; students and parents actively speak out against District’s decision
  - Teachers receive email while hosting Parent Open House; Teachers report “disbelief” that the district “offered” substitute positions. Strong sentiment of district disrespect.
  - Researcher on-site data collection: Full day rotation of interviews with teachers and school leaders
Subsequent to the question and answer session, I followed up with the principal and learned that the District based their recommendation to close the school on 4-points:

I) Inefficient use of facilities space: The Hillsdale School Complex could continue to house Truman High but the space used by Coolidge High could be better utilized by another school

II) Declining enrollment throughout the District requiring a general re-organization of resources

III) Families were reportedly selecting Coolidge High at lower rates on the annual School Preference Selection form

IV) Declining academic performance on state-based assessment measures

The principal rejected these points. From his perspective, the first point had more to do with district-wide money management, than Coolidge High’s efficient use of the school complex. The second point of declining enrollment was also a district wide problem, and not uniquely bound to Coolidge High. The third point partly related to the absence of sufficient public transportation to the site and the lack of a city center near by. In other words, points one through three were all external to the site and beyond the school’s control. The fourth point of declining academic performance, from the principal’s perspective, related to the original merger and the complexity and difficulty of merging teachers together from two different school cultures to collaborate toward a common purpose. In summary according to the principal: the closure was based on selective data points and did not reflect the real achievements of the school and the meaningful teaching
and learning taking place therein. The teachers largely echoed his sentiments.

Two weeks after the announcement, Coolidge High hosted the annual Parent Open House night. Mid-way through the evening, District Human Resources emailed teachers an invitation to apply to become a district substitute for the following year. Teachers were offended and confused about what becoming a substitute could mean relative to their salaries, medical plans and retirement. Teachers reported feeling disrespected and resentful that, after years of service, the district could demote them to substitute status. A special education math teacher explained:

…Someone said, “Check your email,” and getting that email that said, “Become a substitute teacher….” (Statement trailed off; interviewee shook her head, field notes.)

Interviewer: And you've been a teacher here for –

Interviewee: I've been in [the city] for eight years. I’ve been teaching for eight years, yeah.

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: This'll be my ninth. Yeah, I'm in my ninth year, yeah, yeah. So become a substitute. It's a great way to get – consider becoming a substitute. It's a great way to get your foot inside the door at [the city] public schools.

Interviewer: Okay. I see.

Interviewee: And it's being treated that way. I mean, that's how we're being treated by the district. Someone made a conscious decision to send that email.

(Interview, Math Special Education Teacher A, March 16. 2015).
Her comments, in reference to her experiential background and near-decade of service, reflect her firm stance that serving as a substitute was not an acceptable alternative for her current full-time teaching role. The interviewee’s closing statement, emphasizing how staff was treated and that “someone made a conscious decision to send that email” also alludes to a feeling of hurt and disrespect. This feeling was shared by a number of interviewees. For example, another math teacher described how the District’s email communicated a disregard for her professionalism. She said:

Interviewee:…We’re getting emails that are “apply to be a substitute”. I have two Master’s degrees, why would I wanna be a substitute teacher, you know?

(Interview, Math Teacher, March 16, 2015).

Many of the teachers I interviewed felt their professional skills were worthy of a full-time position and decided to protect themselves. Teachers organized after school protests and involved students and families. Teachers also began looking for full-time positions at other District schools as well as outside of the district. The principal referred to this period of time as generating a “shift in focus” – a shift away from school-wide goals.

Principal: After the announcement, you heard a lot more talk about survival. And survival can look different ways, like what are we going to do next year? What’s going to happen with this person? Is this person coming back? Who’s next to leave? Those kind of conversations are more prevalent…. So we’ve gone from a focus, keeping our eye on the pulse of the data of the school, to keeping an eye on the pulse of the social cultural connection of the school. (Interview, Principal, April 12, 2015)
The principal’s reference to “keeping an eye on the pulse of the social cultural connection of the school” describes teachers’ awareness of one and others’ pursuit of job opportunities at other school sites and involvement in protest activities. Many teachers repurposed common planning time (CPT), intended for the development of common formative assessments, looking at student work, and refining instruction, to discuss job opportunities, develop resumes and to write cover letters. Teachers also chose to use after school time to prepare for and enact protests as well as attend interviews.

The duration of time between the recommendation to close and the decision to remain open lasted 5 weeks, or 14% of the school year. Unfortunately, the five weeks coincided with the height of reform work for professional learning communities and fell within close proximity to March state-based assessments. The findings of Phase II present how teachers’ uncertainty about the future of their careers compelled them to enact two protective measures for professional survival: protest and job search. These protective measures fundamentally interrupted the school’s third goal, articulated in the school’s improvement plan, to collaboratively design and implement formative assessments and determine corresponding changes to instructional practice, in order to improve student learning outcomes.

**Phase II Findings, Theme I: Professional Survival, Protest**

The recommendation to close Coolidge High coincided with the commencement of targeted student test-preparation for multi-subject high school exit exams, scheduled for late-March through mid-May. After school test-prep was still offered, but apparently not to the same robust extent as in years’ past. Teachers who ordinarily stayed after
school to support students and prepare them for the state-based assessments, shifted their focus toward organizing after school protests and letter writing campaigns.

An English teacher, who also served as an ILT member, described how the community came together and how it affected her. She said,

I’ve never felt more proud, honestly, as a teacher, as a colleague. I’ve never experienced such passion, such drive, such love, such initiative from the students as well as colleagues, teachers, to fight for what we believe in and to fight for our school….There is proactive, amazing rising up. I mean, I’ve never been a part of such a proactive movement. If we go down, it’s not for a lack of not fighting, you know? So I’m so proud of them [fellow colleagues and students]. (Interview, English Language Arts Lead Teacher, March 16, 2015).

It required a lot of time and energy to lead the fight against the initiative to close. There was a heightened sense of urgency as each passing day brought the school closer to the School Board’s final vote at the end of March. The principal explained how the need to protest correlated to decreased time for after school tutoring and test prep, referred to as test prep “boot camp”.

Interviewer: Did you see declining attendance among staff?

Principal: I would say yeah. I think what I saw most was – you know, that was the time that we were supposed to be focused on getting our [state test] scores up. Teachers weren’t staying [after school] to do boot camps, because they had to get ready for this protest. Teachers were focusing more on trying to save the school than they were on the kids. And after the decision, when I was like, okay, now
let’s focus on the kids please, they started settling down instruction and doing a whole bunch of boot camps…

Interviewer: Did you still miss the [main] test prep window?
Principal: (visual indication, yes) The big window.
Interviewer: …Do you anticipate an effect on the [state test] scores?
Principal: I believe so. And again, it will then be just turned around as evidence for us to close…

(Interview, Principal, April 12, 2015)

In years past, test-prep boot camps began in March and continued through May, in order to prepare students for spring exams. In 2015, boot camps didn’t begin until April, after the first test was implemented. Though some teachers began to host boot camps in April the reduction to learning time and test prep was expected to manifest in lower test scores. Unfortunately, poor performance would not only adversely impact the students sitting for tests in 2015, but also the way the District could perceive the quality of the teachers and school. Students’ ultimate performance on the state-based tests and the District’s response fell outside the scope of this study.

Phase II Findings, Theme II: Professional Survival, Job Search

The uncertain future of Coolidge High and vulnerable positions of teachers motivated many teachers to enact professional survival measures. Professional survival manifested as resume preparation, job searches, and interviewing at District and non-District schools. According to staff members, meetings intended to bring teams of teachers together to advance reform initiatives, such as Professional Learning
Community (PLC) meetings or common planning periods, were replaced by in-house professional networking and application preparation meetings. Teachers leaned on one another during the instructional day to get help with resumes, cover letters and share information about open positions. Additionally, after school test-prep sessions and tutoring were curtailed as teachers left school at the end of the day to attend interviews at other schools.

The uncertain future of Coolidge High was magnified for teachers when the district distributed excess letters. Though teachers had a contractual right to apply to other postings within the district, many teachers didn’t understand what it meant to be excessed and were frightened. A special education math teacher with many years experience teaching expressed her initial confusion and fear. She said,

…when I heard the word excessed, I said, “Oh, my god, what does that mean?” Because I’ve been in the – this is my ninth year but I’ve never gone through a change or anything like this before closing….I had a one-on-one with the Human Resource person. I was like, “Can you tell me what excess means to me?” [And Human Resources said.] “Well, it just means that you are out of your job where you are permanently located or placed. We encourage you to apply for jobs…And I said, “Well, what if I don’t have a place – what if I don’t get hired? What if I go to interviews and don’t get hired by, let’s say June, July? Am I gonna be suffering all summer?” [HR said.] “No, it just means that you go to a different pool.” I guess your name continues to be rolled or transferred to different lists. And then if you don’t get placed by like, say, June, you go to this other list where they
actually take people’s names and you could either end up as a co-teacher or you can end up as administrative support in a building but you still get paid your salary as a teacher….I do feel bad for the teachers who have been here less than three years….if they don’t find something now, then they – they’re out of a job. There’s no choice for them. So it’s very, very sad and overwhelming. (Interview, Special Education Math Teacher A, March 16, 2015)

The teacher’s language reflects her uncertainty about the steps and outcomes of the excess process. For example, when she said, “I guess your name continues to be rolled or transferred to different lists” she revealed she may not fully know what those lists signify or how one’s name gets transferred. Later, when she said, “And then if you don’t get placed by like, say, June, you go to this other list…” she revealed she may not have a firm grasp of the timeline for job placement. Finally, when she stated, “you could either end up as a co-teacher or you can end up as administrative support in a building but you still get paid your salary as a teacher” she demonstrates she had an understanding of her potential salary but no definitive vision of what her actual responsibilities or next career step would look like. Her language suggests her experience in the excess pool would be largely controlled externally.

In an effort to gain control of their careers many teachers prepared to apply to positions within the district. If a teacher could obtain a position at another city school they could avoid the excess pool process. Some teachers began to explore positions at different grade levels within their credentialing area. An interview with a math teacher captured sentiments expressed by colleagues about wanting to continue to teach in the
city but feeling limited by the number of available positions. She said, “I am going to try as hard as I can to get a job in [the city]. I live in [the city]. I have six years in. I like my job” (Interview, Math Teacher, March 16, 2015). Later, she described an upcoming interview but alluded to an internal conflict of wanting to stay at Coolidge High while at the same time needing to find a job for the upcoming year. She said, “…now I’m applying to middle school jobs. It’s crazy, you know, you’re applying to whatever’s out there… it’s not even that we wanna leave. It’s that they’re making us leave. I don’t know” (Interview, Math Teacher, March 16, 2015).

The collective nature of her language “they’re making us leave” was indicative of the teachers’ absence of choice in the closure decision and unified desire to stay at Coolidge High. The notion of being forced out increased the perception of a threatening environment. Professional survival took priority over reform work or other school improvement initiatives underway.

During the 2014–15 school year, Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) collaborated and enacted cycles of inquiry to improve teachers’ practice and corresponding and students’ performance on an identified standard. Each cycle included reciprocal observations, feedback, modification to instruction, and assessment of student performance, and teacher reflection. At the time of the district’s recommendation in late-February, teachers were midway through a cycle.

I asked the principal about whether or not teachers’ focus on teaching and learning changed due to the uncertain status of the school. He asserted that reform work conducted by professional learning communities was disrupted by teachers’ professional
survival measures.

Interviewer: Did teachers – did their focus on teaching and learning change?

Principal: Definitely….So for the three weeks in March, they were sitting there working on their resumes. People won’t even meet in their PLCs [Professional Learning Communities]. And if they did meet in their PLCs, they’d talk about, you know, “how did your interview on that job go? “I’m applying at this place.” Much different conversations. (Interview, Principal, April 12, 2015)

A special education math teacher echoed the principal’s comments from a teacher’s point of view. He suggested PLC work virtually came to a halt in March. He said,

…yeah, we were in the middle of a cycle and then this news hit us and it completely fell apart. We just stopped. It was like, well, this is – we're not gonna be able to use this again next year. It's a ton of work. We've got curriculum to do, we've got stuff to do and doing all of this paperwork for no purpose because we're not gonna be here next year anyway is a waste of our time… (Interview, Special Education Math Teacher B, April 16, 2015)

The teacher’s statement that we’re not going to be here next year provides insight into teachers’ sense of certainty that the school would be closed. Though the school board had not endorsed or rejected the district’s recommendation, teachers appeared to believe the school would close. Consequently, teachers’ focus shifted from school improvement to professional survival.

In an interview with the principal three weeks after the announcement to keep the
school open, we discussed how the five week period of uncertainty affected the stability of his staff heading into the 2015–16 school year. Several teachers accepted positions at other district schools while several others announced their decision to retire.

Interviewer: What happened with staff in the days after [the announcement]?
Principal: Three staff have taken a job elsewhere. Staff went out to interviews.
Interviewer: What subjects?
Principal: Science, math – actually two maths and a science…. 
(Interview, Principal, April 12, 2015)

I learned from the vice principal for instruction and assessment that one of the math teachers had additional leadership responsibilities at Coolidge High. The assistant principal for instruction and assessment explained:

The person who is leaving us is a very strong ninth grade teacher. And it was very unfortunate for us to find out that he was moving on…. 
Interviewer: So that teacher was a ninth grade math teacher.
Interviewee: Yes…. 
Interviewer: Was he a leader in the department?
Interviewee: He was. He was a [department leader\textsuperscript{21}] this year.
Interviewer: So he wears multiple hats, as a teacher [and] a [leader]?
Interviewee: Right.
Interviewer: Is he an ILT [Instructional Leadership Team] person?
Interviewee: Yeah, that, too. Yes, yes.

\textsuperscript{21} Name of role changed to maintain anonymity
The exiting 9th grade math teacher left a human capital void for teacher leadership and the ILT. Both the ILT position and department leader position were roles intended to lead and advance the reform work of the math department. It was anticipated that the reform work underway would be interrupted.

**Conclusion**

In Phase I, the initial absence of social capital within the humanities department appeared to interfere with the department’s ability to meaningfully collaborate and develop a common curriculum to advance student performance on state-based measures. The churn of human capital heightened department instability. The absence of a consistent 10th grade history teacher for three consecutive years impacted the ability of the department to develop stable culture, make agreements and foster positive relationships. The combination of poor social capital and weakened human capital in the initial years inhibited the department’s ability to develop, implement and refine a robust humanities curriculum.

In Phase II, the uncertain future of Coolidge High School, and the vulnerability of teachers’ positions, motivated teachers to shift their attention away from collective PLC reform work toward personal professional survival. The redirection of teachers’ PLCs focus toward networking and the development of resumes caused at least a one-month disruption to the school’s reform efforts. The redistribution of after school minutes from tutoring or boot camps toward protesting or interviewing reduced the amount of time...
available for students to prepare for the state assessments. The combined lost CPT time and boot camp test prep was expected to correlate with a decline in student achievement.
Chapter VII: Monroe High School

Overview

Reform efforts at Monroe High School were neither disrupted nor was the school destabilized by teacher turnover between the fall of 2012 and the spring of 2015. Teacher turnover at Monroe High had two forms: teacher turnover requiring the hiring of new staff; and school directed internal turnover to maximize human capital. The school developed two strategies to mitigate the common disruptive effects of teacher turnover in the event of new hiring: “hiring a fit” by evaluating candidates using an informal, school-developed, candidate-quality assessment screening; and developing interns to be future candidates for open positions. Both of these strategies sought to protect the reform work underway, ease transition, and ensure a match for the needs of the students and culture of the school. The third strategy called for carefully planned internal movement of educators from one grade level to another, within their content discipline, in order to further develop the school’s human capital. The use of planned and carefully enacted turnover facilitated the professional growth of individual teachers, teacher teams, and departments, which school leaders associated with “school improvement”.

School Description

Monroe High School is an urban, public, non-Title I high school located in a bustling city center. At the time of the study, teachers and school leaders repeatedly portrayed Monroe High positively, describing it as a “good school”, “safe”, “a good place to work”, and that “the kids like being there” (Interviews, June 2015). Interviewees described the relationship between the school and parents as generally strong and that
kids like coming to the school.

The school served a heterogeneous student population of approximately eighteen hundred students, grades 9–12. State Department of Education “School Profiles” data indicated that between 2012 and 2015, student enrollment percentages, by race and ethnicity, were in the mid-20% range for African American, Asian, and Hispanic students respectively, with White student enrollment between 28–30%. In the seven years leading up to the study, the percent of students with a first language other than English consistently rose from 36% to 50%. State-based student performance data between 2012 and 2014 indicated English Language Learners (ELLs), or former-ELLs, and Hispanic students consistently did not meet the cumulative progress and performance index accountability targets. Overall student graduation rates increased from 70% in 2010 to 81% in 2014. Roughly 50% of students continued to public or private 4-year colleges and 20–25% continued to 2-year colleges.

Students at Monroe High attended classes in a large, multi-floor school nearly the size of a city block. To make the school feel smaller for students, it was divided into four academic communities or “houses.”

A student was assigned to one house for grades 9–12. Elective coursework such as drama, world language, or music, drew enrollment from all four houses enabling

22 In alignment with my confidentiality agreement, student performance data, enrollment numbers, and demographic percentages have been “rounded” so as not to provide specific data that could be used to identify the case.

23 In alignment with my confidentiality agreement, student performance data, enrollment numbers, and demographic percentages have been “rounded” so as not to provide specific data that could be used to identify the case.

24 Please see Monroe High School Organization Graphics, Graphic I on the following page.
students to befriend and learn with students throughout the school. Three academic tracks were available: college prep (CP), honors and advanced placement (AP).

Monroe High School
Organization Graphics

Figure 6: Organization of Houses at Monroe High

Figure 7: Organization of A House at Monroe High (2015)
Each House had a house principal, technically an assistant principal, guidance counselors and a 9th grade academy. The 9th grade academy was established to meet the unique social-emotional and academic learning needs of an adolescent transitioning from middle school to high school. Within each Academy there was a math teacher, history teacher, science teacher and English Language Arts teacher who served the same group of students.25

Academy teachers were provided daily common planning time to collaborate about lesson plans, share best practices, discuss student learning needs, meet with special education service providers, and connect with parents. Each academy also had a guidance counselor that only serviced the 9th grade students in that particular house. Together with the guidance counselor, the academy provided a high level of targeted support for students and communication with families. Once a student exited the 9th grade academy, the student remained within his or her assigned house and was provided a new guidance counselor for grades 10–12. Additional organizational features promoted teacher collaboration and idea sharing. The school day began at 7:45am, ended 2:15pm and offered six 55-minute blocks. Three out of four Mondays a month, students were dismissed at 1:45pm and faculty remained to engage in professional development. The fourth Monday of the month, teachers arrived at the regular 7:15am start time and collaborated for the first two hours. Students arrived at 9:45am, referred to as a “Late Entry” day. The remainder of a Late Entry day followed a modified instructional schedule.

25 Please see Monroe High School Organization Graphics, Graphic II on previous page.
Core content lead teachers (math, science, English Language Arts) primarily planned Monday professional development sessions. The sessions brought content teachers from all four houses together to set SMART goals26, share instructional practices and discuss student progress. On occasion, a school-wide initiative brought the entire staff together for professional development.

Lead teachers taught a reduced course load of only two academic blocks and were also responsible for providing non-evaluative mentoring and coaching support to colleagues in their department across houses. The math lead teacher described the role in this way:

I teach two blocks and then the rest of the day is designed to go into classrooms and mentor teachers, provide feedback, coach, co-teach, model teach [and] meet with staff. I also plan and implement the PD we have Monday – early release or late entry…and have a content specific PD that I’m responsible for. (Math Lead Teacher, Interview, June 2, 2015)

Student learning goals and instructional practice goals were identified, planned and evaluated during content-focused professional development sessions. Whole-school professional development, drawing the entire staff together, tended to focus on non-academic areas of improvement such as Chrome Book trainings or strategies for responding to the social-emotional needs of students.

26 SMART goals are Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Results-Focused, Time-Bound
Reform Work

At Monroe High, the pursuit to improve was consistently referenced by interviewees. A conversation with the principal captured the ongoing nature and significance of school improvement. The principal stated:

…we’re always looking for ways to better deliver to students, and if this doesn’t work, let’s try this. But let’s always be thinking [about] what we are not doing well, what we are doing well… (Principal, Interview, June 3, 2015)

This commitment to continuously improve motivated many reform efforts throughout the school. When asked about specific reform efforts underway, one House Principal leaned back in his chair and reflected aloud, “The reforms that are happening this year…let me see, we have had so many reforms!” (House Principal #2, Interview, June 2, 2015). From my conversations with teachers and school leaders, three categories of initiatives emerged: school wide initiatives, department or content specific initiatives, and individual professional goals.

School-wide Initiatives

School-wide initiatives enacted between SY2012–2015 included: designating the school site a “trauma-sensitive” school and training faculty for cues and responses to traumatized children; a teacher-designed Chrome Book initiative; training and use of the instructional framework, Understanding By Design; and improving students’ literacy skills across content areas. Training and use of the state-adopted teacher evaluation tool was also cited as a school-wide initiative. More information is provided within the section: Individual or Professional Improvement Goals, because of the individualized
nature of the reform.

**Department Improvement Initiatives**

Department goals in math, English Language Arts and science shared the objective of refining common practices within their respective departments and improving students’ reading and writing skills within the content discipline.

**Math Department Improvement Initiatives**

In the math department, for example, teachers during the 2014–15 school year identified and refined common instructional strategies to meet the needs of ELLs and special education students. The following vignette from a conversation with the Math Lead Teacher provides a brief description of how the math department identified its improvement focus and its rationale.

**Interviewer:** How did you determine which initiatives to pursue this year?

**Interviewee:** We have an ESL\(^ {27} \) program....[It’s for] kids that come into the country, don’t speak any English at all, and kids who are SLIFE\(^ {28} \), [who] have major gaps in learning [and] end up thrown into a mainstreamed class. So for years my staff has been saying, we need to do something about ELLs\(^ {29} \). We need to come up with ideas, strategies, [and] techniques to monitor student growth so that we can improve this.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

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\(^{27}\) English as a Second Language  
\(^{28}\) Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education  
\(^{29}\) English Language Learners
Interviewee: And in the process of us adopting some ESL strategies, we found (a lot of us that have co-taught [Special Education and ESL classes]) that the special-ed students were doing really well with [the ESL strategies]. So basically, we said let’s lump [the strategies] together. It seems like [the] strategies that work for one really help the other… (Math Lead Teacher, Interview, June 2, 2015)

To measure the effectiveness of the ESL strategies, teachers implemented pre-tests and formative assessments, and planned a summative test for the end of the scholastic year. The Lead Teacher explained that she advanced the improvement work and influenced teachers’ practice by observing instruction, providing feedback, and reviewing student work samples.

**English Language Arts Department Improvement Initiatives**

The English Language Arts Lead Teacher described the department’s emphasis on consistency of instructional practice across grade levels and the development of common academic skills among students. Three initiatives emerged from interviews, all driven by standardized assessments. These initiatives included: aligning local assessment to Common Core and state standards, developing pre-AP strategies, and looking at student performance data to inform and refine instructional practice. When asked, “What reform work is happening in English Language Arts?”

The Lead Teacher explained:

A couple of things we’ve done the last couple of years are…[making] sure we’ve aligned to the Common Core [by] creating common assessments [and using] common terms on finals that match the Common Core and state standards. We’ve
been working hard this year…compiling and implementing our measures [to] make sure they’re aligned with the Common Core...And we’ll look at [student] growth. We’ll look at the data. We’ll look at what adjustments need to be made, and we’ll talk about our practices... (English Lead Teacher, Interview, June 2, 2015)

At the time of the interview in early June, the English Language Arts department was preparing to implement the end of year Common Core-aligned assessments. The department planned to meet, analyze the results and then determine what changes to make to better prepare students for similar assessments the following year.

**Science Department Improvement Initiatives**

During 2014–15, the science department focused on the standard, “engaging in argumentation from evidence”, also referred to as claim-evidence-reasoning (CER). The science Lead Teacher described the process for enacting the CER improvement initiative:

So we first introduced the practice…the CER model…[and] we’ve met a lot through the year where we designed a department rubric that could be used on an everyday basis, because it’s expected that we use CER as a regular routine in our classrooms. And then several times throughout this year, we brought in student work examples….We’ve calibrated our grading….[and] we took turns grading different student’s work [to be] sure that we were all on the same page. (Science Lead Teacher, Interview, June 3, 2015)

The science Lead Teacher said the department was making progress implementing the CER model and students’ skills were advancing, but it was too soon to know to what
extent. At the time of our interview in early June, the department was preparing to implement CER summative assessments and would then analyze student work the last week of school.

**Individual or Professional Improvement Goals**

Beyond school-wide and department-focused initiatives, teachers at Monroe High were also adjusting to the state-adopted teacher evaluation rubric, first enacted at Monroe High during SY2012–13. The director of the New Teacher Developer program noted the challenge of finding sufficient time to train and support teachers as they navigated the multiple rigorous evaluation standards. For new teachers, learning how to demonstrate proficiency in the standards while refining their practice was challenging and time consuming. For mentor teachers, teachers who were often highly experienced and skilled practitioners, teaching a new teacher how to use the evaluation tool as a guide for professional practice required a great deal of time and patience.

**Teacher Turnover**

Monroe High experienced limited teacher turnover between school years 2012 and 2015. State-based teacher retention data showed approximately 90%\(^{30}\) of all teachers were retained from one year to the next between 2012–2014, equating to roughly 3–5 percentage points above the average teacher retention rate across the state (Table 13). Please note that data preceding the 2009 school year were not available.

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\(^{30}\) In alignment with my confidentiality agreement, student performance data, enrollment numbers, and demographic percentages and retention numbers have been “rounded” so as not to provide specific data that could be used to identify the case.
Table 13. Annual Staff Retention at Monroe High School from SY2009–SY2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Year</th>
<th>Total Number of Staff</th>
<th># of Staff Retained</th>
<th># of Staff Lost</th>
<th>% of Staff Retained at Monroe High</th>
<th>Average % of Staff Retained by Schools Across the State</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2014–2015</td>
<td>Not reported</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013–2014</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>90.2</td>
<td>84.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012–2013</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>85.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011–2012</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>90.7</td>
<td>84.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010–2011</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>88.9</td>
<td>84.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009–2010</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>87.4</td>
<td>85.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Data provided by the Dept. of Education, School and District Profiles, Staff Retention Data)

These records were consistent with teacher and leadership reports. When asked about teacher turnover and stability at Monroe High, a house principal with six-years on-site experience replied:

I think Monroe High is – well, generally, I think we’re very stable. I think the turnover here is generally below what other districts see….If I sit on six interviews during the course of the summer, it’s a lot. As a matter of fact, six is the most I can remember in my six years here. (House Principal #1, Interview, June 2, 2015)

When teacher turnover did occur at Monroe High, teachers reported that it occurred for life changing reasons. House Principal #2 explained:

Our teachers don’t leave to go somewhere else. Our teachers leave because they move far away, due to a spouse’s change of job or what have you. Or, they have children, and financially are able to be home with their child. Or they retire. (House Principal #2, Interview, June 2, 2015)

According to school leaders, formal records documenting short-term, long-term and
permanent leaves of absence for professional staff did not exist.

One cause for short and long-term substitute positions at Monroe High was for maternity leave coverage. In March 2015, the school principal stated, “...believe it or not, what’s hurt us the most have been maternity leaves. We’ve probably had, in the last 4 years, we’ve had maybe 15 or 16 maternity leaves in the last 4 to 5 years” (Principal, Interview, March 30, 2015). In June, the principal reiterated the rate of recent maternity leaves stating, ”I’ve had three this year. Yeah, so I think that the number of times we’ve had to reach out for a long term sub has increased exponentially over the last three to four years…” (Principal, Interview, June 3, 2015).

According to teachers and school leaders, oftentimes the substitute hired to cover a maternity leave had served as a former student teacher or intern at Monroe High.

Teacher turnover at Monroe High also included carefully planned “internal movement” of teachers within the school. Internal movement was a means to redistribute human capital in order to positively affect the goals of the school. Examples included the reassignment of a teacher within a content discipline, such as from Algebra I to Algebra II in order to “take turns”; transition from one course to another to align skills with needs; reassignment from teacher to teacher-leader; or reassignment from teacher to school administrator.

Though overall stability held at roughly 90% for several years, normal instances of major life events such as retirement, sabbatical, and short term leaves for maternity did require the school to hire new staff members. How the school made these decisions mitigated destabilization and protected the reform work underway from disruption
Overview of Case Findings

Monroe High School was neither destabilized nor was the reform work underway disrupted by teacher turnover. According to several interviewees, carefully planned turnover controlled by the school actually enhanced reform efforts. Three findings emerged from the data. These findings, from here on referred to as “strategies”\(^{31}\), represent the ways Monroe High intentionally mitigated the potentially disruptive effects of teacher turnover. All three strategies sought to maximize and align human capital with the needs and reform interests of the school and were controlled by the school. The first two strategies responded to hiring needs, specifically the recruitment and development of human capital. The third strategy focused on aligning existing human capital to achieve school improvement goals. (Please see Appendices F–H for Coding Structure Graphics for Strategies 1, 2 and 3, respectively.)

Analysis of the Findings

The effect of teacher turnover at Monroe High was neither disruptive nor destabilizing and in some scenarios, planned, internally controlled turnover contributed to positive outcomes. Three leadership level strategies, focused on developing social and human capital, contributed to the stability of the school: hiring “a fit”; hiring a successful former intern; and normalizing internal movement.

Strategy #1: Identify a Fit: Enact Candidate Quality Assessment Screening

Monroe High leaders prioritized hiring “a fit” when hiring for any open teaching position. To identify a fit, school leaders utilized a school-developed and informal

\(^{31}\) The term “strategies” is provided by the researcher.
candidate-quality assessment screening. A formal hard copy representation of the screening was unavailable. The qualities, however, were reiterated repeatedly as though part of the institutional culture. Theoretically, hiring “a fit” would mitigate some of the disruptive new hire exposures and increase the probability that the new hire would successfully fulfill the contracted teaching assignment.

**Qualities of “A Fit”**

“A fit” had multiple characteristics or qualities including: experience with urban education; a strong recommendation from within a professional network of trusted colleagues; knowledge of reforms at the school and/or state level; and knowledge of pedagogy and content. (Please see Appendix F, Coding Graphic Chapter 7: Monroe High School, Strategy #1.) According to interviewees, “a fit” would have a higher success rate than a randomly selected teacher and decrease the traditional challenges associated with bringing on a new hire.

**Fit Quality #1: Experience with Urban Education**

The notion of “fit” emerged in my first interview with a house principal. He identified a series of qualities including extra emphasis on one’s understanding of urban education and the needs of an urban child. Below is a brief excerpt from our conversation.

Interviewer: What makes a “good fit”?

Interviewee: That’s a great question and we talk about this all the time….I think a good fit is understanding – well the first piece is understanding the urban setting….We have had teachers in here and we have made comments that this
teacher would be great in [one high socio-economic town] or this teacher would be great in [another high socio-economic town]…but they’re not a great fit for this school: the urban setting, the urban kid, the immigrant kid….it’s not a judgment on that teacher, it’s just not a great fit...(House Principal #1, Interview, June 2, 2015)

Later in the day, I met with House Principal #3 and asked him the same question: “what makes good fit for Monroe High?” Like House Principal #1, he emphasized the importance of experience in urban education and one’s capacity to handle the challenges of teaching urban students. He also acknowledged that not all interns are candidates for a setting like Monroe High but those that are, tend to develop relationships with students and teachers, and seek opportunities to contribute to the school community (House Principal #4, Interview, June 2, 2015).

The observations offered by House Principal #4 reinforced the importance of a new hire’s personal comfort with urban education. The comments also reveal how school leaders and teachers watched carefully to see if an intern could be a future fit for an opening based on their interactions with students and interest in contributing to the school community.

**Fit Quality #2: Recommendation from within the Professional Network**

Another quality of “a fit” was a potential hire’s strong endorsement of a candidate from within Monroe High’s regional professional network. The principal described multiple long and short-term hiring decisions based on trusted network recommendations.
In March, for example, the principal hired a long-term substitute to fill in for the unexpected leave of a Spanish teacher. The principal said:

…He [the substitute] came to us highly regarded by another principal from Lucas High School. He [the principal] called me and said, “I know you’re looking for a short term, six week, Spanish sub. I’ve got the guy. He just finished with me. He’s great. Bring him on.” So I interviewed the guy, he came on…. And he’s been here a week. But I think it’s going to be a little bit harder for him to sort of, fall into all the nuances of when we meet and how we meet because he doesn’t know the institutional history. I talked to him Friday. He loves it so far. He loves the kids. He’s doing really well. The kids like him. So we’ll see. (Principal, Interview, March 30, 2015)

In a follow-up interview the first week of June the principal was able to report on the success of the substitute Spanish teacher. The principal said, “…he’s been great! He’s been here for seven weeks, eight weeks; he’ll finish out the year. But he’s been masterful, so it’s been really good” (Principal, Interview, June 3, 2015). In our conversation it became clear that the Spanish teacher was “a fit” and was able to successfully fulfill the terms of his contract.

During the 2014–15 school year Monroe High also had a long-term science teacher leave of absence and needed “a fit” to serve from April to the end of the academic year. Again the hire was largely based on network recommendation, though in this case, the additional essential quality of “experience in the content specialty” added to the

32 Fictional name
caliber of “the fit.” The principal described the hiring of the biology substitute teacher, below:

…we hired a retired biology teacher from Wyndham\textsuperscript{33} who was recommended to us, and that’s worked out beautifully because she has 25 years ninth grade biology [experience]. [She] wasn’t ready to retire so she’s in for the last eight weeks and she’s been a perfect fit. (Principal, Interview, June 3, 2015)

The teacher’s knowledge of the content and extended experience as a classroom teacher met two qualities of “a fit”.

The professional network also protected the principal from making hiring mistakes. During our June interview, the Principal leaned forward in his chair and said, in a soft voice as if sharing a secret,

I’ve also had principals call me and say, “Don’t do this. I understand you’re about to hire Lindsay as a “such and such” teacher. Don’t do it! We had her. She’s horrible.” So I think the networking piece is really important….It’s good to do your homework before you bring somebody in. (Principal, Interview, June 3, 2015)

Doing one’s homework, or learning about a candidate, also involved learning about what the candidate knew of reform work.

**Fit Quality #3: Knowledge of Reforms at the Local and/or State Level**

A candidate’s knowledge of reform initiatives was emphasized as essential quality of “a fit”. The English Language Arts Lead Teacher described criteria for a recent

\textsuperscript{33} Fictional name
English Language Arts position and said, “we…wanted someone who [was] kind of scholarly and …[has] kept up with all the reforms of education…” (English Lead Teacher, Interview, June 2, 2015). Ultimately, the school hired a woman who had been highly engaged in reform work at the state level, and wanted to get back to the classroom.

The principal described the fit qualities of the hire:

She…worked for the Department of Education for 18 months doing a lot of literacy work around the frameworks, things like that. When we had an English opening, that was a no brainer….She had met some of our people out in the conferences [and] at workshops. She knew what we were trying to do here in the [English] department. And so when you get somebody of that caliber…. [when] you get somebody like that coming in, we’re off and running. She’s really an outstanding teacher. (Principal, Interview, June 3, 2015)

This new hire’s knowledge of the English Language Arts standards, or “frameworks”, helped advance the work in the department during the 2014–15SY. The English Lead Teacher explained how she pushed his thinking. He said,

I could speak to [the recent hire from the Department of Education (DOE)]…. She was their literacy coach…. So she’s just been awesome as far as like, she knows more stuff about some of the reform stuff than I do! So she’s coming to me and she’s saying, “Have you thought about this? What about this? What about this?” And just knows people [at the DOE]. And so having [her] with that experience and that energy is great. (English Lead Teacher, Interview, June 2, 2015)
The new hire’s capacity to share her knowledge with the department and her prior experience as a coach served to advance the collective knowledge and enrich the human capital of the department.

Though nearly all interviewees addressed the importance of a candidate knowing about reform initiatives at the state and site level in order to be a fit, the New Teacher Developer framed the importance relative to the amount of time it takes to get a new hire “up to speed” if the candidate does not have that prior knowledge.

One of the reform initiatives underway at Monroe High was the adoption of the state-mandated teacher evaluation tool. The New Teacher Developer described the teacher evaluation tool as a multidimensional rubric-based set of measures that rate a teacher’s proficiency across four main standards. The New Teacher Developer indicated it could take a new hire quite a bit of time to get “up to speed” with the standards and that the depth of each standard was often overwhelming. Below is a segment of the interview:

Interviewee: When you say, “it takes time to get them up to speed” what do you mean, exactly?

Interviewee: Just look at what’s required of them [new hire] as a teacher – and it’s just overwhelming in terms of reaching out to parents – well, if you know the evaluation tool, you know the four standards. You know, they have their professional practice, the curriculum, the content and the rigor, and then how is it that you get students to learn? What are some of the things you’re doing? How are you using data? Are you collaborating with your colleagues? And then when you
move into Standards 3 and 4, you’re talking about communications with parents, community – that’s expected – and then over to Standard 4, what are they doing as a colleague and as a professional to further their goals? And it’s not as though you come in and you can [say] to any new teacher, “Let’s just concentrate on Standard 1 and 2.” They need to have all four of those standards up and running to a degree. Of course you really want to see them work on 1 and 2, but then if there’s a problem with the parent, there isn’t any one of those that is less important than the other. So...that’s what I mean by up to speed. (New Teacher Developer, Interview, March 24, 2015)

The amount of time it took both the new hire and the mentor teacher to prepare the new hire for success or “get them up to speed” could detract from other essential work of the school. The more prior knowledge of the school, the culture, and the reform initiatives a new hire brought to the job, the better. It equated to less time, and potentially less energy, to train the individual. Furthermore the more quickly a teacher was “up to speed” and the more readily a mentor and new hire would be to contribute to the advancement of the work. For these reasons, the New Teacher Developer often sought to hire a former successful intern (New Teacher Developer, Interview, March 24, 2015).

**Fit Quality #4: Knowledge of Pedagogy and Content**

Nearly every interviewee identified knowledge of pedagogy and content as an important quality of “a fit”. For example, during a conversation with the New Teacher Developer in March we identified instances of turnover and what mattered to her when
making a hiring decision. She described what she thought about while conducting an interview:

Interviewer: When you conduct an interview, what do you ask? What are you listening for?

Interviewee: I’m listening to see if they [the candidates] have some experience with urban students and meeting their diverse needs. Do they know something about language objectives and pedagogy? In terms of more general stuff: what do you have for best practices? What do you bring to the table? Tell me about a time when you’ve worked with students before for at least an extended period of time. Tell me about your student teaching, even. And then the other thing I look for is...to have a good grasp of literacy and [do] they know how to embed that into the content area… (New Teacher Developer, Interview, March 24, 2015)

House Principal #4 also emphasized the importance of pedagogy but believed it was a capacity that could be developed. “I think pedagogy is extremely important. But, I think it’s something that can be taught” (House Principal #4, Interview, June 2, 2015).

To him, the personality of a candidate exceeded the importance of their pedagogy. Personality, he asserted, would determine if the candidate could be successful with the students of Monroe High. He said, “I find myself looking for the personality that is capable of relating to the kids in our situations. Personality is something…if the personality is not there, then it’s probably not going to be a good fit (House Principal #4, Interview, June 2, 2015).
The reference to one’s personality and capacity to relate to “our kids” are value statements that align closely with the “fit quality” of “experience in urban education”. Finally, House Principal #4’s statement that content and pedagogy can be taught suggests Monroe High is continuously developing human capital.

An example of the time invested to develop human capital emerged from a conversation with the Science Lead Teacher. She described how her role partially involves supporting new hires which influences how she performs her role as Lead Teacher. She said,

…I have two new teachers in the department this year, [and] that’s been a big part of my focus. And I spend a lot more time in their classrooms than I do in the [classrooms of] other teachers in my department. But, that’s also expected by administration and the directors. So, I think that definitely, the fact that I am supposed to spend so much time on them, means…it’s taking my time away from other things. (Science Lead Teacher, Interview, June 3, 2015)

Here, the Science Lead Teacher acknowledged that the Lead Teachers were expected to support the needs of new hires but also had “other things”, or responsibilities of the role, that were not granted as much time to fulfill. Later in our conversation the “other things” were presented as developing professional development sessions, supporting colleagues, co-planning with other lead teachers and preparing for her own courses (Science Lead Teacher, Interview, June 3, 2015).
Social Capital Advantages of Hiring “A Fit”

In addition to the advantages of hiring “a fit” with strong human capital, interviewees also described the social capital advantages of hiring “a fit”. From a social capital perspective “a fit” was associated with the infusion of new energy, new capacities or “gifts”, enthusiasm and a willingness to receive feedback were all identified as benefits of hiring “a fit”. During my conversation with the English Lead Teacher he described three new hires the 2013–14 school year. When asked how teacher turnover affected the instructional program he said, “It was great last year to have three new people. I can say there was definite energy.” (English Lead Teacher, Interview, June 2, 2015). Later in the interview, he described the new hires as having “such unique gifts to bring to the department” (Interview, June 2, 2015). These new hires were also credited with asking probing questions that pushed the work of the department.

House Principal #2 indicated that new hires that were recent graduates of teacher education programs were highly receptive to instructional feedback. When describing the attitudes of recent new hires she said, “…you get the enthusiasm, and you get that they’re willing to listen and have a [Lead Teacher] come in and say, “That was good, try it this way and see what you think. I’ll come back on Tuesday [to see]” (House Principal #2, Interview, June 2, 2015). Here, House Principal #2 appears to couple the strength of one’s social capital with human capital growth. When he described a teacher’s willingness to receive feedback and ask questions in order to improve, he linked one’s attitude and personality to professional improvement.
Strategy #2: Develop Interns for Future Openings

Another strategy for managing teacher turnover at Monroe High involved training interns and student teachers during their practicum to become “a fit” for future open positions. (Please see Appendix G, Coding Graphic Chapter 7: Monroe High School, Strategy #2.) Each year Monroe High accepted interns and student teachers from locally well-regarded schools of education. Over the course of one’s practicum the intern or student teacher observed the mentor teacher; created and implemented lessons and received feedback; attended department and school professional development meetings; made parent phone calls; used the online email and grading system; and developed relationships with students and colleagues. The principal said Monroe High could have up to 15 or 16 student teachers during a given year.

Teachers were not required to accept a student teacher. To increase the likelihood an intern would develop into “a fit”, the experiential and pedagogical training the interns received needed to be consistent with the high expectations of the school. Only certain teachers, trusted with modeling desirable pedagogy and professionalism, were encouraged to become mentors.

The Principal explained,

We never say, “You’re going to have a student teacher this semester.” We always go to people and say, “We have this person from [well regarded institution] and they’re dying to become a math teacher in an urban community. What does it look like for you this year?” And we’ve had some really good teachers say, “I had one last year. I’m going to take this year off. But Billy next door wants one.” And
then we sit back and say – if Billy is not as strong as John, we’re going to pass. So we make sure it’s a good fit for us as well as the student teacher. (Principal, Interview, March 30, 2015)

The Math Lead Teacher acknowledged her sense of responsibility to the department and school to accept an intern. “I don’t want to ever turn away any [interns]” she said, “that is our best feeder system.” (Math Lead Teacher, Interview, June 2, 2015). The Math Lead Teacher’s comments allude to a sense of responsibility to recruit, develop and hire “a fit”. The school generally did not want to wait until a position opened to start looking for a hire, instead, it sought to prepare in advance of turnover and protect the stability of the school.

**Institutional Knowledge**

An intern’s knowledge of Monroe High’s academic day, professional expectations, student community, and relationships with colleagues all decreased the amount of time it took to assimilate to the school. For example, former interns had the distinct advantage of already knowing many of unique school tools like the grading program or email system; where to find resources; who to ask for help; and what routines or instructional protocols were expected of the department. This experiential and organizational knowledge reduced the amount of time and energy a colleague, administrator or mentee would need to invest to support the new hire. Furthermore, the prior knowledge enabled and empowered the new hire to promptly engage in teaching at the start of their employment. The principal explained:
When [the newly hired former interns] get here, 99 percent of the time there’s very little to do because they’ve been here. So they’ve either been a student teacher here [or] an intern here…. So when they get here there’s not a whole lot of hand holding. (Principal, Interview, June 3, 2015)

In addition to having an understanding of school systems and protocols, the New Teacher Developer emphasized that a former intern would already have developed relationships with colleagues and leadership. Former interns will likely still need support but the scope of the support and the starting point is far less burdensome given a former intern’s previous on-site training. The New Teacher Developer said,

…they [former interns] know the student population. They’ve had support. They know how to get a classroom up and running. They’ve worked with an experienced teacher as an intern. They know the support staff. They know the administrative team, and they know the department that they’re in and working with it. So when they start, it’s still a huge leap, they tell me. There’s still so much we need to learn. But they know who to go to if they get stuck. And they know what to expect in terms of student [behavior]– and they were also walking in with strategies and curriculum that they’ve practiced and used and observed others implementing. And they can do it themselves. (New Teacher Developer, Interview, March 24, 2015)

The ability of a hired former intern to focus on teaching and learning was also facilitated by their experiences in department meetings and with colleagues during the practicum. House Principal #1 explained,
Interns…are in on the [department] meetings. They go to those meetings as part of their internship. They get a feel for what the district plan is. They get a feel for the personalities. They get a feel for the leadership team…[and] a lot of the student teachers, they spent the year here, they already know what our instructional strategies are. They know what our goals are for this school; our goals are for the district, so they kind of hit the ground running….Yeah, they have to learn about running their own classroom and all that stuff, but all the – they’ve learned that year they were here, about what our goals are, what our focus is, what the district wide plan is, what the school wide plan is. They’ve learned all that, so they kind of hit the ground running in that sense. They’re focused on the stuff that we want to focus on – we don’t have to teach them that. (House Principal #1, Interview, June 2, 2015)

House Principal #1’s statement largely describes the third “fit quality” of being familiar with state and local reform efforts.

A former intern was perceived to be well versed on the most recent instructional strategies as well as well trained in communication and collaboration. These three strengths were considered highly valuable for advancing the work of a school. The Science Lead Teacher said,

They’re [the interns are] learning about the newest things in their school, so they can come with new ideas and new approaches….I’ve found the newer teachers, who have come out of teacher programs recently, seem to be more willing to
I think that collaboration piece is something that has been pushed.

(Interview, June 3, 2015).

A former intern’s knowledge of “new ideas” and “new approaches” combined with collaboration skills contributed to the sustainability of school and department social capital and human capital. The Science Lead Teacher suggested that the ability of the school to retain interns contributed to the cohesiveness of department and school

(Science Lead Teacher, Interview, June 3, 2015).

**Relationships with Students and Families**

Given a former intern’s experiences at the school, an intern was already familiar with many students and families when hired. Both House Principal #1 and the principal indicated that generally, students did not describe the loss of relationships due to turnover. House Principal #1 said, “In our student’s eyes…this teacher [the newly hired intern] is not new, they were here last year. So I think in some ways it makes our turnover seem a little different…they’ve seen these teachers here before. (House Principal #1, Interview, June 2, 2015). The principal also indicated the students at Monroe High expected continuity – primarily because that was their experience. Students, he noted, didn’t have an appreciation for the intentional coordination and planning required to maintain stability. The principal said,

“…[the students] always see the same faces over and over and over again. And kids are kids. They don’t really think of the logistical piece of Ms. C. was a student teacher here last year and now she’s a full time teacher here this year. For our kids, that’s normal. That’s the way it happens here. When the adults are
saying, “That’s pretty good that you were able to slide somebody in like that and make them full-time”. I think kids here expect consistency. They get that it’s part of our DNA….If you told them that’s unusual, they would say, “Why? Why would that – of course, we’re expecting Ms. C. to be back this year.” What I’m saying is, it took a lot of maneuvering to get her to come back to take a leave position. The kids here are just, “No, that’s how we do business here”.

(Principal, Interview, March 30, 2015)

The principal’s statement that it took a lot of maneuvering to get an intern into an open position, reinforces the planning and preparation invested in an intern so that in the event of an opening, the school could make a smooth transition with a good fit.
**Internship as Audition**

Given the long-range nature of the practicum, the internship allowed the school to know an intern well. For administrators this was highly advantageous. House Principal #4 suggested the internship provided a means for evaluating a candidate long before they’re actually being interviewed. He said, it’s “…an opportunity, to try them [interns] out. It’s an audition for the majority of our student teachers…whether they realize it or not.” (Assistant Principal #4, Interview, June 2, 2015).

House Principal #2 expressed a similar sentiment in greater detail. She said, Bring on a student teacher; you see him or her every day, good, bad, and ugly. You see them when they make the stupid mistakes…. You see them when they are superstars. You see all of it. And you can then, when you have an opening, base your hiring based on that. As an administrator, it's great. (Interview, House Principal #2, June 2, 2015)

House Principal #1 summarized his sentiments about the internship experience by saying, at the end of the internship, “We know them and they know us” (Interview, June 2, 2015).

The strategy of auditioning interns informally allowed the school to get a preview of their instructional practice and professional conduct. Once a position became available, Monroe High could reflect upon the audition as well as the conclusions drawn from candidate-quality assessment screening, to choose the best candidate for the instructional and cultural needs of the school.

As revealed consistently through interviews, the advantages of hiring a successful
former intern were three-fold. First, the amount of time to required to get the new hire up to speed with technological systems, department-based pedagogical and content expectations, department and school-wide reform initiatives, and school routines and rhythms, was significantly less. Second, a former intern’s institutional knowledge of the school’s needs and reforms underway equipped them to be a contributing agent of change upon joining the school. Third the relationships cultivated with colleagues, and rapport developed with students and families, during the internship further stabilized the school and maintained the sense of continuity from one year to the next. All of these benefits enabled the school to keep the reform work on track and progressing.

**Strategy #3: Carefully Planned Internal Movement**

A third strategy that emerged from interviews with Monroe High leaders and teachers was the carefully planned and intentional internal movement of teachers within the school to advance reform initiatives. The internal movement of teachers facilitated teachers’ ability to “take turns” teaching certain courses; and empowered the school to align teachers’ strengths and interests with the needs of the school.

A review of the data revealed that Monroe High leaders initiated internal movement of teachers under certain conditions. Four categories of conditions emerged from the data. (Please see Appendix H, Coding Graphic Chapter 7: Monroe High School, Strategy #3.) The first category of conditions related to teachers “taking turns” teaching particular courses. “Taking turns” involved the reassignment of teachers in order for a colleague to teach a different grade level (9–12) or academic level (College prep, honors, AP) within their certification. The second category of conditions related to aligning
teachers’ particular skills and capacities with the goals and interests of the school. The third category involved expanding a teacher’s role from classroom teacher to Teacher Leader and the fourth category involved the promotion of a teacher to House Principal. Internal movement of this nature empowered the school to capitalize on the school’s existing human capital and social capital.

**Internal Movement: “Taking Turns”**

Monroe High sought to move teachers internally in order for teachers to “take turns” teaching in the 9th grade Academy (referred to as “on Academy”), honors or AP courses, and to inhibit burnout resulting from teaching one particular course. The principal explained his philosophy of internal movement when I asked him if he had reassigned teachers in the last 3–4 years. The vignette below captures his thoughts on a teacher remaining in any one position for an extended period.

Interviewer: In the last three to four years, have you ever looked at what a teacher is teaching and said, “I think I’m going to move Teacher A from teaching 11th grade English to teaching 9th grade English?”

Interviewee: We do that fairly consistently in the sense that we want all of our teachers at Monroe High School to have the spectrum of students. We offer 18 different AP courses and that represents probably about 40 some odd sections of students. We try to spread those 40 sections out among as many people as possible. For instance, this year, I think we have seven or eight different English teachers teaching one AP English section. Those teachers also, somewhere along the line, have [taught] honors level kids and CP [College Prep] level kids because
we don’t want anyone to be just the AP teacher. And I’ve heard in the past, and
I’m not sure how true it is, but I’ve heard in the past that sometimes in a place like
[large bordering urban public school district] you can just be the “AP teacher” and
never anything else but [that]. We are so far away from that. It’s not even close.
Interviewer: Why?
Interviewee: Because it’s not the real world. I mean, CP and honors kids can’t
become AP kids unless you have good teaching….So we move people around.
It’s not every couple of years but we have ninth grade academies where
somebody will be an academy teacher for four or five years and then we’ll say:
that’s your shelf life. It’s now time to go teach eleventh graders, twelfth graders,
tenth graders... (Principal, Interview, March 30, 2015)

The Principal’s reference to “spreading out” which teachers taught AP and
making sure all teachers taught the spectrum of students reflected his belief that every
teacher in the building played an active role in moving the school forward and advancing
all students’ academic achievement. From his point of view, no one teacher was more or
less responsible for the success of students; success was a shared responsibility and
achievement.

His reference to a teacher’s “shelf life” as an Academy teacher referred to the
intensive nature of Academy teaching and his awareness of potential teacher burnout.

Each Lead Teacher described teaching “on Academy” as rewarding yet highly
demanding work requiring a greater investment of professional and emotional energy
than teaching students in the higher grades. The Science Lead Teacher acknowledged that
one reason she applied for the Lead Teacher position was because she had been teaching “on Academy” for several years and needed a break. She said,

…sometimes the 9th grade Academy, once you’ve been on it for awhile, and I’ve started to feel this myself...I’m always teaching freshmen, I need a bit of a break – which is why I applied for this [Lead Teacher] role primarily… (Science Lead Teacher, Interview, June 3, 2015)

According to interviewees, when a 9th grade teacher moved to the 10th grade, for example, the former 9th grade teacher had the advantage of knowing what the students’ previous content and skill development had been the previous year and could build upon it. Rotating teachers from upper grades down to the 9th grade Academy also had advantages. First, teachers at the upper grades had a strong understanding of what skills and content knowledge students needed to be successful in future years. Second, the Academy experience required daily collaboration and sharing of best practices. Through collaboration time, teachers new to the Academy experience were reminded of best practices, learned new strategies and shared their expertise and experience with colleagues.

Ostensibly, the sharing of best practices through collaboration with colleagues, and the transference of one’s experience with students from one grade level to another could have a positive impact on school reform efforts. However, the effect of internal movement could also have negative implications.

During my interview with the Science Lead Teacher she described how Lead Teachers were in the process of making recommendations about teachers’ 2015–16
assignments. The Science Lead Teacher explained how she was analyzing the benefits and limitations of rotating an AP biology teacher into a CP position and moving a strong AP-trained CP teacher into an AP biology position. She said,

…the thought has crossed my mind: Some of the scores that we would be looking at for the next few years, we would have to keep in mind [that] we changed out a couple of bio teachers. We changed our AP teacher. Is that going to affect the kids? That’s tough because you want to supply the best learning situation for the kids. (Science Lead Teacher, Interview, June 3, 2015)

The science teacher was acknowledging that internal movement often required a teacher to become familiar with new curricular standards, pacing and assessments. If a biology teacher, for example, with multiple years experience and solid student assessment scores on state-based measures was moved to a new course, unless the replacement AP teacher was equally strong, it could potentially jeopardize the quality of students’ test scores and cast the school in an unfavorable light with the State or College Board.

Interviews revealed that the practice of “taking turns” yielded mixed reactions from teachers. On the positive side, it enabled teachers to experience other grade levels and courses. Teachers reportedly appreciated the opportunity to rotate onto or off of Academy and teachers valued the sharing of AP courses among multiple instructors. On the negative side, sometimes teachers did not want to teach a different course or grade; or perceived reassignment from an AP course to a CP course as being “downgraded” (Science Lead Teacher, Interview, June 3, 2015). Internal movement also raised
questions about the predictability of student test scores and whether or not student performance would be negatively affectively by the changes. Regardless, “taking turns” was a strategy the principal believed would facilitate the sharing of best practices, the distribution of teachers’ strengths across all grade levels and content areas. Furthermore, “taking turns” would distribute the responsibility of student achievement throughout the faculty. Internal movement or “taking turns” therefore, served as a strategy for advancing the work of the school.

**Internal Movement: Aligning Teachers’ Skills to School Needs**

In March, the principal and Math Lead Teacher both indicated that teaching assignments for the 2015–16 school year likely look different than the current year. Many of the changes were intended to better align the pedagogical skills and content knowledge of math teachers to the needs of the students (Math Lead Teacher, Interview, June 2, 2015; Principal, Interview, June 3, 2015).

At the time of the study, the math department at Monroe High was engaged in department-wide reform work targeting ELLs. The math lead teacher was actively engaged in the formation of the master schedule and in collaboration with other school leaders planned to change teachers’ assignments to meet the needs of the students. She said,

Now that I’ve been doing this job and been in a ton of classrooms, I mean, I’ve been in every teacher’s classroom ten plus times this year, I’m able to say this person will do good with this group of kids. This person will do better with this group of kids. (Math Lead Teacher, Interview, June 2, 2015)
She described the College Prep courses as the most challenging to teach because CP was the lowest level course and had the most needy students. The CP courses, she explained, really needed teachers with excellent pedagogical skills. Furthermore, because the students were assessed by state-based measures at the 10th grade, teachers in the 9th and 10th grade needed to have strong collaboration skills in order to effectively share best practices for the benefit of other teachers and all students. The following interview excerpt comes from our interview on June 2, 2015:

Interviewee: I’m doing my best to move [less effective teachers] into courses where there’s less collaboration necessary.

Interviewer: So you’re making structural –

Interviewee: Yes

Interviewer: – choices around –

Interviewee: Oh yes.

Interviewer: – the teacher assignments?

Interviewee: Yes, 100 percent. So we have Algebra I, geometry, and Algebra II as our “core” courses.

Interviewer: Okay. Those are your 9th and 10th grade classes?

Interviewee: 9th, 10th and 11th

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: And we have CP [College Prep] and honors. The honors kids are going to be fine pretty much regardless of what you do and the seniors are pretty okay because they’re old enough to work around whatever the teacher’s
doing…But those 9th 10th and 11th CP core courses are hard, and you need the right people in there…That’s where I put my key players who are on board, who are ready to try new things, who are working their tail off. And the ones that are not on board, I’ve been trying to move them elsewhere as many periods of the day as I can. (Math Lead Teacher, Interview, June 2, 2015)

In order to support the learning needs of the college prep level math students, the principal and the Math Lead Teacher collaborated to create a master schedule that would align teachers’ skills with the needs students at the respective grades. The final structuring of the math schedule with teachers’ assignments was completed outside the scope of the study.

**Internal Movement: From Teacher to Teacher Leader**

All three Lead Teachers I interviewed transitioned from full-time teacher to a reduced course load in order to be the department leader. Each Lead Teacher submitted an application, was vetted, and was awarded a two-year leadership term. At the end of the term, the Lead Teacher could reapply or return to full-time teaching. By creating non-evaluative leaders from within, the school was able to capitalize the on the leader’s institutional memory, knowledge of department needs, and expertise as an educator to move the department forward. The non-evaluative nature of the role removed the threat of retaliatory or abusive use of power that would be in conflict with the local teachers’ union. The reduced instructional responsibilities allowed the Lead Teachers to continue teaching two periods a day and use the remaining time to support colleagues, plan and implement professional development and attend off-site trainings.
By continuing to teach two periods a day, the Lead Teachers were also able to remain active agents of change at the classroom level. For example, when the math department decided to implement common instructional strategies to support the needs of ESL and special education students, the Math Lead Teacher adopted and enacted the strategies, as well. When the department sought to determine if the strategies were impacting student achievement, the Math Lead Teacher also had student work samples and data to contribute. This enabled the Math Lead Teacher to collaborate as an equal member of the group and serve as a model in order to facilitate the development of the department’s human capital.

During SY2014–15, the former sections of the math lead teacher and science lead teacher were assigned to newly hired teachers who had previously completed their internships with the lead teachers. Given their familiarity with the content requirements of the course and pedagogical expectations of the department, the transition or “turnover” was described as positive and easy. The science lead teacher said:

Monroe really loves to keep student teachers that we like…it just makes the transition into a full time job easier because they’ve been at the school. They know how it functions. They have people they can go to talk to…the one who replaced me…is doing phenomenal. (Science Lead Teacher, Interview, June 3, 2015)

The replacement teacher’s prior knowledge of the school and work underway combined with relationships developed with faculty during the internship contributed to continued stability of the department and reform work underway.
Internal Movement: From Teacher to House Principal

In the spring of 2014, a 30-year veteran teacher, with 16 years of teaching experience at Monroe High, applied to become a House Principal. At the time of the study, the former teacher had been in the house principal role for nearly a full scholastic year.

I asked the house principal about the transition to administration from classroom teacher.

Interviewer: What’s it been like for you to join the administrative team?

Interviewee: It’s been very beneficial…the three other House Principals have come to me quite often and said, “what about this? How come this kid? Why is this a problem?” ….It was a unique experience this year [too].... It was difficult a few times to go into people’s rooms that – you’ve been to their weddings and things like that to say, “Well, there’s something that you could be doing a little better” now. But I knew that was part of [my job], too. And I do it with a friendly enough face and they know why I’m doing it. There haven’t been any major problems that way…. I will say, inside this room, I’ve gotten a number of compliments – comments from teachers, because I hit the ground running this year. There was no sort of learning curve. And that wasn’t necessarily the way it was with the last couple of hirings at the House Principal level. There was quite a learning curve, and they’re still learning the culture of the building. So I do think, in some ways, it’s a good practice. You also let your staff know that if you work hard and you get noticed there is a way to move in-house. I’d like to say that it’s a practice they should put more into, but that’s a district decision…(House
House Principal #4’s prior knowledge of the students and culture of the school from his teacher days eased his transition into administration. Additionally, his pre-existing positive rapport with colleagues appeared to facilitate teachers’ receptiveness to his feedback as an evaluator.

It’s important to note that when House Principal #4 transitioned out of his full-time history teaching position and into the House Principalship, a full-time history position became available at Monroe High. Monroe High hired a history teacher who had been a successful former intern (House Principal #4, Interview, June 2, 2015).

The opportunity for teachers to move into Lead Teacher roles and into the House Principalship allowed teachers at Monroe High to seek leadership roles within the school rather than applying for a leadership role outside the school. Additionally, it enabled the school to capitalize on existing human capital and retain highly effective educators with valuable institutional knowledge and leadership skills, which could be applied to advance the reform work of the school.

**Conclusion**

Monroe High School protected reform work underway from the potentially disruptive nature of teacher turnover by enacting three strategies. First, the school sought to “hire a fit” by evaluating a future candidate using the informal school-developed candidate-quality assessment screening. This strategy helped to ensure that any incoming hire would have the human capital to sustain and advance reform initiatives.

Second, Monroe High School accepted and trained interns annually and used the
internship as an audition, should a position become available. Though Monroe High could not control maternity leaves, medical leaves, retirements or other causes of turnover, the school did seek to control a response to it. Through long-range planning, and development of a culture that embraced internal human and social capital development, Monroe High increased their capacity to hire teachers who would sustain and advance reform efforts. Furthermore, by matching interns to model mentors, and ensuring newly hired teachers had a mentor, Monroe High was able to reinforce the culture of the school, promote stability, and ensure reform efforts were able to progress.

Third, Monroe High sought to align existing human capital to meet the learning needs of students, the professional needs of teachers, and the greater organizational leadership needs of the school by engaging in controlled and planned turnover. Though at times controversial, the site-directed turnover did yield positive outcomes in terms of creating favorable conditions for collaboration, alignment of teachers’ skills to students’ needs, and achievement of school goals.

The implementation of the three strategies served to sustain stability and to ensure that reform efforts remained on track and progressed.
Chapter VIII: Review and Recommendations

Introduction

To investigate whether teacher turnover affects school reform efforts, I conducted three qualitative case studies within two urban public school districts in New England during the 2014–15 scholastic year. This section reviews the findings from each case, provides recommendations for school leaders, and concludes with recommended areas of future study.

Review of the Findings: Adams Career Technical High School

At Adams Career Technical High School, the introduction of teacher job uncertainty in the spring of 2014 motivated a large number of teachers to seek job stability through migration to other school sites. As an uncontrolled number of teachers left Adams Career Technical High School, widespread demand for human and social capital ensued. Ultimately, teacher turnover generated school-wide instability, which led to a significant delay in the design and implementation of department-based reform efforts.

At Adams, the effect of migration was exacerbated by externally controlled hiring limitations. Adams was inhibited from recruiting and retaining teachers and school leaders, for sixty-two open positions, until late-summer 2014. The consequences included incomplete staffing for the start of school year. In some cases, teachers who were hired were subsequently released before December. When those teachers’ positions were terminated, additional instability ensued. The churn of teaching staff affected the development of social capital and the ability of departments to collaborate.
Additionally, turnover resulted in a loss of school-based control over the 2014–15 master schedule. The district’s initial versions included significant scheduling errors, which delayed teaching and learning at the school by approximately one month. The final version of the master schedule did not include department-based common planning time. The loss of common planning time inhibited departments’ ability to collaboratively create student-learning goals and instructional plans. Ultimately, department-based reform work did not begin until the school stabilized and directors coordinated common planning time.

Turnover and ineffective scheduling were disruptive to students. Senior students lost time in their first term to demonstrate strong academic performance for college. Additionally, teacher turnover disrupted pre-existing relationships between students and teachers, leaving students without a familiar support network. The delay in hiring and problems with scheduling also delayed the development of new student-teacher relationships and inhibited the amount of time teachers’ had to develop rapport with students to learn of their unique learning needs and strengths. The absence of formally scheduled common planning time also prevented teachers from meeting to discuss students’ needs. New teachers were particularly disadvantaged by the absence of a department support network.

The instability generated by the turnover at Adams delayed the coupling of new hires to a mentor teacher, in some cases, for several months. In a few cases, new hires were not provided mentors until February. The absence of sufficient support for new hires delayed the development of new teacher human capital and social capital, and
jeopardized the implementation of department-based reform initiatives.

In sum, teacher turnover at Adams Career Technical High School generated significant instability that had implications for the development and advancement of department-based reform work.

**Review of the Findings: Coolidge High School**

At Coolidge High, two phases of findings emerged. Both phases demonstrated that teacher turnover did affect school reform efforts. Phase I “growing pains” presented the struggle to advance humanities reform initiatives intended to improve student performance on state-based measures. The absence of strong social capital in the initial years of the humanities department impeded productive collaboration needed to develop an integrated history-ELA curriculum. Consequently, the humanities platform was not enacted and students did not benefit from the reinforcement of skills across content areas.

Phase I also demonstrated that implications for long-term medical leave or a mid-year retirement at a small school. At Coolidge High, turnover of one ninth grade history teacher interfered with the cohesive advancement of humanities reform initiatives. From a human capital perspective, the substitute hired for humanities did not have the content specialization necessary to contribute to the department’s growth. The absence of strong human capital and unstable social capital created a significant professional void in the humanities program. Furthermore, the three-year loss of a full-time, qualified and committed teacher, adversely affected the learning experiences of three cohorts of students.

Phase II findings revealed how teachers’ sense of uncertainty about the future of
the school and their employment motivated teachers to pursue personal professional survival measures, including protest and job search. Many teachers repurposed school time, allotted for Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), for after school protest planning; or resume development and employment discussions. Teachers’ reallocation of PLC minutes over a several week period led to interrupted and stalled reform work. Additionally, the school experienced uncontrolled turnover as several teachers accepted positions at other school sites for the following year. One exiting teacher, for example, served on the Instructional Leadership Team and was a lead teacher for the math department. His departure resulted in a significant reduction in human capital and an expected change to the social capital of the department and ILT.

Ultimately, the school board chose to keep Coolidge High open for the 2015–16 school year, but the destabilization caused by the district’s recommendation to close had already negatively impacted reform initiatives.

**Review of the Findings: Monroe High School**

Monroe High School was not destabilized nor were reform efforts negatively impacted by teacher turnover. In some cases, internally controlled and thoughtfully enacted teacher turnover was associated with reform advancement. Monroe High enacted three strategies to ensure turnover would not disrupt reform efforts underway. First, Monroe High enacted a candidate quality assessment screening to determine if a candidate would be a good “fit” for the school. These qualities reflected human capital attributes such as previous urban education experience, content and pedagogical knowledge, and knowledge of reforms. Using this framework, Monroe High increased
the probably of hiring a teacher who would be a valuable contributor to the school’s existing human capital and who would be able to sustain reform efforts underway.

Second, Monroe High actively developed interns for future positions. The internship experience was designed to develop the potential hire’s human capital as well as social capital with colleagues. Interns at Monroe High School gained classroom experience, were mentored by a master teacher to improve instructional practice, and learned about current reform initiatives underway at the school. Interns also contributed to the social capital of teacher teams through engagement in grade level and department meetings. The internship also allowed the school to informally “audition” a candidate and witness their growth overtime. Thus if there was turnover at Monroe High, a proven former intern could replenish the exiting teacher’s position with a decreased risk of destabilization.

Third, Monroe High sought to maximize existing human capital by strategically enacting controlled and planned internal turnover. School leaders modified teachers’ assignments to align human capital and social capital with the needs of the school. At the time of the study, for example, the school was planning to make changes to math teachers’ assignments to best align teachers’ skills with students’ needs and to facilitate collaboration within the department. The school also sought to advance teachers’ human capital through internal movement. For example, teachers were intentionally rotated into and out of the 9th grade Academy in order to expand teachers’ scope of curriculum knowledge within their content discipline. The 9th grade Academy also provided teachers daily blocks of time to collaborate, discuss students’ needs and share best practices.
Teachers on Academy were reported to have strong interpersonal relationships or social capital.

Finally, Monroe High School sought to promote people internally. By hiring a House Principal and Lead Teachers from within the existing staff, Monroe High was able to maximize human capital for school improvement progress.

At Monroe High, carefully planned internally controlled turnover was used as a positive tool for school improvement. In effect, by strategically and thoughtfully modifying teachers’ course assignments and promoting from within, Monroe High was able to ensure reform efforts would remain on track and continue to progress.

**Discussion and Recommendations**

Several broad concepts emerged from the case studies which may prompt reflection and provide lessons for urban public school and district leaders enacting reform initiatives while preparing for, or managing, teacher turnover. These themes include: preparation for turnover and internal human capital development; external versus internal school improvement control; the role of social capital in school reform; and the adverse impact of late hiring practices on a school’s ability to recruit and retain the best human capital. It is worth noting that the size of the school district and level of autonomy granted to school leaders may have an effect on the capacity of a district or school to enact these recommendations. The following section explores these themes followed by recommendations for each theme for school and district leaders.

**Theme 1: Preparation for Turnover & Internal Human Capital Development**
Monroe High School’s two-pronged strategic approach to preparing for teacher turnover included the identification of “a fit” through the candidate quality assessment screening and the development of interns for future hire. These two strategies served to protect the school from destabilization and ensured reform efforts continued. Furthermore, the school’s commitment to hiring “a fit” or a successful former intern, served to protect the social capital of departments, which is critical for the advancement of reform initiatives.

In contrast to Monroe High School, neither Adams Career Technical High School nor Coolidge High School had long-range strategies in place to mitigate the effects of teacher turnover on reform efforts. If Adams Career Technical High School had developed teacher interns, or had a strong professional network for employee recommendation, perhaps the school would have been more able to replenish its human capital and foster the development of social capital. If Coolidge High School had strategies in place by the second year, perhaps the school would have been able to recruit a long-term substitute to better meet the needs of the students and support the work of the department.

Monroe High also invested in new hires through Lead Teacher support and district assigned New Teacher Developer mentors. If the new hire was a former intern, there was also a high probability the mentor teacher would be strong source of support. The Lead Teacher and New Teacher Developer program were two existing systems of support for any incoming new hire.
When significant and uncontrolled turnover destabilized Adams Career Technical High School, there were no pre-existing systems in place to support the incoming wave of new hires. Consequently, some new hires waited until February to get help with lesson design and basic classroom management.

**Theme 1: Recommendations**

Given that turnover has the potential to destabilize reform efforts, school and district leaders may benefit from developing an internal teacher development system, as modeled by Monroe High School, to prepare for future openings at the school and ensure reform efforts are protected. School districts, particularly large urban school districts, are encouraged to consider hiring practices that empower school sites’ to “open post” and hire “a fit” for the needs of that specific school as soon as the need is determined. Without this provision, schools are restricted from recruiting and hiring until the stipulated collective bargaining agreement timeframes.

School and district leaders may also consider establishing a framework to support new teachers including mentors, systems trainings, and co-planning sessions. Additional preparation is recommended to facilitate new teachers’ successful engagement with reform initiatives.

**Theme 2: External versus Internal Control of School Improvement**

When District A imposed school-wide change at Adams Career Technical High School and at Coolidge High, the school sites, and teachers therein, lost control over the trajectory of their respective schools. The loss of control led to widespread uncertainty about the stability of the school. Consequently, both schools experienced the unintended
consequences of uncontrolled teacher migration. Correspondingly, the schools experienced the loss of human capital and a disruption to social capital. Reform efforts were de-emphasized as the schools focused on stabilization.

In contrast with Adams Career Technical High School and Coolidge High School, Monroe High School retained local control of school improvement. Monroe High School leaders used carefully planned and thoughtfully enacted internal turnover as a means to capitalize on existing human capital and promote social capital development. While teachers may have experienced bouts of uncertainty about their exact assignment for the subsequent year, there was no reference in interviews to job insecurity or concerns about the future of the school due to internally controlled turnover.

Theme 2: Recommendations

School and district leaders considering school-wide organizational change may find it beneficial to review employees’ existing human and social capital strengths and consider carefully enacting internal movement to align strengths with needs.

If, however, leaders find that organizational change may include school restructuring or closure, leaders are encouraged to invite teachers to be active participants in the change process. Leaders may consider strategizing about how to prevent uncertainty about the future of the school and employees’ careers. Teachers’ sense of vulnerability may jeopardize reform efforts underway and the academic performance of current students.

Theme 3: The Role of Social Capital in School Reform

At Monroe High School, collaboration was an essential aspect of the school’s
culture and closely associated with reform progress. Departmental and grade level collaboration was intentionally incorporated into the master schedule and teachers were expected to work together to advance the work of the school. Interns were folded into collaboration time for human capital development as well as social capital development. If, theoretically, there was teacher turnover, the social capital of a department would remain stable and reform efforts would be able to progress.

The first two years at Coolidge High, the social capital of the humanities department was poor. Teachers were unwilling to collaborate toward the achievement of department and school-wide goals. The absence of social capital in the department was widely associated with the failure of the humanities platform. In years three and four, as the department stabilized, teachers began to collaborate and share best practices. Correspondingly, social capital improved and the humanities department became a cohesive team.

Theme 3: Recommendations

School and district leaders committed to the successful implementation of reform efforts are encouraged to consider social capital development as a fundamental aspect of school improvement work. A department’s capacity to grow and collectively enact reform efforts may be reflected in the strength of their social capital.

Theme 4: The Adverse Impact of Late Hiring Practices

Levin and Quinn (2003) discuss the adverse impact of late hiring practices on urban public schools. Among the negative implications is the lost opportunity of schools to hire from a robust and competitive candidate pool. Often, the most highly qualified
candidates are hired in the spring thus late-hiring equates to a limited or less-qualified collection of candidates.

When Adams Career Technical High School experienced significant uncontrolled turnover and then was restricted from replenishing human capital until late summer, the school was forced to hire from a limited number of candidates. Not only did this inhibit the replenishment of human capital and jeopardize students’ learning, it also led to the selection of candidates that were not a good fit for the school. In science, for example, two teachers hired for the 2014–15 school year were terminated before winter vacation. Their termination yielded additional destabilization. Ultimately, it was too late for school leaders to secure qualified and committed full-time hires, and students in those classes were taught by under-qualified substitutes. Additionally, due to the delayed posting of positions, many positions remained unfilled through the start of the school year. Students eager to learn were not provided a teacher. As leadership sought to stabilize the school and fill open positions, department-based reform work was delayed.

Theme 4: Recommendations

To the greatest extent permitted by budgeting and collective bargaining contract, school and district leaders are encouraged to advocate for early hiring practices so as to secure highly qualified candidates who are a good “fit” for their school and the needs of students. This practice will help to ensure the selected candidate reflects the qualifications and personal qualities required for the continuation of school reform efforts.
To the extent that a district grants a school site or school governing body a variance from the terms of the existing collective bargaining agreement, in the spirit of supporting the needs of that specific school, neither the district nor the school site should lose sight of the intent of the variance. In the instance where the variance language is ambiguous as to when an “open post” can be made public, the best interests of the relevant school should govern the timeline.

**Observations of the Intersection of Human and Social Capital**

This study sought to explore whether teacher turnover affects school reform efforts and if so, how, using qualitative case study methods. An initial review of the literature suggested that if a school was able to recruit and retain teachers who had strong human capital and who would contribute positively to the social capital of the department and school, then reform efforts would be positively affected. This study demonstrated several examples of where the intersection of human capital and social capital affected reform efforts.

At Monroe High, for example, the English teacher hired from the Department of Education was highly valued for her expertise as a practitioner, as well as for her valuable knowledge of best practices, traits that are associated with human capital. She was positively described as adding energy and pushing the thinking of the group, traits that are associated with social capital. Correspondingly, school leaders associated her addition to the team as contributing to the progress of reform initiatives in English Language Arts.
Conversely, the humanities department at Coolidge High struggled to align human and social capital for reform progress. Not only did the humanities department start off with poor social capital as an outcome of the merger, but reform progress was further inhibited by the low human capital and instability of the 10th grade history position.

This study did not reveal examples of how low social capital and high human capital interacted to affect reform efforts. The study also did not reveal how high social capital and low human capital interacted to affect reform efforts. The interaction of human and social capital and its effect on reform efforts remains an area for study.

**Future Areas of Study**

Researchers interested in teacher turnover and the churn of human and social capital may consider the following topics for study.

- Research to determine if there is a quantifiable relationship between teachers’ human and social capital in schools
- Research to determine how the relationship between human and social capital affects reform outcomes
- Research to further explore the role of social capital in departments as foundational to human capital growth
- Research to explore how school-controlled, carefully enacted turnover can maximize existing human capital for school improvement
Chapter IX: Epilogue

Adams Career Technical High School
April 2016

In the fall 2015, the state department of education downgraded Adams Career Technical High School’s designation to turnaround status. Though the school demonstrated improvement on the 2015 English Language Arts assessments, student performance on the 2015 math and science exams showed further decline. The overall Level 4 designation was based on state-based assessments over multiple years, graduation rates and student dropout rates\textsuperscript{34}.

As of early winter 2016, teachers at Adams Career Technical High School were preparing to reapply for their positions later in the spring, and some were projected to lose their jobs.

It appears that Adams Career Technical High School will once again experience teacher turnover. Time will tell if this projected cycle of churn will yield desired results.

\textsuperscript{34} As per my confidentiality agreement, the website has not been provided in order to conceal the state, district and school name.
Appendices

A. About the Researcher
B. School Recruitment Letter
C. IRB Approved Informed Consent Form
D. Coding Graphic Chapter 5: Adams Career Technical High School
E. Coding Graphic Chapter 6: Coolidge High School
F. Coding Graphic Chapter 7: Monroe High School, Strategy #1
G. Coding Graphic Chapter 7: Monroe High School, Strategy #2
H. Coding Graphic Chapter 7: Monroe High School, Strategy #3
Appendix A

About the Researcher

I am a 34 year-old female living in the New England region of the United States. I am of western-European descent, was born in New York State, and speak English as my first language. I have lived and studied in southwest France, western New York, northern California and Massachusetts. My mother is a public school elementary teacher with thirty years of experience. My grandfather, who was a significant part of my childhood, was a university professor for twenty-one years. He served briefly at a private university in Ohio and later joined a college in up-state New York with the State University of New York (SUNY) higher education system. Overlapping with his years in higher education, my grandfather served twenty-one years as a town and county-level politician in up-state New York.

My undergraduate degree is in French language and literature and I was a three-season college athlete. I have professional training in second language acquisition and a Masters degree in the teaching of French as well as state level credentials for the instruction of English as a Second Language (ESL), French and Spanish, grades 5–12. I am currently working as a high school teacher in a large urban public school district, teaching French to 10th, 11th and 12th grade students. As of the fall of 2015, I am in my eleventh year of teaching and earned National Board Certification. At my school site, I have served as co-facilitator to the Instructional Leadership Team. In this role, I contribute to the design and implementation of professional development for my department as well as the school, and in the spring of 2013 was appointed a “lead
teacher”. I have also served as an elected teacher representative to the School Site Council and Personnel sub-committee, as well as the school data facilitator.

In addition to my Masters degree in teaching, I hold a Masters degree in education leadership with state level credentials for principal and assistant-principal, grades 5–8 and 9–12. I hold credential for Director/Supervisor of Foreign Languages, as well. In my doctoral work, I have completed a strand of courses for certification in Program Planning Management, Monitoring, and Evaluation (P-PMME).

I have values that reflect my background in public service. I aim to be aware of those values within my dissertation research and seek to minimize the impact of those values on my findings.

The above statements are inspired by an example provided by Carson, Gilmore, Gronhaug, & Perry (2001) in Sobh & Perry (2006).
Appendix B

School Recruitment: Model Letter

November 20, 2014

Dear Dr./Mr./Mrs. ____________________,

I am a doctoral student at Boston University in the School of Education. In my studies I am exploring whether teacher turnover affects school reform efforts – and if so, how? As a teacher at the O’Bryant and member of our ILT for the last several years, I’ve become particularly interested in how site-based systems, structures and interpersonal dynamics interact with reform efforts. My research seeks to study schools as “cases” and through interviews discuss with leadership and ILT members how staffing choices and assignments have interacted with reform efforts. All the information would be confidential – neither the site names nor our colleagues’ statements would be identifiable. Ultimately, my hope is to uncover “lessons from the field” which will support site leadership and teacher leaders who lead reform efforts in our schools.

I’m hopeful we can meet for a few minutes to discuss working together or chat by phone. I can be reached by cell phone at [REDACTED] and via email at [REDACTED]. Also, my advisors at BU are available to discuss my study, as well. I’m conducting my student in collaboration with Dr. Don Beaudette (djb@bu.edu), Dr. Cathy O’Connor (mco@bu.edu) and Dr. Joe Cronin (jmcranonin@bu.edu).

Best regards,

Elizabeth M. Canfield
ecanfield@bostonpublicschools.org
Appendix C

Copy of IRB Approved Informed Consent Form

Informed Consent Form for Administrators and Teachers

Dear Professional Educator:

I am a doctoral student in the School of Education at Boston University. With the support of my professors Dr. Cathy O’Connor, Dr. Don Beaudette and Dr. Jim Cronin, I am studying whether teacher turnover affects school reform efforts and if so, how? I would like to interview you for about 60 minutes at your school, or off-site at a public location of your choosing (library, Starbucks, etc.), to learn about your experiences. All of your comments will be protected and confidential.

Is participation voluntary? Yes. Participation in this study in entirely voluntary and you may stop at any time.

What will happen in this research study? I will be collecting data for my study between December 2014 and July 2015. During the research study, I will meet with you once, and perhaps a second time, to clarify questions or ask to revisit an idea that emerges in our conversation, in greater detail.

Our conversation will be kept confidential. We can meet at a location that’s most comfortable for you at a time that’s convenient.

Interviews will last about one hour and will be audio recorded. I will transcribe the conversation and then delete the audio recording. Your name will not be bound to the recording and I will not discuss the details of our specific discussion with others in a way that could reveal your identity.

Are my statements confidential? Yes. I will not tie your comments to your name in my research, nor will I speak with others about our plans to meet, or reference our discussion in any way with your colleagues. You and your school site will be coded (given pseudonyms) in the study. A master-code for my own reference as the researcher will be kept in a separate password protected file on a separate hard-drive in my home.

Will participation affect my employment status? No. Your decision to participate or not participate in this study will have no impact on your employment status. Actually, it’s quite likely that the kind of information I seek to collect is information discussed in faculty meetings, among colleagues, and the hallways. Additionally, the name of the school district, the school site, the name of specific reform initiatives and your identity will be kept confidential. The final report will use pseudonyms and all indicators that could trace your involvement will be concealed.
If I join this study will it help me? This study will not help you, but we may learn something in this study that will help public urban high school teachers and leaders implement school reform initiatives better.

Will I be paid to do this study? No.

Taking part in this research study: You do not have to take part in this research study. You can say ‘Yes’ now, and change your mind later. Once we begin the interview process, if you change your mind and would like to exit the study, all you have to do is tell me you would like to stop and that will end your involvement. If you request, your contributions will be removed from the study.

What if I have questions? If you have questions, please feel free contact me at [redacted] or send me an email at [redacted]. Also, my professors can be contacted to resolve any questions or concerns you may have. Their contact information at Boston University is as follows: Dr. Don Beaudette: djb@bu.edu, Dr. Cathy O’Connor: mco@bu.edu and Dr. Joe Cronin: jmcronin@bu.edu. Also, you may obtain further information about your rights as a research subject by calling the BU CRC IRB Office at 617-358-6115.

Thank you for your consideration, and best wishes to you as you and your students during the 2014–15 school year.

Very truly,

Elizabeth Canfield Zajac
Doctoral student, Boston University School of Education

I have read the description of the study above, and my questions have been answered. I understand that my participation is voluntary, and that I may change my mind at any time if I decide I no longer want to participate in the study. I understand that everything I say will be kept confidential as described above, and that my name (and the name of my school, etc.) will not be used in the study.
Appendix D
Adams Career Technical High School
Coding Graphic

Human Capital
- Exodus of Human Capital
- Late Hiring Actions
- Inability to fill positions with most qualified staff
- Not all staff a good fit
- Destabilized school
- Delayed design and implementation of reforms

Scheduling
- Loss of Instructional Minutes
- Reduced instructional time
- Teachers unable to meet
- Delayed design and implementation of reforms

Teacher Support
- Loss of Common Planning Time
- Delayed access to operational support
- Delayed pedagogical/instructional support

Relationships between Students and Teachers
- Assignment of Mentors
- Teachers’ knowledge of students & students’ needs
- Students “connection” to staff weakened

Key Categories
“Nodes”
Appendix E

Coolidge High School
Coding Graphic

PHASE I

“Growing Pains”

Forced Turnover

Ideological Conflicts

Absence of One

Instable dept member

Student cohort Impact

• Ineffective use of PLC time
• Poor dept. social capital
• Delayed reform work

• Churn of human capital; unspecialized substitute
• Multi-cohort learning implications
• Contributes to social capital instability in dept.

PHASE II

Professional Survival

Protest

Job Search

Key

Categories

“Nodes”

• Redirection of PLC minutes
• Stall of reform efforts underway
• Loss of boot camp test prep
• Turnover of teachers – uncertainty sparked migration to other schools
Appendix F

Monroe High School
Coding Graphic

Strategy #1: Identify “A Fit”, Enact Candidate Quality Assessment Screening

“Qualities of a Fit”

- Teacher is familiar with urban education
- Previous classroom experience
- Knowledgeable of current reform movement and improvement efforts within the school
- Recommended from within professional network

• Less time to get new hires “up to speed”
• Addition of new energy
• Increased probability of success at school

Key

Concept

Categories
Strategy #2: Develop Interns and Student Teachers for Future Openings

Key

Concept

Categories

- “Hit the Ground Running”
- Sustain Reform Work Underway
- Collaboration Skills
- Knowledge of “Best Practices”
- Stability for Students
Appendix H

Monroe High School
Coding Graphic

Strategy #3: Carefully Planned Internal Movement

“Internal Movement”

“Taking Turns”
Aligning Teachers’ Skills to School Needs
From Teacher to Teacher-Leader
From Teacher to House Principal

• Utilize existing human capital to advance reform initiatives underway

Key
Concept
Categories
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CURRICULUM VITAE
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GRADUATE, UNDERGRADUATE, AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

2009-2016  Boston University  Boston, MA
Doctor of Education  May 2016
• Dissertation: Teacher Turnover and School Reform: How Teacher Turnover Affects Urban Secondary School Improvement
• Certificate of Program Planning, Management, Monitoring and Evaluation (P-PMME)

2008-2009  University of California at Berkeley  Berkeley, CA
Master of Arts in Education  Dec. 2009
• Thesis: Improving Middle School Students’ Reading Comprehension, Question-Answer-Relationships
• Tier I Administrative Credential; Qualified for K-12 school site leadership

2004-2005  Stanford University  Stanford, CA
Master of Arts in Education  June 2005
• Thesis: Performance Assessment for California Teachers (PACT)
• Single Subject Credential in French; English Language Authorization

2002-2004  University of Rochester  Rochester, NY
Bachelor of Arts in French; Highest Distinction in French  May 2004
• Honors Thesis: The Banana Wars in Europe
• Academic All-America Team, selected by Co-SIDA
• Women’s Scholar Athlete

International Education of Students, Fall 2003  Nantes, France
• French language immersion program and extensive cultural study
• Interned at French day school teaching English to French students, grades 6 and 7

Instituto Cultural de Oaxaca, Summer 2003  Oaxaca, Mexico
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2000-2002  Gettysburg College  Gettysburg, PA
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Instituto Cultural de Oaxaca, Summer 2003  Oaxaca, Mexico
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LEADERSHIP AND TEACHING QUALIFICATIONS

- Massachusetts Initial Credential Supervisor/Director Foreign Languages
- Massachusetts Initial Credential for Administrator, Principal/Assistant Principal, grades 5-8, 9-12
- Massachusetts Professional Credential for the Teaching of French, grades 5-12
- National Board Certified Teacher, 2014
- Massachusetts Initial Credential for the Teaching of Spanish and English as a Second Language (ESL), grades 5-12
- Massachusetts SEI Endorsement, 2013

LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCE

2016-present **Needham Public Schools** Needham, MA
  • District K-12 Director of World Language

2009-2016 **The O’Bryant School of Math and Science** Boston, MA
  • Member of Instructional Leadership Team (ILT), World Language Department Representative
  • Lead Teacher (LT)
  • New Teacher Developer (NTD)
  • NEASC, Visiting Evaluation Team member
  • NEASC Steering Committee Member
  • Member of School Site Council (SSC), Hiring Committee
  • School Data Facilitator

Summer 2009 **Berkeley High School** Berkeley, CA
  • Summer School Vice-Principal, Intern

2007-2009 **Lincoln Middle School**, A National Blue Ribbon School Alameda, CA
  • Literacy Coordinator
  • School Emergency Response Team Member
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TEACHING EXPERIENCE (11 YEARS)

2009-2016 **The O’Bryant School of Math and Science** Boston, MA
  • French Teacher, Levels I, II, III + AP
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Summer 2011 **East Boston High, ELL Summer Enrichment Academy** Boston, MA
  • English as a Second Language, Teacher

2007-2009 **Lincoln Middle School** Alameda, CA
  • French and Spanish Teacher, grades 6, 7 and 8
Summer 2007  **Buchser Middle School**  Santa Clara, CA

- Spanish Teacher, grades 6, 7 and 8
- Mentored Stanford Graduate School of Education teacher candidates


- French and Spanish Teacher, grades 6, 7 and 8
- Junior High and High School Cross Country and Track & Field Coach