**Strategies for School Turnaround:**
**Synergies and Complications of a State Government and Nongovernmental Collaboration to**
**Support Large-scale Improvement of Priority schools**

by

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## Dedication

To my parents, for your unending belief in and support of me.

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**Abstract**

The improvement of federal designated 'priority schools' remains a pressing problem in the U.S. Federal policies have increasingly positioned states to engage in this work of school improvement, and states have adopted diverse approaches to support rapid improvement of student achievement in chronically underperforming schools, a process referred to in this study as 'school turnaround.' However, little research or experience guide these efforts.

In this study, I investigate one such approach in one state: a hybrid model where a statewide school district and nongovernmental organizations (NGO) partner to support large-scale, state-led school turnaround. Through an embedded case study, I examine how these two types of educational organizations distribute the educational work of school turnaround, which is framed as five domains of activity: building educational infrastructure, supporting its use, managing performance, managing the environments, and distributing instructional leadership. I specifically investigate the contributions to the educational work of school turnaround both organizations make, and also the types of complications and synergies that emerge in practice in this hybrid model. I find that in this hybrid model, the state agency largely delegates the five domains of educational work to the NGO. Further, I find that in practice a complex story unfolds, one which highlights the synergies and complications that surface in this hybrid model and also an imperative for organizational learning in this work. A primary objective of this study is to forward a provisional framework to support comparative analysis of state-led hybrid models for school turnaround. A secondary objective is to provide a detailed account of one such model to contribute to the knowledge base on approaches for school turnaround.

**Chapter 1 Introduction**

The U.S. faces the pressing problem of addressing federally designated "priority schools" that educate 2.5 million students (NCES, 2014). Diverse strategies have been employed over the years to improve these underperforming schools, yet experience and results suggest that large-scale improvement of underperforming schools is difficult and uncertain work. This is study is an analysis of one state-led effort to improve these schools, but the street-level work of turning around underperforming schools is bound up with and in the politics and policies of school turnaround at the federal and state level.

**Federal Context**

Understanding the work of turning around a single underperforming school requires the benefits of understanding the politics and policies of school turnaround at the federal and state level. Federal policies over the last 20 years have increasingly emphasized states acting on schools that do not demonstrate growth on state standardized assessments for multiple years, referred to here as priority schools (a federal term used to describe the lowest five percent of Title I schools in the state based on achievement in statewide assessments). No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, for instance, made improvement of priority schools a focal point and emphasized the state's role in that work (Minnici & Hill, 2007). This included the establishment of the School Improvement Grant (SIG) program to provide funding to help schools (and supporting agencies) show adequate yearly progress (AYP) on student proficiency. Between

2007 and 2015, the U.S. Department of Education allocated nearly $8 billion on SIG schools (Emma, 2015).

More recently, the Obama administration's 2009 Race to the Top initiative further prioritized and incentivized state-level action to improve priority schools. Race to the Top (RTTT) had dual objectives of infusing funds to states with depleted assets in the wake of the economic recession and of spurring state-level policy efforts to adopt ambitious education reforms. The goal of these reforms, according to the then U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, was to change the "status quo in our schools" and "reduce dropout rates and elevate the quality of K-12 schooling …" (Duncan, 2009a).

RTTT emerged in July 2009 because of what Secretary of Education Duncan called a "perfect storm for reform" in the U.S. (Duncan, 2009a). This "perfect storm" entailed both broad-based support for reform, including support from President Obama, congressional leaders, union leaders, and governors, and a rare economic opportunity. Indeed, the U.S. Department of Education had $4.35 billion allocated from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA) to drive reform through this unique federal, grant competition. Together, these two conditions created an opportunity that was, in Secretary Duncan's words, "the equivalent of education reform's moon shot" (Duncan, 2009a).

This marked the first major federal education policy advanced after No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001, and it had four key dimensions. First, participation was not mandated but rather states were invited to submit applications (and 45 states and the District of Columbia voluntarily applied). Second, funding was not guaranteed. This was a three-round competition among states, and fewer than half of the states who applied won and received funds. Third, the initiative sought to incentivize collaboration across stake-holder groups (e.g., government

educational agencies, unions, foundations) and also inter-governmental organizations (state

educational agencies and local educational agencies [e.g., school districts]). The RTTT

application requested evidence of support from local districts and stakeholders and plans for how

those entities would support the reform efforts.

Fourth, states would create a proposal for ambitious education policy reform around four

interconnected, highly-specified reform areas. See Figure 1.1 for a description of these areas.

**Figure 1.1 Race to the Top Assurance Areas**

| *Assurance Area 1:* | *Assurance Area 2:* | *Assurance Area 3:* | *Assurance Area 4:* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Adopting high-quality standards and assessments that prepare students to succeed in college and the workplace | Building data systems that measure student growth and success and support instructional improvement | Recruiting, developing, and retaining effective teachers | Turning around low performing schools |

*Source: U.S. Department of Education, 2009*

The fourth priority area focused on the improvement of persistently underperforming schools

("priority schools" that are eligible for Title I that are in the bottom-five percent of the

consistently lowest performing schools in the state based on performance on annual assessments)

(U.S. Department of Education, 2009, p. 10). RTTT's application broadly defined the goals and

basic features of the reform. Two core ideas emerged in this fourth assurance area.

First, the stipulations in the RTTT application created expectations for bold, structural

reforms. Indeed, in Secretary Duncan's (2009a) speech introducing the RTTT initiative, he said:

> To turn around the lowest-performing schools, states and districts must be ready to
> institute far-reaching reforms, replace school staff, and change the school culture. We
> cannot continue to tinker in terrible schools where students fall further and further
> behind, year after year.

Second, it also promoted the idea that states needed to more deeply engage in 'school

turnaround,' a term that is used in this dissertation to describe a comprehensive intervention for

chronically underperforming schools that aims to significantly improve achievement gains and

prepare the school for sustained improvement to become a high-functioning organization in a short period of time (3-5 years) (Kutash, Nico, Gorin, Rhamatullah, & Tallant, 2010). The rapid improvement of priority schools was not a new policy imperative, as this worked was enmeshed in the accountability expectations set under the federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 and the School Improvement Grant Program. However, Race to the Top elevated the matter on state education policy agendas and the state's role in it, and it defined the goals and parameters of the states' policy proposals.

Just six months after announcing the Race to the Top competition, applications for the first round were due on January 19, 2010, creating a small window to rapidly draft policy proposals, secure broad-based support for the reforms, and in some cases, pass state legislation to enact the proposed reforms. Ultimately, in this first round, 41 states applied, sixteen finalists were selected, and two winners were announced- Delaware and Tennessee, receiving $100 million and $500 million respectively.

**State Context**

Amidst this federal policy backdrop, states interpreted the various policy directives and incentives and more deeply engaged in school turnaround work. State Education Agencies (SEAs), typically unaccustomed to such work, have embarked on this in various ways. New types of educational organizations, such as charter management organizations and state-level districts, have emerged to lead or partner in this work.

**The case of Tennessee.** For instance, Tennessee participated in the Race to the Top initiative and through it created a muscular and uncommon approach for state-led school turnaround. Tennessee applied to RTTT for three interrelated reasons: It presented a political and economic opportunity that arose at an opportune time for the state to create a competitive

application, secure additional funds to support educational improvement, and extend their current educational reform efforts.

First, there was a contemporary education reform wave underway in Tennessee at the dawn of RTTT that demonstrated the state's commitment to reform and created conditions "ripe" for continued reforms through the RTTT application, according to the RTTT application (US Department of Education, 2010, p. 11). Starting in 2007, the state unrolled a series of education reforms (e.g., raising state standards, teacher compensation, state-wide expansion of pre-K, and modernization of the state's funding program). These reforms aligned with the RTTT assurance areas, making Tennessee a strong candidate for RTTT (Gates Foundation, 2009). RTTT would enable the state to extend its reform efforts.

Second, there was sustained attention by diverse stakeholders to improve education in Tennessee. There was a perception held by some policymakers that the state was underperforming academically and improvement was needed (Finch, 2012). For instance, Tennessee consistently ranked below the majority of other states in both reading and math on the National Assessment of Education Progress (2011), and, in 2007, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce rated the Tennessee an "F" for its post-secondary readiness, achievement of low-income and minority students, and credibility in test scores.[1] The sources of the educational problems were subject to interpretation, as Glazer and Egan (2018) contend. For instance, while some attributed the problems of their underperforming schools to social and economic isolation (Glazer & Egan, 2018), others, for example, posited that root causes stemmed from human capital challenges in schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2010, p. 10), lack of rigor of the state's standards (Finch, 2012), and more. Third, in addition to the other two conditions, the

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[1] This was published in their *Leaders and Laggards: A state-by-state Report Card on Educational Effectiveness*

prospects of additional funding during an economic downtown also made pursuing Race to the Top appealing (Finch, 2012).

***Creating a state-led strategy for school turnaround.*** While Tennessee embarked on the RTTT application with notable progress in some of the RTTT's four assurance areas, the state would have to make increased efforts to address the fourth area of improving its priority schools. In this sense, Race to the Top defined the problem and created an opportunity for the state to solve that very problem: devise a state-led strategy to support the improvement of persistently underperforming schools that followed the specifications in the RTTT application guidelines, including using one of four "school turnaround approaches" and granting the state the power to intervene in the "persistently lowest achieving schools" (US Department of Education, 2010, p. 119-120).  Indeed, a solution to improving priority schools would need to include reforms to governance and structural arrangements of how priority schools were overseen and operated (i.e., which agency had authority over the school and which organization operated the school) and human capital (e.g., teachers and leaders operating the schools). RTTT did not, for example, require states to craft solutions for school turnaround that centered on other matters also salient to school improvement, such as health and human services.

One of Tennessee's solutions to improving its priority schools in its RTTT proposal was a governance reform that would create a special state-level school district with authority to take over the lowest performing schools in the state, removing them from their host district and placing them under the oversight of this state-run district (the Achievement School District). The schools within the Achievement School District would operate as public neighborhood schools, serving the same neighborhoods and students zoned to catchment area, using the same school facilities, and receiving the same level of public funding based on student enrollment.

However, the state, specifically the state's Commissioner of Education, would have authority over the schools. The schools, in a few cases, would be directly run by the Achievement School District (ASD), and more typically, would be run by nongovernmental charter school operators. In the latter arrangement, the state and the ASD would bring in an array of local and national nongovernmental school operators, referred to here as lead turnaround partners, to run the vast majority of its schools.[2] School operators varied from, for example, a large, nationally based charter management organization called Empowerment Prep (a pseudonym) that arrived in Tennessee with over a decade of experience and success running a network of schools to a local start-up organization with deep experience working in the local school district but not in the charter school sector. These school operators would have autonomy over academic programming, staffing decisions, daily schedule, and all other operational matters of the school(s), in exchange for high levels of accountability from the state and the ASD.

In this strategy, the same students, in the same school facilities serving the same neighborhoods, receiving the same public funding, and measured by the same state standards and assessments would be enrolled in a school overseen by a new state school district, newly operated by a nongovernmental organization, and run by new staff. The school operator would have ambitious accountability expectations to rapidly transform these schools from the very lowest performing schools in the state to top quartile schools in just five years.

Implied in this was a tacit assumption about how Race to the Top and Tennessee defined the solutions for school turnaround: a change in governance and structural re-organization of schools under new school operators (e.g., CMOs) could lead to school improvement in three to five years.  This offered a solution that could be applied nation and state-wide, in principle.

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[2] There are various names used to describe external providers used in school improvement and turnaround initiatives. Here I use the name *lead turnaround partners* (Corbett, 2011; Peurach & Neumerski, 2015).

Together, these nongovernmental school operators and the Achievement School District would be doing something that few states had done before: state-led, large-scale school turnaround. They would be doing this in a novel and uncertain hybrid organizational arrangement with two new organizational forms: a state school district and nongovernmental lead turnaround partners. This new strategy for school turnaround reflected explicit guidelines set forth in the national policy context to create a new governance arrangement for schools.

One question that falls out of this is: In what ways was the actual work of school turnaround in Tennessee's Achievement School District and on the street-level with the NGO school operators aligned with the policies that occasioned it in practice? This, along with understanding how these organizations organize the educational work of school turnaround and the synergies and complications that surfaced in that work, are focal areas for this study.

One the one hand, this hybrid organizational arrangement for large-scale school turnaround that tightly coordinates with federal policy expectations could support the educational work of school turnaround. In theory, the design of this state-led reform could support the educational work of school turnaround. Both the government organization (the ASD) and the NGO turnaround partners (charter school operators) were intended to work in complementary ways to support the work of school turnaround: a state agency with the responsibility to improve schools brings in a collection of lead turnaround partners with technical capabilities to do so.

Indeed, recent research has demonstrated that there are some high performing lead turnaround partners, such as some charter management organizations, that have positive impacts on student achievement and that create effective networks of schools for students (Tuttle et al., 2013). Recent research on charter management organizations (CMOs) suggests that part of the success of such high performing CMOs may rest in their ability to develop designs to organize

key domains of educational work that past research indicate are essential for effective schools, including instruction, professional learning, leadership, school culture, and stakeholder engagement (Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Easton, & Luppescu, 2010). This governance reform built around the expectations set forth in the federal policy of the RTTT initiative could potentially support the educational work likely needed for school turnaround.

On the other hand, this could likely be a more nuanced and multifaceted story of two different educational organizations working together to support the complex educational work of large-scale school turnaround within a broader policy context that complicates the street-level school turnaround work. First, there is a lack of consensus among researchers, policy makers, and practitioners on how states should organize to improve persistently underperforming schools. This particular organizational arrangement of a hybrid state turnaround district/NGO collaboration is unique and relatively little is known about how such organizations would work individually and collectively to organize the educational work of improving schools. Indeed, state turnaround districts are a new type of educational organization with little research or practical experience undergirding it and working within a State Educational Agency (SEA) context that historically has been disengaged from direct educational contributions to school improvement. NGO turnaround partners and their networks are also relatively new types of education organizations with relatively little experience in school turnaround work (Corbett, 2015; Doyle & Field, 2013).

Second, these two types of educational organizations would be working in the same space to support school turnaround in novel, complex, uncertain, and interdependent school, city, state, and national contexts. While limited research has examined how these two types of educational organizations will work together, research and experience have long established that context has

proven to be a formidable force in implementing educational programs (Coburn, Honig, & Stein, 2009; Penuel & Means, 2004). Implemting programs in new contexts oftens requires learning and adapting to coordinate the organizational approach and intervention with the salient external context. The role of local context adds additional wrinkles to the prospects of a hybrid organizational arrangement supporting large-scale school turnaround.

Finally, these two types of organizations would likely have to work in interdependent ways to support school turnaround and learn how to do this in a novel, complex context within a macro policy context that placed high expectations on rapidly improving these priority schools. This policy imperative for rapid improvement adds more wrinkles to how this hybrid strategy for large-scale school turnaround would work within this uncertain, novel context and doing complex, interdependent work. Taken together, uncertainty exists on how these two types of organizations would work together to support large-scale improvement of priority schools.

## Research Questions and Study Overview

The preceding suggests a need for theory-building research that advances conceptual and analytic frameworks that support thinking and reasoning about state and NGO collaboration in supporting the educational work of school turnaround. This leads to a set of three research questions about this particular organizational arrangement for state-led school turnaround:

- What are essential dimensions of the educational contributions of state turnaround districts to support large-scale school turnaround?
- What are essential dimensions of the educational contributions of the NGO turnaround partners to support large-scale school turnaround?
- What categories of synergies and complications arise in the educational work of school turnaround for lead turnaround partners in this organizational arrangement?

I examine these questions within the context of a larger study of the Achievement School District (ASD) led by Dr. Joshua L. Glazer from George Washington University.[3] The aims of this larger study included understanding the official ASD strategy, the influence of other actors and organizations in the surrounding environments, and how ASD nongovernmental school operators (i.e., school operators running schools in the ASD) interpreted the strategy and operated in this context. Data collection included observations of key events, organizational documents, and 181 interviews with 93 different participants across the ASD, charter school operators, elected officials, state officials, community leaders, and the local school district. Analyses from this study include, for example, the school operators' interpretations of and experiences working in this ASD environment, school operators' organizational learning, and building civic capacity in the ASD.[4]

Within this broader context of this larger study, in this dissertation, I conduct an embedded case study of a state's efforts to coordinate school turnaround through a hybrid, state/NGO collaboration to support school turnaround in its lowest performing schools. This particular study adds value to the larger study of the ASD because it examines both the state government organization (the ASD) and an NGO school operator to understand the relationship, synergies, and challenges in this arrangement to support the educational work involved in school turnaround. It also contributes to the extant literature by examining the dynamics between these two educational organizations and the distribution of the educational domains of work in a hybrid model for state-led school turnaround. Data sources for this dissertation study include

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[3] Data from this study, in large part, comes from a study conducted at George Washington University under Dr. Joshua L. Glazer. This study was funded by the Walton Family Foundation and Spencer Foundation. See Chapter 3 for more information on the data used for this study.

[4] For examples of analyses on the NGOs interpretations and experiences in the ASD, see Glazer, Massell, & Malone, 2015, 2018 and Glazer, Groth, & Beuche, 2019. For examples of building civic capacity, see Glazer & Egan, 2018. For an example of NGOs' organizational learning, see Groth, Malone, & Glazer, 2016.

semi-structured interviews from the lead turnaround partner leaders, observations of the organization's training events and evaluation meetings, document analysis of items pertaining to the lead turnaround provider and from the state agency, and analysis of secondary sources (media coverage and extant research) from 2014-2017.

The objective of this study is to develop a provisional analytic framework that can be used as a foundation for further, comparative case studies aimed at examining similarities and differences among states pursuing a strategy to coordinate school turnaround through a hybrid approach between a government agency and an NGO (e.g., lead turnaround partner).

I begin this analysis by examining the educational contributions of the state turnaround district (Tennessee's ASD) in this organizational arrangement during the course of this dissertation study (2014-2017). Through archival documents and primary and secondary sources, I examine the foundations of the policy, its policy design, and implied theory of action to highlight the extent to which it and how directly contributed to the educational work. Then, I examine an NGO lead turnaround partner's (LTP) educational contributions by analyzing documents, interviews with the LTP's leaders, and observational field notes to understand the LTP's educational contributions to school turnaround. In both of these embedded cases, I analyze their educational work by considering their activity in five educational domains of work: (1) building educational infrastructure, (2) supporting use of the infrastructure, (3) managing performance, (4) managing the environments, and (5) distributing instructional leadership.

Finally, drawing on the same data, I identify key synergies and complications in the educational work of school turnaround that emerged in this organizational arrangement within this environment between 2014-2017. I specifically focus on the complications and interactions that the NGO lead turnaround partner encountered working within this hybrid state/NGO

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organizational arrangement and how the broader environment and its own approach interacted

with those to create critical complications, which the LTP had to manage.

The analyses suggest that in this hybrid state/NGO model for school turnaround in this

state, the two organizations- the state ASD and the NGO school operator- were loosely coupled

but interdependent. These were fundamentally different organizations with different theories of

change and designs for the educational domains of work of school turnaround. Indeed, the

statewide Achievement School District's theory of change centered on the market-based pillars

of autonomy and accountability, resulting in a decentralized system that delegated educational

operations and operational decision-making to the school level and the NGOs operating the

schools. The ASD did provide limited, very specific contributions to the educational domains of

work through performance management and managing the environment. The statewide

turnaround district also created conditions that defined the work of turnaround, including setting

accountability expectations, enrollment restrictions, and authorization regulations.

The nongovernmental organization operating schools, on the other hand, managed the

full scope of the five educational domains of work. This NGO had a comprehensive approach to

support instructional improvement that included five key domains of activity, including building

infrastructure, supporting its use in schools, managing performance, managing the environments,

and distributing instructional leadership. This instructional and school improvement work was

the foundation of this NGO's theory of change, which centered on improving teaching and

learning through a comprehensive school model, effective leadership and teaching, engagement

of families and communities in this process, and a central hub office that supported all of this.

However, in practice, these two organizations, with their particular theories of change

and designs, rubbed up against each other and the broader environment in ways that, in some

instances, created direct and indirect complications for the nongovernmental organization to do the educational work involved in improving their schools, and in other instances, created productive opportunities for the NGO to do this work. The complications that surfaced highlighted how the NGO's design and approach were not fully coordinated with this new environment and hybrid organizational arrangement with ASD and its salient operating conditions. In some instances, these complications triggered adaptations to create tighter coordination between the NGO's work and the surrounding context. These processes shed light on the type of learning that the NGO lead turnaround operator did in this novel, uncertain, and complex context.

Findings from this study contribute to the existing research on large-scale school improvement, state-led school turnaround, lead turnaround partners, and charter schools in two key ways. First, this theory building study uses a provisional analytic framework that can be used as a foundation for future comparative case studies of hybrid state-led strategies for school turnaround. To examine the educational contributions of the organizations involved in this model of turnaround, the framework uses a set of domains of activity that capture the educational work of an instructional focused systems identified by Peurach, Cohen, Yurkofsky, & Spillane (2019).

Second, it provides an in-depth portrayal of one NGO lead turnaround partner's approach for organizing for school improvement through an analysis of five educational domains of work. Much like other case studies on school networks, it provides an in depth look at a particular phenomenon and can extend the knowledge base through such a descriptive analysis of the organization's approach.[5] It will join and contribute to a population of studies on school improvement that collectively can deepen the understanding about educational domains of

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[5] For example, see Peurach's (2011) study of Success for All and Rosenberg (2012) study of Achievement First charter schools.

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activity in school improvement, generally, and school turnaround, specifically. Further it can provide insight into a range of domains that a LTP's approach to school improvement would likely address, highlighting the complexity and uncertainty of operating schools in a hybrid state/NGO turnaround model.

In the chapters that follow, I build this argument gradually. First, in the next chapter (Chapter 2), I examine research literature on state-led turnaround efforts and the emergence of a hybrid model where a statewide school turnaround district and an NGO collaborate to support large-scale turnaround, and I then examine the extant literature on NGO lead turnaround partners. I then present the analytic framework for this study by detailing the five domains of activity that collectively capture the educational work of school turnaround, and any instructional improvement effort, more broadly. These five domains of activity that would likely be distributed across this hybrid school turnaround model and its organizations include: (1) building educational infrastructure, (2) supporting its use in schools, (3) managing performance, (4) managing the environments, and (5) distributing instructional leadership (Peurach et al., 2019). Finally, I state the research questions that motivate this study, consider the prospects of a hybrid state /NGO strategy for school turnaround for doing this educational work, and offer conjectures.

In Chapter 3, I explain the study design and methods. First, I describe the larger study led by Dr. Joshua L. Glazer at George Washington University from which this dissertation study emerges and, specifically, the majority of the data for this study comes. I revisit the research questions, and introduce and describe the case and embedded cases of this study. I also provide descriptions of the data collection, data sources, and data analysis.

Chapters 4, 5 and 6 describe the findings from this analysis. In Chapter 4, I examine the state government organization's educational contributions to support large-scale school

turnaround in this particular hybrid state/NGO model to support school turnaround, and I highlight the potential implications for NGO lead turnaround partners drawn into this work. I find that this statewide school turnaround district facilitated (rather than directly led) the educational work of turnaround by delegating the majority of the educational domains to the LTPs; in turn, the LTPs would assume operational control of schools and responsibility for school improvement strategy design and implementation. The statewide district created conditions to facilitate this turnaround work, which included some work in some educational domains: managing performance by setting accountability expectations and managing the environments. The state district largely managed non-educational work. In this sense, this created a decentralized system where LTPs had high levels of autonomy and accountability to operate schools but largely did so as their own system under the umbrella of the broader state turnaround district. Through this analysis, I consider the implications of the state's educational contributions for the work of the LTPs, and I also consider the strengths and weaknesses in state turnaround district's approach to educational contributions.

Then, in Chapter 5, I begin with the understanding that in this hybrid state/NGO model to support school turnaround, the educational work of improving teaching and learning in schools was largely delegated to schools and NGO lead turnaround partners. I then examine the educational contributions of one LTP in this hybrid arrangement. This analysis reveals that the LTP had developed a comprehensive and coherent approach to school turnaround that largely attended to the five educational domains of activity. Indeed, this LTP arrived in Tennessee with an instructionally focused approach to school turnaround that included: a driving mission, educational infrastructure, and instructional leadership distributed across schools and the central

hub office that provided broad guidance for using the infrastructure, leadership, and strategies to manage performance and the environment.

Still, the LTP's design for the educational domains of work of school turnaround was not without uncertainties in this new context. It was responsive to this new hybrid state/NGO organizational arrangement for turnaround in some ways, but in others, there were uncertainties and complications in its use in this hybrid arrangement and the environment in which it was situated. This LTP embarked on this work in a complex, novel, and interdependent context that was unique from their previous context. It stands to reason that the LTP would be adapting and learning, as they operated in such a novel, complex place.

In Chapter 6, I consider the complications and synergies that surfaced in the educational work of turning around schools in this state-led hybrid state/NGO model. Since the NGO lead turnaround partner assumed primary responsibility for educational contributions in the model, this chapter examines the complications and synergies from the perspective of the LTP. I find that in some instances the two organization's strategies and designs for the educational domains of activity create synergies in their work. For example, the state turnaround school district provided high levels of autonomy to the LTP for educational matters, and this enabled the LTP to implement its established design and follow its approach for school improvement with few constraints. However, there were other ways where the two organizations and broader environment interacted in less complementary ways that created direct and indirect complications for the LTP's educational work. LTP leaders, then, had the additional complication of having to manage the complications and incoherence that surfaced between the LTP's approach, the ASD, and the broader environment, all while trying to rapidly improve

schools and build a new, sustainable regional network. Analysis suggests EP:TN was striving to adapt to create tighter coordination with the new context.

In Chapter 7, I discuss these findings in light of the literature and consider the implications of the bounds of this study on those findings. Given that analysis, I then revisit the analytic framework to consider how it aided this analysis, and I revisit the provisional conjectures presented in Chapter 2. Finally, I offer considerations for practice and suggest avenues for future directions for research.

In Chapter 8, I conclude the dissertation study by considering key contributions of this study, and also considering the ways in which the work of school turnaround collided with the broader policies of school turnaround that occasioned the work. I provide priority areas that might be considered when designing future policies to created tither alignment between the realities of the work of school turnaround and the policies that occasion it.

## Chapter 2 Literature Review and Analytic Framework

A review of relevant research literature suggests the growing policy focus on improving the approximately 5,000 chronically underperforming schools in the U.S. has led to an increased role of state educational agencies (SEAs) in school turnaround work. This has spurred state-led school turnaround efforts and organizational variety in this work.

One emergent strategy for state led turnaround couples a state agency and nongovernmental organizations together to support large-scale school turnaround, referred to here as a hybrid state/NGO model. For example, such a strategy may take the form of a state-run school district that partners with nongovernmental organizations to operate the schools under the state's oversight. Research suggests that, like any strategy for large-scale school and instructional improvement, this hybrid state/NGO model would have to manage and organize a set of essential dimensions of educational work to improve teaching and learning in underperforming schools. This educational work likely includes five key domains of activity that show up strongly in the literature for instructional and school improvement efforts: managing the environments, building educational infrastructure, supporting the use of that infrastructure, managing performance, and distributing instructional leadership (Peurach, et al., 2019, p. 17).

However, research literature suggests uncertainty about how the organizations embedded in this hybrid model manage these domains of educational work and the types of complications and affordances that might exist for this work in this type of arrangement. On the one hand, states that have typically lacked the capacity to engage in the domains of educational work of

school improvement (Haynes, 2009) could collaborate with NGO lead turnaround partners who theoretically possess those very capabilities, creating a complementary pairing to support school turnaround (MassInsight, 2010; Corbett, 2011). Still, on the other hand, both organizational forms have relatively little experience in school turnaround and less in operating collaboratively in a hybrid organizational arrangement within a complex environment. For instance, while some lead turnaround partners (LTPs), such as charter management organizations, have demonstrated success at managing those five educational domains of activity, it is likely that working within this state-led strategy and complex local and school environments could push and pull on their work in expected and unexpected ways. Absent more research on this hybrid model, it is hard to know how these organizations organize for the educational work of school turnaround and what opportunities and tensions arise in this arrangement.

I build this argument and grounds for this study by first examining the rise of state-led school turnaround strategies and the increased variety in this work. I then examine the rise of LTPs and role in these strategies. I then provide an overview for what it might take for a state-led school turnaround strategy to improve chronically low performing schools, highlighting the aforementioned key domains of educational activity, which organizations would likely need to manage to support large-scale school turnaround. Finally, with this analytic frame, I introduce the research questions and other conjectures about how these two organizations collectively manage and organize the educational work of school turnaround and synergies and complications that emerge in such an arrangement based on the body research reviewed for this study.

### The Rise and Uncertainty of State-Level Involvement in School Turnaround

Many scholars have demonstrated the increased emphasis on school turnaround and the state's role in it. In the last 30 years, as federal policies have expanded, they have positioned

state educational agencies (SEAs) in a more central role for large scale school turnaround and expanded their responsibilities in this work (Leithwood, Whalstrom, & Anderson, 2010). In response to the policy waves, diverse models for state-led school turnaround emerged. Despite the increased role, uncertainties remain about SEAs capacities for this work.

**The shifting role of the SEA**

While state governments have always maintained authority over public education in the US, local governments have traditionally been the primary caretakers of public education (Fusarelli & Cooper, 2009).[6] Traditionally, SEAs assumed a modest role, managing federal aid, monitoring curricular tasks, ensuring legal compliance, and channeling money to local districts (Brown, Hess, Lautzenheiser, & Owen, 2011). Accordingly, SEAs typically did not develop significant capabilities to support districts and schools to improve teaching and learning.

However, a shift has unfolded in over the last fifty years. States assumed new decision-making power and responsibilities over issues and domains that previously had not existed, as new policies opened up entirely new territories of action in education, such as curriculum development and state assessments (Cohen, 1982). These new policy territories emerged because of increased demands from federal policy and state leaders' own policies to expedite school improvement (Brown et al., 2011). As Cohen (1982) contends, the steady influx of state and federal policies expanded the scope of both the educational problems that state educational agencies were supposed to solve and state government's power in education.

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[6] The U.S. Constitution granted authority of schooling to the states, but states largely delegated this power and responsibility to the local educational authorities (Cohen & Spillane, 1992; Timar, 1997). Local governments created schools, levied taxes to finance schools, and oversaw schools. Local educators primarily made decisions regarding teaching and learning, and until education finance reform swept through most of the states in the 1980s and 1990s, local communities were the major source of funding for schools (Corcoran, Evans, Godwin, Murray, & Schwab, 2004).

**The rise and challenge of state-led school turnaround involvement**

Further, over the last 30 years, shifting policies have placed SEAs in a more central role in school improvement work, positioning these agencies as policy implementation entities (Mintrop & Trujillo, 2005). For instance, the greater focus in the 1980s and 1990s on states' building accountability systems to monitor school performance heightened state involvement in improving, or "turning around", underperforming schools. These efforts largely centered on state takeover of entire school districts that were considered to have a high proportion of low-achieving schools. For example, by the early 2000s, 19 states had taken over a low-performing school district, but typically assumed a limited, behind the scenes role (e.g., increased monitoring, reconstitution, more funding) and with limited improvement (Wong & Shen, 2003).

**No Child Left Behind and SEAs as implementers.** This role expanded in the 2000s in the wake of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001, when accountability for school turnaround work became more pervasive and the states' role became more prominent (Duke, 2012). Schools that failed to make 'Annual Yearly Progress', as required by NCLB, for six years faced progressively invasive interventions, such as: state takeover, private management, and school restructuring (Gill, Zimmer, Christman, & Blanc, 2007). Further, the federal School Improvement Grant (SIG) program was created in 2002 (fully funded in 2007) as a part of NCLB. The SIG program was a means to financially support the improvement of the lowest achieving schools. While NCLB and the SIG program did not "solve" the problem of underperforming schools, it illuminated it as a pressing problem: thousands of schools that served disproportionately large numbers of students from high-poverty backgrounds demonstrated persistently low student achievement results. These policies also supported a

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solution: They defined goals, created structures to organize school turnaround efforts, and provided states funding to devise a way to fix the pressing problem.

NCLB further changed the role of the SEAs. SEAs assumed more responsibilities and authority to improve schools, and accordingly, their domains of work widened, including, for example, improving low-performing schools and authorizing charter schools (Hamman & Lane, 2004). No longer agencies focused on compliance and funding, SEAs embarked on the work of supporting implementation of school and instructional improvement reforms.

Still, just because policy imperatives redefined the role of the SEA did not mean that their capacities were commensurate with these newfound expectations. Recall that SEAs had not traditionally built capabilities for instructionally related work (Brown et al., 2011). Indeed, some SEAs encountered obstacles (e.g., insufficient human capital or financial resources) to transform into organizations that could support implementation (Haynes, 2009), hindering abilities to support low performing schools (Center on Education Policy, 2007).

**Race to the Top and state initiatives for school turnaround**. The Obama Administration continued the federal focus on improving persistently underperforming schools and further extended the notion of 'school turnaround' and the state's role in it. First, the Obama administration expanded the SIG program by allocating $5 billion through the program to states to support the transformation of failing schools.[7] With this infusion of money came an expectation to prioritize the bottom 5% of schools in each state and adopt one of the four comprehensive turnaround models of school improvement in those schools: (1) replacing all of the staff, (2) restarting under a new school operator, (3) school closure, or (4) replacing the

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[7] States could apply for these three-year SIGs to help districts, and school implement reforms. SIG money was distributed over 50 states and the District of Columbia (Miller & Hanna, 2014). The SIG program required states to give competitive award grants to schools and districts based on need and commitment (Lazarin, 2012).

principal and undergo internal reforms (Kutash et al., 2010). The SIG program continued to

define a solution for the pressing problem of low performing schools: The federal government

would provide more funding to support states and districts to re-organize their schools (e.g.,

governance reforms to change operational authority) and make human capital changes (e.g., re-

staff schools) to rapidly improve schools in three to five years.

Second, in 2009, the Obama administration introduced Race to the Top (RTTT), a novel,

$4.35 billion competitive grant program that emerged from American Recovery and

Reinvestment Act of 2009. It was intended to challenge state and local school systems to devise

education policies and infuse state systems with much needed funds following the economic

recession (McGuinn, 2012).  It defined the types of policies that successful applications should

include around four focus assurance areas.[8] One assurance area was to improve what the federal

government defined as 'persistently lowest achieving schools.'[9] In this way, RTTT created a

political and economic opportunity for states to more aggressively engage in school and district

improvement efforts, and it also continued a growing trend of state-level engagement in school

improvement. However, little empirical or practical experience suggested that the SEAs would

have the capacity to support the work of school improvement implied in these new policies

(Brown et al., 2011; Goertz, 2005; Hamann & Lane, 2004; Sunderman & Orfield, 2007).

**Variability in state-led turnaround models**

In light of the policy imperative for and incentivization of state-led turnaround after

NCLB's SIG program and RTTT, a diverse field of strategies and models for state-led

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[8] RTTT had four assurance areas: adopting high-quality standards and assessments, using data to improve instruction, supporting and developing great teachers, and turning around low performing schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2009).

[9] Based on the Race to the Top application (U.S. Department of Education, 2009, p. 10), persistently low performing schools included those schools eligible for Title I that are the bottom-five percent of the consistently lowest performing schools based on annual assessments and, if applicable, have graduation rates below 60 percent.

turnaround emerged.  States created different models that all reflected the basic tenets of the

federal policy guidelines to address the problem of persistently low-performing schools.  These

varied in the extent to which the state agency (a) engaged in school turnaround strategy creation

and implementation and (b) had authority and governance over schools and districts. Still, the

majority of states partnered with external providers, such as lead turnaround providers, to

support or lead this work (VanGronigen & Myers, 2019). This strategy that partners the state and

external providers is referred to here as a 'hybrid model.'

Based on review of studies that examined RTTT applications and state proposals to

improve persistently underperforming schools, three broad categories of state-level turnaround

models emerge that fall into this hybrid model where a state agency collaborates with external

partners to some degree to support school turnaround:

(1) *Facilitating turnaround strategies*: assuming a lighter touch, SEAs and external

partners support districts as they implement one of the four turnaround models

(2) *Driving turnaround strategies*: intensive allocation of resources to schools and

districts through internal SEA work and/or external lead turnaround partners

(3) *Direct state intervention in schools*: states remove schools from their home districts

and place them in new, state-led districts.

I provide examples from different states of the three broad strategies in the sections that follow.

**Facilitating turnaround strategies.** For example, New York created a new division to

oversee its Race to the Top school turnaround initiatives. This division coordinates with external

providers, or lead turnaround partners, to help districts implemented one of the four school

turnaround models. They coordinate support by, for example, disseminating research about best

practices and contracting with external entities to provide professional development. While they

manage and coordinate efforts, they provide less direct, technical assistance in creating or implementing a strategy for improvement (New York State, 2016). Other states, such as Connecticut and Delaware, developed similar plans, relying on (a) the SEA to manage and coordinate and (b) the external providers or districts to develop strategies for implementation.

**Driving turnaround strategies**. In contrast, in Massachusetts, the SEA agency provides intensive to help districts. Following RTTT, Massachusetts created an Office of District and School within the its Department of Education to work closely six regional assistance centers to support ten school districts in their efforts to intervene in their high-needs schools (Miller & Hanna, 2014). The tools, resources, and assistance were intended to complement and bolster the district's capabilities. While Massachusetts' SEA drove many of these efforts to create and implement these strategies internally, they also encouraged districts to partner would lead turnaround partners (LTPs), as well. Other states, such as Rhode Island, North Carolina, and Maryland, devised similar strategies that centered on high-levels of state organization and management to support school improvement, with support from LTPs.

**State level school turnaround districts.** Still, a few states initiated new approaches to address the pressing problem of failing schools by creating special statewide school turnaround districts. These unique districts are run by the state (often a SEA) and manage some of the state's most underperforming schools, either by directly operating the schools or contracting with an LTP, such as a charter school, to manage the schools. For example, Tennessee and Michigan adopted these approaches, each creating a special state-run district that assumes authority and management of selected priority schools (Mason & Arsen, 2014). Additional states, such as Nevada, Georgia, South Carolina, Mississippi, and more have considered such strategies (Smith, 2014).

While the specific governance arrangements, regulatory environment, and operational strategies vary across statewide turnaround districts, a common trait is that schools are removed from the local traditional school district's control and placed under the authority of a statewide district. In some instances, the state district directly runs schools (e.g., the majority of the schools in Michigan's former EAA district) (Mason & Arsen, 2014).

In other instances, the district cedes operational control to external, lead turnaround partners, such as charter management organizations, while establishing the stringent accountability expectations for performance (U.S. Department of Education, 2010b). This type of strategy is rooted in ideas of market-based reform and portfolio management strategies. These strategies seek to design systems that are more responsive to local families and communities, instead of adhering to traditional governance arrangements of "rule bound" district bureaucracies, which critics contend create barriers to change and improvement in schools, and (Chubb & Moe, 1990). Portfolio school systems, in principle, promote differentiation in the market by creating a portfolio of diverse, autonomous schools operated by external providers (e.g., charter management organizations or lead turnaround partners [LTPs]). The district office shifts decision-making authority on educational operations (e.g., curriculum, instruction) to the schools and school operators, while the district maintains responsibilities of monitoring and evaluating performance (Bulkey, Henig, & Levin, 2010).

**The Role and Uncertainty of Lead-Turnaround Partners**

The preceding establishes that states have increasingly partnered with external organizations, such as LTPs to aid in the complex educational work of turning around schools. LTPs are non-governmental organizations that work with states to dramatically improve the outcomes of groups of persistently under-performing schools, and they are held accountable for

doing so (Corbett, 2011; Peurach & Neumerski, 2015). In theory, LTPs possess technical capabilities to do the necessary educational work to improve teaching and learning in priority schools. The theoretical appeal and value of LTPs for state's involved in state-led turnaround efforts is that LTPs can immediately bring expertise to the work, minimizing the state's costs and effort to do the complex work of building those very same capabilities internally.

Examples of LTPs include charter management organizations, institutes for higher education, comprehensive school reform providers (e.g., Success for All) or other external providers that provide educationally related school support around professional development, human capital pipeline development, assessment and curriculum creators (e.g., Achievement Network). For example, one increasingly common type of LTP are charter management organizations (CMOs). CMOs are a relatively new but rapidly growing organizational form in education that emerged out of the charter school movement (Farrell et al., 2012) and gained ground in the LTP market, in part, because of federal policies' emphasis on the use of charter schools in their recommended turnaround models (Furgeson et al., 2012). CMOs establish and operate multiple charter schools with a common mission or school improvement design and also receive support from a shared central office. Distinct from independent charter schools, CMOs create an opportunity to more efficiently expand, promote collaboration across schools, and take advantage of economies of scale (Farrell, Nayfack, Smith, & Wohlstetter, 2014).[10]

**Role in School Turnaround**

As described and implied in the preceding section, lead turnaround partners work in conjunction with (rather than in replacement of) districts and states to support large-scale

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[10] Both charter schools and CMOs share a common logic: in exchange for greater accountability to an authorizer group they are provided greater autonomy in governance, finance, staffing, use of time, and programming so that they have the latitude to meet local needs in more innovative and efficient ways (Finn, Manno, & Vanourek, 2000).

turnaround (Peurach & Neumerski, 2015). In theory, they bring to bear a set of resources and expertise that the state and district do not necessarily have to support school improvement, and they use those to support and manage change and improvement in schools and school systems engaged in turnaround work. According to Peurach and Neumerski (2015), in theory, the support LTPs provide to schools typically could include developing, compiling or coordinating resources, structures and processes to support interdependently with the state and district. They also support system/district-level efforts by, for example, coordinating policies, services, and requirements for the schools.

**The Uncertainties of lead turnaround partners (LTPs)**

However, while the theoretical logic and value of the use of lead turnaround partners in state-led turnaround presents as an appealing option, in practice, the use of LTPs in school turnaround work is uncertain. Past research literature reveals two core challenges with the use of and heavy reliance on LTPs to support school turnaround.

First, there are concerns about the quality of the LTP supply in the U.S. As Corbett (2011) noted, some of the LTPs that enter this field arrive with the relevant capabilities-knowledge and experiences—to support the large-scale turnaround, yet others are new organizations just beginning to develop as organizations and develop these technical capabilities. Even those experienced LTPs who have entered the field have struggled (Borman, Hewes, Overman, & Brown, 2003).  Indeed, in addition to the challenge of building technical expertise, they will also operate in complex economic, political, educational, and social contexts that likely complicate the work of even the most expert and experienced providers (Corbett, 2011).  The limited supply of qualified LTPs has negative ramifications for the schools and districts that rely

on them to support large-scale improvement and also for the broader LTP marketplace, as it weakens their validation and legitimacy as a viable mechanism for school turnaround.

Second, there is little past research or experience guiding and supporting the development and use of the burgeoning field of LTPs. There is a growing but still relatively small body of research that examines these organizations' designs and evidence of their effectiveness.[11] This presents challenges for state educational agencies (SEAs), districts, and schools selecting LTPs with whom to collaborate and also for LTPs seeking to learn and improve. Taken together, while the use of LTPs is an appealing solution to the SEAs' problems of rapidly improving underperforming schools, it is far from certain that LTPs will deliver the desired outcomes.

**Analytic Frame: The Educational Work of School Turnaround**

The preceding establishes that federal and state policy shifts increased state involvement in school turnaround and occasioned the rise of diverse strategies and education organizations to take up the complex work of improving the student outcomes and reducing disparities in chronically underperforming schools. However, the rising policy imperative to do this creates urgency, but not necessarily a clear road map to do this. While the preceding establishes the myriad structural arrangements that states adopted to manage school turnaround, arguably the more critical and challenging work becomes how these models for state-led turnaround organize and manage the educational work necessary to improve student outcomes in those schools.

The focus of this study is on this very educational work that school systems do to support large-scale school turnaround. I take up this focus because this work is critically important for improving student outcomes, on which agencies of government and priority schools are heavily

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[11] For examples, see Datnow, Hubbard, & Meehan, 2002, Cohen and associates (2014) and Peurach, 2011 for CSR examples. For descriptions of charter school operators operating in a turnaround sector, see Glazer, Massell, & Malone, 2015 and Glazer, Groth and Beuche (2019).

evaluated in this current political climate, and it supports a primary function of schooling: student learning.  However, this critical yet challenging educational work has not always been fully addressed in reform efforts in such schools. The historical legacy of "loose coupling" in the U.S. education system between the administrative and political work of government agencies overseeing schools and the educational work of teachers and students renders system-led educational work historically uncommon.[12] It becomes critical to explore how government agencies, particularly SEAs, traditionally unaccustomed to managing this work, take it up in practice in an effort to support large-scale school turnaround or priority schools.

To examine the educational work of a hybrid state/NGO model for school turnaround, I forward an analytic framework that enables me to analyze (a) how such a model for state led school turnaround would organize and distribute the educational work to support school improvement and (b) the complications and synergies that arise in such an approach. This educational work of large-scale school turnaround entails organizing schools for instructional improvement. Indeed, decades of research on large-scale school improvement have demonstrated that school improvement hinges on changing instructional practice in schools (for example, see Rowan, Correnti, & Camburn, 2009). Changing instructional practice rests on the extent to which school improvement efforts enhance the individual and collective capabilities of actors and organizations for ambitious teaching and learning.

School systems engaged in the work of instructional improvement, such as state-led districts to support school turnaround, traditional school districts, or CMOs, will likely need to

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[12] Government agencies have infrequently engaged in or led this educational work and reforms efforts have not also pressed down and into classrooms to touch instruction.  Historically, the educational work has been delegated to teachers to determine the specifics of instruction (Jackson, 1968; Lortie, 1975). This resulted in what Meyer and Rowan (1978) refer to as a "loose coupling" between the administrative and political work of the central offices overseeing schools and the educational work of teachers and students. While schools, districts, states did not manage the educational work, they often tightly manage the administrative and political work (Peurach et al., 2019).

build or renovate their systems to become what Peurach, Cohen, Yurkofsky, and Spillane (2019) call instructionally focused systems. An "instructionally focused system," according to Peurach and his colleagues (2019) is a "mass public schooling enterprise that takes on, as a central matter, guiding and supporting the educational work of schools: classroom instruction" (p. 10). In such a system, schools, central offices, and in some instances, external partners, work together to promote instruction where all students are held to the same, high standards and engage in learning experiences to master ambitious content. These systems would work collectively to improve instructional quality and reduce disparities in outcomes.

Peurach, Cohen, Yurkofsky, and Spillane's (2019) review of research literature on instructional improvement reveals five domains of activity as central to instructionally focused systems. Drawing on this, the framework for this study includes these five domains as constructs for a system's design for the educational work of school turnaround. These include:

1. Building educational infrastructure
2. Supporting Use
3. Managing performance
4. Managing the environment
5. Distributing instructional leadership

A framework organized around these five domains of educational activity enables analysis of how two types of organizations (state agency and lead turnaround partner) embedded in a hybrid model to support school turnaround distribute and manage these five domains of educational work. It allows for a more nuanced examination of the extent to which each organization takes up (or does not) each of these domains. It also supports analysis of the complications and synergies that exist in this hybrid model's approach to support the educational work of school turnaround, and the organizational responses to those complications. In the sections that follow, I describe each of the five domains in terms of their ever-growing empirical research base.

**Domain #1: Building educational infrastructure**

The first key domain for creating instructional focused systems and the educational work of supporting large scale school turnaround is to build or fortify the school systems' and schools' educational infrastructure, which may be understood as the basic resources and systems that support teachers and leaders in focusing on how to improve student learning through classroom instruction (Cohen & Moffitt, 2009). The development of such infrastructure offers an approach to school improvement that coordinates aspects of practice to create a robust system to support teaching and continuous improvement. This type of approach supports individual improvement by affording teachers the resources to use a common language, to guide their instruction with common expectations and tasks, and to set common expectations for student learning. It also provides a system-level approach to improvement where networks can use these instruments to improve teaching and learning at scale (Cohen, Peurach, Glazer, Gates, & Godin, 2014).

However, it is precisely this infrastructure for practice that these underperforming schools typically lack or have not fully developed (Cohen & Moffitt, 2009; Mintrop & Trujillo, 2005). Rather than providing coherent systems to support improvement, chronically underperforming schools are often characterized by having incoherent instructional programs; assessments that do not fully align to common goals; teachers and leaders with limited individual and collective capabilities (the skills, knowledge, beliefs, and dispositions that actors and the organization can leverage to improve teaching and learning) (Bryk, 2010); low expectations for students and learning (Elmore, 2000); and limited material, social, and human resources to bolster capacity.

To support transformational improvement of persistently underperforming schools in the U.S., a first order goal will be to somehow help schools build or bolster this educational

infrastructure. Research of school improvement suggests that key components of this infrastructure would entail designs, which are understood to be a blueprint of the necessary elements intended to achieve a certain outcome for practice in schools (Cohen et al., 2014). A design, according to Cohen and Mehta (2017), would include a "defined a set of educational objectives; created extensive materials, tools, and other forms of practical guidance to support the work; and built sufficient support both within schools and among stakeholders to sustain the reform" (p.676).

In addition, improving student learning and outcomes in the challenging context of persistently underperforming schools would likely requiring reorganizing schools so that they are structured to promote student engagement in school and improve their learning outcomes (Byrk et al., 2010). This would likely require attending to various elements of schooling to create necessary conditions to support instructional improvement, such as developing a supportive school culture that is conducive for learning, engaging key stakeholders in the learning process, and ample supports to support students' development.

Given this, a coherent design for schoolwide improvement in underperforming schools would likely attend to multiple elements of schooling in order to meet the ultimate goal of improving teaching, learning, and student outcomes. These elements would collectively provide guidance for a vision for teaching and learning, curriculum, student assessment, fostering parent engagement, and a school culture focused on learning, all of which would work in concert to support more ambitious teaching and learning. There are broadly two types of designs a system could create: a design for instructional practice and a design for culture.

**Design for instructional practice.** A design for instruction entails creating a set of resources, strategies, and processes that specify how and what to teach in order to support

students to more ambitious learning.  This design includes individual and collective strategies and resources to support and guide high quality teaching across a network of schools. This design might include common curriculum, common assessments aligned to the curriculum, common instructional practices and strategies tied to the curriculum, teacher education and training that is tied to the curriculum and resources, and professional standards and norms to guide the work (Cohen et al., 2014).  Such a design might also attend to the diversity of needs of all students and incorporate supports for who are currently struggling in classes.

**Design for culture.** A design for culture would likely include resources, vision, and structures to promote particular sets of expectations, values, responsibilities; school community and family engagement; and a safe, supportive school climate (Peurach & Neumerski, 2015).

***Organizational values and beliefs shared by leaders, teachers, and students.*** One element for a design for culture is the organization's values, mission, and beliefs about how to promote educational change. An approach to school improvement is likely rooted in some *purpose and goal*. That is, it is motivated by some problem or opportunity. These motivations, coupled with *core values and beliefs* about student learning, root problems in the school systems, and assumptions about how work is done, shape the ways in which the leaders and designers of these reforms envision change (Cohen et al., 2014). Taken together, this *theory of change* (i.e., the components needed to achieve a goal and underlying assumptions about how the components work to reach the goal) becomes the roadmap for how the organization brings about large-scale educational change and school improvement (Connell & Kubisch, 1998).

These goals and beliefs become the connective tissue that bind and shape the system.  For instance, drawing on the school improvement literature, Edmonds (1979), Bryk and colleagues (2010), Elmore (2000), Leithwood and associates (2004), and Rosenholtz (1985) contend that

establishing a unifying and academically-oriented goal provides a source of coherence throughout the school, which is critical for school success.

*School climate that is supportive, safe, and learning centered.* A second element of the design for culture focuses on the school climate. The climate is shaped by the beliefs, values, practices, and interactions held by and demonstrated everyday by students, teachers, leaders, and families. The climate of a school impacts student motivation and teaching and learning (Byrk et al., 2010). State-led school turnaround strategies would likely need to create a design for school climate that attends to two areas. A first order need is to secure basic safety in the schools to protect students, guard instructional time, and support student motivation. In some school contexts and in some school communities, this is pressing concern. A second order task is considering the norms that guide student-teacher interactions and peer-peer relationships that simultaneously create high academic standards and provide ample support (Bryk et al., 2010).

*School community and parent ties.* A third sub- element of a cultural design is to create resources, strategies, and processes to promote ties with parents/families and school communities. Past research suggests the importance of parent and community involvement for students to support student motivation, learning, and participation in schools.[13] To this end, state-led school turnaround strategies likely would need to create a design for engaging parents and community. Byrk and associates (2010) contend that there are three key components to this.

A first component is to devise ways to help parents support student learning. Epstein and associates (2018) find that schools or school systems might create initiatives to support this that

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[13] For example, see Epstein and Dauber (1991), Zimmer and Buddin (2007), and Zellman and Waterman (1998). This line of research has found that schools can increase this involvement through particular actions (Epstein, 2001; Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, & Sandler, 2005; Sheldon & Epstein, 2005). Further, school organization and policies can influence teachers in the extent to which they contact parents to participate in schools (e.g., Sanders & Sheldon, 2009).

include inviting parents to volunteer at the school, communicating with parents about academic expectations, and encouraging parent voice in decision making processes. This work can help cultivate relationship and trust between parents, teachers, and leaders. A second component involves teachers developing knowledge about their students' home life and culture. Such knowledge is a fundamental resource for instruction and for building safe, healthy relationships with students necessary to teach and motivate students (Delpit, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 2009).

A third component centers on forming community partnerships. Educational organizations operating in turnaround contexts, such as LTPs, will likely serve students with high needs that extend beyond the classroom but also interact with learning. Schools in such context may need to provide supplemental services (e.g., mental health services, dental care, etc.) through partnerships with community organizations. An additional byproduct to this work is that it brings community organizations and actors into the schools and forges ties between the community and schools, and it also places the schools as a community institution.

**Domain #2: Supporting the use of educational infrastructure in practice**

The creation of a design alone is likely necessary but insufficient to change practice. Change in instructional practice and in the ultimate improvement of student learning likely requires significant learning for teachers and leaders (Ball & Cohen, 1999). Specifically, it requires supporting the individual and collective capabilities of the teachers and leaders to use the resources provided in the educational infrastructure to improve teaching and learning. Developing and managing professional capabilities requires creating strategies to both enhance the capabilities of current staff and also to hire and retain the necessary staff.

One way to bolster capabilities of current teachers and leaders is through professional learning opportunities. This can broadly be defined as an array of formal and informal activities and interactions that can increase teacher knowledge and skill, teaching practices, and socio-emotional

growth (Cohen, McLaughlin, & Talbert, 1993), all of which can be used to increase teachers' professional capacity (Borko, 2004).   This entails various resources and structures, including workshops, instructional coaching and mentoring, and collegial learning (Cohen, 2011).

**Domain #3: Managing performance**

A third domain of activity is to manage performance at the school and system level. Part of this work includes managing performance for continuous improvement, meaning regularly monitoring performance and adjusting with the intention of school or system improvement. Strategies for this could include data-driven decision-making processes to learn more about the systems and schools and pinpoint areas for improvement (Park & Datnow, 2009; Wohlstetter, Datnow, & Park, 2008), or schools and systems could engage in ongoing cycles of evidence-driven practices, implementation, and evaluation (Bryk, Gomez, Grunow, & LeMathieu, 2015). These types of actions support the organization's learning.

Part of this work also includes managing performance for accountability purposes. That is,  managing performance by using evidence to assess instructional processes and outcomes. For example, systems may develop accountability frameworks based on student outcomes to measure and monitor student progress and measure efficacy of initiatives or schools, more broadly. This work might also entail creating benchmark assessments tied to the state standards to monitor student progress of mastering standards-based content and skills (Armstrong & Anthes, 2001).

**Domain #4: Managing environments**

The third domain of activity is to manage the environments that bear on how the system "understands and pursues excellence and equity in classroom instruction" (Peurach et al., 2019, p.17).  Systems and schools will likely continually negotiate the fit between external demands and influences (e.g., state policies, community values) and their goals and strategies. Through this, they decide to bridge and buffer external demands and resources (Honig & Hatch, 2004).

This is complex work. Past experience and research from other school improvement initiatives highlights the tremendous organizational effort needed to manage the environment, and it also sheds light on the complex interrelationships between the environment and educational organizations (e.g., lead turnaround partner).[14] Indeed, past research on school improvement suggests that organizational and social contexts shape how and for whom reforms work (Bryk, Gomez, Grunow, & Hallinan, 2011; Coburn, Honig, & Stein, 2009; Means & Penuel, 2005). As Honig (2006) contends, how something is implemented, such as a strategy for school turnaround, is a product of the interactions between place, people, and policies, or the interactions that occur in the local context.

I draw on extant research on comprehensive school improvement approaches to identify six potential environments that educational organizations within a hybrid state/NGO turnaround model would likely have to manage in an effort to pursue excellence and equity in classroom instruction. These include (1) school and school communities, (2) social environment, (3) policy environment, (4) political environment, and (5) economic. It is important to note that I bound these environments to focus on those matters that have *direct* bearing on the system's pursuit excellence and equity in instruction (rather than indirect bearing, such as charter school authorization laws, federal compliance requirements).

**Schools and school community environment.** In this hybrid model, the statewide district and the LTPs charter school operators would be operating in and implementing their strategy in pre-existing 'priority schools.' These schools are often characterized by having weak

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[14] For example, research on comprehensive school reforms suggests that program designs did evolve and adapt to local conditions and contexts, as they expanded throughout the country (Berends, Bodilly, & Kirby, 2002). Far from linear, this was a co-constructed and ongoing process between the program and the local context (Datnow et al., 2002), which was challenging and complicated by the broader environments in which they work (Glazer, 2009; Peurach, 2011).

capabilities and limited and/or incoherent instructional programs (Cohen & Moffitt, 2009; Mintrop & Trujillo, 2005) low expectations for student learning (Elmore, 2000); and limited resources to bolster capacity. Additionally, these schools would also have important community value, as long-standing institutions that have served neighborhoods for generations.

Taken together, this environment presents potential conditions that statewide districts removing schools from their home districts and placing them under new oversight and new management will likely have to manage. This includes attending to range of student needs, meeting the values and needs of the community and parents, and building trust in a community unfamiliar with the new school operator and district. This domain of activity presumably will require the LTP to learn about the community, school, and new students, and adapt, refine, and develop strategies accordingly.

**Policy environment.** In a hybrid model for school turnaround, the statewide district and the LTPs charter school operators would operate in policy environments that might bear on teaching and learning. These include the education related policies, such as state academic standards, state assessments, accountability expectations, and student enrollment regulations. This also includes the broader macro policy context of Race to the Top and federal policies that define the accountability expectations, including, for example, setting expectations for quick school improvement in three to five years as measured by performance on state assessments.

**Organizational environment.** The statewide district and the LTPs charter school operators would also have to manage their organizational environment. LTPs in state-run turnaround districts work under a new governance structure or authority. However, many LTP charter school operators are accustomed to running their schools with a high degree of autonomy and little oversight, and devising their own organizational structures, such as a central office or

hub, to manage and monitor the schools within their networks (Lake et al., 2010). Operating in this new organizational environment may require LTP learning and adapting.

**Political environment: local and community relations.** The statewide district and the LTPs charter school operators would like have to manage the political, social, and cultural dimensions of taking over a traditional public school and simultaneously converting it to a charter school in a state turnaround district. While some LTPs, such as charters schools, have a long history of maneuvering political obstacles, such as charter caps and funding issues, the political environment in a school takeover context likely creates new political issues not typically encountered by charter school operators.

Research on local reactions to school reform efforts and state takeovers suggest that there can be local opposition to state takeover (Burns, 2010), and local actors can form powerful coalitions to block reform efforts (Orr, 1999).[15] LTPs, like charter school operators, that take over priority schools within a state run school district will likely have to manage opposition and develop strategies to engage community, build support, and mitigate the residual effects of opposition once the takeover is complete in order to bolster community support and legitimacy. This may be novel work for CMOs, requiring learning and adaptations to strategies and design.

**Domain #5: Distributing instructional leadership**

The final domain of activity is, as summarized by Peurach and associates (2019), creating "leadership roles and teams responsible for performing, coordinating, and managing all of the preceding [four domains of activity]" (p. 17). Two key ideas emerge. First, the focus of leadership is educational and instructional in nature.[16] For example, at the school level, according

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[15] Local pushback to takeover can stem from community leaders' sense of loss of power, disenfranchisement, economic concerns, concerns about educational quality, or desire to maintain the status quo (Orr, 1999).
[16] For more description on what this would entail, see Elmore (2002).

to Bryk and associates (2010) work on essential supports in schools, this might mean that principals would have keen, strategic focus on instruction and would also draw others into that work. Principals' responsibilities could include the design of the master schedule (instructional time allocation), initiatives related to the instructional system (e.g., designing curriculum), or initiatives for the professional learning system (e.g., serving as an instructional coach, designing professional development, organizing professional learning communities for teachers).

Second, these instructionally focused leadership roles would be distributed within schools and systems. Leadership responsibilities would likely span across a network of actors at the school and system level (Gronn, 2000: Spillane et al., 2004) and have interdependencies across the network (Elmore, 2000; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2004). For instance, school and system level instructional leaders would support the implementation of the instructional system and professional learning through collaborative work at different levels of the system.

**Coherence across the five domains**

A growing body of literature also suggests the importance of the degree to which these five domains of educational work are organized coherently. Coherence, here, is conceptualized as coordinated and connected structures, processes, and resources aligned to and oriented toward a common end goal or purpose of educational improvement (Cobb & Jackson, 2011; Cobb, Jackson, Henrick, Smith, & team, 2018; Honig & Hatch, 2004; Mehta & Fine, 2015; Newmann, King, & Youngs, 2000). Coherence can influence how well these domains bolster the capabilities of the organizations and individuals to develop high-performing schools and systems of schools.

## Research Questions

This leads to a set of three research questions about state-led turnaround between a statewide school turnaround district and NGO lead turnaround partners and how these two organizations distribute and manage the educational work to support school turnaround:

- What are essential dimensions of the educational contributions of state turnaround districts to support large-scale school turnaround?

- What are essential dimensions of the educational contributions of the nongovernmental organization (NGO) turnaround partners to support large-scale school turnaround?

- What categories of synergies and complications arise in the educational work of school turnaround for state and turnaround partners in this organizational arrangement?

## Considering Prospects and Offering Provisional Conjectures

Past research suggest uncertainty about the prospects of a state agency and NGO collaborating to support the educational work for large-scale school turnaround. Supporting and taking up the domains of educational activity described above, of course, is no small feat. While there have been pockets of success of system-level school turnaround efforts, there have been larger pockets of nominal or nonexistent progress.[17]

**Provisional Conjectures**

One conjecture is that this hybrid strategy's approach to the educational work of school turnaround goes quite well. After all, this hybrid state /NGO strategy has been utilized in various

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[17] For example, see Schueler, Goodman, and Deming (2017) for evidence of success in Lawrence, MA and the SEA's work to improve the district's schools. See Zimmer, Henry, and Kho (2017) for evidence on the effectiveness of Shelby County, TN's Izone. See Zavadsky (2012) for examples of various districts, including Charlotte-Mecklenberg, Denver and Long Beach.

states and is a new way to bring technical capabilities to schools to support and the educational work likely needed to support school turnaround, in theory.

Further, these two different organizations would, in principle, be complementary to one another. States, with power and authority to takeover schools and authorize new school operators, typically lack the very capabilities to do the educational work to improve schools that NGO lead turnaround partners possess, in theory. Indeed, some research suggests that there are examples of lead turnaround partners that attend to the five key domains of educational work and have supported improvement in student outcomes. For example, there are a small number of effective charter management organization that have demonstrated significant effects on student achievement for low income and minority students, such as YES prep (Woodroof & Raymond, 2013).[18] There are also some charter networks that have developed instructionally focused systems around these five domains, such as Achievement First (Rosenberg, 2012).[19] Still, LTPs would have to do all of this work in a complex environment, and there is limited evidence on their work in this context.[20]

However, another conjecture is that the use of such of strategy to do the educational work necessary to improve persistently underperforming schools in a complex environment would be an uncertain endeavor. State run school districts are new types of educational organizations

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[18] In a CREDO study, Woodworth & Raymond (2013) estimated the amount of growth of students attending these schools, compared to their non-charter school-attending peers. The growth effect at YES Prep school network (10 schools) for reading was 0.13 SD (p< .01) and for math was 0.19 SD (p<.01), placing it near the top of the list for growth rates for all charter schools in the study (Woodworth & Raymond, 2013, p. 57).

[19] For instance, in a case study of the Achievement First network, Rosenberg (2012) found that the network had developed an emergent infrastructure of practice to guide high-quality teaching and learning across classrooms by developing (a) a selective recruitment process tied to the mission and values of the organization; (b) an instructional framework and tools to guide teachers' work, students' learning, and ongoing learning opportunities to enhance professional capabilities; (c) an instructional leadership design that supported teachers; and (d) an organizational culture centered around common goals- performance, continuous improvement, trust and shared responsibility.

[20] For example, Abdulkadiroğlu, Angrist, Hull, and Pathak (2016) find large math and reading impacts from converting persistently low-performing traditional public schools into charter schools in Boston and in New Orleans.

about which we know very little. Indeed, there is little empirical evidence backing the use and guiding the work of new statewide turnaround districts overseen by and within state educational agencies.  Further, past experience suggests that SEAs have typically lacked capabilities to do the educational work outlined in the five domains described in this chapter. Recall that SEAs typically did not develop significant capabilities to support districts and schools to improve teaching and learning because they largely delegated this work to local districts or schools (Brown et al., 2011).  While some SEAs have the capabilities to manage the aforementioned educational domains and many others have attempted to bolster capabilities in recent years (Childs & Russell, 2017), recent research on SEAs continues to indicate that many are still trying to build such capacity (Manna, 2012; Miller & Hanna, 2014). Given this, it seems likely that organizing and operating in such a context will likely require the organization to learn and adapt to continuously improve its capabilities to support large-scale turnaround. Taken together, absent a breadth of experience or research on these districts, questions loom large about the prospects of SEAs and agencies within them to manage and support activity in the five educational domains.

Additionally, NGO lead turnaround partners, such as charter school operators, are also relatively new types of educational organizations, and we know little about how they work in complex school turnaround contexts. For example, some LTPs have demonstrated mixed progress towards develop high-achieving schools that promote the kind of excellence in outcomes expected in school turnaround context.[21] Further, the school, city, state, and national contexts in which this strategy plays out are complex, uncertain, and novel. LTPs would be asked to leverage their knowledge assets and implement them in novel and complex contexts that are

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[21] For example, researchers examining charter schools have documented variability in their influence on student learning (For example, see Center for Research on Education Outcomes, 2009; Epple, Romano, Zimmer, 2015; Zimmer et al., 2012).

presumably different from any context they have previously encountered. Little is known about how these two embedded organizations would work together to support the educational work of school turnaround in practice in these contexts.

If the use of a state/NGO hybrid strategy to support improvement of underperforming schools roughly unfolds in the ways described here, then the use of such a strategy will likely be about learning in many dimensions. After all, state turnaround districts, such as Tennessee's Achievement School District, are a new organizational form with no template or breadth of experience to precisely guide their work. Moreover, NGO lead turnaround partners would begin this work by entering in a very new, complex, uncertain context, and they would likely have to learn this context and how their approach fits within it. It is quite likely that this would unfold in complex, non-linear ways for both types of organizations, creating a likely potential that both will be figuring things out and learning to some degree. Indeed, an important part of this story will be about learning and adaptation of the organizations' individual approaches and theories to better align with this unique hybrid model and the salient conditions in the broader context.

To the extent these organizations engage in this type of learning and adapting, this work of turnaround is at odds with the prevailing politics and policies of school turnaround. Recall that the macro level policies and politics of turnaround, such as federal policy initiatives like Race to the Top, were not necessarily structured to support organizational learning. First, this policy context was structured to incentivize states to organize school turnaround in ways to leverage established knowledge (i.e., bring in external providers with capabilities to support and drive school improvement processes). Such a theory of change rested on exploiting pre-existing knowledge assets (rather than creating new knowledge or iterative improvement of existing knowledge). Second, this policy context expected rapid improvement in in priority schools and

created urgency for fast implementation and little margin for error. The logic of this policy context hinged on the notion that persistently underperforming schools could be rapidly changed to produce stronger student achievement outcomes by leveraging pre-existing knowledge assets and organizing schools in such a way that such knowledge could be used effectively and quickly. This, in turn, rested on three critical assumptions: (1) knowledge about how to improve schools existed, (2) such knowledge could be used anywhere, and (3) could be mobilized quickly. While these assumptions could hold, the macro school turnaround policy context did not account for the kind of learning that may be necessary to support organizations improving schools in complex, uncertain, and interdependent contexts.

### Concluding thoughts

I ended this chapter with provisional conjectures that highlight the prospects and the uncertainty around a state's hybrid state/NGO strategy for school turnaround to do the complex educational work of school turnaround. This chapter led us to this set of conjectures by first considering the increasing role of the state in school turnaround work and the uncertainties about their capabilities for this work, and then it examined the research literature on lead turnaround partners and considered the challenges with the use and reliance on those organizations to support large scale school turnaround. With that understanding in hand, I then considered research on the educational work of school turnaround and the five domains of activity of instructionally focused organizations that this hybrid model would likely have to organize and manage to support large-scale school turnaround. I then raised the research questions the emerge from this analytic perspective and that drive this study. Next, I will present my research design, an overview of Dr. Joshua Glazer of George Washington University's study from which I use data for this dissertation, analytic methods, and limitations for this embedded-case study.

# Chapter 3 Methodology

In this chapter, I will elaborate the details of the research methodology employed for this study. First, I will present the research questions that motivate and frame this study. I will then describe the research design and the rationale for the selection of a case study design. Then, I will present the case, the data sources, sample selection, and data collection processes. I will then describe the analytic methods that were used and will conclude with limitations that were encountered and strategies employed to enhance validity and reliability.

## Research Questions

This study seeks to examine one state's strategy to support large-scale school turnaround. Of a variety of strategies that this state pursues to improve its federally designated priority schools, this study examines one particular strategy: a state-led strategy where a statewide school turnaround district and nongovernmental organizations (NGO) partner to support large scale improvement in some of the state's lowest performing schools. This strategy is referred to as a hybrid state/NGO model. This study examines analyzes how this model distributes the educational work of school turnaround across the two types of organizations.

As a first order level of understanding, I seek to understand educational contributions of the state agency, the Achievement School District. Then, I examine the educational contributions of the NGO lead turnaround partner, Empowerment Prep.[22] Finally, I examine the

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[22] To protect the identities of the participants in this study, I have assigned a pseudonym to the lead turnaround partner organization in the study and do not identify any of the participants by name or role.

interactions of the two embedded organizations in this hybrid model for school turnaround and analyze the synergies and complications that emerge in the educational work of the NGO/led turnaround partner, Empowerment Prep (EP) and the ways in which the organization adapted in response to those experiences. The preceding motivates the following set of questions:

- What are essential dimensions of the educational contributions of state turnaround districts to support large-scale school turnaround?

- What are essential dimensions of the educational contributions of the NGO turnaround partners to support large-scale school turnaround?

- What categories of synergies and complications arise in the educational work of school turnaround for state and turnaround partners in this organizational arrangement?

## Research Design

The embedded case study design for this dissertation study emerged out of a larger, longitudinal qualitative study of the development and management of the Achievement School District (ASD), led by the principal investigator, Dr. Joshua L. Glazer at George Washington University. I describe this study here to situate this dissertation project and the data used for it within Dr. Glazer's broader study. This larger study sought to understand the official ASD strategy, the influence of other actors and organizations in the surrounding environments, and how ASD nongovernmental school operators (i.e., school operators running schools in the ASD) interpreted the strategy and operated in this context. The study examined the work of the ASD through three different lenses: (1) the ASD leadership team; (2) key organizations and individuals within the ASD environment, such as the district from which the ASD schools were removed, community groups, and state officials; and (3) a sample of six nongovernmental

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charter school operators running schools within the ASD context.[23]   Data collection included

181 interviews with 93 different participants, including individuals from the ASD office

executive team, charter organizations operating schools, elected officials, state officials, leaders

from community organizations, and the local school district. Across the sample of charter

organizations, organizational members with similar roles were interviewed, where possible.

Participants included organization executives, instructional leaders, and other staff members.

Interviews were supplemented by observational data and document analysis.

　　　　For this dissertation, I take up the aforementioned three research questions through an

embedded case study. A case study has been defined by Merriam (1998) as "an examination of

specific phenomenon such as a program, an event, a person, a process, an institution, or a social

group" (p.9). I conducted an embedded case study of one of Tennessee's strategies to improving

"priority schools", or those schools performing in the bottom five percent in the state, using a

hybrid state/NGO model, where the Achievement School District is the embedded case of the

state agency and Empowerment Prep is the embedded case of the nongovernmental agency. For

this dissertation project, I specifically draw on data collected under the larger ASD study on one

nongovernmental school operator – Empowerment Prep - between 2014 and 2017 to answer my

research questions. I also draw on data from publicly available sources to analyze the ASD.

**Rationale for a qualitative case study**

　　　　An embedded case study design is appropriate for this study for three reasons. First, this

embedded case study approach allowed me gain a detailed understanding of *how* two different

types of educational organizations- the ASD and Empowerment Prep (EP)- manage the

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[23] The sample of school operators initially included nine charter operators authorized to operate ASD schools in the first two years, but three operators did not participate for the duration of the study.

educational work likely necessary for school turnaround in a hybrid state/NGO strategy to promote school turnaround, and how the two organizations and their respective approaches to this work fared in practice (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2009). Second, an embedded case study design is appropriate because I sought to understand contemporary, real-life embedded cases and the salient contextual conditions pertinent to them, requiring me to examine the complex boundaries and relationship between the phenomenon and context (Yin, 2009; Yin & Davis, 2007).

Third, I wanted to examine the complex interactions that occurred within the state's hybrid strategy, and within the broader environmental context, to understand the synergies, complications, adaptations, and learning that arise for the lead turnaround partner in the pursuit of managing the educational work of school turnaround. Qualitative methods can be suitable to explain events because such methods attend to and can account for the complexity endemic in events (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). To capture and unpack this complexity, it is important to obtain multiple perspectives on events and situate and analyze the experiences within a social, political, and cultural framework. The embedded case study approach and methods applied in this study enabled me to examine the complexity of events and triangulate multiple forms of data (interviews, documents, observations) to consider different perspectives and develop a richer analysis of the events that transpired over time with this organization in this unique environment.

Further, the use of an embedded single case study design allowed me to incorporate subunits of analysis and look at the specific phenomenon in operational detail (Yin, 2014). This is a case of Tennessee's approach to school turnaround and Race to the Top. This embedded case study has nested units of analysis: the case and two embedded units of analysis (Yin, 2014). (See Figure 3.1: Embedded Case Study Design.)

**Figure 3.1: Embedded Case Study Design**
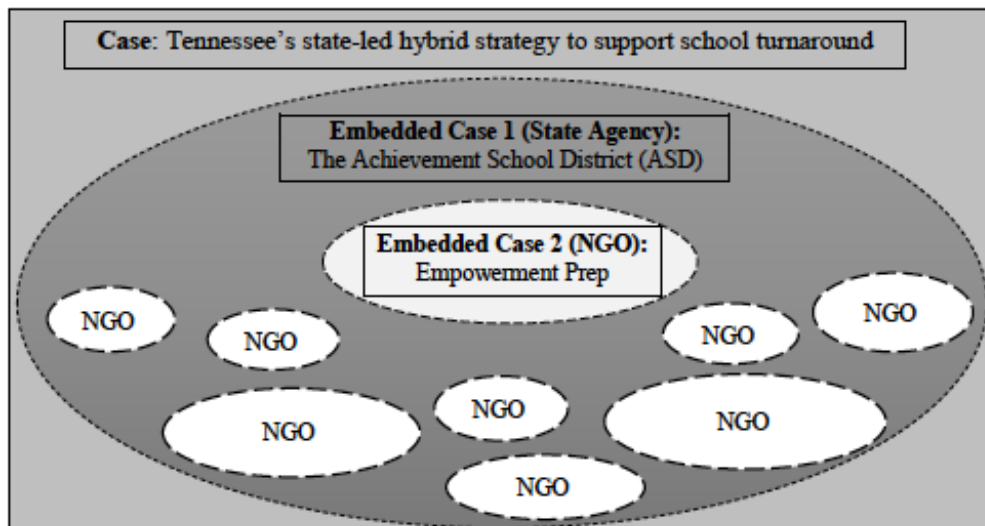
Inside the case of this state's hybrid state/NGO model to support school turnaround, the one embedded case is the state agency and the other embedded case is an NGO lead turnaround partner. There are multiple NGOs that partner with the state agency, and those NGO lead turnaround partners are represented in the figure as "NGOs" to present and contextualize this case of Tennessee's hybrid strategy for school turnaround. I specifically examine the two embedded cases' ("the ASD" and "Empowerment Prep") educational contributions to support school turnaround in this hybrid model and then, the NGO regional leaders' analysis of their experience implementing it within this hybrid environment and the broader environment over a three-year period (2014-2017).

<center>**Case**</center>

**Case: Tennessee's Hybrid state/NGO strategy**

The case of this study is Tennessee and its hybrid state/NGO strategy to support school wide-scale improvement of its lowest performing schools, or school turnaround. In this strategy, a special state agency was formed to serve as a statewide school district to support and transform

the state's most underperforming schools into higher performing organizations. This agency is called the Achievement School District. One strategy that this district would use to improve school is contracting with NGOs to directly operate its schools. This strategy was instituted in 2010, put into practice in schools in 2012, and continues in practice at the time of this writing.

**Embedded Case 1: The Achievement School District**

The state agency in this case is a state-run school turnaround district in Tennessee: The Achievement School District (ASD). The ASD was created in 2010, initially through the state's Race to the Top (RTTT) Application (2010) application and legally through enabling state legislation in 2010.[24] As it was conceived in RTTT and this legislation, the State Commissioner of Education may select schools in the bottom five percent of all schools in the state, remove them from their home local education agency (LEA), and place them under the direction of the new state-run district in order to improve these schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2010b). The commissioner and the ASD superintendent would have authority over this district, including the design for how it would operate in practice to support school improvement. One strategy they pursued was directly operating, or leading, school turnaround in a select number of schools. Another strategy, the focus of this study, was to partner with high-quality nongovernmental organizations (lead turnaround partners) to operate schools and would be overseen by the ASD.

At the time of this writing in 2019, the ASD has 29 schools under its oversight, managed by eleven different school operators.[25] The schools that the ASD oversees are all located in the state's two largest cities. More discussion of the origins, theory of action, and operational environment of the ASD are presented in Chapter 4.

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[24] For more information on RTTT, see Chapter 1, Chapter 2, and Chapter 4 in this dissertation.
[25] This information was gathered from the organization's website, accessed January 2019.

**Embedded Case 2: Empowerment Prep Public Schools**

The other embedded case is Empowerment Prep. Empowerment Prep (EP) is a charter school operator with over a decade of experience. EP expanded their enterprise to Tennessee to begin operating schools in the Achievement School District. They arrived in Tennessee with an established model for schoolwide improvement that had been implemented successfully in its original regional network of schools in another context with a different historical, political, and social context for schooling.  The model was grounded in a common goal of supporting all students so that they are prepared for college, leadership, and life. Their model focused on meeting individual student needs by offering a rigorous curriculum, academic counseling, and additional supports students may need to be successful. This approach utilized a personalized learning environment, a core focus on instruction, and family and community involvement. EP also arrived to the new region with regional and national hub offices to aid individual and collective schools in their network in educational and non-educational matters. While Empowerment Prep arrived in Tennessee with ample knowledge and experience, the organization embarked on this work in a new region with different environmental conditions, resources, and opportunities.

The objective in selecting one NGO from the study's larger sample of nongovernmental organizations operating schools in the ASD was to create an in depth look at a specific phenomenon that was occurring in a particular environmental context. I selected EP, in particular, in order to examine how one NGO with strong track record, previous experience running a network of schools, and experience managing the educational domains of work operated within a hybrid model for school turnaround within a new environment.   EP's

experiences in this new hybrid strategy would illuminate how these organizational features press up on its approach to support school turnaround and how EP responded to these interactions.

**Sampling**

Purposeful sampling was used to select the case and embedded cases. Purposeful sampling is important because it can facilitate learning by being intentional in the selection of the case from which much can be gleaned (Merriam, 1998). The case of this study is one of Tennessee's strategies for school turnaround: a hybrid state/NGO model. It was selected because it provides insight into an increasingly common approach to state-led school turnaround that couples a state agency with a nongovernmental organization to collectively support large scale, state-led school turnaround, rendering this a practical type of case to investigate. Second, I take this study up in Tennessee, in particular, for two reasons. First, it is a case of Race to the Top because it was one of the two states first awarded funds from RTTT. Second, it's a strong case of a state that has demonstrated capabilities and commitment to education reform.

The embedded case of Empowerment Prep was selected because of its unique attributes and potential for deepening understanding of this hybrid model. Empowerment Prep also represents a strong case of an NGO lead turnaround provider because it is an experienced charter school operator that with past success in other contexts. EP brings this knowledge and experience to this hybrid model. This creates a unique, strong case that would help highlight the educational work and learning likely involved in school turnaround in a hybrid, state-led model.

**Data Collection**

Multiple data sources, including a combination of semi-structured interviews, field observations, and documentation support the two segments of this study: (1) the ASD's educational contributions to school turnaround in a hybrid model and (2) EP's educational

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contributions and experiences in doing this work in this hybrid model. I primarily draw on documents to address the first part of the study on the context of the ASD (Research Question 1).

For the latter part of this study (Research Question 2 and 3), I primarily draw on data from participant interviews, document analysis, and observational data from Dr. Joshua L. Glazer of George Washington University's larger longitudinal study of the Achievement School District. Recall that this larger study encompassed a breadth of data, but for this portion of the study, I draw on only the portion of data that attends to one charter school operator-Empowerment Prep. I also collected additional document analysis to supplement and extend these data sources. Data collection for this study spanned from 2014 to 2017.

The array of complementary data sources over this period of time allowed me to capture an in-depth understanding of the ASD and EP's educational contributions and the synergies and complications that arise in managing the educational work in this hybrid model to support school turnaround. (See Table 3.1: Sources of Evidence by Research Question.) In the sections that follow, I describe the sources of evidence and data collection procedures for the two embedded cases. I first explain data collection for research question 1 on the ASD, and then I explain the data collection for research questions 2 and 3.

**Research Question 1**

Data sources from this portion of the study include a vast array of documents and archival records relevant to the period of the study (2014-2017). Data for this portion of the study were collected ongoing.

**Table 3.1 Sources of Evidence by Research Question**

| | RQ1: What are essential domains of the educational contributions of the statewide school turnaround district to large-scale school turnaround? | RQ2: What are essential domains of the educational contributions of the NGO turnaround partners to large-scale school turnaround? | RQ3: What categories of synergies and complications arise in the educational work of school turnaround for state and turnaround partners in this organizational arrangement? |
|---|---|---|---|
| Interviews: EP Leader Interviews | | X | X |
| Observations: EP professional training workshops | | X | X |
| Observations: EP internal monitoring school visits | | X | X |
| Document Analysis: Primary source documents relevant to ASD | X | | |
| Document Analysis: Secondary source documents | X | | |
| Document Analysis: EP application to the ASD | X | X | |
| Document Analysis: EP professional development materials | | X | X |
| Document Analysis: EP materials | | X | X |
| Archival Records | X | | X |

**Documentation**. This portion of the study primarily draws on an array of documents. Documents can be beneficial in this instance because they are stable, provide very specific details about organizations or individuals, and can be retrieved in an unobtrusive way (Yin, 2014). Additionally, document analysis counters the concern of reflexivity and are non-reactive, meaning the researchers' presence does not alter what is being studied (Merriam, 1998; Bowen, 2009). To avoid biased selectivity of documents, I searched and collected a range of documents that forwarded a range of perspectives to corroborate findings.

Documents were essential in this study to identify aspects of the origin of the ASD, its policy design, implied theory of change, and accordingly, its educational contributions in the hybrid state/NGO strategy. This portion of the study about the ASD's context draws on primary and secondary documents. See Table 3.2 for examples of the documents used in this study. These

documents were found through online searches. Documents were catalogued in a computer and

online database.

**Table 3.2 Document Collection and Analysis**

| Category | Document Type |
|---|---|
| *State government documents* | • Public statements from public officials<br>• Legislation from the state's General Assembly that pertained to the district<br>• Minutes and videos from the Special General Assembly and committee meetings,<br>• State report cards, ESEA waiver<br>• Public releases from the state government pertaining to enabling legislation, additional ASD legislation (2015-2017)<br>• Race to the Top application |
| *Federal government records* | • Public statements from public officials<br>• The state's RTTT application<br>• Race to the Top evaluation<br>• Report on Race to the Top winners<br>• Report on the first year of state's implementation of RTTTT<br>• Video from the state's defense of the RTTT application in Washington D.C. |
| *ASD organization documents* | State district documents that depict the ASD strategy and approach to the educational work to support school turnaround, including:<br>• strategic plans<br>• organization website<br>• mission statements<br>• theory of change statements<br>• performance framework |
| *Nongovernmental documents* | • Tennessee SCORE reports<br>• Gates Foundation Reports |
| *Media* | • Coverage of Tennessee education reform and the ASD from 2007-2017 from local and regional newspapers about pertinent topics (e.g., its establishment, political reaction to the ASD, school enrollment) |
| *Research literature* | • Reports and peer-reviewed studies of the ASD and the region (14) and other state-run school districts across the country (10).<br>*These documents were identified through online search of research on the ASD and the New Orleans Recovery School District and were written between 2010-2019. While this is a nascent area of research, a priority was placed on studies that examined the design of these reforms and their broader historical, political, and economic environments.* |

**Archival Records**. This portion of the study also draws on archival records. These data

are used in conjunction with other sources of information to better understand the context of the

case and provide quantitative insight into the case. I retrieved "public use files" from the

Tennessee State Department of Education on ASD and its schools' performance, attendance, and

outcomes on a variety of indicators (e.g., state assessment scores, and suspension/expulsion rates). These provide supplemental information about the ASD and its schools.

**Research Question 2 and 3**

Data sources for this portion of the study were collected within the context of Dr. Joshua L. Glazer's larger longitudinal study of the ASD at George Washington University, including: interviews, observational data, and documents. I supplement and extend these data with additional collection of documents and archival records that provide additional context about the embedded case of the NGO (Empowerment Prep). Data collection occurred from 2014 to 2017.

**Interviews**. Semi-structured interview data form the cornerstone of this portion of the study's data collection. I draw on data from 30 semi-structured interviews with the Empowerment Prep Tennessee leaders for my primary source of data for the second part of this study (Research Questions 2 and 3). These semi- structured interviews enable me to gain insight on the strategies used to improve persistently underperforming schools and how their design for doing this interacted with the environment in implementation and how EP responded to the challenges and opportunities that emerged.

*Sample*. Participants were selected to participate in the study through purposeful and snowball sampling based on role, knowledge, and experiences with the organization. Purposeful sampling enables a researcher to select "information-rich cases for study in depth" (Patton, 2002, p.230). Interview participants were purposefully selected to ensure that they were knowledgeable and represented a breadth of perspectives and experiences to support validity. Snowball sampling, where participants refer other people relevant to the study, was also used ongoing in the study to further deepen and broaden data collection. Participants included EP Tennessee leaders at the network and school levels. Not all participants participated for the duration of the

study. The number of interviews per participant ranged from one to seven. The number of interviews with each participant varied depending on participant knowledge and experience with certain topics, participant availability, and participant continued participation in the study.

This study primarily draws on semi-structured interview data with leaders from the regional network central hub office and schools. The initial interviews provided evidence on the following areas: the participants background (professional experience, experience in EP) and role; baseline data on the CMO's strategies for operating turnaround schools; and baseline data about their experience working in the ASD, including experiences working in school turnaround and in a new state and new school district context takeover setting. The same interview protocol was typically used for the first interview with all leaders in all CMOs in this study.

Subsequent interviews asked participants to reflect on (1) the implementation of the strategies, the challenges they encountered, and steps to address them and (2) their experiences operating in the ASD environment, including relations with the community, the local school district and the state. Additionally, specific questions were asked to follow up from the previous interview and other salient events that occurred during the year. Interview protocols became increasingly more individualized by role group and participant, as the study progressed and more was learned about individualized experiences and roles.

Additionally, for those participants with instructional knowledge at the network and school level and knowledge of the educational domains of activity (e.g., building educational infrastructure, supporting its use), the purpose of the interviews was more tailored to instructional matters. In these instances, the protocols were refined with the purpose of: (1) gaining background knowledge of the participant (professional experience, experience in EP), (2) discussing big ideas about the EP's strategy for school turnaround, generally, and instruction

and managing and developing teachers and leaders in EP schools, specifically, (4) discussing the design and specific strategies and resources the leaders and network offer to support the educational domains, and (5) gaining information on the experience of working with in the ASD context and their interpretations of the challenges and successes the network encountered instructional improvement.

*Interview procedures.* All of the semi-structured interviews used for this study lasted 30 to 120 minutes, with the typical interview lasting about an hour. Interviews were conducted in person (an office or classroom at a school site) or over the phone. Prior to each interview, participants were reminded of their rights as a participant and the purpose of this study. All interviews were audio recorded with verbal permission from the participants.  Interviews were guided by semi-structured interview protocols. These instruments were created by research team members from the larger ASD study from which the data of this study are derived. They provided a flexible structure and enabled the interviewer to pursue salient and emergent topics during the course of the conversation (Patton, 2002). All interviews were transcribed by a transcription service and then verified and corrected, as necessary, to ensure that information the participant shared in the interview was accurately captured.

**Observations**. This portion of the study also draws on direct observational data as a way to complement interview data with first-hand encounters with the setting of the case and also the phenomenon being observed (Yin, 2014).  These observations occurred within the context of the larger ASD study led by Dr. Joshua L. Glazer. Observational instruments were created by this larger research team for data collection, and, where possible, there was use of multiple observers during the observations.

This study draws on observational data collected from site visits of Empowerment Prep trainings and EP school internal monitoring visits between 2014-2017. The use of such data from trainings and internal monitoring visits enabled me to more deeply understand the design, the strategies and resources the organization used to support schoolwide improvement, and the adaptations that the organizational eventually made to their instructional system in response to the complications they perceived in implementation.

***Empowerment Prep professional training workshops.*** This study draws on data collected from EP's regional teacher professional training workshops. The purpose of using these data was multifold. I sought to gain a baseline understanding of EP's initial design for the five educational domains for school turnaround. I also sought to gain a deeper understanding of EP's approach to their professional learning system for teachers, including the organization's beliefs, values, structures, and processes, and how this approach and design changed over three years. Observations also enabled me to gain insight into the conditions (physical, social) of the immediate environment in which EP works. Finally, and perhaps most critically, the use of observational data enables me to triangulate evidence from other data sources.

EP typically provides teachers ten or more full days of regional network professional training workshops each year, as well as school-site professional development on consistent weekly basis ('school day PD'). This study draws on data from: ten full day professional workshops over three years (2015, 2016, and 2017) and one 'school day PD' session (2015). Sessions for observation were picked by a combination of convenience sampling (coordinating appropriate times for school visits with multiple stakeholders) but these decisions, where possible, were tied to selecting observations of sessions that were pertinent to this (information about workshop topics and relevance was attained through review of organizational materials or

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discussion with EP leaders about topics and relevance). While the workshops ranged in topic and format (e.g., network-wide group, school groups), all were tied to aspects of EP's school design.

In each session, detailed field notes were compiled during the session and immediately following the conclusion of the session. Additionally, an observation structured guide was completed immediately following the observation to capture consistent types of evidence across multiple observations, including a network's key ideas about instruction, student learning, teacher learning, and more.

*Network internal monitoring school visits*. This study also draws on observational data from two EP network internal monitoring visits (2014 and 2015). This is a visit at a school building where the national EP network team observes and evaluates the school around the key pillars of the network's design. A network wide practice, these visits occurred in their new region for the first two years. Specifically, these observations provided evidence about the network's goals, vision, strategy, and design for school improvement; the ways in which they perceive those big ideas being implemented in the schools; their interpretation of the results; and their proposed actions to address those results. During these observations, detailed field notes were compiled and one observation structured guide was collaboratively completed by multiple observers from the research team from Dr. Glazer's larger study of the ASD.

**Documentation**. This portion of the study also draws on documents to provide additional evidence on EP's theory of change and design for the educational domains of school turnaround. For example, this study uses printed and online documents retrieved from the organization and also from publicly available sources. These included rubrics to guide and assess instruction, documents from professional training workshops for teachers (agendas, handouts, readings distributed to teachers), documents that provide instructional guidance to teachers (i.e.,

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descriptions of instructional strategies, curriculum documents), documents that explain school

monitoring and evaluation processes (teaching evaluation framework), EP's initial application

for operating schools in the ASD, and the organization's website (description of core values,

strategy). These documents enabled me to corroborate and extend information provided in

observations and interviews to better understand EP's design for the educational work of school

turnaround organized around the five domains of activity.

**Archival Records**. The final source of data for this portion of study is archival records.

Much like for research question 1, I retrieved "public use files" from the state on EP's schools'

performance and outcomes on a variety of indicators, including attendance, state assessment

scores, and suspension/expulsion rates.  These provide supplemental information for my third

research question to shed light on outcomes that had bearing on leaders' perceptions of

complications and synergies in this hybrid model's approach to large scale school turnaround.

<p align="center">**Data Analysis**</p>

Since data collection for this study comprised of two parts, I engaged in two separate data

analysis processes for (1) ASD's educational contributions and (2) EP:TN's educational

contributions to support large-scale school turnaround in a hybrid model and the synergies and

complications EP encountered in implementing this design in this organizational arrangement

and strategy. Analytic activity began with and was continually aided by the research team for the

larger study of the Achievement School District conducted by Joshua L. Glazer. I elaborate the

two phases of analysis in the sections that follow.

**Analysis Research Question 1**

Data collection and analysis occurred simultaneously throughout the study, affording the

opportunity to explore emerging trends and adjust data collection processes, as necessary (Miles

& Huberman, 1994). First, I catalogued the diverse set of relevant documents (see "data collection" for indepth list of documents used) on a computer, using an online database for websites and a folder for secondary documents (e.g., scholarly articles). I engaged in an interative process of skimming, reading, and interpreting these documents (Bowen, 2009). This process occurred ongoing during the course of this study, as additional documents were found and selected. I created organizational categories to identify emerging themes about the ASD's policy origins, implied theory of change, and educational contributions. I then created a document to organize big ideas and excerpts from these documents around these categories. It was arranged by the organizational categories and smaller themes within those categories (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This was a continuous process, as more documents were gathered.

I then engaged in iterative memo writing (Miles & Huberman, 1994) to draw connections across the data (Maxwell, 2013) and to also corroborate emergent themes across multiple sources. This included discussing, analzying data, and memo writing with the larger research team. Given the nascency of the ASD and limited reserarch on it (most of which comes from the Dr. Joshua Glazer's study of the ASD from which this dissertation study emerged), I was intentional about triangulating data across multiple types of documents where possible. From there, I identified emergent themes in the different organizational categories. I used these memos to construct an analytical narrative of the origins of the ASD and its roots in the federal Race to the Top initiative, its strategy, its theory of change, its design for the educational domains of activity to support school turnaround, the non-educational contributions it makes to support this work, and the constraints it presented to the learning of its school operators.

**Analysis Research Question 2 & 3**

The analytic process for this portion of the study began within the larger ASD study led by Dr. Joshua L. Glazer at George Washington University.  Immediately upon the completion of an interview for this ASD larger study, the interview recording was transcribed, reviewed by research team members for accuracy, deidentified (using a pseudonym) and uploaded to Dedoose, a qualitative analysis computer program.  The research team developed a set of descriptive and analytic codes organized around key topics embedded in the study's research questions, and through an iterative process, the coding system evolved to attend to new themes and events that transpired during the duration of the study. Research team members coded transcripts. Inter-coder reliability was enhanced through multiple coding practice sessions where all members developed common interpretations and conceptions of the codes in transcripts.

I then analyzed data for all of the EP interviews, field notes and documents. I created a spreadsheet matrix that contained all of the deidentified data excerpts from the coding process organized by categorical code (39 codes total). Each code had a separate worksheet within the spreadsheet (39 worksheets total with 1450 data excerpts), and the worksheet contained three columns: the excerpt, a summary of the excerpt, and a key theme or analytic construct. I read each excerpt, denoting critically important pieces of text in red text, recorded a brief summary of it in a cell, and then identified any emergent concept in the third column. This process led to the emergence of new analytic themes that aligned to this portion of the dissertation's research questions about (1) how EP organized for instructional improvement, (2) EP's experiences in implementation, and (3) adaptations that were made in response to those experiences.

I then deepened this level of analysis by creating an in-depth memo that integrated the emergent constructs uncovered in this iteration of the analysis that was organized around key

dimensions: the background of EP, EP's strategy for school improvement, and EP's experience implementing it and key adaptations made. This memo was disseminated and discussed with members of the broader study's research team to strengthen the validity and depth of the analysis.

Through this first round of analysis, I developed a revised set of substantive codes (Maxwell, 2012). These codes aligned with the emergent themes and constructs from the first round of coding and analysis and also aligned with the emergent analytic framework I had concurrently developed for this study. One set of emergent codes aligned with each educational domain (e.g., building educational infrastructure, supporting its use, managing performance, managing the environments, and instructional leadership). Within each, there were sub-codes. For example, for "building educational infrastructure", there were sub-codes for each of embedded sub-elements (e.g., instruction and school culture) and for environments, there were codes for each sub-environment (e.g., social, political, policy, economic). A second set of codes focused on EP's experiences in implementation of those educational domains. A third set of codes included hub responses (e.g., the ways in which they adapted their approach in light of the new context) to those complications along each of the domains and their embedded sub-codes. These new emic codes helped illuminate a more granular and complex understanding of the educational contributions and interactions with the environment (Maxwell, 2013; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

I then re-read the de-identified excerpts from interviews, field notes from observations, and documents, and transferred the key excerpts into a new analysis document that was organized around these new codes. This document enabled me to see patterns, comparisons, trends, and paradoxes (Miles &Huberman, 1994). As my analysis and framework sharpened and

solidified, I continued refining and revisiting this document to identify clear domains of educational activity of the organization, the specific organizational activity involved within them, and the experiences of those in implementation. I developed key trends within each code category.

I then iteratively wrote a memo for each of the research questions to begin to construct a description of EP's educational contributions and the complications and synergies that arose in practice in this hybrid model, carefully noting points of discrepancy, differences in responses by different participants, and changes that occurred over time (Maxwell, 2013). To accompany the memo, I created matrixes that incorporated convergent findings across all the data sources that (a) detailed the initial entailments of EP's design and approach to the five educational domains and (b) how the salient interdependencies between the macro policy context, the ASD, the broader environments and the design, organization, and schools pressed on the EP: TN organization and, in turn, how the organization responded to the problems.

**Validity and Reliability**

I anticipated that there would be potential for validity threats to this study, as is a common concern for qualitative research, and case study research in particular. Validity, according to Maxwell, refers to "the correctness or credibility of a description, conclusion, explanation, interpretation, or other sort of account" (2013, p. 122). Validity threats, in turn, are a way that the researcher might be wrong, or alternative explanations or interpretations of understanding the data. I sought to proactively mitigate potential validity threats and bias by conceptualizing the potential sources of validity threat that are plausible in this study and strategies that could be used to mitigate and manage them.

**Internal Validity and Researcher bias.**

Researcher bias has the potential to threaten the validity of a study because of potential subjective judgments that occurred in data collection and analysis (Yin, 2014). Indeed, in this study, I brought to bear my own prior understanding of the topic of study, including experiences as an educator and also an understanding of school improvement scholarship, including dimensions of educational infrastructure and professional learning systems.

To manage this, I employed strategies throughout the study to mitigate the adverse consequences of researcher bias and strengthen the study's internal validity. I analyzed my own biases and revisited these throughout the study to challenge or confirm my prior assumptions (Maxwell, 2013). During data analysis, I strived to maximize accuracy and reliability. Part of this was accomplished by using "rich data" that was varied and gathered across multiple points in time. Data collection spanned three years and included multiple sources: interviews with participants with varied perspectives and roles, observational data, and documents.

Further, I strived to maximize accuracy in data analysis and reporting. I triangulated the variety of sources of evidence (see Table 3.1) (Maxwell, 2013). In that process, I searched for multiple cases of discrepant evidence, such as outliers, extreme cases, and negative evidence, which helps prevent selecting evidence that just fits into my frame of reference (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I carefully attended to multiple, alternative explanations for different events, in an attempt to mitigate the influence of preconceived beliefs and understanding from affecting the validity of the study. Finally, I collaborated with other members of the larger Achievement School District study's research team to consider alternative explanations and interpretations. In my reporting of the findings, I use specific excerpts from interviews and documents to support my claims (Maxwell, 2013).

**Participant Self-reporting Bias**

This study is also vulnerable to self-reporting bias due to the large use of interview data of the NGO. For instance, participants may have intentionally or unintentionally misrepresented the work they do or experiences they have had. Further, participants bring to bear their own experiences, beliefs, theories, and perceptions as they reflect and share their views on particular events, so any self-reported depiction of an event will be interpreted and filtered through those lenses.

This concern was addressed in the data collection process and the analysis process. Research team members worked collaboratively to design interview protocols that were free of leading questions and in the interviews made clear the purpose of the study and the interviews. During the interviews, research team members engaged in periodic member checking to minimize the possibility of misinterpreting what the participant is saying. In the data analysis process, I drew from multiple, varied sources of evidence to not only triangulate my findings but also to attempt to draw the most valid interpretations as possible (see Table 3.1). Through this, I was able to more clearly detect convergent and discrepant evidence across participants' responses and minimize the potential detrimental impact of self-reporting bias.

**Conclusion**

In the chapters that follow, I will explain the findings that emerged from the research questions and methodology described in this chapter. I start by examining the educational contributions of one of the embedded cases: The Achievement School District in Tennessee. I consider the organization's (i) origins situated within the federal Race to the Top initiative, (ii) theory of change, and (iii) design for the educational domains of school turnaround. I conclude by considering the strengths and vulnerabilities of their approach and ways in which they support

NGO school operator's educational work and learning that are likely critical for turning around underperforming schools. I then examine the case of the NGO: Empowerment Prep. I present its origins, theory of change, and design for the educational work of school turnaround. I conclude by considering the strengths and vulnerabilities of its approach, especially highlighting the need and ability to learn to adapt to this novel, complex context in which it was working. In both chapters, I present the educational contributions of the organizations by analyzing the design for the five domains of educational work: building educational infrastructure, supporting its use, managing performance, managing the environments, and distributing instructional leadership.

Finally, in Chapter 6, I examine the interactions between the ASD's approach (theory of change and design for the educational work of school turnaround), EP's approach, and the broader environment. First, I examine the synergies and complications that EP encounters in their educational work in this hybrid model. Then, I present and analyze key adaptations that EP made in response to those experiences to better align their approach to its new context in this hybrid arrangement in the ASD. I conclude by considering the adapting and learning that EP:TN did in those three years, the scope of work of school turnaround, and how the realities of that work collide with the ambitious expectations for rapid improvement set forth in the policies of school turnaround.

This three-year embedded case study provides insight into one state's hybrid state/NGO model for school turnaround that emerged following the federal Race to the Top initiative. One key finding is that organizational learning is a critical feature of this work of school turnaround, yet this runs counter to the macro politics and policies for school turnaround that seek immediate improvement with little account for or emphasis on the kind of learning that is likely imperative for organizations engaged in the complex and uncertain work of school turnaround. In addition,

the goal of this study is to develop a provisional framework that can be used as a foundation for future comparative case studies that analyze hybrid state/NGO strategies to support school turnaround.

**Chapter 4 Findings: A state organization's educational contributions in a hybrid state/NGO model**


In 2010, Tennessee launched a new approach to promote large-scale school turnaround in response to the federal government's Race to the Top initiative. They established a state-level school turnaround district called the Achievement School District (ASD) as one treatment for the state's 'priority schools' (a federal term used for those schools in the bottom five percent of a state based on performance on state assessments). Within this state-wide district, two core strategies for school turnaround emerged: one where the ASD directly operated a small proportion of schools and, more commonly, another where the ASD partnered with nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that would directly operate the schools. This study examines the latter, a strategy referred to here as a hybrid state/NGO model to support large-scale turnaround. In this hybrid model, the state turnaround district and NGO school operators (lead turnaround partners), such as charter school operators, were intended to work in tandem to improve chronically underperforming schools under the ASD's oversight.

However, little is known about these uncommon statewide school districts, such as the ASD, in general, and how they support the educational work of school turnaround and specifically contribute to five domains of work. These domains include building educational infrastructure, supporting use of infrastructure, managing performance, managing the environment, and distributing leadership (see Table 4.1 for a description of these five domains).

This leads to the research question driving this chapter: What are essential domains of the educational contributions of the statewide school turnaround district to support large-scale school turnaround? The purpose of this chapter is to begin to understand this hybrid state/NGO model for school turnaround, considering how these two organizations- a statewide turnaround district and an NGO lead turnaround partner- organize and distribute the domains of the educational work of improving priority schools and the ways in which the design and theory create opportunities and complications in the work and learning embedded in school turnaround efforts.

**Table 4.1 Analytic Framework: Five Domains of Educational Activity**

| *Domains* | *Description* |
|---|---|
| 1. *Building educational infrastructure* | Developing or compiling a set resources, strategies, processes, and beliefs that coordinates a vision and guidance for instructional practices and also fostering a culture that supports and promotes those (school climate, building community and family ties, and organizational values) |
| 2. *Supporting the use of the educational infrastructure in practice* | Developing teachers' and leaders' professional knowledge and capabilities through practice based instructional coaching, workshops, and collegial interactions |
| 3. *Managing performance* | Managing school and system performance for continuous improvement and accountability. |
| 4. *Managing the environment* | Determining how to address the influences and resources in the broader environments that inform the system's understanding and pursuit of instructional improvement. |
| 5. *Distributing instructional leadership* | Develop leadership across schools and systems to support, manage, and coordinate this educational work. |

*Source: Peurach, Cohen, Yurkofsky, & Spillane (2019)*

Recall that I bounded this study to attend to the educational contributions (rather than non-educational matters such as administrative, financial, political etc.) to be able to look more deeply at the critical work of improving teaching and learning in the persistently underperforming schools that are targeted in these state-led treatments. This focus on educational contributions is not to imply that the non-educational domains of activity, such as managing operations, are not critical. Indeed, they are, and I briefly touch on these contributions because

they create important conditions that fundamentally shape the environment in which the educational work unfolds. Still, the focus on this chapter centers on the ASD's educational contributions to support school improvement in priority schools in this hybrid model.

With this educational focus, a first order matter, then, is to consider the ASD's educational contributions to support school turnaround in this hybrid organizational arrangement. Specifically, I seek to examine the extent to which the ASD attends to the five key domains of educational activity previously described (see Table 4.1).

In order to engage in this analysis, the first task is understanding the organization's origins and design, including examining how the macro federal policy context of Race to the Top and the state-level policy antecedents to the ASD led to the creation of the ASD and informed its design. Then, a second order matter is to understand the ASD's implied strategy for improving schools and the educational contributions it makes to support large-scale school turnaround. This analysis then leads to a conclusion that considers the potential strengths and vulnerabilities in this organization's approach to the distribution of educational work and the ways it may constrain or support the charter school operators' educational work and learning. To complete this analysis, I draw on data from primary and secondary source documents and archival documents. This includes federal and state policy documents, and records, media reports on the ASD, ASD internally created documents, and a review of extant research on the ASD.

I find that in this hybrid state/NGO school turnaround model between 2014-2017, the ASD assumed a very specific, narrow role in the direct educational contributions to support large scale school turnaround that included work in the domains of managing performance and managing the environments for matters directly related to instruction. They did not directly contribute to the domains of activity of developing educational infrastructure, supporting use of

infrastructure, or distributing instructional leadership. Importantly, the ASD in this hybrid strategy was not designed to take on the full scope of the educational work in this strategy. This was intentionally delegated to the lead turnaround partners (school operators). The ASD, instead, would do the complex work to create, support, and coordinate conditions that would establish the performance goals, regulations, and salient environmental resources that would shape LTPs' working environment. The ASD's role, in turn, had implications for the LTPs working in this decentralized organizational arrangement in this hybrid state/NGO model. Namely, LTPs would function, in principle, as their own autonomous, micro-systems under the umbrella of the ASD. They would be empowered to and responsible for independently managing a broad scope of activity to operate turnaround schools, including activity associated with the five educational domains delegated to them. They would also be positioned in silos within the ASD landscape without formal, required structures to support collaboration and continuous improvement efforts with and among other school operators and the ASD.

To present these findings and answer the motivating question for this chapter, I will first examine how and why the Achievement School District emerged in Tennessee in 2010, providing critical context about the macro federal policy context of Race to the Top and the undergirding motivation of, vision for, purpose of, and design of the ASD. I then will explain the implied strategy of the ASD's within this hybrid state/NGO model. I then present the ASD's educational contributions across the five key educational domains and also briefly highlight examples of the ASD's activity in domains of non-educational work. I conclude by presenting the potential implications of the ASD's role in this hybrid model for the LTPs working within it, and I consider the strengths and weaknesses of this approach.

**Setting the Context: The Emergence of the ASD and a hybrid state/NGO model**

To examine the educational contributions of the ASD within a hybrid state/NGO strategy, a first order task is to understand how and why such a muscular, state-led strategy for large scale turnaround emerged in Tennessee in 2010. The understanding is important for two reasons. First, it sheds light how the macro policy context of Race to the Top informed this strategy, and the state's goals and vision for school turnaround and the ways in which those were shaped by the federal policy context. Second, it sets the stage for the particular strategy of the ASD in this hybrid state/NGO approach to school turnaround.

Among documents and primary and secondary sources analyzed, a common theme emerges: Tennessee's ASD and its hybrid state/NGO model to support large school turnaround emerged because for two broad reason. First, there was a policy window created by the Obama administration's Race to the Top grant competition in 2009-2010. Tennessee's policy leaders leveraged the financial and political opportunity and a decade worth of state education reforms to propose (and enact) the bold creation of state-wide school turnaround district in 2010 (U.S. Department of Education, 2010a). Second, the enabling policy for the ASD provided vision for a state-level intervention over the state's lowest performing schools. However, the details of this strategy would be largely determined through implementation, bestowing power to the Commissioner of Education and future superintendent of the ASD to devise specific strategies for turnaround that used the Achievement School District.  To present each of these, the following sections examine the specific origins of the ASD in Tennessee and the policy that emerged and was passed in 2010 to legally establish the ASD.

**The Opportunity for Creating a State-led Intervention for Priority Schools**

First, to understand how this hybrid state/NGO model emerged in Tennessee a first order matter is to understand the federal Race to the Top policy, the Tennessee political and policy environment, and the interactions of the two. Document analysis of state and federal records, public officials' speeches, and reports generated by non-governmental entities reveal that one primary reason the ASD and its hybrid state/NGO model for school turnaround emerged in Tennessee was because of a unique federal political and economic opportunity and a decade-long policy commitment to education reform that preceded it. Indeed, the ASD formally emerged through the federal Race to the Top application process and subsequent enabling state legislation of the First to the Top Act (2010). The federal government's Race to the Top grant competition defined a worthy problem (improving underperforming schools) and motivated a solution that would be confined by a set of parameters set forth by the federal initiative.

However, deeper analysis reveals that while the Race to the Top (RTTT) program created an opportunity for policy agenda setting, it was state policy leaders who leveraged the opportunity to enact sweeping education reform legislation in 2010.  They did so by coupling the RTTT funding opportunity with the state's recent track record of education reform and broad-based support for RTTT to enact legislation to create the ASD, among other RTTT inspired reforms. In this sense, federal policy instigated the creation of the ASD, yet policy making at two levels of government forged a path for a muscular organization like the ASD to emerge.

**Federal policy creates a window.** RTTT, a federal policy initiative, created the explicit opportunity and motivated the creation of the Achievement School District to support the rapid improvement of Tennessee's lowest performing priority schools in the state.  It presented a short, six-month time frame in which the state would devise (and in some cases legislate) ambitious

and sweeping education reform. It was not new that the federal government positioned states centrally in school turnaround work. Indeed, recall from Chapter 2, state involvement in improving persistently underperforming schools increased over the last fifty years in the wake of federal policies, particularly intensifying following the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 and the School Improvement Grant (SIG) program. However, RTTT further elevated school turnaround on state agendas and incentivized states to create policy responses, such as the ASD.

The federal RTTT was a novel educational reform policy and economic policy that was announced in July 2009. It was a competition intended to spur ambitious education reform, while also provide states much needed funding during the recession (McGuinn, 2012). RTTT both narrowly defined problems and solutions for states choosing to participate in the competition and create policy proposals. RTTT specifically defined the types of policies that successful applications should include around four focus assurance areas, including adopting high-quality standards and assessments, using data to improve instruction, supporting and developing great teachers, and, most notably for this study, turning around what the federal government defined as "persistently lowest achieving schools" (U.S. Department of Education, 2009).[26]

For instance, the RTTT application and accompanying rubric (2010a) used to assess the applications provided clear specifications and parameters on what these successful proposals would include.  For example, for the fourth assurance area focused on improvement of priority schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2010a; U.S. Department of Education, 2010b), the application specified that proposals should ensure that the state has the:

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[26]Based on the Race to the Top application (U.S. Department of Education, 2009, p. 10), persistently low performing schools included those schools eligible for Title I that are the bottom-five percent of the consistently lowest performing schools based on annual assessments and, if applicable, have graduation rates below 60 percent.

(1) "[L]egal, statutory, or regulatory authority to intervene directly in the State's persistently lowest-achieving schools and in LEAs that are in improvement or corrective action status.

(2)  [H]igh-quality plan and ambitious yet achievable annual targets identify the persistently lowest-achieving schools…[and] support its LEAs in turning around these schools by implementing one of the four school intervention models: turnaround model, restart model, school closure, or transformation model."

Further, and more broadly, based on guidelines in the RTTT application and rubric, state proposals should include evidence of: broad-based support from diverse stakeholders (e.g., districts, school boards, foundations, unions); inter-governmental organizational support and engagement in the proposals; and a strong track record of reform efforts that support the initiatives. While these guidelines framed the types of policies proposed, there was still the expectation that states would create individualized reforms. Indeed, this happened, as Chapter 2 shows the differentiation across states' strategies for school turnaround. Still, the RTTT competition assumed a heavy hand in defining problems and the types of solutions to solve them.

This federal competition unfolded quickly, in part due to the national financial crisis and urgency to distribute funds to states through this medium. It forwarded similar urgency for states to develop, submit, and enact proposals upon being awarded funds. For instance, the competition was announced in July 2009 and completed proposals were due in January 2010. Winning states would have to report annual progress and expected to immediately use the funds to enact proposed policies.

*Tennessee embarks on the RTTT competition*. RTTT created a unique moment for education reform in Tennessee. Through RTTT, Tennessee created the Achievement School

District as one intervention included in the state's policy proposal for the school turnaround assurance area. Tennessee policymakers engaged in the RTTT because the state had a current track record of reform that positioned it to create a competitive application, expand its current education reform efforts, and possibly secure additional funds in the midst of a national financial crisis (Finch, 2012). As Tennessee's then Governor Bredesen said at the start of a Special Session for the General Assembly to pass the RTTT inspired legislation in January, 2010:

> The stars have aligned this year to create opportunities to make significant improvements in public education in Tennessee. What that happens, we're obligated as public officials to seize the moment…That moment is now (Tennessee State Department, 2010).

Following this Special Session, the ASD was formally and legally created, and just two days later, Tennessee's RTTT Application was submitted to the U.S. Department of Education in time to meet the deadline and deemed a "winner" of the competition a few months later.

**State-level policymakers seize the moment in Tennessee.** While document analysis reveals that RTTT created an opportunity for policy agenda setting, opportunities like these are not self-enacting. Accordingly, the creation of the ASD relied on Tennessee's political leaders' capabilities to "seize the moment" of the unique RTTT opportunity from the federal political subsystem. Policy leaders, particularly a popular, second term governor with an education-focused agenda, created and leveraged two sets of conditions for the state to seize this moment and create a competitive application: (1) leveraging the state's strong track record of recent education reforms and perception that education reform was an ongoing priority and (2) garnered broad-based support for the RTTT proposal and enabling legislation.

*Past state education reforms*. First, previous education reforms were important precursors for the ASD and the state's successful RTTT application. Major education reforms were advanced starting in 2007 (preceding RTTT) that related to and were important building

blocks for new policies aligned to RTTT's assurance areas. These reforms were spearheaded by Governor Bredesen's administration in response to the administration's agenda and also growing public perception of challenges with the state education system (Finch, 2012). For instance, reports and scores on national normed tests indicated that Tennessee was lagging behind other states and insufficiently preparing its students for post-secondary success (Competitive workforce, 2007). The governor addressed this and forwarded the agenda with a suite of education reforms, including: using data to improve instruction, supporting and developing teachers, increasing teacher compensation, expanding state-wide pre-K, modernizing of the state's Basic Education Program for funding (SCORE, 2009). This resulted in sustained and heightened attention on and imperative for education reform in Tennessee in 2009 when RTTT was introduced.

With these reforms and sustained attention to reform, RTTT and its prospects of securing additional revenue did not necessarily propel education reform on the political agenda but rather heightened and incentivized additional attention to it (Finch, 2012). All of this positioned Tennessee to produce a strong and broadly supported RTTT application. The proposed reforms in the RTTT application could be viewed as a logical extension of years of committed educational reform (rather than a major pivot that potential could raise questions of public support and political sustainability for such reforms); they softened the ground for additional reforms. This strengthened Tennessee's RTTT application by demonstrating commitment to educational change. For example, Governor Bredesen in his speech at the Special Session of the General Assembly in 2010 said, "Tennessee is very competitive" in the RTTT competition, stating "we have a number of things going for us," and identified all of the aforementioned reforms and how they bolstered the state's competitive edge ("Bredesen urges swift passage of

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Education Innovation", 2010). Further, U.S. Secretary Duncan, when announcing the winners of the first round of RTTT, said that previous reform efforts fortified Tennessee's application, stating, "Both of the winning states built on their unique strengths and track records, rather than trying to manufacture a reform agenda from whole cloth" (Duncan, 2009b).

***Broad based acceptability for RTTT proposal and enabling legislation.*** Second, a bi-partisan coalition of political leaders and non-governmental organizations championed reforms to create momentum for RTTT and to develop a competitive RTTT application. All of the aforementioned conditions (sustained focus and emphasis on education reform in the state, a track record of education reforms, the opportunity to secure additional revenue), as well as a proactive governor and bi-partisan leadership spearheading the initiative and emphasis on diverse stakeholders' formal support created conditions ripe for broad-based acceptability (Finch, 2012). For instance, the enabling legislation for the ASD and the other proposed reforms included in the RTTT application were passed in the General Assembly with all but 12 of the 124 legislators voting in favor of it (Tennessee General Assembly, 2010). External advocacy groups and foundations also supported reforms, such as the Gates Foundation and State Collaborative on Reforming Education (an independent advocacy and research institution). Further, all 136 school districts in the state submitted letters of support for the RTTT application (U.S. Department of Education, 2010b).

Taken together, federal policy making created a window of opportunity to formally establish an uncommon, muscular, state intervention for school turnaround. RTTT defined a problem and established the bounds for how states might devise a solution. While this RTTT initiative created an opportunity, state-level policy makers leveraged it by coupling steady attention to education reform, strong leadership, and the economic and political opportunity of

RTTT to create a proposal for sweeping reforms and the institution of the ASD. RTTT did not

mandate the creation of specific strategies, such as a state-run school turnaround district;

Tennessee created that. RTTT did not stipulate that states create the explicit hybrid model that

came to life in Tennessee in 2012; Tennessee created that.

**The ASD policy**

To further understand how Tennessee's particular hybrid state/NGO strategy for large-

scale improvement of its "priority schools" developed, a second order matter is to examine the

ASD's enabling policy. The ASD policy proposal in the RTTT application and First to the Top

(FTTT) Act of 2010 (*Tennessee Code 49-1-614*) tightly aligned to the criteria of the RTTT

application, while it loosely elaborated how the ASD would support the improvement of the

lowest performing schools. The policy proposal stated that many of those decisions would be

delegated to the State Commissioner of Education and the future leader of the ASD and,

accordingly, made during implementation (U.S. Department of Education, 2010, p.22).[27]

As it was stated in RTTT application and FTTT legislation, the State Commissioner of

Education would be allowed to intervene in the persistently lowest-achieving schools in the state

(See Appendix C for First to the Top legislation). The commissioner would be able select

schools in the bottom five percent of all the state's Title I schools (referred to as "priority

schools"), remove them from their local district, and place them under the direction of the new

state-run district (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). As stated in the law, "The commissioner

shall have the authority to choose for the school the plan of alternative governance to be

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[27] RTTT application reviewers gave this portion of the application the highest possible score, signaling the tight alignment.  The RTTT application reviewers' comments for the first dimension stated that the Tennessee State Department of Education had "unprecedented authority to intervene in the State's persistently lowest-performing schools and LEA's failing to produce results. Specifically, the State gave the Commissioner the authority to create a state-run school district.

developed and implemented" (*Tennessee Code 49-1-614*) (See Appendix C). For instance, every

ASD school would be subject to one of the four intervention models outlined in the RTTT.[28]

Schools would return to their home district in five years, conditional on improved performance.

Further, the policy granted the commissioner and superintendent of the ASD authority

and autonomy to create a strategy within the parameters set forth in the legislation. The ASD

would be led by a superintendent who would have "full authority to enact change in schools, or

confer authority on school leaders or operators, while reporting directly to the commissioner"

(U.S. Department of Education, 2010b, p.124). Ultimately, the commissioner was bestowed

"complete decision-making authority for the schools in the ASD" in the RTTT application (U.S.

Department of Education, 2010b, p. 124).

The legislation and proposal for the ASD provided a sketch of a reform premised on high

stakes accountability, state intervention and removal of schools from local control, external

partners enhancing school capabilities, and ample authority granted to the commissioner and

superintendent. It did not fully elaborate how the ASD would be operationalized to support the

improvement of low performing schools. For example, the law stated that the ASD would partner

with non-profit organizations to assist in operating the schools.  The RTTT application stated:

> The ASD will give [the targeted bottom 5 percent schools] the conditions they need to
> turn around successfully, and partnering with a small number of high-capacity non-profit
> organizations chosen from around the country to provide an outstanding supply of
> teachers, leaders, and charter school operators for schools in the ASD. (U.S. Department
> of Education, 2010b)

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[28] According to the RTTT application, these four interventions included: turnaround (new school leader and new staff would have increased operational authority), restart (converting a school into a charter school operated by one of the ASD partner organizations), closure (state closes the school), or transformation (new leader and staff works with partner to improve schools).

The proposal or legislation did not specify what those conditions would be, how or what type of non-profit organizations would be selected, and how the state and the schools would work with the non-profit organizations to improve outcomes.

Those decisions, and others, would be operationalized in implementation, when the commissioner and ASD superintendent would devise a specific vision, theory of change, and technical specifications for the ASD. This process of translating a policy vision into a practical intervention began in 2011, when the state appointed a superintendent for the special state-run district to begin to operationalize ideas into practice (Glazer, Massell, Beuche, & Egan, 2016).

Taken together, the findings presenting in the preceding analysis suggest that the federal grant competition, Race to the Top, motivated a bold state-level policy response to improve persistently underperforming schools. Tennessee policymakers designed a policy for the ASD that reflected the ideas in the macro policy context and also provided a general frame for this new school district that, in practice, would be operationalized by its leaders. In effect, the policy afforded a few state-level leaders' autonomy, authority, and no oversight from a democratically elected body (e.g., school board) to devise a state-level intervention that removed schools from local districts. This serves as a critical context on which the ASD would be built and how a hybrid state/NGO model for school turnaround would operate.

**ASD and the approach of the hybrid state/NGO model for school turnaround**

With this understanding in hand, the next matter is to examine the hybrid state/NGO model's implied strategy. This is critical as it sets the stage for how the two organizations- the statewide school district and the lead turnaround partner- were envisioned to work in concert to attend to the educational domains of work necessary to support large-scale school turnaround.

Between 2014-2017, recall that the ASD used two types of strategies to support large-scale school turnaround. One strategy was to partner with nongovernmental, lead turnaround partner organizations to operate the schools under the ASD's oversight (the "hybrid state/NGO model") and the other less common one was to directly run schools (a "state-led model").

In the latter strategy, the ASD directly ran a small portion of the schools under its oversight. Specifically, the ASD leaders directly managed the operational and educational programs of those schools. This study does not take up this strategy because over 80% of the ASD schools were operated via the hybrid model.

Accordingly, the former strategy – the hybrid state/NGO model -- is the focal strategy for this study. In this arrangement, the ASD had the authority to create a district that partnered with an array of lead turnaround providers (e.g., charter management organizations) to operate turnaround schools under the ASD's oversight (Smith et al., 2013).

As a first step in this process, the ASD removed state-identified, chronically underperforming schools from the local district and placed them under state control (U.S. Department of Education, 20010b). They would remain neighborhood schools, meaning schools that primarily educate the students within the school's catchment zone (or zoned to other ASD schools), but they would no longer be a part of the local district in which the school was geographically located. Then, the ASD would match high-quality lead turnaround partners with a track record of past success to run "priority schools" placed in the ASD through what was termed the 'school matching process' (Glazer et al., 2015).

The ASD, as self-reported on their website in 2014, granted school operators increased autonomy (in resource allocation, academic programming, human capital management [e.g., ability to hire a new staff]), in exchange for high student achievement expectations

(Achievement School District, 2014c). Indeed, operators would be accountable to the ASD, and ultimately, the Commissioner of Education to demonstrate results (rather than an elected school board or other democratically elected body) (*Tennessee Code 49-1-614*).

In addition to high levels of autonomy and accountability, the lead turnaround partners (LTPs) would also have to comply with a particular set of operating conditions. For example, they would use facilities from the local school district rent-free. School operators would receive public funding, like traditional public schools in Tennessee, through sate per pupil funding based on student enrollment. Additionally, they would comply with state restrictions on student enrollment, where schools must serve all students (and the surrounding neighborhood communities) in their zoned catchment area (rather than open choice in schools, which is a typical feature of charter school environments) (Massell, Glazer, & Malone, 2016).

**The ASD's Implied Theory of Change**

The ASD's hybrid model's theory of change partly rested on creating a set of conditions to enable lead turnaround partners to succeed in operating schools. The conditions centered on the principles of autonomy and accountability for the LTPs that resembled a typical charter environment. The ASD sought to create a decentralized, portfolio system of relatively autonomous school operators (Glazer, Massell, & Malone, 2018). These school operators would function as largely autonomous micro-systems overseen and regulated by a state-level school district that would set accountability goals and expectations for the schools and LTPs.

Such conditions, according to advocates of more market-based approaches, could address an implied chief problem in school improvement and developing a system of high performing schools that the ASD sought to solve: the centralized decision making and bureaucracy in traditional districts and governance arrangements that are at odds with efficiency (Glazer,

Massell, & Malone, 2018).  Following this line of thinking, this "problem" could be hypothetically "solved" by placing decision-making power in the hands of capable educators with the knowledge assets for how to create high performing schools, in exchange for high levels of accountability on outcomes to promote quality control. In this sense, the logic of this theory of change suggests that the ASD can leverage preexisting knowledge assets – capable individual and collective human capital with knowledge on how to improve schools from external organizations-- to "turn around" priority schools in Tennessee.

ASD leaders envisioned that such a decentralized system premised on autonomy and accountability would create optimal conditions for charter school operators to improve schools because the autonomy would empower the capable educators to do the work of improving schools and liberate them from the typical centralized control (Glazer, Massell, & Malone, 2018).  Indeed, leaders of the ASD espoused commitment to the ideals of providing operators with as much autonomy as possible and eliminate central control. According to research by Glazer, Massell, Beuche, & Egan (2016), one ASD leader stated the rationale this way:

> One of the primary benefits of our portfolio structure with our autonomous schools and operators is our promise that we will… rapidly develop innovative, student-centered responses. This is going to enable the schools to perform much better and much faster than they would within a bureaucracy where all of the decisions are centrally made and are playing to the middle (p. 9).

NGO school operators would have broad discretion over academics and operation, and they avoided mandating actions or requirements besides the legal requirement (Glazer et al., 2015).

The accountability, in principle, would promote urgency and provide narrow, clear goals on which operators could unilaterally focus their work.  Through these outcome controls, they sought to establish quality control mechanisms (Glazer & Egan, 2018).

**Theoretical and Practical Precursors for Tennessee's hybrid state/NGO model**

This hybrid state/NGO model drew inspiration from Louisiana's Recovery School District and drew on the theoretical principles of market-driven reforms and portfolio management (Bulkley, Henig, & Levin, 2010; Lake & Hill, 2009). The Recovery School District (2003-2018) was a decentralized system-level approach to school turnaround that created a portfolio district of lead turnaround partners (e.g., charter school operators) operating schools, much like the ASD and principles from market-drive portfolio management.[29]

The Recovery School District granted its LTPs considerable operational autonomy of the schools in exchange for high levels of accountability (Sims & Rossmeier, 2015). As a result, the role of the Recovery Schools District, like the ASD, centered on overseeing and enforcing accountability for a portfolio of schools run by LTPs within a school choice environment (rather than directly managing schools itself). Additionally, in the Recovery School District, much the ASD, state level executives (governors, commissioners of education, and superintendents) controlled this district without democratically elected bodies to oversee the district or their schools or formal mechanisms for democratic participation (Smith, 2014).

However, ASD and the Recovery School District differed in the operating conditions they fostered for the school operators. The Recovery School District's lead turnaround partners operated in a regulatory environment that more closely resembled the typical charter school environment in that their schools had open enrollment for all students, meaning that any student in the city could attend any school, much like the typical charter school enrollment process

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[29] As advocates for charter schools contend, this decentralized setting will spur innovation that will promote organizational structures and systems that will lead to changes in instructional practices and ultimately, will accelerate student outcomes (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Walberg & Bast, 2003).

(Babineau, Hand, & Rossmeier, 2017). This type of regulatory environment stood in contrast to the ASD, which had a more stringent restrictions on student enrollment.

## Educational Contributions of the ASD

The preceding establishes the ASD, in its role in the hybrid state/NGO model, was designed to oversee and facilitate school turnaround by creating conditions for lead turnaround partners to operate schools. Given this design and intended theory of change, the next matter to consider is the educational contributions that this statewide district made in this organizational arrangement.  Among the documents and extant literature on the ASD reviewed, a common theme emerges: during the years of this study (2014-2017), the ASD was not designed to make substantial educational contributions to support large-scale school turnaround in the hybrid state/NGO model but rather to facilitate the educational work of school turnaround by creating conditions that support their LTPs to manage this educational work. Still, they did make targeted, limited, and very specific educational contributions in the domains of managing performance and managing the environments.

### Considering the ASD's contributions to the key domains of activity

As established in preceding sections, ASD was not designed or ideologically oriented to be a direct provider of educational support or manage the full scope of the educational domains, such as developing infrastructure, supporting the use of infrastructure, or distributing instructional leadership to manage instructionally related matters (see Table 4.1 for descriptions of these domains). The ASD's approach relied on giving LTPs with a proven track record autonomy and power to devise and implement a design for school improvement. According to Groth, Malone, and Glazer's (2017) analysis, one ASD leader described the approach this way:

> I think there's one common thread across all the school regardless of type, and that is that
> we want to create a system of autonomous schools. The philosophy behind it is that if

you put decision-making power in the hands of educators that actually know what to do with that, they create high performing schools (p.15).

Implied in this is that the school operators and the individuals working within the organizations possessed the knowledge necessary to improve schools, and the ASD would improve schools by both leveraging that knowledge and organizing schools differently (i.e. create a decentralize system of autonomy schools) to use that knowledge effectively. This orientation, mirroring the macro policy of Race to the Top, presumed that lead turnaround partners had the capabilities they needed to do the complex, uncertain work of school turnaround.

Accordingly, in this hybrid model, LTPs would manage the full scope of educational domains. For instance, they would have sole responsibility of building educational infrastructure. Recall from Chapter 2, this would likely include building an instructional vision and goal, creating or compiling resources that promote that vision, creating a school climate that fosters an environment to support that vision, and engaging with parents and the community to support student engagement, student learning, and the creation of a school that is responsive to the community's values and needs. LTPs would also then create systems to support the use of that comprehensive infrastructure so that teachers and leaders could leverage the infrastructure to meet the desired ends. Further, they would likely need to develop systems to monitor progress on accountability goals set by the ASD, and also develop systems to support continuous improvement efforts so that they could continually refine their strategies, design, and approach to align with the current context (environments, schools, students, teachers). Finally, to manage the aforementioned domains of work, the LTPs would also likely have to distribute instructional leadership capabilities across the central hub office and the schools.

**Managing the environment.** While the ASD would not directly manage matters related to teaching and learning, the ASD would assume some responsibilities in managing the

environments to directly support teaching and learning in the ASD's turnaround schools. They did this in various ways, and I provide several examples to illustrate their activity in this domain.

For example, they managed the educational environment to find capable LTPs to operate their schools. This was a critical activity for the pursuit of instructional improvement in its schools, given the emphasis on LTPs' leveraging their knowledge assets to autonomously improve underperforming schools. They did this by recruiting LTPs to come work in the ASD, and vetting them through an application process. For example, according to document analysis of an experienced charter school operator's (Empowerment Prep) written application to operate schools in the ASD, the application requested a range of information, such as its: previous schools' past performance, enrollment projections in its proposed schools, detailed descriptions about the organization's educational model and organizational model, financial plans, parent and community involvement plan, plans for student enrollment and recruitment, and much more.

A second example is the ASD's management of the community environment and the school matching process, where an approved LTP was strategically matched to operate a priority school placed in the ASD. This process entailed months of planned interactions between the ASD, the priority school, the community, and potential school operator (Achievement School District Council, 2014e). The ASD engaged various local committees to play an advisory role in this process, where they would make a recommendation for which LTP should be paired with the priority schools. This was, according to Glazer and Egan (2018), a strategy to garner community support and elicit input in a complex matching process to try to make a community-responsive pairing between the LTP and the school. It is important to note, however, that the ASD had sole authority to make final matching decisions, per legislation. Still, it was critical work and created a foundation on which the school operator- the ASD- community relationship would develop.

The ASD also aided the lead turnaround partners in managing their new environment by providing guidance (e.g., meetings, trainings) to support LTPs as they expanded and transitioned to operating to a new school building in this ASD context. For example, they would support the school facility transfer process from the local school district to the new LTP.

As a final example, the ASD managed the educational policy environment. They made clear that state standards and state assessments are salient by centrally placing them in their organizational goal and accountability expectations in their performance management process, which is described in the next section on managing performance.

**Managing performance.** The ASD also made contributions to managing school and system performance during the 2014-2017 period of this study. Recall from Chapter 2, a key domain of activity for educational work is managing system and school performance for continuous improvement efforts and for accountability purposes.

Accountability was a key pillar of the ASD's approach to large-scale school turnaround. The ASD would establish high expectations in terms of student achievement outcomes and pace of improvement that would, in theory, motivate operators to develop effective and efficient means of transforming persistently underperforming schools into higher performing ones. They would monitor and evaluate progress annually, and use outcomes for high stakes decision-making (Glazer et al., 2015). Specifically, during the course of this study (2014-2017), a key way the ASD did this was by establishing accountability expectations, providing annual feedback to LTPs about their performance relative to those outcomes, and making replication and revocation decisions based on those results (Achievement School District, 2014a).

Their work for this started with setting accountability goals. Specifically, the ASD set the ambitious goal that operators would move schools from the bottom five percent to the top 25

percent in five years (Glazer et al., 2016). It also included devising ways to measure and monitor schools' performance relative to those goals. The district created a school performance framework that established the metrics by which they would evaluate school (and LTP-level performance). For example, in 2015, the school performance framework (SPF) contained three components and multiple embedded metrics, according to ASD internally created documents from 2015:

- Financial (to ensure LTPs were financially viable and responsibility [example metric: clean financial audit])

- Compliance (to ensure that LTPs comply with legal obligations [example metric: enrollment, qualified staff])

- Academic composite scores (used to track progress toward the ASD's goal of moving all schools into the top 25 percent and measure the extent to which students are growing [example metric: student progress measured by TVASS]).[30]

Taken together, this suggests that they provided metrics and performance goals for academic performance in their schools that created performance expectations for LTPs.

The ASD's performance work also included collecting, compiling, analyzing, and reporting data through each school's performance review and annual evaluations. From these results, according to ASD internally created documents in 2015, school actions would be determined. For instance, annual performance reviews would be used to make decisions about replication and expansion in the ASD; every three years, the ASD would examine data and make decisions about revoking operators' charters.

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[30] Tennessee Value Added Assessment System (TVAAS) measures the impact schools have on their students' academic outcomes compared to the student's prior year outcomes and the growth of other Tennessee students in that year. Schools receive a rating 1-5, with 5 indicating that students grew much more than expected.

**Engaging in continuous improvement activity.** The ASD largely provided accountability expectations and data to the LTPs for them to use to drive their own continuous improvement efforts; however, during the course of this 2014-2017 study, the ASD did briefly mandate practices or provide services that could be used to drive system continuously improvement efforts for LTPs (and were not tied to their performance framework). These included, for example, required use of NWEA MAP testing in some grades and providing consultations as requested. However, by 2015, the ASD terminated such practices to support continuous improvement and learning efforts for the LTPs and reoriented toward their principles of autonomy and accountability for their LTPs. This highlights a tension between their pillar of operator autonomy and supporting LTP learning in this complex high accountability context.

One example illuminates this tension and the ASD's foray in continuous improvement work: School Performance Reviews (SPR). The ASD briefly adopted a process to provide midyear, non-evaluative feedback on school level processes with the intention of providing LTPs an opportunity to learn and make adaptations to support better outcomes and continuous improvement efforts (Groth, Malone, & Glazer, 2016). The ASD used an external process that included a one-day visit to a school campus with a team of observers to gather and analyze data about school performance from observations, focus groups, and interviews.

However, this process raised a dilemma: If the ASD's strategy was purportedly designed to afford LTPs' autonomy on the educational processes and to position the ASD as a non-intervening LEA and authorizer, how did such a "non-evaluative" systematic evaluation of educational processes intended to support continuous improvement and learning align with that strategy? This dilemma surfaced for some LTP leaders. One leader from one LTP cited concerns about how this process added value to the ASD's ability to evaluate outcomes, stating: "I don't

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know that that's a level of detail that the ASD needs to get into, and I don't know that it helps

them a lot in terms of authorizing and maintaining high quality schools." This statement

highlights the perception of misalignment between the ASD's proclaimed role and implied

theory of change and this process.

This uncertainty about the purpose of the SPR converged with ASD leaders and other

LTPs, according to Groth, Malone, and Glazer's (2016) chapter on the ASD's use of the SPR. By

the spring of 2015, the ASD discontinued the SPR process, citing it as a costly process that did

not align with their focus on authorization and accountability. According to Groth and

colleagues' (2017) analysis, one ASD leader said this about the decision to discontinue the SPR:

> We reminded ourselves that operators came into this work with the expectation that they
> would be given freedom and autonomy to make decisions, to be responsible for those
> decisions, to learn from those decisions, and to act on their learning in a swift manner
> without the hindrance of a central bureaucratic entity quarterbacking all of that. That was
> the premise of how this all got started (p. 165-166).

This discontinuation of this work in 2015 reaffirmed the ASD's commitment to the principles of

autonomy and accountability and removed themselves from involvement in supporting LTPs'

learning and continuous improvement efforts, specifically, and more broadly, decision-making

regarding educational processes for the duration of the study.

### Considering the Non-Educational Contributions

The preceding establishes that the ASD made targeted and very specific educational

contributions in managing performance and also managing the environment to support

instructional excellence. However, the ASD's contributions to support turnaround largely

focused on non-educational matters: creating conditions to support LTPs in teaching and learning

during the course of this study (2014-2017). While it falls outside the bounds of this study to

provide an in-depth analysis of all of the non-educational contributions of the ASD in this hybrid

state/NGO arrangement, in this section I highlight examples of the types of non-educational

contributions that the ASD made to foster conditions to support LTPs in operating turnaround

schools. I present these examples because this work was critical, sheds light on the type of

contributions that the ASD did make, and illuminates the environmental conditions that bear on

the work of LTPs and the ASD in this hybrid state/NGO model for school turnaround.

Through document analysis and review of extant research literature on the ASD, one

critical non-educational domain of work emerged: managing the environment for non-

educational matters. This included, for example, managing the political, policy, local school

district, state government, economic environments that did not direct bear on teaching and

learning (although often did have an indirect impact).  In the sections that follow, I highlight a

few examples of the ASD's efforts to manage conditions to support large-scale turnaround.

**Managing the environments for non-instructionally focused matters**

The ASD engaged in activity to maintain a legal and operational environment in which its

school operators (the LTPs) would run schools. This activity included efforts to manage the

environment to protect the LTPs' autonomy, remove barriers to work, and maximize resources,

according to document analysis of ASD internally created documents.  The ASD addressed this

by, for example, managing relationships with key stakeholders across different environments,

such as the local school districts, community partners, and the Tennessee Department of

Education, and managing other environments, like the political, economic, and regulatory

environments.  The activities contributed to the shape of the operating conditions in which ASD

lead turnaround partners would work.

**Economic environment and conditions**. One example of this is that the ASD tried to

manage the economic environment and maximize resources for the LTPs. For instance,

according to internally created ASD documents, the ASD intended to maximize the flow of public funding (e.g., state basic education program [BEP] funds based on student enrollment by school, school improvement grants [SIG]) to the LTPs. The ASD did so, in part, by maintaining a lean central office staff and limited overhead costs.[31] Still, the ASD did not manage the economic environments for the LTPs or the finance and operations of the LTPs. Rather, the ASD expected operators to be financially solvent and devise pathways to sustainability, meaning that school operators would have to devise sufficient funding sources.

**Regulatory policy environment and conditions**. As another example, the ASD activity also managed the regulatory environment. The ASD operated in a policy context that defined regulations for operations for the schools it would oversee. Accordingly, the ASD and school operators would be subject to the laws and regulations that governed the ASD's work, yet the dynamic nature of policymaking implied that these laws could shift and "rules of the game" for the ASD and its operators would need to bridge those new environmental requirements.

For example, a legislative mandate required ASD schools to primarily enroll the students who were zoned to the school (rather than recruiting any student from outside the school zone to attend their schools). An implication of this was that students, families, and school communities were not necessarily actively choosing to attend their school, quite unlike the traditional charter school policy environments with open enrollment opportunities. Another implication was LTPs would have to manage high levels of student mobility (i.e., students entering and exiting the school at different points in the year), since they were required to enroll and accept students at any point in the school year (Glazer et al., 2018). A third implication was they would have to manage a dynamic student recruitment process because students still had a degree of choice to

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[31] For example, according to ASD created documents, in 2015, 97.5% of state per pupil funding was distributed to the school operators.

attend a different priority school or certain other schools (district optional school, charter schools, or independent schools) outside of their attendance area (Glazer et al., 2018). This example demonstrates how both the ASD and LTPs managed the same environmental condition but in different ways and for different reasons.

A second example of this regulatory environment is that the ASD's schools were expected to be compliant with all state and federal education requirements for monitoring and oversight. Assuming this typical LEA responsibility, the ASD also monitored compliance requirements for the LTPs in its district, including student enrollment and attendance, special education, compliance paperwork for the federal government, state testing administration, student information, and employment records and background checks for all of the schools (and school operators) under its authority (Glazer et al., 2016a). In turn, this implied that LTPs would be subject and accountable to this monitoring and oversight by the state, through the ASD.

**Local school district environment and conditions.** Another example of this activity can be seen through their work to manage and maintain relationships with the local school districts. Indeed, while the ASD did not require consent of local district leaders to take control of schools, the ASD leaders said that forming collaborative relationships with the local districts would be critical for sustainability (Glazer, et al., 2016a). Still, the nature of the policy design of the ASD created unintended pressures, interactions, and dependencies between the ASD and the local district, but the design did not provide any formalized processes to mediate these interactions. There were many ways that this unfolded.

One example of this was in the selection of priority schools to be placed in the ASD Recall that under the enabling legislation for the ASD, the state's priority schools could be placed in a variety of interventions for school turnaround, such as remaining in their own

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districts and receiving additional assistance. This implied that the ASD would have to negotiate with the local districts on which schools would be placed within the ASD and which would receive other district-based treatments. This negotiation process became more contentious, according to Glazer and colleagues (2016a), as both public uncertainty of the ASD grew over the 2014-2017 period of this study and ASD school performance on state assessments lagged. Another example of these interactions can be seen with school facility management. The ASD would assume control over the local districts' school facilities and use those buildings rent-free, while the local district would still assume responsibility for capital repairs (Glazer et al., 2016a). Third, while the ASD schools would serve students zoned to their priority schools, those attendance zone boundaries were determined by the local school district (Massell, Glazer, & Malone, 2016). As a fourth example, the school district-controlled access to student information, a key resource of student enrollment recruitment efforts. In turn, all four of these created another set of operating conditions for the LTP school operators that would shape the operating context while working in the ASD and potentially interact with their work to improve schools and indirectly press on their strategies for the five educational domains.

Together, these interactions rendered the ASD and its operators partly dependent on a local school district that had minimal financial or political motivation to cooperate. This created a dynamic the ASD (and other LTPs) would continually have to manage during the course of this study (Massell, Glazer, & Malone, 2016).

**Local community environment and conditions.** All of these interactions with the local school district were further complicated by the historical context of the local communities in which the ASD would work. This creates added complexities to the environments that the ASD would likely need to manage and in which it would maneuver as a state takeover district.

For instance, one local community in which the ASD worked had a historical context marked by complex racial dynamics and educational politics, including racial oppression, an arduous battle for representation and participation for its African American population, and a complex process to desegregate schools that lasted decades (Kiel, 2011).[32] In 2010, as the ASD was legally established by the Tennessee General Assembly with unprecedented power to intervene in local schools, a major local governance shift was underway in this city.  The city and six surrounding school districts merged to form a county district, but only to de-merge in 2013 when the surrounding six suburban districts seceded from the district. The de-demerger had ramifications for the city district and community. The district cut its budget, closed schools due to declining enrollment, and laid off hundreds of teachers (Kiel, 2011; "Fractured: The Breakdown of America's Schools Districts," 2019).

ASD arrived to this city in 2012 in the midst of this merger/de-merger process. The ASD's state-given authority to remove schools out of the local school district's control and students from the district introduced new financial, social, and political issues for the embattled and financially strained district.[33] In addition to the economic ramifications of the ASD's arrival, there were social and political implications. According to Glazer and Egan (2018), there were varying narratives about the ASD in the community. One of those represented growing pockets of local opposition toward the ASD, continually exacerbated by the ASD's growth, its schools' lackluster performance, the local school board's loss of power, and financial implications of the ASD for the local school district.

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[32] While other areas in the southern United States were forced to consolidate county school districts for purposes of desegregation, this city and its surrounding county did not, leading to a set of racially and economically segregated school districts within the county boundaries (Frankenberg, Siegel-Hawley, & Diem, 2017).

[33] For example, the arrival of the ASD diverted resources from traditional school districts and schools. ASD schools enrolled nearly 10,000 students who would otherwise be in traditional, local districts in Tennessee, according to district attendance data publicly available on the Tennessee Department of Education website.

This historical context of this local community created a critical foundation for one of the environments in which the ASD would work and need to manage. In turn, the historical context of the surrounding local community would create critical conditions in which school operators, directly working in the neighborhoods, would encounter and would have to manage.

**Political**. Additionally, the ASD sought to manage the political environment to remove barriers for operators by creating a political space for them that was free from political pressure and competing interest groups (Glazer, Massell, & Malone, 2016). For example, they did not establish a democratically elected body, such as an elected school board (Glazer, Massell, & Malone, 2016). Additionally, the ASD would have to continue to monitor the political environment because of increasing pockets of public uncertainty and disapproval (Glazer & Egan, 2018). Indeed, by the 2015 legislative session, just three years after the ASD started operating its first schools, 22 bills were filed that sought to limit or disband the ASD altogether. While all but two of these bills were defeated, the growing discontent coupled with tepid student achievement results from the ASD schools increasingly weakened political support for the ASD. This created an ongoing challenge that the ASD, and, in turn, its lead turnaround partner school operators had to manage during the course of this study, especially as it was mediated by the increasingly complex relationship with the local school district.

Taken together, the ASD would likely have to manage various environments, as this section broadly sketched, in an effort to foster a set of conditions that would, in theory, support the working environment for its lead turnaround providers. However, as this brief overview of this domain of activity suggests, this would likely be complex, uncertain, and interdependent work.

<center>**Reflections**</center>

The ASD was built on the pillars of providing its LTP school operators autonomy and accountability as key levers to support school improvement. The ASD was designed to be a decentralized system of autonomous schools (rather than a centralized bureaucratic system) overseen by a lean central office that coordinates and seldom intervenes in the educational domains of school turnaround. While the ASD was not designed to directly manage a substantial scope of the educational domains, it did take responsibility for a targeted role in managing performance and managing the environments for both educationally related matters and other non-educational matters related to the political, local, economic, and regulatory environments. The types of contributions that the ASD did (or did not) make and the core commitments to high-levels of autonomy and accountability, in turn, had implications for the work of the LTPs in this hybrid state/NGO model, including work in managing educational domains, managing the operating conditions the ASD created, and learning and continuous improvement efforts. They also raised considerations about the potential strengths and vulnerabilities for this hybrid model.

**Considerations for the LTPs in Tennessee's Hybrid state/NGO model**

Indeed, the preceding implies that LTPs would function largely as autonomous microsystems improving schools under the authority of the ASD and within a set of conditions that its leaders and the surrounding environments established. Through the autonomy ceded to them from the ASD in this policy, operators would independently manage a broad range of domains of work to independently operate their schools within the ASD (Glazer, Groth, & Beuche, 2019). This raises three considerations for the work of LTPs in this hybrid arrangement.

First, in this decentralized system that privileged operator autonomy, the expectation and condition of being selected by the ASD to operate schools was that these LTP operators were

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equipped with ample capabilities and knowledge assets of how to transform teaching and learning in underperforming schools. Specifically, this would likely mean that they had the capabilities to develop (or find) and implement all of the structures, resources, and processes to guide and support teachers and leaders in improving teaching, learning, school climate, and parent and community support. They would also likely need to have the capabilities to manage administration and operations matters (school operations and finance, human capital and resource management, IT, knowledge management, compliance and oversight, and more).

Second, LTPs would likely need do that work within and while managing a complex outward facing context. A byproduct of the ASD's premise of autonomy was that LTP charter school operators would be autonomous systems working within the ASD context, with little direct support from the ASD, and with little buffer from the external environment. Accordingly, LTP school operators would likely be highly interdependent with the environment. They would have to contend with, learn, and then manage a set of historical, political, economic, and policy environments that surround the ASD and its local context that have bearing on the educational and non-educational work. For example, LTPs that run these schools would be accountable to accountability expectations set by the ASD and shaped by the federal Race to the Top initiative, enmeshed in the historical context that surrounds and shapes the ASD's work and the local community, and vulnerable to the political conditions that press on the ASD.

Third, they would have to leverage their knowledge assets of how to improve the state's underperforming schools and manage the aforementioned outward facing work and forward-facing work of building a viable organization in a unique, complex, and uncertain context (Glazer et al., 2019; Glazer et al., 2018). They would likely have to learn how to work in this type of environment. However, they would have to do that in the absence of formal structures

and social mechanisms in the ASD to support that type of learning, since that type of continuous improvement work was a province of the LTPs in this decentralized system.

**Strengths and Vulnerabilities of the ASD's contributions in this hybrid model**

This chapter suggests that the ASD created a decentralized system of autonomous schools that intentionally distributed the majority of the educational domains of work to the LTPs and that those LTPs would be left to autonomously manage a broad scope of educational and non-educational domains of work. This raises a series of questions about the strengths and vulnerabilities of this hybrid state/NGO strategy for large-scale school turnaround in this context.

On the one hand, such an approach within a hybrid model could support large-scale school turnaround. They followed a decentralized approach to improvement that emphasized highly capable LTPs leveraging pre-existing knowledge assets to run and improve persistently underperforming schools. Advocates of market-based reforms would contend that the system's emphasis on school operator autonomy and accountability could lead to novel approaches to improving schools because operators would be unencumbered by constraints that might otherwise stymie change, such as regulations on school personnel decisions, curriculum and instruction (Bulkley & Henig, 2015). This liberation, in theory, could enable LTPs to re-organize schools in ways that allow school operators to maximize their knowledge assets. Further, LTPs would be held accountable to transparent, high expectations, which could be used to drive their improvement efforts without interfering with the inputs or processes that LTPs employ to reach those ends. Indeed, assuming that the ASD could find a sufficient number of LTPs that possessed the knowledge of how to "turnaround" schools and equipped with the capabilities to leverage that in a complex, uncertain environment like this one, these assumptions might hold and educational improvement across these underperforming schools potentially could unfold.

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On the other hand, the ASD's approach and its underlying assumptions also had potential vulnerabilities. Much like the logic undergirding the theory of change in the macro policy context of Race to the Top, the logic of the ASD's theory of change, rests on the key assumption that the ASD can leverage preexisting knowledge assets, meaning capable individuals and organizations with knowledge on how to improve schools from external organizations, to "turn around" priority schools in Tennessee. This, in turn, rests on the assumptions that such knowledge exists, that such knowledge can be used in any context, and that a sufficient number of LTPs that possess such knowledge exist and would work in the ASD.

While it is quite possible that all of these assumptions hold, it is also quite possible that they may not hold. For instance, would there be a sufficient number of LTPs with deep knowledge and experience in improving schools in the educational landscape, and would they want to work in the ASD? For those that do enter into this work, how would the LTPs knowledge and capabilities transfer to this new context? In cases where their complications in this, to what extent would these operators have to learn and adjust to context? Past research and experience would suggest that some of these organizations would likely have to do some learning and adapting in this context. However, such learning and the gradual improvement process that might ensue would collide with the politics and policies of school turnaround in the macro federal and state policy context that set high expectations for rapid improvement.

What emerges from this is the ASD was designed to delegate the major educational work to the LTPs. The ASD would rely on these capable LTPs to do the street-level work of improving schools in this complex context. This, in turn, raises the question about the educational contributions of LTPs in this hybrid state/NGO model, which is taken up in the proceeding chapter.

**Chapter 5 Findings: A NGO's Educational Contributions to School Turnaround**

The preceding chapter establishes that the state's Achievement School District made targeted and very specific educational contributions to support large scale school turnaround within Tennessee's hybrid state/NGO model. However, it was not designed to lead the educational work to support school turnaround; rather, its role was to facilitate that work. The ASD created a decentralized system of schools built to promote school operator (lead turnaround partner) autonomy and accountability of school operators. Accordingly, the lead turnaround partners would have autonomy and responsibility to manage and organize the vast majority of the educational domains of work of school turnaround, and, the ASD would not intervene in and would provide minimal support to the lead turnaround partners' (LTPs') educational work.

The objective of this chapter is to examine the educational contributions of the LTP in this hybrid state/NGO model for school improvement between 2014-2017. I do this by examining one LTP, a charter management organization called Empowerment Prep, that was contracted by the ASD to operate some of the schools under ASD oversight.[34] This inquiry is motivated by the following question: What are essential dimensions of the educational contributions of an NGO lead turnaround partner to support large-scale school turnaround?

I find that Empowerment Prep (EP) managed and organized the educational work of improving its schools in this hybrid state/NGO model for large-scale school turnaround around

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[34] A pseudonym is used here to protect the identity of the participants in this study.

five domains of activity: (1) building educational infrastructure, (2) supporting the use of the educational infrastructure in practice, (3) managing performance, (4) managing the environment, and (5) distributing instructional leadership.[35]  These five domains of activity were interdependent and coordinated and, in principle, intended to function collectively to enhance organizational and individual capabilities to improve teaching, learning, and outcomes in EP's Tennessee schools.  EP's approach to managing the educational domains of school turnaround emphasized both the capabilities of (a) teachers to use its designs for instruction and culture in context-specific ways and (b) school and network leaders to lead, guide, refine, and support the use of those designs, manage performance, manage the environments, manage an expansive set of non-educational work, and buffer schools from non-instructionally focused matters.

Given all of this, EP's comprehensive approach to managing and organizing those five domains of activity aligned, in principle, with the implied theory of change for the ASD, which was premised on school operator autonomy and accountability.  EP created a regional system of instructionally focused schools that required little of the ASD and aligned with the envisioned role of an NGO lead turnaround partner in this hybrid state/NGO school turnaround model.

Still, EP's system and approach to educational improvement had been created and used in another context. EP:TN would be implementing this established approach in a novel, unique, complex, and uncertain context, shaped by, for example, a unique hybrid state/NGO strategy for turnaround, a macro policy context that created ambitious time expectations for school turnaround, and a complex local political, social, and historical context.

To build this argument, I will first briefly revisit the analytic framework that guides this inquiry. Then, I will provide a brief descriptive background of Empowerment Prep, the lead

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[35] These domains of activity come from Peurach and colleagues (2019) work to synthesize common themes of research on instructional focused school systems, and they identified five key domains of activity.

turnaround partner that is featured as an embedded case for this study. I then will present the organization's implied theory of change. With this understanding in hand, I then analyze EP's educational contributions for the work of school turnaround within this hybrid model by analyzing five key educational domains of activity. I conclude by considering the potential strengths and vulnerabilities of EP's approach to this educational work in this new, complex, uncertain context of the hybrid state/NGO model in which they are situated.

## Setting the Framework and Context of the Case

My objective in answering this chapter's research question is to examine the educational contributions of an LTP in this hybrid state-led turnaround model to shed light on how this type of school turnaround model supports the educational work of instructional improvement in persistently underperforming schools. A first-order step is to analyze the key educational domains of activity that EP organizes and manages, and how those were envisioned to work individually and collectively to increase capabilities and improve instruction in federally designated "priority schools" (a term used to describe the lowest five percent of Title I schools in the state based on achievement in statewide assessments). A description of the entailments of EP's educational contributions is a critical step for more deeply understanding how a strategy for school turnaround, such as this hybrid state/NGO model, manages and distributes this complex educational work and also sheds light on the kinds of synergies and opportunities arise in this work under this hybrid state/NGO arrangement.

### Revisiting the analytic framework

To guide this inquiry, I use a framework grounded in research on school and instructional improvement, as described in Chapter 2. The framework includes Peurach and colleagues (2019) five "domains of activity of instructionally focused systems." I add definition to these domains

based on research on school improvement in "priority schools"  by incorporating specific

elements within each domain. Within the domain of educational infrastructure, I add two key

elements and a series of sub-elements to provide greater definition on the type of educational

infrastructure that a system of turnaround schools might need: (1) design for instruction and (2)

design for culture (school climate, parent and community ties, and organizational values). See

Table 5.1 for the five domains included  in this analytic framework.

**Table 5.1 Analytic Framework Five Domains of Educational Work**

| *Domains* | *Description* |
|---|---|
| 1. *Building educational infrastructure* | Developing or compiling a set resources, strategies, processes, and beliefs that coordinates a vision and guidance for instructional practices and also fostering a culture that supports and promotes those (school climate, building community and family ties, and organizational values). |
| 2. *Supporting the use of the educational infrastructure in practice* | Developing teachers' and leaders' professional knowledge and capabilities through practice based instructional coaching, workshops, and collegial interactions. |
| 3. *Managing performance* | Managing school and system performance for continuous improvement and accountability. |
| 4. *Managing the environment* | Determining how to address the influences and resources in the broader environments that inform the system's understanding and pursuit of instructional improvement. |
| 5. *Distributing instructional leadership* | Develop leadership across schools and systems to support, manage, and coordinate this educational work. |

*Source: Peurach, Cohen, Yurkofsky, & Spillane (2019)*

**The case of the lead turnaround partner: Empowerment Prep**

I take up this inquiry with the case of Empowerment Prep (EP), a large charter

management organization in the United States. Drawing on interview data, publicly available

data, and the operator's initial application to the ASD, I provide a brief organizational overview

of EP's arrival to Tennessee's ASD, the types of schools' EP ran in this hybrid state/NGO

turnaround model, and EP's central hub organization in this Tennessee region.

Well over a decade after opening its first school, EP expanded its enterprise to work in a

new region and within Tennessee's Achievement School District (ASD). They created a regional

hub office in the new region (referred to as EP:TN) and envisioned creating a small system of

schools within this region through the ASD. EP's national office (referred to as EP:N) sought to expand to a new region in Tennessee because, according to one EP leader, "all of the chips lined up." This leader said that in Tennessee, the political environment was supportive of charters; there was a commitment to Common Core State Standards; there were opportunities for growth; and there were sufficient funding streams. However, this leader said there were initial concerns about human capital due to the smaller market and, in turn, smaller applicant pool for teachers and leaders in this new context. Still, EP entered Tennessee with experience operating a network of charter schools, an established school model, and an experienced national hub central office.

**Schools.** During the course of this study, EP operated in one city in this new regional context. Since EP would operate within this new hybrid state/NGO state-led school turnaround model, it would operate schools through a unique arrangement that introduced three new types of working conditions for the organization that, in turn, had implications for EP's work.

First, EP's Tennessee regional network, referred to as EP:Tennessee (EP:TN), operated priority schools placed under the authority of the ASD for immediate and drastic improvement.[36] This had several implications for EP's operating conditions. Recall from Chapter 4 that LTPs, like EP, and priority schools identified to be in the ASD were paired through ASD's school matching process in the fall and winter. This had implications for the timeline for LTPs taking over schools. For instance, the lead turnaround operator would assume control over the building at the end of that school year (June), paving a short, two-month runway to prepare a facility (with often deferred maintenance), hire and train a staff, recruit and enroll students, and engage school community members. Schools would re-open under the new operator for the start of the following school year (August). The new school operator (LTP) would immediately be held

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[36] For more information on the ASD, the schools that are selected to be placed in the ASD, and the school and operator matching process, see Chapter 4.

accountable for results in that first year of operation. Another implication of this is that that EP (and other LTPs) would be transforming rather than building schools, and accordingly, these schools (and their communities) would have complex and unique histories, all of which EP would likely have limited initial knowledge or understanding and would need to learn quickly.

Second, recall that these schools would function as traditional neighborhood schools, enrolling students zoned to it. This stood in contrast to traditional, start-up charters that had more control over student enrollment through lotteries and open enrollment.[37] This had implications. For example, it had potential public funding implications, as state funding was based on student enrollment in schools, placing an onus and critical importance on securing enrollment for organizational viability. It also had implications for the students they would serve. According to multiple EP:TN leaders, the student populations at these schools were, on average, multiple grade levels below in math and reading and reported high levels of student mobility.

Third, while EP would have operational control over these schools, they were not completely independent. Rather, they would be in the middle of murky boundaries of overlapping governance systems. Recall, for example, that LTPs would use facilities on loan from the local school district and would be under the authority of the Achievement School District. An implication of this is that they would have to navigate different institutions as they ran their schools. Additionally, the ASD (the charter authorizer) would determine LTP's eligibility to expand and match them with new priority schools through a matching process that required coordination between the state and local districts. An implication of this is that EP:TN would have more limited control in how many and which schools they would operate.

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[37] At the start of this study, they were not legally allowed to enroll students outside of their zoned area. This would change in 2015, when operators of ASD schools were allowed to open enrollment to students located outside of their zoned area (only up to 25% of the student population) after all zoned students had the opportunity to enroll first.

On the one hand, parts of this unique arrangement were familiar to EP. They had past experience recruiting students, opening schools, implementing their design in a new school with a newly hired staff, and building relationships with community members. On the other hand, parts of this arrangement with the schools and conditions of operating them were new for EP. Namely, they would have less control. EP, accustomed to being their own LEA, would now have navigate layers of oversight between the ASD, the local school district, and national and regional EP hub offices over their schools, student enrollment, school expansion, and school facility management, as the preceding analysis and Chapter 6 show.

**Regional System Hub Organization.** EP leaders' interviews, observational data, and network documents provided a consistent depiction of the central, robust, and interdependent role that the system hub organizations (EP national hub [EP:National] and the regional hub office [EP:Tennessee]) would assume in EP's work in Tennessee. The EP hub offices (EP:Tennessee and EP: National) were tightly connected to its schools and functioned as a centralized office that had formal organizational control over the operations of its schools. All schools would receive ongoing support from the hub offices for educational related matters (e.g., instructional system, teacher learning system) and non-educational operations (e.g., finance, operations).[38]

Still, the regional Tennessee hub office would assume an expansive set of responsibilities in Tennessee, all the while developing itself and gaining an understanding of the context in which it would operate. Indeed, in the first full school year of operating schools in the new region, the regional hub was described as a "lean" team by one leader who reflected on that first year in a final interview in 2017. The hub office consisted of directors (one with experience with

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[38] EP:National and EP:Tennessee had shared organizational control over the schools when EP:TN initially arrived in the new region, according to EP leaders. The national and regional hub offices shared services, including: education, human resources and human capital, knowledge management, finance and accounting, strategic planning, advancement, and IT.

EP) for various domains (e.g., operations, special populations, human resources) and curriculum specialists in the core content areas.

**EP's implied strategy for change.**  Interviews and review of organizational documents convey an implied strategy for improving priority schools that included (i) effective school leaders and teachers implementing (ii) EP's school model in its schools, which would be buttressed by (iii) a system to continuously develop the professional capacities of teachers and school leaders, (iv) a forward-oriented purpose and aligned set of organizational values, and (v) a well-resourced hub office to provide critical technical and non-technical core support to the schools. These interdependent components would be enacted simultaneously and immediately.

This implied strategy for improvement would follow a gradual change process that would trigger immediate change (e.g., a more orderly school culture) and also a longer-term change trajectory for sustained and deep improvement in instructional quality, school culture, and student outcomes. One EP leader said this about the school change process: "You have to understand that not everything is going to happen at once and you have to know what the process is to get to the end goal. It's not going to be a week process to fix this." EP:TN leaders expected that "school turnaround" would take time. It would take time to build the skills, knowledge, and mindsets in all stakeholders- leaders, teachers, students, and families- that EP's strategy for improvement required. For instance, it would take time to establish the type of "good teaching in classrooms" that school improvement would ultimately require, as one EP leader explained. It also would take time to change mindsets. As one leader said, "Turnaround is really difficult work. It's about changing the mindset of students, parents, and the community about what's possible for students and what excellence looks like."  EP:TN leaders expected a gradual, complex improvement process.

EP's implied strategy for change, differing from the ASD's and Tennessee's vision for change, sought to directly organize schools in ways that improve teaching and learning. They would do this building educational infrastructure to promote quality instruction and a supportive culture, supporting the use of that infrastructure by developing teachers, closely managing performance, and guiding all of this work through strong, instructional leadership. Such a strategy for change would lead to higher performing schools and address a problem that EP sought to solve: students were not graduating at a high enough rate and not leaving the K-12 education system necessarily prepared for college or career. In this sense, EP's strategy implies that the solution to this problem centered on improving the learning experiences and environment for all students by directly intervening in the technical core.

With this organizational context in hand, a vision of a relatively experienced charter management organization with an established approach for school improvement that had been used successfully elsewhere, and a formalized hub office emerges. While it was equipped with many resources, EP would be embarking on complex and arduous work of improving "priority schools" in a new, complex context. For instance, it would operate as a lead turnaround partner within a unique hybrid state/NGO model for school turnaround, instead of operating as a stand-alone strategy for school improvement. In this hybrid strategy, they would work within a governance structure of the ASD, subject to its oversight and regulation. Further, EP would also be operating in a new region that was just as unfamiliar to them as they were to it. This region would have a unique set of social, historical, educational, and political conditions. While they were prepared in many ways to assume the responsibilities of the five educational domains of activity, this was a new context that EP leaders would likely have to learn about and gain an understanding of it. The ways in which this new context would press on that work loomed large.

**An LTP's Educational Contributions: EP and the Five Domains**

Analysis of interview responses from leaders in the EP's Tennessee's regional organization collected from 2014-2017, observational data, and organizational documents suggest that EP made extensive educational contributions to the state's hybrid state/NGO model for school improvement. While the ASD managed performance by establishing summative accountability expectations and the environments, EP managed all five educational domains of activity in comprehensive ways such that the activity across the domains and within the domains were coordinated by common visions and resources. These domains included: building educational infrastructure, supporting the use of the educational infrastructure in practice, managing performance, managing the environment, and distributing instructional leadership.

While EP attended to all of these domains of activity, analysis reveals three key findings about the way that EP organized these domains that had potential implications for EP's educational work in this new context within this hybrid state/NGO model. First, some aspects of their approach were still emerging and less developed (e.g., few collegial interactions and content specific instructional vision and guidance). Second, some aspects of their approach were specifically tailored for a different environmental context (e.g., the curriculum), suggesting potential incoherence between EPs comprehensive approach and this new regional environment. Third, EP's educational infrastructure emphasized human capital, illuminating potential dependencies on environmental resources that might not be met in this new context.

Taken together, EP's comprehensive and coordinated approach to manage all of these educational domains of work was resource-intensive and interdependent with the environment, raising questions about how such an approach would transfer over to this new context and the

type of learning that might be involved for EP in this process. It also raises questions about expectations and roles of LTPs in this hybrid state/NGO school turnaround strategy.

To show this, I will present evidence to examine each of the domains of activity. I will explain the resources and strategies EP provides and how they are intended to be used to support school turnaround in Tennessee's ASD during 2014-2017. I will conclude by considering the strengths and vulnerabilities of EP's approach within this hybrid model and context.

**Building educational infrastructure**

Among the EP:TN leaders interviewed, observational data gathered, and network documents reviewed, all of them provided a consistent depiction of multifaceted educational infrastructure that EP had developed and brought to Tennessee. This included a design for instruction and also a design for culture. EP's initial designs would provide coordinated frameworks and broad guidance (through materials, processes, guiding ideas, and learning opportunities) to teachers and leaders that, in principle, established a vision of how to create an instructional system and a school culture marked by a safe and supportive climate and high levels of engagement from parents and community. The guidance provided vision and broad guidance (as opposed to, for example, providing explicit guidance, lock step expectations).

These designs emphasized individual capabilities and teacher autonomy to use the infrastructure in context-specific, adaptable ways that matched the capabilities and needs of the teachers, leaders, students, and communities. Accordingly, the use of their design relied on human resources, such as teachers, to adaptively implement the model in classrooms, and instructional leaders, to support teachers in using the resources.

In the sections that follow, I present findings for this by presenting the two main parts of EP's educational infrastructure: the instructional design and the culture design. For each, I will

describe the core elements and key resources (see Table 5.2) and explain how EP:TN leaders

envisioned those being implemented individually and collectively to support improvement.

**Table 5.2: Primary Components of EP's Educational Infrastructure**

| Design | Element of the Design | Components (e.g., materials, processes, learning opportunities) |
|---|---|---|
| Instructional | *Instructional System* | **Instructional vision**<br>• EP's teaching evaluation tool lays out the standards and expectations for teaching around a series of comprehensive domains<br>• Access to a college-prep skills, knowledge, and courses: all students to have access to course sequence that will prepare them to graduate from high school and for college; courses to build cognitive strategies (i.e., reasoning) and academic behavior (i.e., self-monitoring).<br>• Traditional instruction (e.g., "gradual release of responsibility") with increasing emphasis on inquiry based and constructivist approaches.<br>**Instructional materials and tools**<br>• Curricular guidance for what to teach at each grade level and content area<br>• Signature instructional strategies<br>• Quarterly common assessments<br>**Supplemental Supports for students:** academic interventions for all students below grade level (e.g., double math and English classes) and more targeted interventions through the three tiers of RTI and services for special populations |
| Cultural | *Purpose and values* | • Mission: prepare all students for college and life by providing a small, individualized learning environment that engages key stakeholders<br>• Values: belief in students' potential, personal responsibility, commitment for excellence, respect for others in the community, and all stakeholders are crucial in the learning process |
| Cultural | *Parent and Community Engagement* | • Parent coordinator at each school site to work with the principal and the hub central office to promote parent, family, and community involvement<br>• Community and alumni events at schools<br>• School level activities<br>• A leader at central hub manages network-wide work on community engagement<br>• Partnerships with external organizations to provide integrated wrap around services |
| Cultural | *School Climate and Environment* | • School wide culture program to foster a positive and safe school environment and campus<br>• Strategies to build college awareness: college campus visits, visible signs of college<br>• Advisory program<br>• Internal and external student leadership opportunities. |

**Design for culture.** Data from EP:TN leader interviews, observations, and network

documents suggest that EP's educational infrastructure included a three-prong design for culture:

organizational purpose and values, school climate, and community and parent ties. Collectively,

these would create, in theory, a school and organizational culture to support learning. Much like

other facets of their design, the elements and resources provided frameworks and principles to

guide teachers and instructional leaders.

***Organizational purpose and values.*** Among the EP:TN leader interviews, observational

data, and network documents, a key theme emerged: EP's mission and organizational values

were oriented toward supporting *all* students' learning and working as a team to uphold their commitment to students. EP's mission and values set the stage for an organizational culture that emphasized a belief in all students' capabilities to learn.

Interview responses from every EP:TN leader interviewed revealed a consistent and forward oriented organizational mission: prepare all students for post-secondary success (college, career, life) by providing a small learning environment where many people are engaged in the learning process. From this forward oriented mission two core ideas emerge that permeated EP's approach and served as the foundation of the normative expectations and social values of the organization. First, as one EP:TN leader said, "Everybody who comes here needs to believe that students can learn, and that we're not going to give up on kids. We're not an organization that only wants the kids who want to be here in the room." Second, they also sought to prepare all students for post-secondary opportunities.

This forward oriented mission was accompanied by common organizational principles and values, which leaders described as key drivers of their work and foundation for the organization's culture. These were referenced in interviews and discussed in observations. EP's core values included, for example: belief in students' potential, assume personal responsibility, commitment to excellence, and belief that all stakeholders are important for learning.

Taken together, these organizational values and mission emphasized students', teachers', and leaders' capabilities, the potential for and emphasis on continuous improvement, and collaborative engagement of multiple stakeholders in realizing the vision of improving schools. These were envisioned to create a foundation of common beliefs that would drive school improvement. One EP:TN leader said, "Our mission drives us; our model drives us; our [organizational] principles drive us. These are all things that we internalize as leaders."

This mission and set of values, in many ways, coordinated with the types of "priority" schools they would be running. These beliefs could, in theory, support raising collective expectations and beliefs about what is possible for students, teaching, learning, and schooling.

***School Climate.*** Among the leaders interviewed, observations of school events, and internal documents, a consistent vision for school climate emerged: a safe, respectful, forward-oriented school culture that would support all students, eliminate impediments to student learning, and prepare students for post-secondary opportunities. Their vision for school culture coordinated with the organization's purpose and vision that emphasized educating all students.

Much like other elements of the educational infrastructure, EP provided vision and broad guidance through expectations and routines on how to enact the envisioned school culture; further elaboration and vision setting would be provided by regional and school instructional leaders; and teachers would learn how to use the resources and guidance in the design through EP's professional learning system. Two examples in the design for school climate highlight their vision and nature of the guidance they provided.

A first example of this was EP's approach to creating a safe and orderly environment for all students. The design established principles, vision, and organizing frameworks to school-level personnel to establish this. The design established a broad vision: teachers and leaders would form safe relationships with students and follow a positive approach to student behavior that focused on students' learning from and adapting their behavior through proactive and restorative practices. EP partnered with an external program to build a normative foundation for a school wide behavioral plan that emphasized this type of environment. Additionally, EP's teaching evaluation tool created formalized expectations for teacher practice that aligned to these normative ideas for school and classroom climate.

The guidance and resources created a vision and frame that enabled implementation in context-specific ways. While EP:TN leaders stated in interviews that they expected their schools to use common practices espoused in the program, including, for example, use of a specific procedure to communicate classroom expectations, the design afforded leaders some autonomy to customize the program for their schools. As one central hub office leader explained, "(The program is) not sort of a lock step 'This is what you do.' You have to … tailor the elements of that program to your needs as a school." Accordingly, such adaptive use of the resources would, in part, rest on both teachers' and school leaders' capabilities to learn about the context and determine appropriate customization of the design.

Second, EP sought to build a forward-oriented school climate in order to prepare students for the future, such as post-secondary opportunities. The design provided expectations that schools would build student leadership skills, early college awareness, and socio-emotional and critical thinking skills through various schoolwide initiatives. The design provided general guidance to leaders and teachers and rested on teacher discretion to implement these key initiatives in context specific ways. For example, they offered a program to support developing leadership, critical thinking, and socio-emotional skills. For this, EP provided a framework that delineated general topics to cover, but left it to school level staff to provide more explicit guidance and support for daily instruction. One leader stated EP would never fully script a curriculum for this program because it was the "the part of the [EP school] program that should be the most flexible because of the different needs of different kids will dictate how it is executed." This leader also said that, programmatically, it is "the thing that varies the most, I think, in EP schools." This highlights how this program design was intended to be adaptive to fit each context, and, in turn, would rely on individual capabilities and ability to learn the context.

*Community and parent ties.* EP:TN leader interviews and analysis of organization documents indicate that cultivating parent and community engagement was an important element of their design, but multiple EP:TN leaders across various roles one that would take time to deeply implement. Much like the aforementioned elements of their educational infrastructure, the design for parent and community ties provided vision, general expectations, and material and social learning resources to support teachers and leaders promoting engagement in schools.

For example, the design established an expectation that teachers would regularly engage and collaborate with parents and community members. This expectation was formalized in EP's teacher evaluation rubric that included expectations for parent engagement. Additionally, principals were expected to lead and support these efforts at the school through an array of initiatives, including, for instance one-on-one communication with parents, principal meetings, promoting student-planned schoolwide events, and hosting community events at the school.

There was also an expectation that there would be a leader at the regional hub office who would, among other responsibilities, support this parental engagement work by managing the parent coordinators, parent training workshops, alumni events, and student recruitment and enrollment. Further, they would hire school-site parent leaders for each school to act as a key liaison between the school and the parents. The parent lead would "create systems for parents and the community to get involved in the school," according to an EP:TN leader.

**Design for instruction.** Data from interviews, observation, and documents from 2014-2016 conveyed that EP also had a comprehensive and coordinated instructional design that included an instructional vision, accompanying instructional resources, and supplemental academic supports. These component parts would work in concert to provide teachers a framework, general vision, and suggested instructional guidance to teacher. In turn, it provided

teachers a degree of autonomy in using the tools, promoted adaptive, context-sensitive implementation, and relied on EP's professional learning system to support developing teacher capabilities to use the design.

*Instructional vision and goals.* The first component of EP:TN's instructional system was their instructional vision. Interview data, observational data, and internal documents suggest that EP had a forward-oriented instructional vision that was general and content neutral (rather than elaborating specific visions for each content area). Three key ideas emerge about this vision.

First, when asked to describe EP's central ideas about instruction, EP:TN leaders consistently referenced EP's teacher evaluation tool, referred to here as the TET. As one leader explained, "(The TET) is really meant as a tool to define good teaching for us." The TET served as an intellectual and material resource that framed EP's educational infrastructure. It provided broad guidance on expectations of teaching practices; it created the standards by which teacher practice would be evaluated; it guided instructional coaching and professional development objectives; and it created a common language to describe practice and propagate shared ideas about quality instruction. It would do all of this by forwarding a content neutral vision and set of expectations for general teaching practices, including: planning and assessing student learning, classroom learning environment, instruction, developing professional practice, and developing partnerships with family.

Second, several EP:TN leaders described a forward-oriented vision for instruction that focused on the future outcomes. Quality instruction resulted in learning that would propel students towards post-secondary opportunity. A few leaders explained that good instruction should meet an appropriate "level of rigor," which was considered teaching that was tied to the content and skill expectations set in grade level standards, so that as one leader said, "We can

actually get the kids to where we need them to be." In this sense, part of EP's instructional vision was tightly coordinated to and dependent on the local environmental context (e.g., state academic standards that established learning expectations).

Third, EP:TN leaders described an evolving vision of instruction that was transitioning from a more traditional style to a more constructivist vision. For instance, one leader described how daily lessons would typically follow an "I do, we do, you do" instructional format where teachers gradually released control over to students. Leaders explained that they envisioned striving toward a more inquiry-based and constructivist approach to instruction, which, according to one leader, meant "that [students are] going to be grappling with problems before we have direct instruction in a lot of cases ... And try to have [them] do a little bit more of the creation of the learning."

***Instructional materials designed to support instructional vision.*** A second component of their instructional system was an array of resources that were intended to provide guidance on how to deliver this desired instruction and to support teachers' capabilities to do so. Together, they would provide expectations and material resources on what content teachers should teach, broad expectations on when to teach it, and general, content-neutral guidance on how to teach it. This design intentionally afforded teachers' a degree of autonomy to tailor their instruction to their context. Teachers would receive more guidance from EP's professional learning system.

The instructional system provided three categories of resources between 2014-2016, all of which were coordinated with the teaching evaluation tool (TET): curricular materials, instructional strategies, and assessments (see Table 5.2). First, EP's design offered curricular materials to guide teachers on what content to teach at certain points of the year, including a course overview document, curriculum maps, a sample unit plan, and a lesson planning template

(see Table 5.3). EP did not provide detailed curriculums with high-levels of explicit guidance on daily or weekly instruction (e.g., scripted lesson plans). Instead, EP's instructional design enabled teachers to decide exactly how to organize and plan the units and lessons within the parameters of the expectations and resources (e.g., pacing guidance for content coverage). The design privileged teacher autonomy in this way, but in doing so, it relied on teachers' capabilities to use and adaptively implement the resources to fit the local, classroom context.

**Table 5.3 Core Curricular Materials in the Instructional System**

| Course Overview | One-page document that lists the standards and strategies that teachers are expected to teach and incorporate during each of quarter of the year. |
|---|---|
| Curriculum Maps | A document that specifies the course content to be covered (the academic state standards). The level of detail provided in this varied by content area. |
| Sample unit plans | One model unit plan to provide a model to guide teachers on how to plan subsequent units. |
| Lesson planning template | A template that explicitly lays out components that should be included in a lesson plan |

Second, between 2014-2016, data from interviews, observations, and documents suggest that the instructional system provided some suggested guidance on how to teach the content specified in the curricular materials by promoting the use of certain instructional strategies, routines, and micro-instructional practices. EP would encourage but not mandate the use of particular strategies at particular times. One EP:TN leader said, "We don't pigeonhole our teachers and say 'well these are the strategies you can choose from; this is what we do at EP…"

Still, even with this vision for teacher autonomy, several leaders indicated that through the use and ongoing training on these strategies, common forms of instructional practice would emerge. One leader reflected on the extent of guidance for daily instructional practice and said:

> You'll see teachers using very similar questioning methods, or structuring a discussion that has students considering a problem that's posed with a content in a real-world application, being assessed in very similar ways through an exit slip. While it's not scripted, there are certain things where teachers are supported very similarly in every region and guided to be able to execute the curriculum in a specific way.

Teachers' would have flexibility, but still, leaders envisioned that instructional practices would look similar (e.g., common questioning strategies, warm up activity at the start of class).

Third, EP's instructional system also included interim assessments aligned to the curricular materials and instructional vision. Multiple EP leaders in interviews said that they intended for teachers to use these to inform instruction in terms of what they teach (content and skills) and adjustments and reteaching based on student performance on the assessment.

***Supplemental supports for students.*** A final component of their instructional system was a system of supports for students who are currently struggling. All EP:TN leaders interviewed explained that a critical piece to their instructional system was the array of academic interventions they provided to help those students who are currently struggling to recover existing learning gaps. Given their mission, organizational value of having an unwavering belief in all students' abilities, and the types of students they would serve in "priority school" settings, such supports were articulated as a fundamental dimension of their instructional design.

These supports included individualized learning opportunities, such as tutoring with teachers, and also additional courses for students "below grade level" in math and English to help students recover skills to be able to engage in grade-level courses. For instance, students below grade level at the start of the year were placed in an additional math and/or reading class. Additionally, EP would provide more targeted support through their Response to Intervention (RtI) program, and as needed, their special education and English language learner programs.

Taken together, two key themes in EP's educational infrastructure between 2014-2016 emerge in this preceding analysis. First, EP:TN's educational infrastructure provided vision, frameworks and broad guidance to inform teachers' instructional practice and build a culture. Their approach, consequently, emphasized human capital (teachers and leaders) to adroitly use

the resources effectively and in context-specific and adaptive ways. One key assumption undergirding this was that teachers would have the capabilities to do just that—to translate this general vision and broad guidance into the desired quality of instruction and culture and that they could do so to meet the needs of their particular classroom context. This assumption would likely require teacher learning about that context and how to adaptatively use those resources in it.

EP:TN's educational infrastructure was also made in and for a different context. A second key assumption is that the design would largely be serviceable in this new context and EP's instructional leaders could learn about this context and make the necessary decisions to support its use (or refinement and adaptation) in this novel, uncertain context.

**Domain of Activity #2: Supporting the use of the educational infrastructure in practice**

Interviews, observations, and document analysis reveal that EP also devised and emphasized a comprehensive, multipronged approach to support teachers use of their educational infrastructure between 2014-2016. This entailed a teacher learning system that was coordinated around the EP's educational infrastructure. (See Table 5.4 for a summary of key components.) Much like EP's educational infrastructure, the components of their teacher learning system established broad expectations and vision, and the design also afforded school-level instructional leaders a degree of autonomy to tailor the approach in context-specific ways.

**Table 5.4 Key Components of Supporting Use of Educational Infrastructure**

| Key Domain of Activity | Components<br>• (e.g., materials, processes, learning opportunities) |
|---|---|
| *Supporting use of educational infrastructure* | • Workshops*:* over 10 full-day professional development workshops a year and short sessions held during the school day multiple weekly.<br>• Coaching*:* one-on-one coaching 1-4 times a month with differentiated supports for teachers.<br>• Collegial interaction: informal and encouraged but no formal structures |

This domain of activity was considered to be a key lever in EP's strategy of improvement. Their approach focused on leveraging and continuously building capabilities of

teachers so that teachers could effectively use their loosely elaborated educational infrastructure and ultimately improve learning opportunities for all students.

**Professional development workshops and instructional coaching.** EP's teacher learning system focused on cultivating skills, knowledge, and dispositions of teachers so that teachers could use the loosely elaborated and adaptable tools from their instructional system to provide instruction that aligned to EP's instructional vision set forth in the TET. Professional learning workshops and instructional coaching functioned, in principle, as a connector between the guidance provided by the instructional design and leaders' vision of quality instruction.

*Workshops.* Professional development workshops (PD) were central to their approach to building teacher capabilities. Much like the educational infrastructure, EP's design for how to plan and deliver PD had clear, broad expectations, and it relied on individuals (instructional leaders at the school and system level) to develop more elaborated visions and plans to create teacher learning opportunities coordinated to the educational infrastructure and their context. For instance, EP had established expectations for the type and frequency of PD (see Table 5.4).

However, while there were firm expectations and structures in place, the explicit scope and sequence of the professional learning continuum would be designed at the school and regional network level in order to create context-specific plans tailored for the instructional priorities and needs of each school and region. One leader explained the process this way:

> Early on, before the school year even starts, we work with our [EP:National] team and we figure out, 'Okay, what are the goals for EP in general?' It's usually driven by …the standards… Then we take a qualitative and quantitative analysis of data from previous years… Just planning backwards from there.

Then, school leaders design a school specific learning continuum, identifying priority areas and targeting specific indicators in the "teacher evaluation tool (TET)" to emphasize throughout the

year. PD workshops would be designed around learning objectives that directly tied to a broader

learning continuum. These workshops were typically whole group (including all content areas).

***Instructional coaching.*** To further enhance teacher capabilities to provide the desired

instruction, EP:TN leaders said that teachers would receive more content-specific, individualized

instructional coaching that directly tied to the TET and the instructional tools. The instructional

coaching design was meant to be adaptive, flexible, and personalized, reflecting similar attributes

of other elements of their designs that were intentionally open to meet context-specific needs.

For example, EP sought to achieve this level of content- specific and differentiated

support by creating a system that would pair every teacher with a content expert (an instructional

leader in the region) to support teacher development through different types of one-on-one

interactions (e.g., co-planning, rehearsal, co-teaching). The type and frequency of interactions

would vary depending on teacher experience and needs. One leader provided a hypothetical

example of how this differentiation would work for a co-planning service, stating:

> I think depending on teacher practice, skill, and comfort level... the coach can guide [this
> co-planning conversation]. So you know, sometimes it can just be [a teacher saying] 'Oh
> you know what, I was thinking of planning this and I wanted to run it by you. Can I get
> some feedback?' Versus, I would say the polar end of that is [a coach saying] 'Let's sit
> down together and script out what is your "Do Now" (start of class activity). What are
> you going to say to students after they do the "Do Now"? How are you going to transition
> from the Do Now to this activity? Let's plan backwards from this standard. What are
> going to be the practice problems you're going to model? How are you going to model
> it?' So I think it looks very different, just like there's differentiation for students, in this
> case, there'd be different differentiation for teachers in the support that the coach
> provides for how to execute the curriculum in the classroom.

Such a differentiated system emphasized capable instructional leaders to adeptly provide

tailored, differentiated support to teachers and adaptively implement their design. This would

likely require leaders to understand their context (e.g., teacher capabilities, local academic

standards), requiring some degree of instructional leader learning in this new regional context.

**Collegial interaction.** EP's design for its professional learning system provided a much less formalized role for teacher professional collaboration. While EP:TN leaders said they allocated some time for teacher collaboration, leaders did not report that they had expectations or provided guidance for how teachers should use that time to collaborate.

Taken together, EP created a professional learning system to support the development of teachers' capabilities to use the educational infrastructure and provide the desired instruction and cultivate the envisioned culture in adaptive, context-specific ways. The professional learning system would play a significant role in EP's theory of change and approach to school improvement. Indeed, EP:TN would have to support teacher learning (a) to use the educational infrastructure and (b) to understand the local context in which they would use it in order to support implementation done in context-specific ways. EP:TN leaders would have to do this at a fast pace to support dramatic school improvement of its priority schools at the fast rate in which the macro policy context of Race to the Top and the Achievements School District expected.

**Domain of Activity #3: Performance management**

Interviews and observational data reveal that EP also contributed to the educational work of supporting school turnaround in this hybrid state/NGO model by using various strategies for managing school and system performance. This work complemented the work that the ASD also did in this domain of activity. The EP:TN central office, largely leading this work, used a series of external and internal resources to monitor organizational (network and school-level) progress relative to their own internal goals and also the ASD's accountability goals to support continuous improvement activity. EP:TN leaders described collecting an array of data and shared a few, emerging strategies for how they reported to use these for continuous improvement efforts.

**Accountability**

EP arrived in Tennessee with strategies to manage their schools' and network's accountability performance. One repeatedly cited mechanism they used to monitor their performance was data from annual state assessments. The state assessments would provide EP an annual benchmark to determine the extent to which the students were meeting state standards and demonstrating growth, as measured by standardized assessments. These results would also be used by the ASD to make high stakes decisions about school expansion and school closure. However, these external data points provided summative (rather than formative) feedback relative to performance that focused on student achievement outcomes (rather than process).

**Continuous Improvement**

They also drew on many data points and processes for information about performance relative to an array of outcomes and processes that would be used for the schools' and network's continuous improvement. While the scope and array of data sources that the system collected and disseminated to instructional leaders was large, the processes for using the data to drive continuous improvement efforts were less evident. That is not to say that those processes did not exist, but data from this study did not provide as much insight into these.

EP:TN leaders consistently described three sources of data (and data collection processes) that they used to monitor performance and support continuous improvement efforts. First, they had an internal, network-wide platform that provided hub and school instructional leaders performance data on a series of metrics collected from various sources, including, for example, parent surveys, academic data (e.g., state assessment scores, reading growth), student behavior (e.g., suspensions), and staff data (e.g., staff surveys). Additionally, the system's hub

office would produce data reports on these metrics. One EP:TN leader said, "We have a million [data] reports, so I think there's a lot of those types of feedback…that are hugely helpful."

Another source of internal monitoring would be EP:National's school visit. According to an EP internal document, the purpose of these visits was "to gather observational and qualitative evidence of schools' implementation of their programs and how they are performing relative to [EP's school design]." During the visits, EP leaders would visit schools to collect data through observations and focus groups, analyze trends, and evaluate the schools using EP's teaching evaluation tool. The visit team then would meet with the school leadership team to discuss priority areas for continuous improvement.  For example, after one oversight visit, one school tweaked their professional learning system in response to the feedback the school received.

Third, a more informal source of data reported by multiple EP:TN leaders was instructional leaders' informal observations of classroom instruction, hallways, cafeterias, and staff professional development in their schools. These observations, according to one leader, enabled the regional leaders to "really see what's working and what's not working." One regional central office hub leader said that data from these informal observations would be used in practice-based coaching sessions to provide feedback on instructional leaders' practice.

Taken together, EP:TN had an array of mechanisms to gather data and support continuous improvement efforts. These strategies coordinated with the organization's oft cited value for continuous improvement and learning.

**Domain of Activity #4: Managing the environment**

A fourth type of educational contribution that this LTP made to support large-scale turnaround in this hybrid state/NGO model was managing the environment to support their instructional work. Recall from Chapters 2 and 4 that managing the environment in this domain

of work centered on addressing those influences that have direct bearing on how the system "understands and pursues excellence and equity in instruction" (Peurach et al., 2019, p. 17).

This domain of activity took many forms in this network. They managed the educational policy environment for standards and accountability expectations that would shape their goals and work, the educational environment for resources to support their instructional program, the social environment for teachers, and the community environment to build relationships with school community members to directly engage in EP's schools, build community trust, and elicit community input in their educational work. Recall that EP would be working in a new environmental context, where the organizational leaders would encounter novel, uncertain, and complex conditions with which they would likely need to become familiar and, in turn, learn how to manage. In the sections that follow, I highlight two examples of this work in more detail.

One example is the management of the educational policy and regulatory environments. EP was operating in a new state educational policy context and would have to learn about these new federal and state policies defining their work and manage any discrepancies that emerge to promote greater coherence between their designs and the salient policy environmental features.

Specifically, for example, EP:TN had to manage this environment to discern Tennessee's accountability expectations and the standards and assessments embedded within those. This was important work for two overlapping reasons. First, working within this hybrid state/NGO turnaround model, the ASD created accountability expectations for lead turnaround partners' school performance tied to state assessments, among other metrics. Second, recall that EP's instructional vision and educational infrastructure were intended to tightly coordinate with standards to help students reach grade-level expectations and prepare students to for secondary educational attainment and post-secondary opportunities.

For these reasons, EP:TN leaders reported that they sought to create tight alignment between their educational approach and the external factors shaping goals and expectations. For example, upon arrival in Tennessee, EP leaders reviewed the differences between the new state's standards and assessments and their previous state's, and as a result of this process and learning, adjusted the science curricular resources to better align to the Tennessee standards.

EP:TN leaders and school leaders also managed the environment for other instructionally focused matters. They managed relationships with the local school community, including families in the neighborhood, students, and school alumni, to help build schools and school community responsive to local community. EP was a newcomer to educational landscape in Tennessee, and they were initially just as unfamiliar with the communities as the communities were to them. This would require learning about the community, as well as supporting the community to learn about them. EP:TN leaders did this by engaging these groups in the work that they were doing and educating them about EP's approach for schooling. For example, EP organized alumni events, community meetings, back to school events, open gym times, volunteer opportunities, and community service days that were open to local community members.

**Domain of Activity #5: Distributive instructional leadership**

The preceding establishes that EP devised comprehensive approaches to address four key domains of activity and made substantive educational contributions to support school turnaround in this hybrid state/NGO model for state-led school turnaround. A running theme throughout EP's activity in each domain is that EP had a comprehensive model for its schools that provided expectations, vision, and broad guidance to teachers and leaders, and while it was comprehensive, EP leaders also described a vision for context-specific and adaptable implementation. In turn, this emphasized the importance of instructional leadership to (a)

develop and continually refine infrastructure, (b) manage the environment, and (c) support

teacher learning and developing the necessary capabilities to use the educational infrastructure in

the envisioned ways. Accordingly, EP had a layered instructional leadership model between the

schools and the central hub office to support this work (see Table 5.5).

**School level instructional leadership.** Data collected from interviews, observations, and

internal document review between 2014-2016 reveal that school level instructional leaders

assumed a central role in EP's educational contributions to school turnaround.  They were

expected to lead and support the use of the EP's designs in schools to create a learning

environment that would accelerate learning for all students. They would do so in two ways.

**Table 5.5 Distributive Instructional Leadership**

| Key Domain of Activity | Components (e.g., materials, processes, learning opportunities) |
|---|---|
| *Leaders* | **School level**<br>• **Organizational structure & role groups**: Principal, assistant principals<br>• **Instructional leadership vision & responsibilities:** School leaders are considered instructional leaders of their buildings (attending to the domains of educational infrastructure, use of infrastructure, and performance management). They execute and design plans and vision for use of system-level resources.<br>**System level**<br>• **Organization structure and role groups:** Academic team (director of academics, specialists who would serve as instructional coaches and content-area experts).<br>• **Responsibilities:**<br>   o Develop, refine, oversee, and support educational infrastructure<br>   o Oversees and supports teacher learning system to support use of infrastructure<br>   o Oversees and supports school leadership and school leader learning system<br>   o Oversees and supports student services (e.g., special education)<br>   o Manages and executes human capital strategy<br>   o Oversees performance management |

A first order matter was adhering to established structures and broad expectations for

practice for school-level instructional leaders. For example, each school would have a common

school instructional leadership organizational structure that included a principal and assistant

principals.  Additionally, there were common expectations about their role and responsibilities.

For instance, EP school leaders were instructional leaders. According to one leader, school

leaders were expected to spend "at least 51% or more of …every day on developing teachers and

staff in instruction." This work entailed, for example, establishing the instructional vision of the school, setting annual academic priorities, providing professional development, and evaluating teachers. Other instructionally-related responsibilities included, for example, envisioning and implementing a plan for school culture, leading parent engagement efforts, and managing staff.

Notably absent from this list were responsibilities for operations, finance, knowledge management, and other tasks not directly related to improving teaching and learning. One EP:TN leader said, "The principal is the instructional leader of the school, so where it makes sense, we'd like to take burdens off of the principal so that [they] can focus on instructional things."

A second order matter was for school-level leaders to draw on their own capabilities and understanding of the local context to tailor the instructional and cultural designs to their schools. For example, they would create school specific instructional visions and academic priorities that used the resources provided in the EP design as a foundation. For instance, part of an instructional vision might entail the instructional leaders prioritizing certain instructional strategies that teachers would use and emphasize in their classrooms in that school.

Indeed, the preceding suggests that, much like the other domains of activity, instructional leadership rested on highly capable leaders implementing the design by setting school specific visions and guidance to further elaborate the network's design. This approach to instructional leadership emphasized school leaders' capabilities to use EP's designs and resources for instruction, culture, and professional learning resources in context specific ways. EP provided a comprehensive school leader learning system to support leaders in doing this complex work, which included, for example, coaching and professional development.[39]

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[39] For example, coaching would include weekly one-on-one meetings with a regional hub leader to, for example, discuss weekly goals and tasks, analyze problems of practice, conduct co-observations of classrooms, receive feedback, and more. They also attended network wide professional development.

**System hub level leadership.** EP hub offices would support and assume responsibility for the design, support, and oversight of the educational infrastructure, supporting use of the infrastructure and managing performance. This encompassed many responsibilities, as listed in Table 5.5. Here I highlight two examples.

One example of this is their support to the schools with ongoing implementation of the educational infrastructure. System level instructional leaders assumed a critical role in the EP's strategy for supporting use of educational infrastructure. This support would include, for example, instructional coaching, regional professional development planning and execution, and modifying instructional resources to fit the new regional context.

Second, the system provided professional learning opportunities to their instructional leaders to further bolster their capabilities. EP:TN leaders described an approach that included one-on-one interactions with a more expert other to support individual development and also professional development training sessions. Formal opportunities included, for example, network leader training sessions, visits to other schools, and the regional academic team meetings.

## Considering the non-educational contributions

EP:TN leaders' responses in interviews conveyed an expansive set of non-educational contributions to support the work of school turnaround in this hybrid state/NGO model, much like what was observed with the state agency in this model (the ASD). Indeed, EP's new regional hub office managed a scope of work that extended beyond educational matters and the key domains of activity presented in this chapter, as Table 5.6 shows. While a full description of the non-educational work that EP manages falls outside the scope of this study, here I provide a glimpse into the operations and administrative domain of activity that that EP simultaneously managed with the educational domains of activity presented in the preceding sections.

**Table 5.6 Central Office Hub Organization Key Roles and Functions**

| Educational Related Roles and Functions | Non-educational Related Roles and Functions |
|---|---|
| • Oversees and supports instructional and teacher learning system<br>• Oversees and supports school leadership and school leader learning system<br>• Oversees and supports student services (special education; supplemental supports for students)<br>• Manages and executes human capital strategy<br>• Performance management and monitoring | • Public relations, community engagement, enrollment, communication<br>• Knowledge management<br>• Information technology<br>• Human resources<br>• Operations, finance, and accounting<br>• Development<br>• Strategic planning |

The EP:TN leader interview responses suggest that the regional central hub office's non-educational work was deemed critical for two reasons: the work was essential for organizational viability and for creating conditions for schools to deeply attend to educational matters. Two examples illuminate the activity in the domain of administration and operations related work.

First, the hub office also assumed responsibility for managing finances and operations. An EP:TN leader would oversee school operations, school nutrition, transportation, security, and facilities, whereas accounting was primarily centralized at the EP:N office. All of this work was critical for the EP's network and schools for two reasons. First, smooth operations matter. Without safe, operable school facilities, creating a suitable learning climate without distraction becomes challenging. Without arranging reliable transportation, logistics of daily attendance becomes more complicated. It is hard to improve student outcomes without students in schools. Second, since the hub office managed these operational matters, there were fewer domains of activity for school-level leaders to manage and detract from their focus on educational domains.

Similarly, a second example is the system's the hub office leadership in student recruitment and enrollment, community engagement, and public relations, more broadly. Much of this work entailed engaging with local actors and organizations through varied interactions, such as: alumni events, one-on-one and small group meetings, phone calls to neighborhood

parents, and canvassing neighborhoods. These strategies were envisioned to build visibility and

support for EP, an important endeavor because EP, recall, had no previous experience in this

community context on which to draw to build support and recruit students. While schools still

actively engaged in these activities, much of the work rested at the hub office, minimizing

demands on schools and enabling them to more directly attend to educational matters.

Taken together, the system's hub organization engaged in administrative and operational

activities that were critical for EP's approach to school improvement. The system hub office

strived to buffer the schools' leaders and schools from non-educational related matters so that

school leaders could be the instructional leaders that EP's theory of change envisioned. Still,

while it buffered school level-actors from tasks that fall outside of the technical core of a

schooling, it also meant that EP:TN's central office would be shouldering a heavy, ever

changing, and complex domains of work in a new environment, with high demands, high

expectations, and high-levels of scrutiny and uncertainty surrounding it.  Recall that they would

be doing all of this in conjunction with the ASD, within a turbulent hybrid state/NGO turnaround

context, and in a new environment in which EP had never operated schools.

**Looking Back and Looking Forward: Considering Potential Strengths and Vulnerabilities**

In this chapter, I have presented this lead turnaround partner's educational contributions

to support large scale turnaround in a hybrid state/NGO model by identifying and analyzing their

key domains of educational activity. I started with the proposition in my analytic framework that

state-led turnaround models would likely need to attend to five key domains of educational

activity to support the educational work of school turnaround: developing infrastructure,

supporting the use of that infrastructure, managing performance, managing the environment, and

distributing instructional leadership to oversee all of this work. I also started this chapter with the

finding that the other educational organization involved in this hybrid state/NGO turnaround model- Tennessee's Achievement School District- delegated the primary educational matters to the school-level and the LTPs operating schools. This led to a critical question that drives this chapter: What are the key domains of the educational contributions of one lead turnaround partner operating in this state/NGO hybrid school turnaround model?

Findings presented in this chapter suggest that EP:TN managed the vast majority of the educational work to support large-scale school turnaround and attended to all five domains of educational activity in instructional focused school systems (see Figure 5.1). The approach to the educational work was coordinated and unified around a common mission, organizational values, and coordinated set of resources. The EP central office developed educational infrastructure and systems to support the use of that infrastructure. These designs allowed for teachers and leaders to use resources and guidance in adaptive and context-responsive ways (e.g., responsive to students and their needs and preferences, school community needs and preferences, teachers' capabilities, leaders' capabilities and vision). The schools and staff would be buttressed by the instructional leadership and resources at the system's hub office to provide critical support and resources for this educational work and also manage non-educational work.

Findings presented in this chapter reveal key ideas about the kind of educational work this NGO lead turnaround partner took on in this hybrid state/NGO strategy for school turnaround. They had a comprehensive approach to schooling that attended to five domains of educational work. Findings also reveal the ambitious scope of work that this LTP would assume in this organizational arrangement and the range of capabilities that the LTP would likely need to possess to manage these domains of activity. Findings also suggest that EP emphasized human resources (rather than social or material) in all of this work, and EP would be implementing all of

this in a new, uncertain environment that differed from the environment in and for which their designs and theory of change were created.

**Figure 5.1 Distribution of Educational Domains across the ASD and EP**
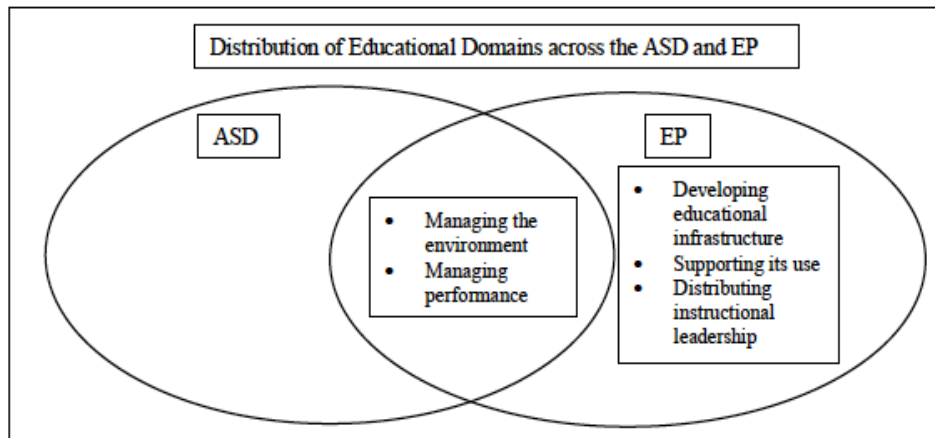


**Potential Strengths and Vulnerabilities of the Design in this novel and uncertain Context**

While EP had experience in these domains of activity and developed a comprehensive approach to addressing them, which had proven successful elsewhere, they were embarking on this work in a new, uncertain context: a hybrid state/NGO turnaround model to support large-scale, state-led school turnaround in Tennessee. Findings from Chapter 4 and this chapter indicate that EP would embark on this work in a context, with new educational policies (e.g., academic standards and assessments), a smaller labor market, and a different social and historical context that would undergird this reform effort. Further, findings from Chapter 4 indicate that their counterpart in this organizational arrangement- Tennessee's statewide school turnaround district (the ASD) - would establish conditions to facilitate the school turnaround work and largely delegate direct educational responsibilities down to the school operator/lead turnaround provider level. Some of these conditions, such as enrollment restrictions and being a part of a new school governance arrangement, would create a set of circumstances that were, in some ways, unusual for this LTP and in other cases expected challenges of this work.

In all cases, this would be a decidedly different environmental context that would introduce a new set of conditions that EP would have to learn and manage. It stands to reason that these could bear on their approach, design, and assumptions in their theory of change. It also stands to reason that the complexity of school turnaround work in this hybrid model within this context and the uncertainty and novelty of working within a new organizational arrangement in a new state would likely create a need for EP to learn and adapt to coordinate their approach to these prevailing conditions. Given these conditions, three potential vulnerabilities and strengths in EP's initial approach for managing the educational work to support school turnaround emerge.

**Infrastructure to support teaching and learning.** A core strength of EP's approach to managing the educational work of school turnaround in such a demanding, complex, and uncertain context was that they created coordinated infrastructure aligned to a common teaching evaluation tool that established expectations for instruction, instructional planning, classroom culture, parent and community engagement. Further, as the findings in this chapter also show, the design was open (rather than scripted) and intended to be adapted to some degree by teachers, and in turn, an implicit assumption was that highly capable teachers could leverage the broad guidance and use it to provide quality instruction and learning environments for students.

On the one hand, EP came to Tennessee with an established, comprehensive set of educational resources to support instructional improvement and build a school culture that could be implemented in new schools on "day one" to immediately begin the school transformation process. Second, EP's theory of openness and reliance on individual capabilities created an opportunity for teachers and leaders to adaptively implement the designs to specifically meet the needs and strengths of students, teachers, leaders, and the school community. For example, teachers could design lessons that incorporated topics or texts that were germane to student

interests, experiences, or ability levels. School leaders could provide learning opportunities, such extracurricular activities, that mattered to and responsive to the values and needs of the students and the community. As they embarked on a new, uncertain, environment, such an intentionally context-specific implementation approach could prove helpful.

However, on the other hand, they would have to leverage this infrastructure and knowledge assets in a novel, complex, and uncertain environment with a different, smaller labor market, a different organizational governance structure bounding the work, a novel regulatory environment defining operating conditions, and different state academic standards. Would EP's infrastructure align to and support school improvement in these conditions? Would EP leaders be able to adapt and coordinate their infrastructure to this context, and could they do this quickly enough to meet the time-sensitive macro policy expectations for school turnaround? Adjusting to this new context and learning would likely be critical work, but also work that is complex, time consuming, and interdependent with EP's design, organization, and broader environment.

**Developing professional capabilities to use the infrastructure.** Relatedly, findings from this chapter show EP:TN emphasized the domain of supporting use of infrastructure to build teacher and leader capabilities as a key lever for instructional improvement. On the one hand, given this approach, there is potential for optimism for their educational work in this hybrid state/NGO model, as the structures and processes in the professional learning system could, in principle, support the development of a new cadre of teachers to successfully use the designs' tools in this novel, uncertain context to provide quality instruction in short order.

However, on the other hand, EP's strategy to improve schools hinged on key assumptions. One was that teachers could learn how to use the educational infrastructure through EP's learning system to provide high quality instruction and adaptively use the resources to best

meet each classroom context, and another was that they could learn at a fast-enough rate to meet the macro policy context's high and urgent expectations for rapid school improvement. It also assumed that the EP:TN instructional leaders would have the capabilities to lead the complex work of developing the professional capabilities of enough teachers at a fast-enough rate to meet demands of the growing region and the RTTT and ASD accountability expectations. While all of this is possible, it seems possible that these assumptions might not hold within the complex, uncertain, and novel context in which they would be working.

**Working in a hybrid school turnaround space.** A third consideration is the transferability of EP's approach and EP's capabilities for continuous improvement of this approach in this new context. While EP:TN arrived in Tennessee with a strategy and school design that had been successfully used before, it was designed in and for operating schools in a different context. EP:TN was now in a new context. This new context was marked by uncertain operating conditions that accompanied working within a new local community, state and governance and organizational arrangement. While it's possible that EP's model would work seamlessly in this new context, past research studies and experience would suggest that managing all of the new contextual features would likely require adapting aspects of their approach and designs to coordinate with the context. This would likely require learning about the context, devising adaptations to create tighter coordination between the context and EP's approach, and building capacity to do this continuous improvement work.

On the one hand, EP had various mechanisms to support this type of learning and continuous improvement. Further, continuous improvement and learning were enmeshed in the organization's values. This pre-existing capacity would likely be critical to support the adapting and learning that would likely be necessary as EP implemented its approach in this context.

On the other hand, questions loom large about how EP would manage using their approach in this new context. Would they have sufficient capacity (e.g., human capital, access to relevant data, processes and structures) in place do support the type of learning and adapting that might be necessary in this new context? Further, could they do the necessary learning and adaptations to improve its schools fast enough to meet accountability expectations set in the state (ASD) and federal (Race to the Top) policy context? Recall that EP would be operating turnaround schools and learning and engaging in continuous improvement efforts in a macro policy context that demanded rapid improvement and did not necessarily account for or support such learning and continuous improvement efforts. Rather, the policy context assumed that these capable lead turnaround partners possessed the knowledge of how to turn around priority schools, and the matter was organizing schools to leverage that knowledge (e.g., giving LTP school operators autonomy to work). This assumption in these policies suggests that such learning would likely not be necessary. However, the findings presented in this chapter raises doubts about this policy assumption, and it seems likely that this LTP would need to learn, adapt and build capacity to do all of that efficiently and effectively. This sets the stage for potential tension between the policies and politics of turnaround and the actual work of turning around schools in this context.

While EP had experience and past success with their robust approach for school improvement that attended to the five key domains of educational activity, the preceding questions and assumptions undergirding their approach loomed large for EP as they embarked on the work of improving priority schools under and within this new, uncertain, and complex context. It is this issue, that we turn to next.

**Chapter 6 Findings: Complications and Synergies for an LTP in this Hybrid Model**

In the previous two chapters, I presented the educational contributions of two different educational organizations embedded in a state-led hybrid state/NGO strategy for school turnaround. First, I examined the state school turnaround district: The Achievement School District. Findings suggest that this organization would facilitate (rather than lead) the educational work by creating conditions for lead turnaround partners to drive the educational work at the school-level. Then, I presented the educational contributions of one lead turnaround partner: Empowerment Prep. Findings suggest that Empowerment Prep would manage the full scope of educational work of school turnaround. Specifically, I examined how these two organizations distributed the five domains of educational activity to support the educational work of school turnaround in this unique context (see Table 6.1 for a description of these educational domains). At the conclusion of each chapter, I reflected on the potential strengths and vulnerabilities of both organizations' respective strategy and embedded assumptions.

These analyses revealed that this hybrid strategy, in principle, juxtaposed different types of educational organizations that would manage different domains of work to jointly support the educational work of school turnaround. While Empowerment Prep (EP) assumed responsibility for the full scope of educational domains, including the domains developing educational infrastructure, supporting the use of that infrastructure, managing performance, managing the environments, and distributing instructional leadership, the Achievement School District (ASD) and EP jointly (yet separately) assumed responsibility for managing performance and managing

the environments. However, these analyses also suggest that such an organizational arrangement to support large-scale school turnaround hinged on key yet uncertain assumptions. These analyses also considered that both organizations would likely learn and adapt as they are worked in this complex, novel context of this hybrid state/NGO model in Tennessee.   However, such learning gradual improvement that would likely ensue did not necessarily coincide with federal and state policy imperative for rapid improvement in student outcomes in the "priority schools."

**Table 6.1 Analytic Framework: Five Domains of Educational Activity**

| *Domains* | *Description* |
|---|---|
| 1. *Building educational infrastructure* | Developing or compiling a set resources, strategies, processes, and beliefs that coordinates a vision and guidance for instructional practices and also fostering a culture that supports and promotes those (school climate, building community and family ties, and organizational values). |
| 2. *Supporting the use of the educational infrastructure in practice* | Developing teachers' and leaders' professional knowledge and capabilities through practice based instructional coaching, workshops, and collegial interactions. |
| 3. *Managing performance* | Managing school and system performance for continuous improvement and accountability. |
| 4. *Managing the environment* | Determining how to address the influences and resources in the broader environments that inform the system's understanding and pursuit of instructional improvement. |
| 5. *Distributing instructional leadership* | Develop leadership across schools and systems to support, manage, and coordinate this educational work. |

*Source: Peurach, Cohen, Yurkofsky, & Spillane (2019)*

The next undertaking addressed in this chapter is to examine the ways in which these two organizations work cooperatively and productively and also in tension with one another to manage and distribute the educational domains in this hybrid state/NGO strategy for school turnaround between 2014-2017.  This chapter specifically attends to this by examining the experiences of the lead turnaround provider, EP, working in this organizational arrangement and the ways in which it learned and adapted in response to those experiences in this hybrid model.

This chapter focuses solely on EP and not the ASD because an analysis of the ASD's experiences falls outside of the scope of this study. To be sure, during the course of this study

(2014-2017), evidence indicates that the ASD was evolving, and perhaps in ways that could be from learning. For instance, recall from Chapter 4 the ASD terminated the School Performance Review process because it was not aligned to its theory of change: it did not support accountability work and it was at odds with operator autonomy. Additionally, they stopped providing consultations to the LTP school operators. While such an analysis would be a fruitful complement to this study, it goes beyond the scope of this paper to attend to this.

Instead, the most specific analysis I have on this study focuses on EP:Tennessee. This chapter's focus on EP:TN's experiences provides a useful lens to examine the synergies and complications in the educational work of school turnaround in a hybrid model because EP:TN, like all LTPs in this model, assumed responsibility for the full scope of the educational domains.

This chapter is motivated by the following research question: What categories of synergies and complications arise in the educational work of school turnaround for Empowerment Prep in this organizational arrangement? I respond to this question by analyzing the synergies and complications that surface in practice for EP while working within the ASD and this hybrid strategy to make educational contributions to support large scale turnaround from 2014-2017. A first order matter is to develop an understanding of the types of resources (conditions, policies, arrangements) that would support EP's work in this hybrid model to shed light on key resources that could have bearing on complications or synergies that might arise in this work within this hybrid model. To do this, I begin by examining the resources on which, in principle, EP:TN relies to manage the five educational domains to support the educational work.

Then, I consider how those resource dependencies are or are not met in this environment and the types of synergies and complications that result. First, I examine the ways that the resource dependencies are met and the types of synergies that arise for EP:TN in this hybrid

model within the broader environment. Then, I examine the complications that arise for EP:TN and the educational work of school turnaround in this model. I do this by examining the resource dependency breakdowns between the two organizations that unfolded in practice in this novel, complex environment and how those manifested into complications EP:TN had to manage. I then consider how EP:TN evolved and adapted in response to these complications.

To complete this analysis, I draw on data from EP:TN leader interviews, observational data, and document analysis. These data enable me to examine EP:TN's experiences in implementing and adapting their approach in a new environment and hybrid model.

I find that the ASD's approach and the types of resources it afforded the LTPs, EP:TN's approach, and the broader environment interacted in some ways that created synergies for EP:TN's educational work, and in other ways that created direct and indirect complications for this work. In this hybrid state/NGO model, EP:TN's approach to this educational work was reliant on the ASD to establish conditions that define the rules for school operations (autonomy, accountability, and operational and legal conditions). In some instances, the ASD's approach and the ways in which interacted with the environment complemented EP:TN's work. This created synergies for the LTP's pursuit of instructional excellence and equity in its schools.

However, in other cases, the ASD's approach and the types of resources it afforded the LTPs, the broader environment, and EP:TN's approach collided, creating complications for EP:TN. These complications revealed the ways in which EP's approach was not entirely coordinated with this new context. Indeed, the novel, uncertain conditions of the ASD and its broader environment interacted with EP:TN's educational approach, its central hub office, and its schools in all sorts of ways, some which were expected and others unexpected. In turn, this created more demands on EP:TN's capacities and already wide scope of work to learn how to

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manage the complications and create coherence in its approach and broader environment. Indeed, while EP:TN engaged in activity across the full scope of educational domains, findings from this chapter highlight how critical the work in the domain of performance management (and continuous improvement, specifically) is to support the adapting and learning that was necessary, and how interdependent the domains of activity are.

To present these findings, I will first explain EP:TN's dependencies on the ASD and the uncertainties that existed in those in this Tennessee ASD context. Next, I examine the synergies and two broad categories of complications that arise for EP:TN's educational domains of activity within the ASD in this hybrid state/ NGO model for school turnaround. I then describe what EP:TN did to attempt to manage these problems.

## Revisiting the Framework and setting the Context

To complete this analysis, I will draw on the analytic framework presented in Chapter 2 and used in Chapters 4 and 5. This frame provides a lens to examine the educational contributions of a school network, such as an LTP, a statewide school turnaround district, or a hybrid state/NGO model for turnaround. The educational contributions, or the educational work of school turnaround, can be categorized into five domains of activity: managing environments, building educational infrastructure, supporting the use of educational infrastructure in practice, managing performance, and distributing instructional leadership (Peurach et al., 2019) (see Table 6.1). In this chapter, I extend past analyses in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 by considering how the interactions between the state, NGO organization, and the broader environment lead to indirect and direct synergies and complications for those aforementioned five domains of activity. I also examine how the NGO responds to the complications. I do this by considering the ways in which the organization adapts based on their experiences and learning in this new, uncertain context.

There is an important caveat to the findings presented in this chapter. The breadth and complexity of EP's experience working within the ASD in 2014-2017 prevents an exhaustive account of the dependencies, complications that manifest from those, and adaptations that EP:TN made in light of their experiences. Instead, I provide key examples to highlight critical synergies and complications that emerged when these two organizations worked together in a hybrid strategy to support the educational domains of work of school turnaround. Further, while I provide examples of the kinds of adaptations that EP:TN made in response to some of the complications that emerged, it falls outside of the scope of this study to consider the outcomes of those changes, such as whether they contributed to improvement.

**Context: Considering Outcomes to Set the Stage for Synergies and Complications**

To help contextualize this chapter, I provide a brief summary on EP:TN leaders' perceptions of results in 2014-2016. Results from 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 school years present a picture of a mixed record of improvement in EP's Tennessee school.[40] On the one hand, EP:TN leaders reported improved attendance rates, positive parent feedback, declining expulsion and suspension rates, and sustained commitment to their overall approach and design, for example. For instance, one leader reflected on the 2014-15 school year and said, "The [EP design] model is working in general. The course offerings that we have, the other services that we provide… I think all of that was the right thing [and] is the right thing in Tennessee."

On the other hand, other results indicated more limited improvement. Leaders said that school enrollment was not meeting the organization's goals, classroom instruction was not consistently at a high enough quality, and results on state assessments taken in 2016 were not good enough. For instance, one EP:TN leader reflected on 2016 test scores and said, "We saw

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[40] Data from the 2016-2017 school year was not yet available at the close of this study.

those test scores, we were like, 'We've got to do something now. This is not good.'" While several EP:TN leaders described important signs of progress, they also noted urgency to address student performance on tests and low student enrollment by 2017.

**Considering EP's Dependencies on the ASD in this Hybrid School Turnaround Model**

In this hybrid state/NGO strategy to support large scale improvement in Tennessee's priority schools, two educational organizations worked in different spaces and in different domains. The ASD would facilitate turnaround by creating favorable conditions for autonomous school operators to run schools, and in turn, the LTPs would autonomously operate ASD authorized schools under the conditions set by the ASD. Even though LTPs would have a high degree of autonomy, the LTP in this study still depended on the ASD for key resources.

Among analyses of interview responses, organizational and secondary document analysis and observation data, a key trend emerged: within this hybrid state/NGO model for school turnaround, EP was dependent on the ASD to set the conditions that would define "the rules of the game" for the school operator. These conditions and accompanying resources fall into three categories that reflect the key facets of the ASD's implied theory for change: autonomy, performance accountability, and legal and operational conditions. EP:TN depended on the ASD for autonomy to run their schools, clear accountability expectations, and legal and operational conditions that would define the bounds of LTPs efforts to run schools in the ASD (as these were the responsibilities that the ASD was envisioned to assume).

**Autonomy**

EP:TN relied on the ASD to grant them operational autonomy in schools. Recall from Chapter 5, this seasoned charter school operator had experience operating schools, had a comprehensive approach for the educational work of school turnaround, and a network central

hub office. Three EP:TN leaders stated over the three years of this study (2014-2017) that they did not want support in educational matters from the ASD but preferred, what one leader called, a "more minimalist approach," described this way: "[W]e want the ASD to do…as little as possible. We want you to authorize; we want you to ensure quality; we want you to replace [schools]; we want you to do absolutely integral tasks because they're the LEA." This same leader said that EP:TN was already providing most of the services that a district (LEA) would provide (e.g., professional development, curriculum). Another EP:TN leader reiterated that they did not need typical LEA services or supports from the ASD, saying:

> From the beginning we were always like, 'We need you to be the authorizer, not the district.' [One ASD leader] used to be like, 'Oh, let's build this whole system of supports and stuff,' and we were like, 'We've got it…We don't need that…'

The pillar and promise of autonomy of the lead turnaround provider was oft cited as a desired resource and operational condition for EP:TN.

**Accountability: Managing Performance vis a vis Accountability Expectations**

EP:TN also relied on the ASD to establish accountability goals and expectations. Recall from Chapter 4, a key educational contribution of the ASD in this hybrid model for school turnaround was to set specific annual performance goals for its lead turnaround partners around student outcomes, and also compliance and finances. Student outcome metrics were tightly tied to performance on state assessments (along with other metrics, such as reading growth). Annual performance on those metrics would be used to make decisions about replication and revocation. Accordingly, these goals had bearing on EP:TN's work.

Interview responses from multiple EP:TN leaders suggest that they took these expectations seriously, as they stated the performance-based, high-stakes decisions were tightly coupled to these accountability expectations. Specifically, for example, growth and sustainability

hinged on performance on the ASD's performance framework. Accordingly, multiple EP:TN leaders' interview responses suggest that hub-level leaders managed this environmental condition by tightly coordinating their educational domains of activity to these accountability expectations. For example, one EP:TN leader said that EP:TN used the ASD framework to guide their own internal performance management, stating "[W]e're using the ASD performance framework and then trying to get data so we can track to that." Additionally, several EP:TN leaders said that they attempted to coordinate their curricular resources to these expectations by closely mapping their educational infrastructure to the state standards and assessments. These efforts, recall from Chapter 5, were also coordinated with their own internal goals, since their instructional vision tied to standards-align instruction, and instructional practices.

**Managing the environments to create operational and legal conditions**

Analysis of documents, secondary sources, and EP:TN leader interviews suggest that EP:TN also was reliant on how the ASD established the legal and operational conditions that would bound the "rules of the game" for how the LTP could operate in this new context. These conditions materialized through the laws the governed the ASD's work, ASD created policies, and conditions from the surrounding environments.

**Political environment.** EP:TN depended on the ASD's political environment because it would have bearing on the conditions that would frame EP:TN's work. First and foremost, during the course of this study (2014-2017), EP:TN operated schools in Tennessee through the ASD. EP:TN's ongoing sustainability and stability in the region, would partly depend on the sustainability, stability, and legal standing of the ASD. If the ASD dissolved or if its power or scope diminished, that would have ramifications for EP:TN and its prospects for school expansions, and in turn, their viability. Further, EP:TN also relied on the political environment to

afford the organization sufficient time to implement its model and for its theory of change to unfold, which envisioned both immediate change and also a gradual change trajectory.

**Regulatory Environment.** EP:TN was dependent on how the ASD, state, and federal policies and regulations defined its operations. In principle, EP:TN's approach counted on a regulatory environment that would provide it adequate time to prepare school facilities during the school takeover and transition process, supportive conditions for recruiting and enrolling students, and possibilities for expansion in the region to meet sustainability goals.  For instance, EP:TN opened in Tennessee conditionally approved for multiple schools within the ASD, and the ASD would be the arbiter to decide if they could be allowed to expand. As one EP:TN leader said, "We are hoping to grow, but it is not up to us."

**Local environment.** EP:TN also depended on the ASD for management of relationships with organizations and stakeholders in the local environments (e.g., local school districts, school communities) to foster conditions for their work.  For instance, recall from Chapter 4 that LTPs would rely on the ASD to select and remove priority schools from the local district to be placed in the ASD and match those schools with an LTP. In that matching process, EP:TN relied on the ASD to manage relationships with the local school district and school communities, which, in principle, had potential to be contentious and complex process given past research (Orr, 1997).

### Synergies for the LTP Operating in the Hybrid Turnaround Model

In some ways, the two organizations and their respective strategies worked in complementary ways in this hybrid strategy.  The affordances and resources of the ASD's approach and the conditions it created for its LTPs coincided with EP:TN's strengths and dependencies. This analysis revealed one chief synergy for EP and its educational work in this hybrid state/NGO system: This hybrid strategy and the conditions that the ASD created afforded

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EP the autonomy that it sought to run its educational program and implement its approach and school model. The ASD delegated the educational domains of school turnaround work to the NGO lead turnaround partners.

This aligned with EP's approach and dependencies. EP:TN had their own mission and vision for school improvement, a corresponding model for improving schools that attended to the five domains, and an established central office and instructional leadership team to support its implementation. They had a system, and recall that multiple EP:TN leaders stated that they did not want support or intervention from the ASD in these matters. One EP:TN leader said, "[O]ne of the big things for us is that we are an established CMO and most of the services that an LEA [would usually create] we're providing it as a CMO…" In this regard, this hybrid state/NGO model advanced a compatible approach to the educational contributions for school turnaround.

**Complications for EP Operating in the Hybrid Turnaround Model**

However, complications surfaced in this arrangement for the LTP, too. Tensions and uncertainties emerged in EP's educational work because some of the resources for which they relied on the ASD (autonomy, accountability, and conditions) were uncertain in some way in this novel, complex hybrid state/NGO model context. Uncertainties grew into complications, as the ASD's operational conditions, the broader environment, and EP's strategy for school turnaround interacted in practice. There were discrepancies between the ASD's implied theory of change and operating conditions that it created, EP's approach and five educational domains of work, and the broader environment. This led to two types of complications for EP's educational work: (1) direct complications that pressed on EP:TN's capabilities in the educational domains and (2) indirect complications that did not immediately press on the educational work but diverted organizational resources away from it.

To present this, first I examine the resource-uncertainties and tensions that surfaced for

EP:TN in this hybrid state/NGO arrangement. I then present findings of the direct and indirect

complications that arose for EP:TN as a result of those uncertainties and tensions pressing on

EP's strategy and educational domains of activity.

**Tensions surface between the ASD's strategy and EP:TN**

In some instances, there were uncertainties and tensions that emerged in the interaction

between the prevalent resources and conditions of the ASD and broader environment, and

EP:TN's strategy and dependencies. These tensions surfaced in three areas: the ASD's

accountability system, the operating conditions of the ASD, and autonomy provided to LTPs.

**Accountability: An unfamiliar high-pressure system tied to accountability.** First,

ASD's accountability expectations and the conditions that surfaced from those interacted with

EP:TN's approach in ways that revealed points of tension for the LTP. Recall that EP:TN and its

schools were under pressure to meet the student achievement improvement goals of the ASD and

the broader federal school turnaround policy context. These demanded the rapid improvement of

schools' EP operated. While the ASD provided clear expectations and goals, EP:TN leaders

described examples of how the accountability expectations pressed on their work because they

created an undercurrent of pressure and urgency to rapidly improve.

This pressure was challenging because it strained key resources, including time to adapt

and learn in this new context. EP:TN leaders reported not experiencing this degree of

accountability pressure previously. For example, two EP:TN leaders said this heavy emphasis on

state assessment results differed from what they experienced elsewhere. One leader said:

> I think out here in Tennessee, there's a different emphasis on student achievement and the
> implications of student achievement on network success. I'm just going to say it: there's a
> different level of pressure and scrutiny of results in Tennessee that doesn't currently exist
> as much in [another state].

There was also pressure to demonstrate rapid improvement. As one leader said, "The way the ASD works (and) the way everything works out here (in Tennessee), it's a little more immediate, real-time … You don't have a lot of time to figure things out."

Taken together, this pressed their educational work by creating conditions that demanded rapid instructional transformation in a context where transformative change in schools would likely not be immediate, as several EP:TN said over the three years. One leader, when reflecting on the expectations in the external community, said "You have to recognize the time that it takes to do these things." It would likely require time to learn and adapt to this new context and, as one leader said, "figure things out." In this context, time was not always on the LTP's side. The policies of school turnaround expected rapid improvement.

**Managing the environment: legal and operating conditions.** Second, EP:TN also encountered uncertainties in the operating conditions that the ASD fostered for its LTPs. Some of these conditions pressed on EP:TN's work. Examples of this from the regulatory environment and the political environment are presented in the sections that follow.

*ASD policy and regulatory environment.* Several EP:TN leader interview responses suggest that some policies that governed EP:TN's work created tensions. This was a novel, uncertain, and layered policy and regulatory environment between the state and LEA for EP:TN. One leader said, "There's the state regulation and then there's the ASD and all of these different layers…[I]t's not like we weren't prepared to work with [in it] but it just is a lot more work to translate the things that we had at Empowerment Prep." Three examples shed light on the ways in which the policies and regulatory environment pressed on the EP:TN leaders and their work.

First, state policies created restrictions on student enrollment in ASD operated schools. Recall from Chapter 4 that EP:TN's schools would operate as neighborhood schools, enrolling

students who were zoned to their schools' catchment areas. One consequence of this is that these enrollment restrictions rendered it difficult to recruit students across the city to fill vacancies and ultimately, to fully enroll schools, according to multiple EP:TN leaders. This uncertainty had implications for public funding and hiring sufficient numbers of teachers and staff, for example.

A second consequence is that school operators would accept any student zoned to their school at any point in the school year, contributing to high transiency rates in their schools. Multiple EP:TN leaders said that this impacted school culture, as their schools experienced a constant churn of new students unfamiliar with norms and expectations of the school community. One EP:TN leader said:

> The transfers in the middle of the year are a huge issue to deal with. Not because they're bad people, but … we spend so much time at the beginning of the year sort of getting kids to understand certain things and having them miss all that and then come in and think they're ready to be students the way we want them to be. It's hard.

As this leader stated, EP was "prepared for it" and experienced in other contexts, but still, it created challenges on their educational work.

A second example of tensions that surfaced for EP as a result of the regulatory environment centered on the oversight relationship between the ASD and its LTPs. Recall that the ASD would oversee and serve as the Local Education Agency (LEA) over its schools. However, according to several EP:TN leaders, this relationship introduced new layers of oversight through which EP:TN had maneuver in ways that they typically did not have to do in its past context, where EP functioned as an independent LEA. One leader put it this way: "The fact that we're not our own LEA is a big issue… We have to learn to work through somebody else's system. It's a lot more than we were anticipating." Specifically, EP:TN had to learn how to work with and through the ASD for non-educational matters such as compliance, human resources, and more.

A final example was that the ASD policy design positioned LTPs and the local school district to interact in complex, uncertain ways that EP would have to learn and manage. For instance, the local school district was involved in the school takeover transition process, with the facilities that it would loan LTPs, the transfer of student records, communication with the public and families about the transition, demarcation of attendance boundaries, and more. EP:TN relied on the local school district and the ASD to make this as seamless a transition as possible. However, this was not always the case. Certain conditions made this an uncertain process: The policy environment lacked established inter-organizational processes and agreements to manage that work; the local school district had little incentive to facilitate a smooth transition; and the ASD was also involved in managing this, creating overlapping responsibility. This, as well as the previous examples, highlight how resources (policy regulations, conditions and expectations) had bearing on EP:TN's capabilities for building a network of schools in this complex and uncertain ASD context. They introduced new variables into their work in this new context that EP:TN had to learn and devise strategies to manage.

*Political environment.* EP:TN was dependent on the ASD's political environment for political sustainability and viability, yet such conditions were uncertain in practice. Several EP:TN leaders stated that growing pockets of public discontent of the ASD trickled down to EP:TN, creating political pushback that EP:TN would have to manage. At the state level, for example, recall from Chapter 4 that by the 2015 legislative session, 22 bills were filed that sought to limit or disband the ASD (and all but two were defeated). This political pushback further exacerbated the growing negativity and skepticism around the ASD (Glazer & Egan, 2017). In the case of EP:TN, it created more uncertainty for building social legitimacy,

beginning in the school matching process. In 2015, one EP:TN leader reflected on the public

perception challenges of the ASD during the matching process and said:

> What we got here at [an EP school following the school matching process] was interestingly a lot of [parents and community members saying,] "We are not mad at EP. We are mad at the ASD." It was like "Well, we are kind of the same.' Collectively, we have got some branding work to do."

Negative perceptions of the ASD created more challenges for EP:TN as they entered this new

environment that would require time and learning to understand and address the salient issues.

**Autonomy.** Importantly, implicit in all of the restrictions and conditions in the regulatory

environment for ASD school operators was that LTPs did not have complete autonomy or

control, unlike the typical charter school context. Indeed, the ASD established a set of conditions

(some stemming from state and federal laws and others from their own policies) that defined the

bounds of LTPs work.  The reach of these conditions was not deep or so expansive to penetrate

or mandate particular practices in the LTP's educational work. Still, these presented new and an

uncertain and complex set of conditions that shaped EP:TN leaders' work.

Taken together, the ASD's approach around autonomy, accountability, and operating

conditions created a set of conditions on which EP:TN would depend, but at the same time, some

of these conditions pressed on EP's approach and educational domains of work in various ways

that led to complications for EP:TN. Additionally, these conditions shaped a new context for EP

that was complex, uncertain, and full of interdependencies, which EP leaders would have to learn

and manage. All of this resulted in critical complications that EP:TN would have to manage.

**Direct and Indirect Complications to EP's Educational Work**

Analysis of interviews, documents, and observation reveal a common theme: The

interactions between EP's instructional design and lean central hub organization, the hybrid

organizational arrangement with the ASD, and the broader environment created direct and

indirect complications for EP's educational domains of activity. I distinguish between two types of complications that arise for EP:TN. The direct complications straightforwardly impacted EP's activity in its educational domains of activity. The indirect complications had a less immediate, clear impact on the educational domains of activity; they made EP's educational work more complicated by diverting resources (time, attention, money, human capital) from educational matters to address these non-educational matters.

All of complications pressed on the organization, design, and schools. In addition to the other educational and non-educational work of turnaround, EP leaders would manage these complications and somehow create tighter coordination between their work and the conditions in this context by bridging or buffering those conditions. Below I highlight select examples of direct and indirect complications that emerged in practice for EP:TN in their work within the ASD and this hybrid state/NGO model.

**Direct complications for educational work.** In some ways, the aforementioned conditions that the ASD created, EP:TN's approach to managing the educational domains, central hub organization's capabilities, and the environment interacted in ways that led to direct complications in EP:TN's educational work.

One striking example of this can be seen with how the ASD's accountability expectations, EP:TN's educational infrastructure and system to support its use, and broader environment rubbed up against each other. This interaction ultimately surfaced a direct complication for EP:TN's educational work: its instructional design and accompanying professional learning system were not promoting the kind of instruction EP:TN leaders perceived to be necessary to meet the ASD's accountability expectations and their own internal expectations.  Several EP:TN leaders reasoned that part of the challenge rested in problems with

the instructional and professional learning designs and part rested in how the ASD's

accountability expectations and the broader environmental conditions pressed on their designs in

this context. Findings for the challenges in the design and the interactions with the environment

are presented in the subsections that follow.

     *<mark>Designs.</mark>* A first challenge rested in the nature of EP's designs in this environment. EP's

instructional design and professional learning system were not promoting consistent, standards-

aligned instruction across classrooms. Indeed, one EP:TN leader said, "We saw pockets of good

teaching and larger pockets where we [had] not necessarily bad teaching but not the teaching that

needed to happen to get kids where they needed to be…"

     Part of this instructional inconsistency stemmed from the nature of EP's instructional

design, according to data from EP:TN leaders' interviews and observations. A common theme

emerged from interviews in 2017 with several EP:TN leaders: the EP instructional design did not

provide sufficient instructional guidance to support teachers' practice, and this contributed to the

inconsistencies in practice in this context.  One leader reflected on the guidance from the original

curriculum and said:

> The suggested curriculum we had before, you had to figure out what to teach, how do I
> design my lesson, what do I do to start, what type of practice questions am I giving my
> students, what type of assessment am I giving my students?  There were so many
> variables that teachers had to determine on their own when it came to the quality and the
> nuances of implementing those plans.

Several EP:TN leaders explained that it was challenging for teachers to transform the loose

guidance into standards-aligned, rigorous daily lesson plans. One leader said:

> It was a big leap for teachers to internalize and pretty much implement the curriculum
> map.  They were very skeletal in nature.  They gave you a guide, but there was no
> explicit 'this is how you teach it; this is what it looks like day one, day two, day three.'
> We definitely had inconsistent results…across schools, within schools.  It really just
> depended on teacher experience, their understanding of the standards and how to
> implement [the curriculum].

Successful implementation relied on teachers' capabilities (knowledge, skills, and beliefs) to design daily instruction, with support from EP's teacher learning system.

A second identified challenge to instructional consistency stemmed from EP's professional learning system. While EP:TN developed and used a comprehensive professional learning system to support the use of this infrastructure in the early years of this study 2014-2016, three EP:TN leaders contended a limitation was that it did not provide targeted, content-specific support to help teachers more rapidly take up the loosely elaborated instructional guidance. For example, one leader reflected on their professional development in those three years and said, "School setting professional development is really generic to meet the needs of all the teachers in the school.  It's data-driven, but it wasn't necessarily supporting teachers in implementing their specific contents."

***Designs collide with the environments.*** These vulnerabilities might have been more manageable if they were working in an environmental context with less ambitious and time-sensitive accountability expectations that afforded schools time to learn and improve, with consistent academic standards and assessments to which EP could coordinate their educational infrastructure, professional learning system, and performance management system. However, this was not the environment that EP encountered in this new context and hybrid arrangement.

Rather, several EP:TN leaders reasoned that part of their instructional improvement challenges also rested in how accountability expectations and the broader social and policy environments interacted with EP:TN's educational infrastructure, system to support use of that infrastructure, and system to manage performance. These interactions contributed to a direct complication to instructional improvement.

For example, EP entered a novel, uncertain educational policy environment, and this pressed on the aforementioned challenges that surfaced in using EP's design in this context. Recall that the ASD and the macro policy context of the federal government's Race to the Top initiative created high-pressure accountability expectations that were grounded in state standards and assessments and placed ambitious expectations for raising student outcomes on assessments in short-order. Further, Tennessee adopted new standards and assessments in 2016. This created three sorts of complications for EP:TN instructional leaders to manage.

First, several EP:TN leaders stated that the EP curriculum was not fully aligned to the new standards and assessments in Tennessee to which they would be accountable. Recall, EP:TN had to embrace the new standards when they arrived in Tennessee and then had to manage another change in standards in 2016. One EP:TN staff member reflected on this challenge: "[I]t always feels like we're reaching for a moving target. It's made our work that much more to challenging." These shifts required EP:TN's instructional leaders to learn what it would take to tightly coordinate the instructional design and teacher learning opportunities to the new standards so that teachers were more closely coupling their instruction to the standards to which they were accountable. This, for example, required careful study of the curricular resources and standards, and adaptations to them in some cases.

Second, the shifting standards and assessments in 2016 complicated EP:TN's ability to create a shared vision of student learning, a key element in their instructional system. One leader reflected on transition to new standards and said: "We've got teachers with lots of experience with the previous standards, but [don't have an] understanding this is what the rigor is supposed to look like, sound like, feel like (with the new standards)." The new standards placed new, higher demands on student learning and teaching, but not all teachers conceptualized the

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standards the same way. This contributed to inconsistent instruction across classrooms that varied in how the specific content and skills were covered, practiced, and assessed, according to three EP:TN leaders.

Third, the educational policy environment and, specifically, the challenge in managing the shifts in standards also impacted another educational domain of EP's work: performance management. For example, state-wide testing issues delayed distribution of test results from the 2015-2016 school year until December 2016. Several EP:TN leaders said that this made it to manage performance for accountability and continuous improvement purposes. One leader said:

> It's frustrating that we don't have the [state assessment] data to start the year because we're building blind metrics, right? So, we can continue to build off of internal metrics, but we still don't know how aligned our internal metrics are with the state assessment... I think that's really frustrating. It's kind of building a tent in the dark.

Key elements of EP's performance management designs were dependent on timely access to state assessment data so that they could adjust their resources and designs in response to outcomes. Absent such timely access to the data, leaders reported limitations in their capabilities to monitor progress and use data to support efforts to learn and adjust to improve their approach.

Taken together, the policy environment collided with aspects of EP's designs and made it challenging for instructional leaders to coordinate activity in the domains of educational infrastructure, professional learning systems, and performance management systems with the environment (standards and the accountability expectations set by the ASD and federal policies).

In addition to the education policy environment, the teacher labor market also collided with the designs and the ASD's accountability expectations, further contributing to the complications of instructional improvement. Many EP:TN leaders interviewed stated that they struggled to recruit, hire, and retain a sufficient supply of the types of teachers that EP:TN sought between 2014 and 2016. What resulted, according to leaders, was a constant churn of new

teachers who would arrive with varying levels of experience and expertise. This placed pressure on the educational infrastructure and professional learning system to rapidly build teacher capabilities in order for them to use the instructional resources for practice. One leader said:

> [With EP:TN's initial curricular materials, teachers] were figuring out what to teach and how to teach it. They were trying to do both. Having teacher retention being an issue, every year, you're starting over, so you're just teaching one person this year how to teach and what to teach. Okay, great, they have it at the end of the year, and next year, you have a new set of people …. So it was just ongoing.

The churn of teachers created a heavy reliance on EP's professional learning system and instructional leaders to rapidly develop teachers, but that system had noted challenges, as described in a preceding section, exacerbating EP's complications for instructional improvement.

Taken together, the ASD strategy and the broader environment pressed on EP:TN's instructional design and system to support its use. Key assumptions and components of EP's approach did not seamlessly transfer to this new context. The open nature of the instructional design and reliance on the teacher professional learning system did not provide sufficient instructional guidance to teachers in this new context, according to EP:TN leaders. This suggests that, in some ways, the design was not fully aligned and coordinated with this environment (e.g., the prevailing accountability expectations, shifting standards, teacher labor market). This contributed to direct complications in improving instruction at a fast-enough rate to meet accountability expectations set by the ASD and, more broadly, the macro policy context of Race to the Top. This policy context created urgency for immediate improvement yet did not provide much time for EP to learn the new standards and environment and adjust its designs to create tighter coordination with that environment.

**Indirect complications for educational work.** In other instances, the interactions between the organizational arrangement with the ASD, EP's strategy, and the broader

environment created indirect complications for EP's educational domains of activity. Specifically, the ASD strategy and conditions it created for LTPs introduced a number of non-educational matters (relationships, environments) that pressed on EP's work. This indirectly complicated EP's educational work by diverting a finite set of organizational resources (time, attention, money, human capital) away from educational matters in order to manage these non-educational matters. To shed light on this, I share three examples in the sections that follow.

*Learning how to be a system in the ASD LEA.* Among interviews with multiple EP:TN leaders from 2014-2017, a common theme emerged: EP:TN leaders had to learn how to operate within the ASD LEA. Recall in this hybrid model in Tennessee that LTPs would operate in the ASD regulatory environment and under the oversight of the ASD LEA. This was a new arrangement for EP:TN, which had previously had operated as its own LEA. Two facets of this relationship posed indirect complications to EP's educational work: (1) managing additional work and learning how to operate an LEA in the ASD and (2) managing the political pushback that arose from its association with the ASD and learning about the community context. Both of these introduced new work EP had to manage, such as learning the new context or managing new tasks, and both diverted the finite set of resources away from other work, such as other educational domains. In this sense, the interaction indirectly pressed on EP's educational work.

First, multiple EP:TN leaders said that new layers of work emerged in working with the ASD LEA to complete certain tasks. For example, various EP:TN leaders mentioned having to carefully monitor how the ASD completed some tasks for which they were responsible and to which EP was accountable. For instance, one leader described this challenge and said, "We're having a huge struggle with things that we're dependent on them for, which is stuff like state testing data..." The process of working through the ASD added a layer of oversight that

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constrained the autonomy to which EP was typically accustomed, created extra work for EP:TN leaders to manage, and required EP:TN leaders to learn a new system and continuously improve their own processes to better coordinate with this new hybrid state/NGO model context. This created an indirect complication for EP:TN's educational work because this diverted organizational resources away from other work, such as educational matters.

On the other hand, there were few instances in which several EP:TN leaders reported that they would have benefitted from more support from the ASD. Absent that, their work was made more complex and demanded more organizational resources to manage it. Several leaders discussed this challenge as it related to community engagement and the school matching process.

For instance, a few EP:TN leaders said that the ASD did not have a clear, compelling message or one-on-one communication with parents and the community about the change process during the school matching process between 2014-2016. One EP:TN leader said:

> [The ASD] started out as 'There's a new sheriff in town'…One of the things they did not do that I feel like we've done decently and getting better is that opportunity to engage with the community before you come in [for the matching process]. Have some meetings. Talk to people. Don't just go to the school and tell them, 'Hey, all of you are losing your job.' There is no better way to make everyone upset, you know?...

This leader, and others, reasoned that the absence of such communication and messaging contributed to a negative process. One EP:TN leader said, "People view (the school takeover process) as hostile. They don't view this as an opportunity to feel empowered to take back your school from a system that is failing your children. That is a huge problem."

Analysis of EP:TN leader interviews suggested that several EP:TN leaders reasoned that the lack of compelling messaging perpetuated the negative perception of the ASD, further exacerbating challenges that EP:TN encountered building community support. One EP:TN leader reflected on community perceptions of the ASD and EP:TN, by association, and said:

[W]hen you think of ASD, you think, 'Oh, it's a failing school, and they've been taken over by the state.' So we're sometimes seen as outsiders, so you'll hear people say, 'Those people are coming in here and taking our schools.' So people have this very kind of negative connotation around the work that we do.

This leaders statement suggest that EP's initial introduction to the neighborhood through the matching process would begin with a negative connotation from its association with the ASD.

In sum, EP:TN relied on the ASD for orchestrating the school takeover and matching process and for managing LEA compliance responsibilities; however, the complications that manifested from the interactions between ASD's management of these activities, EP's approach, and the broader environment created complications to EP:TN's work in some ways. Namely, it created more work for EP:TN to (a) work through the ASD to manage compliance matters and learn their processes, and (b) buffer the political pushback that ensued from the school takeover process. These instances created indirect complications for EP's educational work in two ways. First, these additional demands required resources (time, human capital, funding, learning) that could have otherwise been allocated toward other work, such as educational domains. Further, in the case of the matching process, any local perceptions of negativity about EP could have deleterious consequences for EP's social legitimacy in the community, and this could impede the educational work of managing the environments.

***The challenge of working in the same space as the local school district.*** Analysis of interview data from 2014-2017 reveal a second example of the indirect complications that working with in this hybrid state/NGO turnaround model: the external relationship that EP had to manage with the local school district. While the ASD, EP, and the local district interacted around a few activities, there were no formal inter-organizational arrangements guiding these. Further, EP had to manage these dynamics with and through the ASD. This created additional layers of management that pressed on EP's work and required some of its finite organizational resources.

For example, under the ASD policy, there was multilayered oversight of operations of the facilities between local school district, ASD, and EP:TN. This created new work for EP:TN leaders to manage the overlap (e.g., additional communication and learning the new processes). For instance, they had to work through the ASD and the local district to manage contracts with vendors (e.g., security guards, transportation, maintenance). This muddled, multilayered process to operate schools diverted resources (time, human capital, learning) from other matters.

***Community engagement, student enrollment, and concerns about viability.*** A third example of the indirect complications that working with the ASD in this hybrid state/NGO model had on EP:TN was the struggle to bolster student enrollment and broad-based local support. While these matters did not have an immediate impact on the instructionally focused domains of work, they did indirectly impact them by constraining resources (funding, time, social legitimacy) that could have otherwise been allocated towards other matters essential to building an instructional focused network in the new region.

Among interviews with several EP:TN leaders, a key theme emerges: EP:TN leaders reasoned that they experienced low student enrollment numbers as a result of a complex set of interdependent conditions, including the regulatory conditions that came with working within the ASD (e.g., enrollment regulations), social and political dynamics of working in the ASD (e.g., ASD's increasing lack of deep, broad-based public support) and EP:TN's own challenges (e.g., lagging student outcomes and a growing but initially limited broad-based public support and trust as an outside organization new to Tennessee).

Multiple EP:TN leaders cited two reasons that low enrollment was problematic. It created public funding challenges because funding was tied to student enrollment, which impacted organizational viability and school operations (e.g., staffing, training). It also reflected the

organization's challenges in engendering broad based support and trust within a local community that was increasingly skeptical of the ASD and unfamiliar with EP:TN.

Given the implications of low student enrollment, EP:TN allocated significant resources to increase enrollment, and more broadly, to build community support and trust. Several EP:TN leaders contended it was uniquely challenging for them in Tennessee for two reasons.

First, several leaders said it was challenging because of EP:TN's social position in the city as a nationally-based, ASD operator with no local brand recognition or widely held understanding of their approach to schooling. One EP:TN leader said, "The challenge of year one any time you go to a new region, is we don't have a brand." Another EP:TN leader reflected on the amount of work that they have to do with student enrollment, community engagement, and making connections with the community absent deep local roots and brand recognition and said:

> We have to really engage people more than [the local school district] does, even more so than I would say [a locally based ASD operator] does, and it is because the perception is that everyone here is from somewhere else rather than the fact that we've hired people from this community.

EP:TN was a new organization in the Tennessee that was perceived to be filled with outsiders.

Further, several EP:TN leaders responses suggested that a second part of the challenge stemmed from EP's association with the ASD and their initial introduction to the local neighborhood through the ASD's matching process, stating:

> So we've really had to…work hard to talk to parents and make them feel comfortable with this transition… A big part of this job is really helping people understand EP is not the big, bad wolf... We are here to do a great job with your child academically, socially.

Indeed, not only was EP:TN new to the region, without a brand and using an approach to schooling that was not fully understood by the community, but they also were associated with the ASD and the challenges surrounding school takeover.  In this sense, EP:TN began operating schools with a public support deficit that EP:TN leaders would have to overcome and, as another

central hub leader said, "create our own brand awareness." This complex, uncertain work required time: time to learn about the community, time to consider how to thoughtfully engage with the community, and time to build those relationships, trust, and understanding of EP's approach. However, the urgency of building effective schools with sufficient numbers of students to support sustainable funding further complicated this critical pursuit.

In 2014-2016, several EP:TN leaders described efforts to grow student enrollment at their schools through resource-intensive efforts into community engagement. According to three leaders, starting in the early winter, they launched a 9-month long community engagement process where hub and school staff members would canvass neighborhoods, hold community meetings, meet with local groups, advertise, and disseminate information to build understanding about their approach and relationships. Despite these efforts, increasing enrollment remained a challenge. These results strained the organization's finances. They also indirectly complicated EP's educational efforts by diverting resources from them; however, EP:TN leaders could not limit this enrollment work, for as one leader said, "If we don't have students, we don't have schools." Enrollment was critical for funding, and without that, EP:TN could not exist, staff could not be hired, and instructional improvement efforts could not be funded.

This all might have been more manageable if EP were working in a context with a larger student age population and less competition for students, and if they were not subject to enrollment regulations. However, this was not the case. These were the salient contextual conditions of working in Tennessee's hybrid state/NGO model for school turnaround.

**Concluding reflections on the Complications EP encountered**

Taken together, the preceding analysis suggest that there were discrepancies and incoherence between the ASD's strategy and contributions, EP's educational domains of work,

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and the broader environment. Consequently, this created points of friction for parts of EP:TN's educational work, and in turn, introduced complications for this lead turnaround partner. First, a direct complication to EP's educational work surfaced: EP's instructional design and system for supporting teachers' use of the design, while effective elsewhere, were not sufficiently promoting consistent, standards-aligned instruction to raise student outcomes commensurate with the ASD's accountability expectations and social and policy environmental conditions in this new context. This new context and its salient conditions pressed on EP:TN's approach in ways that their previous context did not, and EP:TN leaders learned that their approach was not fully aligned to the types of environment conditions and resources present in this context.

Second, the operating conditions that the ASD fostered, environment, and EP:TN interacted in ways that introduced non-educational demands on the EP:TN. The ASD and the environment created a new set of environmental conditions and resources that EP:TN had to learn, manage, and leverage. Managing these diverted organizational resources from other work, such as the educational domains, creating an indirect complication to EP:TN's educational work.

In both instances, these complications were born from tensions that emerged between the ASD's strategy and its conditions it created for its operators, EP:TN's strategy, and the ways in which the broader environment interacted with those. What emerged was that a seasoned lead turnaround partner- Empowerment Prep- arrived with experience and a robust approach that had proven effective elsewhere, but the prevailing conditions in the ASD (from the accountability pressure, enrollment restrictions, to political pushback) and its surrounding environment bore on EP:TN's approach in ways that complicated their work. This revealed points of misalignment between the environment and EP's approach, and it also created an urgency for learning and continuous improvement to realign EP:TN's approach to better fit this specific context.

**EP:TN Manages Complications: Learning and Adapting in a New Context**

Analysis of EP:TN leader interviews and observations suggest that EP:TN sought to manage the aforementioned complications in order to better coordinate their approach to the ASD's operational conditions and broader environments in this hybrid state/NGO model for school turnaround. To this end, responses from interviews suggest that EP:TN leaders made adaptations in their key educational domains of activity and hub to (a) increase the capabilities of teachers, instructional leaders, and hub leaders in an effort to manage the complications they encountered in this hybrid state/NGO arrangement and (b) more tightly align their approach to the local environment (see Table 6.2 for sample key adaptations).

**Table 6.2 Key EP:TN Adaptations**

| YEAR | EXAMPLES OF KEY ADAPTATIONS |
|---|---|
| 2014-15 | • Minor adaptions to EP:N school model and educational domains of activity (e.g., educational infrastructure [curriculum, advisory curriculum] and supporting use of infrastructure) |
| 2015-16 | • Enlarge regional central office staff<br>• EP:National and EP:TN decentralize some key functions |
| 2016-17 | • Educational infrastructure and professional learning system adaptations<br>• Refined student recruitment, student recruitment and community engagement strategies, and enrollment process<br>• Enlarge regional central office staff |

Interviews with EP:TN leaders suggest that they were engaging in this learning and adaptation process, in part, because they were operating in a policy context that (a) placed high, time-sensitive expectations on school improvement and (b) tied public funding to student enrollment that was far from guaranteed. However, they were doing this work—learning, adapting, and building capacity to do it—despite that the very same environmental context did not provide resources to support such a learning process required in this school turnaround work.

Analysis from interviews, observations and documents suggests that EP:TN leaders made

three types of adaptations within the five educational domains during the period of the study. These include (1) managing the direct complications with the domains of infrastructure and supporting its use, (2) managing the environment, and (3) distributing instructional leadership.

In the sections that follow, I present findings for these categories of adaptations. I provide evidence on key adaptations EP:TN leaders stated they made and their rationale for why and how the changes were made. It is important to note that I do not present findings on the outcomes (or leader perceptions of the outcomes) of these adaptations, meaning whether these adaptations led to organizational improvement. I conclude by considering how all of these adaptations and efforts to learn to manage the environments created yet another complication for EP:TN's lean central office: this critical work of learning and adapting expanded an already expansive scope of work for the organization. They had to continuously build capacity to manage all of the work. EP:TN leaders engaged in rapid learning and adaptation efforts because of and despite of the political and policy environments in which they were embedded.

**Managing direct complications: Educational infrastructure and supporting its use**

Findings from the preceding section indicate that while EP:TN's instructional design proved effective elsewhere, issues emerged with the ways in which the design promoted consistent instruction in the new Tennessee ASD context. According to responses from several EP:TN leaders, all of this came to a tipping point following the public release of state assessment results from 2016. One leader, when reflecting on this time period, said, "We knew there was a need to do something, but [the release of the state assessment scores] just was the moment of 'we can't wait.'' Multiple EP:TN leaders reported urgency to improve and to address the problems that surfaced in their instructional design so that they could elevate state test scores to continuously meet the ASD's (and federal-level) accountability expectations and help attain EP's

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internal goals and mission. To manage this, EP:TN sought to more tightly coordinate their

instructional design to environmental context. Specifically, EP:TN leaders made major

adaptations to their educational infrastructure and system to support its use in light of these

outcomes in 2017. This included clearer expectations on what to teach, content-specific guidance

on pedagogical approaches for teaching the content, and more coordinated, content-specific

supports to scaffold teacher learning to enact the curriculum in the desired way.

Among interviews with several EP:TN instructional leaders, a common theme emerged:

the objective of these changes was to provide sufficient guidance and support to teachers to

promote consistent, standards-aligned instruction across all classrooms, regardless of how

experienced or expert a teacher was. These leaders reasoned that through these changes they

could address some of the design challenges that emerged in this ASD context by more tightly

coupling their instructional system with the local academic standards and assessments and to

reduce emphasis on teacher capabilities to enact the design, given human capital constraints in

the new region. In the sections that follow, I present findings of the learning and adaptations

made to their instructional design and their professional learning system.

**Instructional design adaptations.** Data from observations and interviews with EP:TN

leaders suggests that EP:TN's hub made a series of adaptations to their instructional system to

better align it for this hybrid organizational arrangement with the ASD (and its accountability

expectations) and its broader social and policy context (human capital and accountability). First,

EP:TN adopted more elaborated, externally created curricula to guide teacher instruction for

math and ELA. These nationally created curricula were aligned to Tennessee standards and

provided daily lesson plans, PowerPoint slides, texts, tasks, and exemplar student responses.

EP:TN instructional leaders created additional resources to support teacher enactment of the curriculum and promote greater instructional consistency. These included instructional planning documents that provided guidance and vision for each course and weekly instructional plans that provided teachers daily guidance on what objectives to teach, texts to use, end of day assessment to give, and suggestive guidance on how to teach the lesson. Still emphasizing some degree of teacher autonomy and decision making, EP:TN leaders would expect teachers to create a daily lesson plan to help them use and adapt resources for their particular students.

Such adaptations to the curriculum necessitated changes to the rest of EP's educational infrastructure to craft coherence across the system. For example, EP:TN leaders stated that they intended to add weekly common assessments to elicit timely, standards-aligned feedback on student learning to drive ongoing performance management domain activity and continuous improvement efforts. They also adjusted their system of additional supports for students by adopting a new curriculum for the intervention classes that closely coordinated to the newly adopted math and ELA curricula. They introduced a new, externally created instructional framework to offer a more content-specific, common core aligned instructional vision. Recall their initial instructional vision was grounded in EP's teaching evaluation tool (TET), but, as one leader said, "The (TET) is pretty content agnostic, which is a problem."

**Professional learning adaptations**. In light of those changes, EP:TN leaders also adapted the professional learning system. Among interviews with five EP:TN leaders, a common theme surfaced: they sought to provide more content-specific, practice-based, and collaborative support to teachers that was coordinated to the new instructional materials and state-standards.

Specifically, EP:TN leaders described the types of adaptations that they were in the process of making for instructional coaching, professional development, and collaborative

learning opportunities to better support teachers. For example, EP:TN leaders described a plan to introduce a new initiative to implement weekly virtual professional learning communities (PLC) across the regional network to provide more content-specific support and collaborative learning opportunities. Additionally, several EP:TN leaders described how they intended to design professional development workshops that provided opportunities for collegial interaction and peer-teaching, seeing concrete examples of practice, and productive struggle. Similarly, EP:TN leaders described plans to adapt instructional coaching to more tightly coordinate it with the new curricula and the state standards by using the new content-specific instructional framework for classroom feedback. Through their learning process, EP:TN leaders said that this would better support teacher enactment of the new curriculum because, as one leader said, **"The curriculum needs to be supported more intentionally, and the coaching needs to be aligned to content specific feedback."** Together, these adaptations in this new context would provide more content-specific and standards-aligned support to teachers.

**Reflecting on educational infrastructure adaptations.** Taken together, several EP:TN leaders' interview responses suggest that leaders sought to more tightly align their instructional design and professional learning system with the resources and realities of this new Tennessee context. Findings suggest that these adaptations were envisioned to address the complications of promoting consistent, standards aligned instruction that surfaced in the first two years of this study in two ways.

First, the adaptations provided teachers substantially more elaborated guidance and standardized expectations for their practice compared to the relative autonomy they had in the initial design. One EP:TN leader described the new curriculum this way:

> I think what having an external curriculum source does is it eliminates the question of what to teach and it puts the focus on how to teach…When I take away the variable of

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what is that I'm going to teach today, you can really focus on the higher leverage feel of how do I teach this and how is this lesson implemented.… I'm hopeful that it will launch student achievement in the next level.

The more elaborated instructional system, according to several EP:TN leaders, was envisioned to be a lever for increasing instructional consistency and test scores because it would set clear and common expectations and vision. Improving student achievement was a key goal in this ASD and federal policy environments, as multiple leaders said, and providing high quality instruction that was tied to standards was key component of this organization's approach. Leaders reasoned that coordinating their instructional system to provide more explicit guidance on providing standards aligned instruction could be a means to those ends.

Second, the increased elaboration of material resources, in theory, would address another challenge EP:TN encountered in this new context: it would decrease EP:TN's reliance on human capital (teachers and instructional leaders) and create a more sustainable approach for instructional improvement. It would do this by creating baseline expectations for instructional practice to promote more consistent levels of instruction, regardless of teacher expertise. One leader described the adaptations this way:

> We have to establish the minimum expectation [for practice] and really define that for teachers. I think that for a long time, we make a lot of assumptions in terms of teacher's level of preparation and previous experience. That has led to, I think, sometimes inconsistent results academically in the classroom or of teacher effectiveness.

The findings presented here suggest that EP:TN adapted their educational infrastructure to better support teachers in providing consistent, standards-aligned instruction and to create tighter coherence between the designs and the ASD context in which they worked. These adaptations were made at the end of this study, so the outcomes of these adaptations are unknown.

**Managing indirect complications: the environments**

In this hybrid state/NGO model, the environment and operating conditions established by the ASD introduced various relationships and circumstances that EP:TN would have to learn and manage. I present two examples of how EP:TN sought to manage these indirect complications by addressing activity in the domain of managing the environments.

**Building community support and an EP brand.** According to interview data from several EP:TN leaders, one way that EP:TN attempted to address these indirect complications was to build stronger relationships with the local community and widen the EP local brand awareness. Based on their learning from their experience operating schools in the ASD, EP:TN leaders envisioned that a more recognizable brand would build public support and increase awareness of their work. Three EP:TN leaders said that, in principle, these interdependent efforts would support the interrelated goals of increasing enrollment, teacher recruitment, community engagement with the schools, public funding, and ultimately, the viability of the network.

Through analysis of interview responses, one approach that emerged to address this was to build public awareness about EP through building relationships with community members. This included engaging in intentional, one-on-one interactions with community members to educate them on EP and their approach. For example, one leader stated that they sought to create public awareness about EP that was distinct from the ASD and project a positive message about EP and its personalized approach to educating students. This leader said:

> We need people to know that we really are being a positive impact in this community, and we didn't come to take over. We're not trying to speak poorly of [the local school district] or any of that. We just want to come here and do what's best for children. So that's my messaging whenever I'm out but it has been a hard message to give, because there is still this negative aura around the ASD.

Indeed, part of the messaging also required navigating the ASD's "negative aura" within the community that, recall, emerged over the first two years of this study (2014-2016). Over this time, EP:TN learned more about the new context and considered how to message their work to the community. One leader described the balance in messaging this way: "Everything we do is EP. We're not saying we're ASD, and we're not *not* saying we are but that's not the focal point." The main priority was building a unique, EP centric brand that focused on how they would partner with and support the community, families, and students.

**Devising strategies to support viability: enrollment and school expansion.** A second example of a set of strategies the EP:TN leaders employed to address the indirect complications centered on diversifying and widening their funding streams to enhance prospects for financial viability. Analysis of interview responses with EP:TN leaders, recall, suggested that they learned over the first two years of this study that they had uncertain pathways to increasing public revenue in this environment, as public funding from student enrollment proved to be variable and opportunities to expand to new schools were uncertain, especially as the ASD did not take over new schools to start in the 2017-2018 SY. To address this, two EP:TN leaders described two strategies to diversify and streamline their approach to sustainability and viability.

One strategy focused on student recruitment and enrollment in 2017. Since EP:TN learned that student enrollment numbers were uncertain, even with resource intensive recruitment efforts, EP:TN leaders sought to forge a pathway to increase enrollment through an intentional, data-driven process to identify effective student recruitment strategies. One leader explained the process they adopted for streamlining and codifying their approach to the recruitment this way:

> [We] work[ed] on organizing the framework … to make sure we're kind of doing some
> things very uniformly…So that has been very helpful to really kind of streamline the

process of what this needs to look like and when do we start recruitment… [This] has really shaven a little bit of that time off. We're not here all day and all night, but really helping us see what we do that really works and then kind of doing away with things that aren't very successful for us.

As this statement suggests, in the past, this was time-intensive work. To address this, EP:TN made these adaptations to identify effective, common practices that would, in theory, increase inefficiency and decrease resource allocation to this work. While leaders noted improvements in that regard, the work still required resources. For example, one leader said they still made over one thousand parent phone calls about registration in a three-month window in 2017.

A second strategy that EP:TN pursued was diversifying how they could expand the number of schools they operated to increase prospects for sustainability and, specifically, enrollment across EP:TN's region. Two leaders, as early as 2015, conjectured that expansion prospects within the ASD would be uncertain, and one noted it would be unlikely that EP:TN would reach their initial strategic growth goals. By 2017, one leader said that EP:N had lowered the strategic growth goal because of limited opportunities for expansion (e.g., limited number of priority schools, ASD moratorium). As a result of that, one leader said, a "[W]e have spent this year forging a way to make that happen." They did so by considering alternative pathways to be authorized to operate schools. One leader said that growing their market share in Tennessee's educational landscape would help them build a sustainable enterprise by generating more public revenue (rather than relying on private funding) and decreasing their reliance on the ASD for what had become uncertain growth opportunities.

As the preceding presentation of findings on the adaptations that EP:TN made to the educational domain of managing the environments suggests, several EP:TN leaders described urgency to address financial viability and sustainability concerns by increasing revenue through student enrollment and also to build community trust and support. Indeed, EP leaders were trying

to simultaneously manage distinct yet interdependent complications that surfaced during the interactions between EP:TN's strategy, the ASD, and the broader environment during 2014-2016). EP:TN had to learn this context and adapt, as this section suggests. While the outcomes of these adaptations were unclear at the close of this study, findings indicate that leaders were allocating resources and trying to build capacity to manage these complications that surfaced.

**Managing direct and indirect complications: Distributing instructional leadership**

While EP:TN opened a new region, managed the educational domains of work, and managed a set of complications and adaptations within a short timeframe, they did so, according to one leader, with the leadership of a "lean" regional hub team with finite resources and capabilities (e.g., time) to tackle a complex scope of work. To address this, EP:TN also made efforts to increase its capacities for all of this work by specifically trying to build their regional central office capabilities through two main strategies (see Table 6.2).

**Network restructuring of key functions.** One strategy centered at the organizational level. EP national decentralized some functions and gave the TN regional central office more autonomy to adapt and operate in the Tennessee context. Network leaders, according to one EP leader, learned over the first two years in Tennessee that there were distinctions between the regions that impacted academics, human resources, and community engagement, and the initial structural arrangement of sharing some services across regions no longer proved sufficient. EP decentralized education and human resources to the regional level, while knowledge management, finance, development, communications, and strategy remained centralized.

One EP:TN leader reasoned that this would accomplish two goals: increase organizational efficiency by eliminating challenges that came with sharing services across different regions with different environments, and also make the organization more effective by

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given its regions autonomy to operate in ways that were more responsive to their environments. One EP:TN leader, soon after this shift was made, cited an example of a perceived benefit of the decentralization by reflecting on EP:TN's educational functions, stating:

> [EP  national is] not necessarily the authority over the regional curricular model.  There are things that are going to obviously stay the same, but history and science [curricula] and things that are completely different from region to region [will change]. We're going to have a lot more work to do, but we're excited about that to figure it out.

This autonomy to adapt EP systems for this Tennessee context would help EP:TN, in theory, to create systems more responsive to this new environment. One leader said, "[W]e feel out here [in Tennessee] much more empowered to say, "Okay, these are the needs here.  We now have the people here who can actually make changes and do things."  Implied in this is that EP learned that some aspects of the knowledge, resources, and approach for schooling that they brought to Tennessee was contextualized and that regional contextual differences would likely necessitate learning and adaptations to their original approach.

**Regional hub leadership team capabilities**. Interview responses from multiple EP:TN leaders suggests that a second strategy to build organizational capacities for this work focused on developing the individual and collective capabilities of the regional hub leadership team. To do this, the regional hub team grew in size, experience, and expertise in the three years of this study. For example, the education team, during the course of this study, continually expanded their team by adding more content-area specialists and a new teacher leadership role to support implementation of the new curriculum.

Through the growth of staff members, the team increased its bandwidth to manage their expansive scope of work and their abilities to develop more elaborated processes to support hub staff members do their jobs. Leaders envisioned that such changes would help increase organizational effectiveness and increase efficiency by reducing the demands placed on

individual and hub teams. For instance, one leader cited the example of how the additional staff on the educational team aided instructional leaders in unrolling the major adaptation to the instructional and professional learning systems planned for the 2017-18 school year.  This leader reflected on why they were able to make the major instructional shift in 2017 (rather than earlier) and said, "You have to get in; you have to learn the context wherever you work.  You also have to be big enough to have the capacity to make decisions…" Implied in this was that the regional hub office team had to take time to learn the context and build internal capacities in order to be able to adapt to address the complications that surfaced.

## Reflecting and Looking Forward

The preceding suggests that EP:TN encountered synergies and complications in their educational work in this hybrid state/NGO arrangement and new context.  The operating conditions (rules, policies, laws that defined the conditions in which LTPs would operate schools) and broader environment interacted with EP's strategy in ways that, in some instances, created synergies for their work, and in others, created indirect and direct complications to it. EP:TN leaders responded by adapting various elements of their approach and design in an attempt to more tightly coordinate their approach with the environment. While the study ended before it was possible to gain insight into how all of these adaptations fared, findings indicate that leaders recognized complications that emerged in this new context and acted quickly in attempt to remedy them because of internal and external motivations and pressures to improve.

Four key themes emerge from this chapter. First, this hybrid state/NGO model and the broader environment in which it was situated interacted with EP's educational work in supportive and constraining ways that surfaced the ways in which EP's established approach created in another context was, in some ways, not fully coordinated and aligned with this new

context. Second, in this hybrid model for school turnaround policy design, EP:TN managed a broad, complex scope of educational and non-educational work within an uncertain, complex environment. Third, the domain of managing performance showed up prominently in this case of the work of school turnaround. EP:TN learned and evolved between 2014-2017. Leaders made adaptations that they envisioned would improve their approach and better align it with the context, although it falls outside the scope of this study to analyze the outcomes of those adaptations. EP:TN embarked on this series of adaptations absent external resources to support that critical work, such as a networked improvement community across ASD operators, and they also did so while working within a macro-policy context that did not anticipate, understand, or value such learning and gradual improvement processes. Fourth, findings also suggest the complex, interdependent nature of these domains of activity in the work of school turnaround, as the work of managing performance was deeply interconnected with the work of managing the environments, instructional leadership, educational infrastructure, and supporting its use.

What surfaces from this is both the complex and, at times, contextualized nature of the educational domains of work of school turnaround and the extent of continuous improvement efforts that are likely required in this work, given the dynamic, uncertain, interdependent, novel contexts of school turnaround strategies. This experienced, capable LTP managed a broad and complex scope of educational work, including considerable work in the educational domain of performance management to learn and adapt its approach in an attempt to improve, to support school turnaround in this hybrid state/NGO strategy for school turnaround. Still, EP did not demonstrate evidence of rapid improvement in student achievement in the ways that the federal and state policies of school turnaround expected by the end of this study. This raises questions about how the work of school turnaround aligns with the policies that occasion it.

**Chapter 7 Discussion**

This dissertation explored one state's strategy for large scale school turnaround that created a special statewide school turnaround district that partnered with nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to support school improvement in designated priority schools. The preceding chapters examined how the state district and one NGO between 2014-2017 contributed to the educational work of school turnaround in this hybrid state/NGO school turnaround across five domains: building educational infrastructure, supporting the use of educational infrastructure, managing performance, managing the environments, and distributing instructional leadership. The final findings chapter explored the synergies and complications that emerged in practice for this NGO, as they managed these domains of activity in this context, and it also highlighted the ways in which the organization attempted to manage those complications. The preceding chapters specifically addressed three questions:

- What are essential dimensions of the educational contributions of state turnaround districts to large-scale school turnaround?

- What are essential dimensions of the educational contributions of the NGO lead turnaround partners to large-scale school turnaround?

- What categories of synergies and complications arise in the educational work of school turnaround for state and lead turnaround partners in this organizational arrangement?

The questions were motivated by interest in extending the knowledge base of one type of increasingly common state-led strategy for school improvement for persistently underperforming schools. I drew on data from Dr. Joshua L. Glazer at George Washington University's study of the Achievement School District to answer these questions and complete this study.

The purpose of this study was threefold. A first order purpose was to identify how one specific state-led strategy for large-scale school turnaround organized and managed the educational work of the aforementioned educational domains to support rapid instructional improvement in a complex, uncertain environment. A second purpose was to provide an in-depth descriptive case of how one educational organizational- a lead turnaround partner- organized and managed this educational work to support school turnaround. An in-depth understanding of how a school improvement organization organizes to embark on this challenging work provides a lens into practice that could support practitioners and researchers, alike, to see the scope of work of organizing for dramatic school improvement. A third purpose was to develop a provisional analytic framework that can be used as a foundation for further, comparative case studies aimed at examining similarities and differences among states pursuing a hybrid state/NGP strategy.

The evidence and analysis in the preceding chapters suggests that between 2014-2017 Tennessee's Achievement School District and the NGO case for this study (Empowerment Prep) had different designs, implied theories of change, and contributions to the educational domains of activity in this hybrid model. Juxtaposed in this hybrid state/NGO model for school turnaround, these two organizations' designs and contributions to the educational domains of work, in theory, were somewhat complementary because they brought different capabilities and resources to the work and assumed different responsibilities within that work. However, in practice, many complications surfaced in this arrangement, which the NGO lead turnaround

partner in this study attempted to manage through learning, adapting, and by building

organizational capacity. This examination of one state-led strategy for school turnaround and two

embedded organizations also suggests an array of considerations for research and policy designs

for hybrid state-led turnaround models, lead turnaround partners, and state-run school districts.

In this chapter, I share the key findings that emerged from this study between 2014-2017,

situate those within the broader conversation on large-scale school and instructional

improvement, and offer considerations for policy and future research. To begin, I share a

summary of the key findings. I consider the bounds of this study and how what was learned from

it is a byproduct of the particularities of this study. Then, I reflect on the analytic framework

used in this study for analyzing this case, and I consider the conjectures I presented in Chapter 2

and revisit the notion of a learning imperative in school turnaround work. Finally, I consider how

the findings from this study support new ways to think about policy and future research.

**Summary of Findings**

One state-led strategy that Tennessee adopted to support large scale turnaround of some

of the state's priority schools was a hybrid state/NGO model. This type of hybrid state/NGO

model for school turnaround placed two different types of organizations- a state agency (the

Achievement School District) and a nongovernmental lead turnaround partner- together to

support dramatic improvement of chronically underperforming schools. This was a decentralized

strategy, which gave the Achievement School District (ASD) formal oversight of school and

delegated the operational control of the schools to the NGO lead turnaround partners.

This examination of the ASD and one of the NGOs drawn to work within it

(Empowerment Prep) between 2014-2017 suggests that these two organizations brought different

theories of change and designs for the educational work of school improvement to their joint

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effort to support large-scale turnaround in Tennessee. They made different educational

contributions in the five educational domains of work of school turnaround (see Table 7.1 for a

review of these domains). The ASD facilitated the educational work of school turnaround by

managing performance (e.g., accountability) and managing the environment for educational (and

non-educational administrative, political, and operational matters) to create a set of conditions

that framed the lead turnaround partners (LTPs) work but delegated most of the educational work

to the LTPs. Empowerment Prep (EP) led the full scope of the educational domains of work by

building infrastructure, supporting its use, managing performance, managing the environment,

and distributing instructional leadership. In some ways, this organizational arrangement created

synergies for the educational work of dramatically improving underperforming schools. In

others, this arrangement created direct and indirect complications to the EP's educational work. I

summarize the key findings in the sections that follow.

**Table 7.1 Analytic Framework: Five Domains of Educational Activity**

| *Domains* | *Description* |
|---|---|
| 1. *Building educational infrastructure* | Developing or compiling a set resources, strategies, processes, and beliefs that coordinates a vision and guidance for instructional practices and also fostering a culture that supports and promotes those (school climate, building community and family ties, and organizational values). |
| 2. *Supporting the use of the educational infrastructure in practice* | Developing teachers' and leaders' professional knowledge and capabilities through practice based instructional coaching, workshops, and collegial interactions. |
| 3. *Managing performance* | Managing school and system performance for continuous improvement and accountability. |
| 4. *Managing the environment* | Determining how to address the influences and resources in the broader environments that inform the system's understanding and pursuit of instructional improvement. |
| 5. *Distributing instructional leadership* | Develop leadership across schools and systems to support, manage, and coordinate this educational work. |

*Source: Peurach, Cohen, Yurkofsky, & Spillane (2019)*

**The state educational organization: The Achievement School District**

At the center of Tennessee's hybrid state/NGO model to support large scale school

turnaround was the Achievement School District, a special state school district established in

2010 in the state's response to the federal Race to the Top competitive grant program. The ASD would partner with nongovernmental organizations to support large-scale turnaround in priority schools, a federal term used to describe the lowest five percent of Title I schools in the state based on achievement in statewide assessments, that were removed from their home LEA and placed under the oversight of the ASD. In this particular model, the ASD's implied theory of change was that it could support large-scale school turnaround by selecting highly capable LTPs to run their schools with a high degree of operational autonomy in exchange for high accountability. The ASD would facilitate that work by fostering a set of operational and legal conditions for the LTPs that would establish the "rules of the game." This created a vision for a decentralized strategy where LTPs would operate ASD authorized schools as their own system, yet under the authority and within the conditions of the ASD.

The ASD was not envisioned or designed to lead the full scope of educational domains of activity. The ASD's design placed the lead turnaround partners at the center of this work where they would lead the activity of the educational domains, and placed the ASD as a facilitator where it would support some educational domains of activity. These activities included managing performance by setting accountability expectations for the LTPs and managing the environment, for example, to ensure high quality LTP organizations ran schools, performance goals were tightly coupled with state standards, and more.

Between 2014-2017, the majority of the ASD's contributions were not directly related to the educational domains of activity. The ASD engaged in complex and critical non-educational work of facilitating school turnaround focused on cultivating conditions for operators. The entailments of such non-educational work fall outside of the scope of this study, but examples of this include upholding or setting regulations (e.g., enrollment, expansion and revocation

decisions), managing relationships (e.g., with local school districts, state department of education), establishing and implementing processes and policies (e.g., the school matching process, selecting priority schools), and providing resources (e.g., maximizing allocations of public funding to the NGOs operating schools).

This theory of change had potential strengths and vulnerabilities for supporting large-scale school turnaround in Tennessee. On the one hand, the state government could partner with NGOs (lead turnaround partners) that possess the capabilities to lead the domains of educational work to support school turnaround that the government did not necessarily readily possess. This, in principle, could create an efficient strategy to infuse capabilities into historical weak schools and spur school transformation without having to invest resources in developing internal SEA capabilities to do this work.

However, on the other hand, it also would leave the ASD highly dependent on LTPs to successfully manage a broad spectrum of domains of activity quite autonomously. For instance, the ASD's LTPs would be expected to manage the five educational domains of activity in a state takeover school turnaround context that differed from the typical charter school environment and was complex and uncertain. They would do this educational work, while also managing outward facing work (e.g., managing community relations) and forward-facing work (e.g., sustainability). LTPs would have to do all of this work and adapting and learning that would likely accompany it in a policy and political context of school turnaround that placed high expectations for rapid and dramatic improvement of schools in three to five years that did not account for such learning.

**The nongovernmental organization: Empowerment Prep**

Empowerment Prep, a lead turnaround partner, functioned as its own largely autonomous system within the ASD. EP's system and approach included a theory of change, a well-

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established, comprehensive design for school improvement and a central hub office to lead the work. Unlike the ASD's theory of change that focused on governance, EP's implied theory of change centered on the educational work necessary to build high performing schools. The implied theory of change was that EP could transform schools through effective school leadership, quality teaching, engaging stakeholders, and a shared commitment to educating all students. To do this, EP had a multifaceted strategy that included (i) effective school leaders and teachers implementing (ii) EP's model for schoolwide improvement, all of which would be buttressed by (iii) a professional learning system to continuously develop professional capacities, and (iv) a central hub office to oversee and support all of this.

As this implies, EP's initial implied theory of change included a design for the educational work of school improvement that included the full scope of educational domains, including: building educational infrastructure, supporting its use, managing performance, managing the environments, and distributing instructional leadership. EP had a comprehensive design for this educational work that provided broad guidance, vision, and principles, while still giving teachers a degree of autonomy to adaptively use it in context-specific ways.

EP's initial approach in Tennessee was responsive to this hybrid state/NGO model and the context in which they would work in some ways but also vulnerable. On the one hand, it was responsive because of EP's capabilities it brought to this work. EP had a central hub office designed to manage key organizational functions (e.g., operations, strategy, community engagement, human resources), support the educational domains, and to buffer EP schools from non-instructional matters and the environments. EP also had educational infrastructure that was intentionally designed to be implemented in context-specific ways, and they also attended to the other four domains. Finally, EP:TN did not rely on the ASD for much.

On the other hand, their model and approach were designed in and through experiences in a different context, with different environmental conditions and resources. This raised a chief question: Would their approach and theory of change translate to a new context, and would the prevailing macro policy environment of school turnaround support the likely work of learning how to use, adapt, and improve their approach to improve schools in this context?

**Synergies and complications in EP:TN's educational work in this hybrid state/NGO model**

The preceding establishes that these two educational organizations had fundamentally different theories of change and approaches to and designs for the five educational domains of work to support large-scale school turnaround. These different organizations would work collectively to manage and distribute the educational work involved in supporting the improvement in the ASD's schools.  In theory, both organizations' approaches would operate in a complementary fashion to address the domains of educational work. However, in practice, findings suggest EP:TN encountered synergies and indirect and direct complications in this educational work. The complications that emerged highlighted the prominence of the domain of managing performance in the work of school turnaround.

 Findings from the study did suggest that there were a few synergies in this hybrid arrangement for the educational work of school turnaround from the perspective of EP. Namely, a key synergy was that the ASD's design and theory of change afforded EP the very autonomy it desired to use EP's established design to manage the educational domains of activity.

Findings also indicate that EP:TN encountered multiple direct and indirect complications in its educational work in this hybrid state/NGO model and context. Some of the complications prompted adaptations in EP's work to better coordinate its approach with the ASD and the

broader environment, highlighting the critical role of performance management and learning in the work of school turnaround.

For example, a chief direct complication was that the ASD's design for performance management (the accountability expectations they set), the environment, and EP:TN's instructional design interacted in ways that created direct complications for EP:TN. EP:TN leaders reasoned that classroom instruction was not consistently providing enough high-quality, standards aligned learning opportunities for students. While part of the challenge rested in their instructional design and system to support its use, multiple leaders also said that part of the challenge also rested in how the environment and the ASD's (and federal government's) ambitious accountability expectations pressed on their design and system to support teachers' use of it. This suggests that EP:TN's initial design for instruction and building professional capacities and the ASD environment were not tightly aligned. Ultimately, through their experience and learning, EP:TN leaders engaged in activity in the performance management domain and made strategic adaptations to its instructional design and professional learning system in an attempt to create tighter coordination with this environment. These adaptations included a new curriculum, instructional guidance materials, and more. Since these adaptations occurred at the end of the study, an analysis of the outcomes and whether these adaptations led to improvements or tighter coherence across the system fall outside the scope of this study.

Findings also suggest that operating in this hybrid state/NGO model for school turnaround posed indirect complications to EP:TN's educational work. In these instances, the ASD's theory of change and design forwarded a set of operational conditions that interacted with EP's strategy and the broader environment in ways that indirectly complicated (rather than supported) EP:TN's educational work. These operating conditions created additional non-

educational work for EP:TN leaders that diverted resources (time, money, human capital) from other work, such as the educational domains, and also required EP to learn and adapt their approach in response to them. Examples of this included managing relationships with the school districts, the ASD LEA, and the local communities. For instance, EP:TN had to manage a complicated relationship with the local school district over facilities, student enrollment, communication with teachers and families, all of which was fraught with competition, conflicting incentives, and communication challenges. This culminated into a steady stream of work, resource demands, an imperative to develop an understanding of this new context, and additional layers of oversight and work for EP's lean regional central office to manage.

Taken together, in this hybrid state/NGO model and new context, EP:TN encountered a new set of resources and conditions that would shape its work in new, context-specific ways. In turn, this contributed to and also revealed that parts of EP:TN's design and approach to the school improvement were not fully coordinated with this context. Resources on which EP's approach relied (e.g., large supply of teachers, autonomy) did not necessarily exist in this context. Findings suggest that this required steady activity in the domain of performance management to learn and adapt some facets of its approach in to attempt to create tighter coordination between their educational work and the salient environmental features and resources in this hybrid state/NGO model. This work was interdependent with activity in the other domains, including managing these salient environments, building instructional leadership capabilities to lead this work, building educational infrastructure, and supporting its use.

While this critical activity to learn and adapt, in some ways, was motivated by the policies of school turnaround that placed expectations for rapid improvement on school

operators, it also, in ways, was with odds with the policies. The accountability expectations did not provide time or account for this learning and the gradual change process that unfolded.

**Situating Findings within the Research**

Findings in this study (2014-2017) converge with some of the broader research on large-scale school turnaround and instructional improvement. Indeed, this case reflects the recent and continual expansion of state-led school turnaround efforts over the past 30 years (Mintrop & Trujillo, 2004; Childs & Russell, 2017; VanGronigen & Myers, 2019). This case also reflects a growing trend of states' partnering with external providers to dramatically improve the outcomes of groups of persistently low-performing schools, referred to as lead turnaround partners (LTPs) (Corbett, 2011; Peurach & Neumerski, 2015).  In these hybrid models, like Tennessee's strategy examined in this study, the state agency partners with LTPs to aid and enhance their capacities (VanGronigen & Meyers, 2019; Childs & Russell, 2017). In the case of Tennessee's hybrid model, the state agency coordinated (rather than led) large scale school turnaround, and its LTPs drove the educational work, much like VanGronigen and Myers (2019) find about Tennessee in their analysis of SEA's approaches to organizing efforts for school turnaround.

Key findings in this study also converge with the uncertainty of past research on lead turnaround partners capabilities for this work and prospects for them to support the educational work in a hybrid model for school turnaround.  While LTPs are increasingly engaged in this state-led turnaround work, less is known about their capabilities of this work. Findings from this study shed light on the broad scope of work that this LTP had to assume and requisite capabilities for this work, including the work of managing the educational domains of activity and also managing the non-educational domains of activity, such as managing the external environments for administrative and financial matters.  Past analyses from Joshua L. Glazer's

larger study of ASD (from which this dissertation emerged) that included a broad sample of

LTPs demonstrate the same type of enormity in scope of work, complexity of the work, and

learning involved in the work (Glazer et al., 2019; Glazer et al., 2018).

Additionally, findings here also suggest that this seasoned LTP encountered

complications in implementing its established approach for school turnaround in this uncertain,

and complex context. This aligns with the long-established line of research that suggests that

organizational and social contexts shape and complicate reform efforts (see, for example:

Berends, Bodily, & Kirby, 2002; Bryk et al., 2011; Coburn et al., 2009; Datnow et al., 2002;

Glazer, 2009; Peurach, 2011; Cohen et al., 2014). It also aligns with research on charter school

operators engaged in school turnaround, where findings suggest that the environment in which

LTPs operate can complicate the work of even the most experienced providers (Corbett, 2011).

These complications created more complications, as the LTP in this study had to then

manage the challenges and discrepancies that emerged between its approach to school

turnaround, the hybrid state/NGO model for school turnaround in which it was operating, and the

broader environmental context that surrounded the work. Similar to past research on large-scale

instructional improvement, this work of learning and figuring out how to manage these

discrepancies is complex, resource-intensive, yet critical for organizational viability (Cohen et

al., 2014; Datnow & Park, 2009; Peurach, 2011; Peurach & Glazer, 2016).  EP engaged in a type

of divergent learning to understand and address these through discovery and invention, often

referred to as exploration in research literature, and also a convergent form of learning with

iterative improvement of established knowledge assets (Hatch, 2000; Peurach, Glazer, &

Lenhoff, 2016). Further, EP's learning of this new context and how to bridge the discrepancies

between their work and the context in which they worked resulted in an array of adaptations that

leaders envisioned and hoped would create greater coherence between their work and the new context, much like what Glazer and colleagues (2016, 2019) found for many LTPs operating in the ASD.

Taken together, this study reflects the common trend in research and practice of the challenges of promoting large-scale school turnaround in novel, complex, interdependent environments, even with comprehensive reforms and experienced external providers. Context bears on these designs and interventions in critical ways that interact with organizations' work in complex ways, suggesting an imperative for learning about the context and how an organization's approach for school turnaround work coordinates with the context. However, this nature of school turnaround work collides with the policies and politics that govern it and demand rapid improvement with little account for the complexity and learning involved in it.

## Considering the Bounds of the Study

These findings are from one particular case of a state-led hybrid state/NGO approach to school turnaround and two embedded cases of a statewide school turnaround district and one lead turnaround provider operating within the district. This establishes particular bounds to this study, and it is critical to consider how what has been learned from this study is a product of this particular case and unique context.

### Rich Data and Construct Validity

A first consideration centers on the nature of data collection and the sample of interviewees for the lead turnaround partner analysis. The study primarily draws on interviews from EP's regional leaders, rather than other actors within the organization, such as teachers, and outside of the organization (e.g., neighborhood or community members). The way that data collection was bounded potentially created a narrower lens through which to analyze the

phenomenon, and in turn, potential issues with construct validity. I could not, for instance, corroborate findings with other role groups outside of the sample. While I sought to strengthen the construct validity and answer my research questions by using multiple sources of evidence to measure the same phenomenon (including observations, document analysis, and interviews), the sample still represents a particular organizational vantage point that shapes the findings of this study (Patton, 2002; Yin, 2009).

**Generalizability**

This was an embedded case study of one state's efforts to use a hybrid state/NGO model to support large-scale school turnaround. This was not a randomly selected case, and there were particularities to this embedded case study. The findings from this study cannot be generalized to other cases embedded within the ASD, other lead turnaround partners, or other hybrid models for state-led school turnaround. For instance, past analyses from Glazer's larger ASD study from which this study emerged indicates that the experiences of LTPs in the ASD were not the same, as LTPs varied in capabilities, educational infrastructure, funding, or connections with the local community (Glazer et al., 2019; Glazer et al., 2018). While all of that may be true, it is equally important to note that this study was not intended to nor does it seek to forward any general claims about state-led turnaround strategies, statewide turnaround districts, or LTPs.

**Strength of the Study Design**

Instead, the study design enables me to contribute to this field in various ways. The study design enables me to document the intricate details of one case, depicting the entailments of the treatment for priority schools targeted for school turnaround and shedding light on how the treatment functions (Kennedy, 1979, p.669). It provides an in depth look at an embedded case study of a state-run school turnaround district and one nongovernmental LTP to examine how

they individually and collectively contribute to the educational domains in school turnaround. Further, it contributes to a growing population of case studies on school improvement which could collectively be used to generalize about school improvement (Kennedy, 1979).

## Revisiting the Framework

I also can use these findings to generalize to theory. To do so, in the section that follows, I consider how the evidence from this study aligns to the study's analytic framework and in what ways it extends it. This study used a framework organized around five educational domains that show up prominently in leading research on instructional improvement and school improvement (Peurach et al., 2019). These educational domains include: developing educational infrastructure, supporting its use, managing performance, managing the environments, and distributing instructional leadership

### Points of convergence

First, findings suggest that the five domains of educational work of school turnaround showed up prominently in this case of the hybrid model and in particular, with Empowerment Prep (EP). All five domains appeared in the work that these organizations collectively managed to support large-scale school turnaround. All five domains proved critical in EP's work of school turnaround, as results demonstrated that it was critical to have educational infrastructure, a system to support its use, strategies to manage the complex environment, capabilities to manage performance in a high-stakes accountability environment, and instructional leadership to steward all of this work.

Notably, findings suggests the prominent role that the domain of managing performance held in this case of the work of school turnaround. Indeed, EP:TN leaders reported multiple ways that they engaged in different stages and types of continuous improvement processes and adapted

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their approach in attempt to increase its efficacy in this context. While it is unknown if EP's adaptations resulted in improvement, findings from this study do indicate that leaders reflected on challenges and devised strategies and adaptations to attempt to remedy complications and improve their approach in this context. This framework enables a key theme to surface: performance management becomes paramount for the work of school turnaround.

Second, analysis with this framework reveals a key finding that both organizations contributed to the educational domains of work in some capacity, although the work was largely distributed to the LTP. While the LTP assumed responsibility for the full scope of domains, the state agency did make targeted contributions to managing performance and managing the environments. The nature of the framework allowed a nuance analysis of the distribution of the educational contributions across two different educational organizations within the hybrid strategy. For instance, both organizations attended to aspects of managing performance. This framework supported a nuanced approach to understanding the type and extent of educational activity to which each organization contributed, rather than, for example, treating each domain as a binary variable and that would be "assigned" or "attributed" to only one of the organizations.

A third finding from this study is that each organization organized around the domains to which they were responsible to differing extents and designs varied. For example, EP had a large scope of activity in performance management, whereas the ASD had a very targeted specific role in that work that looked very different from EP's work in that domain. The scope of the domains largely captured the extent of the educational activity in that domain for each organization. Findings from the study also indicate that EP had a comprehensive set of educational infrastructure and design to support its use. The domains of this framework were broad and

flexible enough to accommodate EP's approach, and presumably are broad enough to capture the unique organizational approaches and designs that likely characterize a diverse field of LTPs.

For instance, the educational infrastructure domain could be interpreted in broad terms, extending far beyond just an instructional design and narrow definitions of infrastructure to account for variation in approach. EP:TN had a comprehensive school model design that incorporated robust designs for instruction and culture. For example, the culture design was broad, expansive, and interdependent with the other domains. It incorporated social, material, and intellectual resources for organizational core values, parent and community engagement, school climate, and social-emotional learning. The flexible, open-ended nature of domain's definition enabled an analysis of the totality of their cultural design and the places of interdependencies with other domains. This, in turn, provided a means to give a robust depiction of EP:TN's educational contributions.

**Extending the framework**

While this framework certainly afforded flexibility in considering the entailments of a system's educational infrastructure, findings from this study offers ideas to extend the framework in two ways. First, two elements emerged as quite central to EP's educational infrastructure and showed up strongly as key elements in the research on school turnaround and LTPs (Corbett, 2010): a design to build community engagement and a design to support currently struggling students with academics. In my conceptualization of the five educational domains of activity, I included EP's designs for these elements. These could be useful sub-elements to more explicitly include in the domain of building educational infrastructure due to the potential salience of these for the work of school turnaround.

First, findings suggest that building community engagement proved to be a major component of the educational (and non-educational work) of this LTP. This was, in part, because the enrollment regulations in school turnaround work create a certain set of implications for school operators that, in turn, necessitate a response to address them, and was in part due to the political charged process of school takeover. For example, by not having open enrollment and choice, students, parents, and the broader school community do not have the opportunity to "opt in" to a school but are "placed in" a school that has been taken over by the state and converted into a charter school with some limited input from community but largely through a state-driven decision-making process. As this study shows, EP:TN leaders perceived that this dynamic and process strained community trust and relations, requiring work to create and deepen relationships with families, the local neighborhood, and the broader community. The nature of these relationships touched on student enrollment, community support of and engagement in the school, and viability of the organization, all of which had indirect bearing on instructional improvement efforts. EP:TN anticipated this type of work, as their past experience in another region taught them the importance of this work. Still, it would be uncertain, complex, and context specific work in this new region that required organizational capacities to devise a context-specific approach, learn about the new regional context, and allocate sufficient resources to manage it. Including this element might support future comparative case analyses by creating a more consistent set of elements to consider within an organization's educational infrastructure.

Second, EP:TN operated neighborhood schools where they served students with a diverse range of academic and social needs. Recall from Chapter 5 that EP:TN leaders contended that they served students performing multiple grade levels below grade level expectations, which mirrors research on student populations in federal designated priority schools. EP:TN anticipated

this from previous experience, and its design included, for example, detailed systems to support students currently struggling to meet grade level expectations and plans to incorporate and develop wrap around services to support students' non-academic needs that impact learning and the learning environment. It stands to reason that a framework attending to the educational work of school turnaround strategies would benefit from specifically attending to student supports to create deeper comparative analyses of strategies.

A second potential extension of this framework is to continue to add analytic clarity to the domain of managing the environments to support instructional excellence and equity. In practice, analyzing this domain presented challenges in how to bound the activity in managing the environment, and, specifically, determining appropriate, consistent boundaries for the management of non-educational and educational work. For example, at what point did the activity of community engagement (both in managing the environment and in educational infrastructure) start and stop being instructionally focused activity? For instance, a researcher might forgo analyzing or presenting certain details of the work of managing the environment because of the researcher's interpretation of the definition of the domain. Such clarity and depth could support more consistent analysis of different organizations' contributions of educational work (as opposed to non-educational work), especially when conducting comparative case studies that seek to look across common domains. Future use of the framework could support the development of tighter boundaries to support consistent analysis of this domain.

## Revisiting the Conjectures

The preceding establishes that the framework forwarded in this study provided a useful lens to understand and reveal key findings about the educational contributions of organizations working within a hybrid state/NGO model and the synergies and complications that emerged in

this arrangement. At the start of this study, after I presented this framework and research questions guiding this study, I offered a set of conjectures about how these two organizations might manage the educational work and how this story might unfold.

On the one hand, I conjectured that such an arrangement might support school turnaround because the two types organizations would assume different but complementary approaches to support large-scale school turnaround. Indeed, Empowerment Prep, a seasoned charter school operator with experience and past success at managing the key domains of educational work, would be paired with state agency with unprecedented authority to oversee schools that would grant the school operator considerable autonomy to do what they know how to do to improve the priority schools. EP, a strong case, had a pre-existing knowledge assets and organizational capabilities that collectively had been used to build high performing schools in the past. Aligned to the theories and assumptions of the ASD, Race to the Top and the macro policy context of school turnaround, the LTP would leverage its knowledge assets in this new context to lead transformative change in schools within an LEA (the ASD) that would create conditions (autonomy and accountability) to support that work. In principle, one could imagine how this arrangement might support large-scale school turnaround.

On the other hand, I also conjectured that this story of a hybrid state/NGO model to support school improvement would be more complex and complicated. The state agency (the ASD) and the nongovernmental organizations (lead turnaround partner school operators) were new organizational forms, individually. Collectively, these organizations would work within a hybrid model that was a novel, uncertain organizational arrangement to support the complex work of large-scale turnaround with little experience or empirical research undergirding it.

Further, they would be embarking on the challenging work of school turnaround within a context that would likely be uncertain, interdependent, and complex. I conjectured that it seemed plausible that the novelty, complexity, and uncertainty of the arrangement within this context would create conditions that would require organizational learning, adaptations and continuous improvement efforts.  However, this work of school turnaround—the management of the educational domains and the learning that it would likely require in this context—would likely be at odds with the federal politics of turnaround that demanded rapid improvement of schools and did not account for the type of learning and gradual change that turnaround would likely take.

Findings from this study suggest that, indeed, this was a complex story and complications emerged in this hybrid organizational arrangement. First, managing the educational domains of work of school turnaround proved to be complicated in such a novel, uncertain, turbulent and interdependent context, even for an experienced charter school operator that had a track record of success. Indeed, even though this LTP school operator had experience, brought tremendous knowledge with them, and anticipated many of the conditions and complications that surfaced, the complications that emerged still existed and required management. For example, multiple EP:TN leaders noted how they entered Tennessee well aware that student mobility and high-levels of mid-year student transfers would be challenging to manage, but despite the awareness, this still remained a complex issue to address and one that defied a simple solution.  The same is true for building community trust and support, securing sufficient student enrollment, hiring, developing, and retaining teachers, and more.

This starts to suggests that while some knowledge assets for how to improve priority schools exists, the knowledge base is far from complete and the work of pulling all of the knowledge together to address the educational domains in a coherent way is complex, uncertain

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work made more so by dynamic contexts, like the ASD. This raises questions about an

assumption embedded in macro school turnaround policies, such as  RTTT and the ASD, that

knowledge assets of how to rapidly transform priority schools exist and can be leveraged rapidly.

Additionally, this proved to be a complex story because of the ways in which context

interacted with the educational work of school turnaround. EP arrived in Tennessee with an

established design that had proven successful in another context; however, some features of their

approach did not seamlessly transfer to this new context but required some learning and

adaptations because of the conditions of this new context. For example, they had to learn about

new state standards, the political environment, new state policies and regulations, a new local

community, and how to operate within the ASD LEA.

Key ideas begin to surface from this point. First, this starts to suggest the type of learning

that this LTP had to do in this context and how important the domain of performance

management (and continuous improvement) is for the work of school turnaround. It also starts to

suggest the contextualized nature of some of EP's knowledge assets for school turnaround.

Indeed, what worked in one context might not necessarily work in another context because, in

part, of the complexity and novelty of the operating and external conditions in each context.

LTPs would likely need to learn the context and adapt knowledge assets accordingly.

This, too, begins to raise questions about a tacit assumption of the ASD and the macro

policy context of Race to the Top: an assumption that LTPs' knowledge assets could be used in

any context to drastically and rapidly improve student achievement outcomes in 'priority

schools.' This is to say that the structures of these policies implied that the knowledge assets for

school turnaround could be mobilized rapidly and used effectively without explicitly accounting

for the learning and gradual change process that would likely ensue when implementing a school

design in a new, complex, and uncertain context (e.g., a state takeover or school turnaround context). However, findings from this study suggest that the work of performance management, specifically continuous improvement, is key domain of the work of school turnaround.

<center>**Considering the Findings for Future Research and Practice**</center>

The preceding discussion of findings from this study shed light on the complex, interdependent domains of educational work of school turnaround that unfolded in a hybrid state/NGO model to support state-led school turnaround. The discussion also offered reflection on how the findings aligned to the framework forwarded in this study and the provisional conjectures advanced in the beginning of this piece. Together, the discussion provides insight that could be useful to support practitioners' and researchers' thinking and reasoning around state-led strategies for school turnaround. In the sections that follow, I reflect on these findings and offer considerations for practice and four ideas for potential avenues for future research.

**Considering the implications of the learning imperative for practice**

As the preceding discussion suggests, one key objective of this study was to provide an in-depth examination of a state/NGO hybrid strategy for school turnaround. This study shows the complexity and expansiveness of the domains of educational work, the ways in which context bears on that work, and type of organizational learning and adapting likely involved in it and prominence of the educational domain of managing performance.

As EP:TN leaders experiences suggests, this work of school turnaround is more than just merely using a previously successful model for school improvement in a new context. EP:TN leaders continuously reflected on and refined their approach upon arrival in Tennessee (e.g., tailoring their curriculum to align to the new standards), making ongoing adaptations as they gained experience and learning in this context (e.g., adopting a new curriculum more tightly tied

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to standards and that provided more explicit guidance). They did this learning and made these adaptations in an attempt to continuously improve their approach to fit the new context. All of this work reflected their core organizational value of growth and continuous improvement. However, they did all of this amidst a policy environment that emphasized rapid improvement in student achievement outcomes that seemed at odds with the more gradual change, learning oriented continuous improvement trajectory that turnaround seemingly followed in this case. Learning (learning how to refine, create, or use an approach to school turnaround in context-responsive ways) was imperative to achieve the lofty goals set by the policy environment, but that very learning was not supported or accounted for in the policies.

Findings from this study shed light on a potential implication for this learning imperative for practice: the importance of positioning practitioners to be able to engage in the kind of learning that is likely important in these hybrid models for large scale school turnaround. It seems likely that practitioners, such as those working as lead turnaround partners operating turnaround schools, will likely need sufficient resources (time, structures to support learning) to be positioned to continuously engage in organizational learning and improvement processes.

**A provisional framework to support future comparative analysis and practice**

Another key objective and contribution of this study is to forward a provisional framework that could be used as a foundation for comparative analysis among and within states that pursue hybrid state-led strategies for school turnaround (i.e., where the state supports some aspect(s) of school turnaround and contracts with nongovernmental organizations to manage the remaining aspects). This study used a provisional framework to support thinking and reasoning about government and NGO collaboration in large-scale school turnaround that examines the

organizations' educational contributions to school turnaround by analyzing their theories of change and designs for the educational domains of activity.

This study looked at just one particular type of hybrid state-led strategy for school turnaround in one state: a model where the state facilitates (rather than drives or assists) school turnaround by establishing a set of operating conditions for NGOs and delegating all operational and academic programming to the NGOs. Recent research has shown that states have adopted a wide spectrum of state-led strategies with the aim to support large-scale school turnaround. These include strategies where the state education agencies (SEA) internally drive all efforts of the turnaround strategy (e.g., Montana) to the opposite end of the spectrum where the SEA delegates the turnaround work to the LEAs who, in turn, delegate that work to external providers (e.g., Utah).[41] Many states also adopted an array of hybrid model strategies. For example, VanGronigen & Myers' (2019) analysis of how each SEA in the U.S. is administering school turnaround efforts defined three types of "hybrid" models across states; by their coding, 36 states administered some type of "hybrid" model to support school turnaround (p. 436).

This wave of state-led strategies has risen in response to policy changes, most recently the federal Every Child Succeeds Act (ESSA), that have required states to more directly intervene in persistently underperforming schools (For example, see VanGronigen & Myers, 2019; Mintrop & Truijillo, 2005; Hamman & Lane, 2004). If federal policies remain intact, it seems likely that the state-level involvement in this work will not lessen any time soon and the federal policy pressures for rapid improvement of priority schools will remain high for states, districts, lead turnaround partners, and schools.

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[41] For example, see Rhim and Redding (2014) for information on Montana's approach. See Lang, Donaldson, & Evans (2018) for Utah's approach.

However, the research base on these strategies is burgeoning and more research is needed to understand these rapidly spreading hybrid strategies. This includes understanding the organizations' theories of change, model designs for the educational work of school turnaround, and how they distribute the educational domains of activity between the state agencies and the external partners with whom they contract. This level of comparative analysis across and within states could provide valuable insight to practitioners devising strategies for school turnaround and to researchers seeking to deepen the understanding about large-scale school improvement.

To consider what types of analyses would be most fruitful for deepening the research base on this policy design, a first order matter is to reflect on potential dimensions and considerations for these strategies that emerge from this theory building study. Then, with this understanding in hand, I propose four potential avenues for future comparative analyses that seem helpful to deepen understanding about the designs and strategies of these hybrid models.

**Considerations about the structures of hybrid models.** Findings from this study shed light on potential considerations for the different dimensions and distinguishing traits of the hybrid school turnaround models' policy designs. This could be helpful for case selection for comparative studies that seek to deepen understanding about various types of hybrid models.

For instance, past research on hybrid models for state-led, large-scale school turnaround suggest that they likely vary in their structural arrangements in terms of the role of the state agency and the lead turnaround partner (for example, see Mason & Arsen, 2014; VanGronigen & Myers, 2019; Welsh, 2019). A distinguishing feature of each hybrid model is how its theory of change positions each organization within the strategy. That is to say: What is the implied role of the state agency and the NGO in the hybrid model? VanGronigen and Myers' (2019) study of state led models for school turnaround suggest that states vary in how they are positioned these

organizations in the turnaround work. For instance, this study shows that Tennessee's hybrid model positioned the state district as a facilitator of school turnaround, and the lead turnaround partners were the drivers; however, Tennessee also had another hybrid strategy for school turnaround that positioned the state district as a leader (rather than facilitator and coordinator) of the educational work. Taken together, all of this suggests that considering the role of the two organizations in the model is a potentially valuable organizational dimension to consider when designing studies for comparative analysis of these hybrid models.

**Considerations for future comparative analyses.** With this understanding in hand, I contend that four future comparative analyses could further the collective understanding of these hybrid state/NGO models. These analyses would take up different types of hybrid models (that position the state organization and the NGO in different roles) in different contexts. Such comparisons would shed light on how these models work, distribute the educational domains of activity across organizations to promote school turnaround, the types of complications and synergies that arise through such organizational arrangements, and the ways in which context bears on the work. This, in turn, could provide theoretical and practical insight to support policy making and deepen the empirical base on strategies for large-scale school improvement.

*Similar hybrid models across states.* Future research could continue this line of inquiry on hybrid state-led turnaround by looking across states that use similar models as a strategy for school turnaround. For instance, one might take examine the Achievement School District in Tennessee and the Recovery School District from Louisiana.

This is an important comparison because these two state's strategies are perceived to have similarities in how they organized for large-scale school turnaround. Recall from Chapter 4 in this study that the ASD drew inspiration from the Recovery School District and its portfolio

approach that created a decentralized system of lead turnaround partners (charter school operators) running schools relatively autonomous.  However, there were also noted differences. For instance, LTPs in Tennessee were subject to a more stringent regulatory environment than that of the RSD's LTPs. Namely, Tennessee imposed enrollment restrictions, whereas the Recovery School District did not and families and students could exercise choice in school selection. Presumably, other important differences exist in the theories of change, the designs for school improvement, and the environmental context in which the organizations operate.

A deeper understanding of the similarities and differences in these two models could help illuminate the dimensions (and variability in those patterns) of these hybrid educational organizational forms. Further, they could also help shed light on the types of complications and synergies that arise in these models and connections between the designs of these policies, the context in which they are implemented, and these complications and synergies.

***Different hybrid models across states.*** A second avenue for future research could compare different models across states. Such an inquiry would present a range of variables in terms of design of model and context that would illuminate the diversity of state-led school turnaround and all of the variables that bear on this work by looking at distinct cases. This would be potentially beneficial for practitioners and policy makers because it would highlight the degree of differentiation in models and implementation of those models in unique contexts.  For example, a comparative analysis of Massachusetts, where the state leads turnaround efforts, and Arizona, where the state coordinates efforts, could highlight the differences in the theories of change, designs for managing the educational work, the capabilities of the state and NGO organizations, and the ways the surrounding environmental contexts interact with this work.[42]

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[42] See VanGronigen and Myers (2019) for more information of the classification of these two state's hybrid models.

Such a study might shed light on the how states' SEA capabilities bear on their theories of change or designs for the educational domains of work, for example.  Further, this type of inquiry would be particularly helpful for theory building and development of a framework to analyze these hybrid state-led school turnaround models. Indeed, examining very different cases would test a framework and its applicability across diverse cases.

*Within state comparisons of hybrid models.* A third potentially fruitful line of future research could examine one state's hybrid model and multiple NGO lead turnaround partners working within it. This type of research would shed light on varied LTP organizations operating in the same context and their theories of change, designs for the educational domains of work of school turnaround, experiences in implementation, and the learning imperative in that work. Such research could deepen the collective understanding about LTPs.

For instance, findings from this study reveal that in Tennessee's hybrid school turnaround model, LTPs would manage nearly all of the educational domains of activity and operated autonomously to improve schools. Such autonomy afforded LTPs space to devise unique theories of change and designs to manage the educational domains of work of school turnaround. Indeed, Glazer and colleagues (2018, 2019) found differentiation in the LTPs' strategy creation and experiences in implementation.

In turn, research that explores the NGOs strategies and experiences within one hybrid model could also deepen understandings about lead turnaround providers, which has a limited research base (Peurach & Neumerski, 2015; Corbett, 2011). LTPs are increasingly positioned as a key lever in these hybrid models, yet little is still known about their approaches; how they work in these hybrid models; what types of complications and synergies arise in their work; and what work is required to manage those complications.

Further research on this matter could shed light on considerations for practitioners and researchers on how to evaluate these lead turnaround partners. Such insight would be important for state agencies, as they consider how to effectively vet LTPs to better ensure that highly capable LTPs are entering this work. In addition to this quality control feature, it could also shed light on how to evaluate their work within these models. For example, this study showed that in the ASD, LTPs were evaluated in narrow terms of their schools' performance on statewide assessments and student outcomes, largely mirroring the macro policy expectations for school turnaround. This emphasis on and pursuit of student achievement, in practice, left other goals and imperative work of turnaround, such as creating schools responsive to the community and organizational learning, unaccounted for in evaluation metrics. More research on the work of these LTPs might highlight the dimensions of the LTPs work in ways that could deepen the collective understanding of LTPs and the work of school turnaround, and it could provide practical insights on how to assess and evaluate LTPs in these hybrid models.

***Within state comparisons of NGOs within hybrid models***. A final line of research that could benefit the collective understanding and research base on hybrid state-led school turnaround models would be to explore different types of hybrid strategies within one state. In this research, the context would remain constant, allowing to more deeply look at the features of the models and the complications and synergies that arise in practice in these different models.

For example, in Tennessee the state has multiple strategies for school turnaround. Two of those are state-level hybrid models that rely on the same statewide school district (the ASD) to oversee the schools. However, in one instance, the state district directly leads school turnaround and operating the schools (Glazer et al., 2018), and in the other instance, the case of this study, the ASD coordinates the work and uses lead turnaround partners to operate it schools.

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This type of inquiry could promote deeper understanding in two key ways. First, it could shed light on the organizations' theories of change and design features, how these hybrid models distribute the educational domains of work, and the capabilities of the SEAs and the LTPs in the educational work of supporting school turnaround. Such insight could be beneficial for policy makers and practitioners because it could highlight complications that emerge in these arrangements, while holding context constant, in principle.

Second, this type of inquiry could examine the role of the state agency and the capabilities required of it in different types of hybrid models. For instance, a state agency "leading" school turnaround work presumably needs different capabilities from an agency "coordinating" it (VanGronigen & Meyers, 2019). Indeed, past research literature on SEAs suggests uncertainty about their capacity to do the work of school improvement (Brown et al., 2011; Goertz, 2005; Sunderman & Orfield, 2007). An in-state examination of two different model types could shed light on the SEAs and their capabilities and how those interact with the designs, theory of change, and work of turnaround in these models.

Taken together, the preceding establishes the importance of future research to examine these hybrid state/NGO models for school turnaround. Much remains unknown about these models, yet extant research indicates that they are an increasingly common strategy in across the United States for state-led school turnaround efforts.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have presented a discussion of the key findings from this study and situated those within the broader research literature on large scale school improvement and school turnaround. I considered how this case fits with the framework and proposed potential ways to extend the framework to support future analysis of state-led strategies to support large-

scale school turnaround. I also offered considerations on how these findings might inform thinking about practice and future research for hybrid state/NGO models for turnaround.

This study examined one state's strategy to support large-scale school turnaround between 2014-2017. The state created a statewide school turnaround district that would oversee the improvement of federally designated 'priority schools' and would partner with NGOs to operate its schools. This study examined how these two organizations worked in concert to support the educational work of school turnaround through the frame of five educational domains: developing educational infrastructure, supporting its use, managing performance, managing the environments, and distributing instructional leadership.  It then considered the synergies and complications of this organizational arrangement on the LTPs educational work.

Findings from this study (occurred between 2014-2017) suggest that Tennessee created a decentralized strategy for school turnaround: the ASD was loosely coupled to the educational work in its schools (except for targeted contributions to managing the environment and performance), and the LTPs largely drove the educational efforts for school turnaround. This arrangement presented some synergies for the EP, but also contributed to complications, as the LTP's strategy, the ASD's strategy, and the environment interacted in practice. What surfaced was a large, complex scope of work that this LTP had to manage in a complex context and the ways in which the organization continuously learned and adapted in small and large ways to better coordinate their approach to the context.

 Findings also suggest that this framework could be a potentially useful tool for analyzing and reasoning about state strategies for school improvement that use hybrid models. It provides a lens to examine how multiple organizations manage the educational work of school turnaround

across a system. The categories afford flexibility to consider how activity in those domains is distributed between loosely connected, fundamentally different organizations.

In addition to contributing to theory building about hybrid models for state-led school turnaround efforts through the development of a provisional framework, this study also sheds light on a LTP's design for school turnaround. It provides in depth description of the organization's educational infrastructure for instruction and culture; a system to support the use of that infrastructure; systems for managing performance for accountability and for continuous improvement; systems for managing the environment; and a distributed instructional leadership system (at the school and central office) that orchestrates all of the preceding domains of activity. This reveals a comprehensive, coordinated approach to school turnaround.

However, it also reveals the complexity of the work of the lead turnaround partner operating in a hybrid system for large-scale turnaround. A seasoned LTP that brought to the work years of experience and an established design for school improvement encountered complications operating with and within the state agency and new context. The state agency's theory of change and design interacted with the NGOs design and the broader environment in ways created complications for the NGOs educational work of school turnaround.

Future comparative analyses of hybrid models for state-led school turnaround could further explore these issues to understand these models, their designs, and how they interact with one another to create positive synergies and complications. As long as hybrid models remain an increasingly common strategy for states to adopt to support school turnaround, continued understanding and research of these models will be important to support the students and communities who are served by these models.

**Chapter 8 Conclusion**

I began this study by presenting a pressing challenge facing the U.S. education system: What strategies can be employed to improve the 5,000 federally designated 'priority schools' in the U.S.? Federal policies over the past twenty years have increasingly made the improvement of these schools an educational policy priority and positioned states as a key lever for supporting this work. The federal Race to the Top initiative in 2009 extended this agenda and placed states centrally in this work. Accordingly, states have adopted diverse strategies to support large-scale improvement of these priority schools, a process referred to as "school turnaround." These include strategies that are completely state-led, those that are completely led by external organizations, and most commonly, those that are organized in a hybrid manner, whereby the state contracts with nongovernmental organizations (lead turnaround partners) to support large-scale school turnaround. However, little is known about many of these strategies, including how they are organized; how they are envisioned to support the complex educational work of school turnaround; and how they work within complex, uncertain environmental contexts.

Given all of this, I examined one state's hybrid model to support widescale improvement of priority schools through an embedded case study of the state agency and a nongovernmental organization (NGO) between 2014-2017. I examined this case in two central ways. A first order matter was to examine how this hybrid model attends to the central educational work of school turnaround, meaning how it organizes and distributes the educational work of school turnaround across two organizations partnering to support school turnaround. Second, I examined the

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complications and synergies that surfaced in managing the educational work of school

turnaround in such an organizational arrangement.

I forwarded a provisional analytic framework for studying hybrid state/NGO models to

guide this analysis.  It is organized around five educational domains that show up strongly in

leading research on instructional improvement and school improvement (Peurach et al., 2019).

These five domains include: developing educational infrastructure, supporting its use, managing

performance, managing the environments, and distributing instructional leadership.

This theory building study finds that these five domains hold up as key dimensions of

educational work in this hybrid state/NGO strategy, and performance management surfaces as a

particularly prominent domain of activity in this case of school turnaround work. Further, they

created a useful frame by which to analyze the educational contributions that two different

educational organizations manage in a collaborative effort to support large-scale school

turnaround. Through this frame, the distribution of educational domains across these

organizations comes to the fore. It provides a nuanced lens to look at the complexity of the work,

the ways in which the organizations separately and jointly managed the domains, the

complications and synergies that emerged, and the ways in which the NGO managed and

adapted to address the complications.

What surfaces from this study is that these are two fundamentally different organizations

designed for different purposes to manage particular aspects of school turnaround, and in this

model, they are positioned to work in concert to achieve common goals. This did not mean that

the two organizations would be working in tight collaboration around common educational

domains of work. On the contrary, in this particular hybrid strategy, findings suggest that the

ASD and this NGO school operator (Empowerment Prep) were loosely connected by formal

authority and accountability expectations. The ASD would serve as an umbrella organization under which an array of micro-educational systems (NGOs) would autonomously operate ASD authorized schools within the legal and operational conditions established by and for the ASD.

The ASD, in this particular hybrid strategy, was designed to facilitate school turnaround by creating a set of conditions (autonomy, accountability, and operational and legal), and intended to partner with highly capable NGO lead turnaround partners (LTPs) that would lead and operate the schools with a high degree of autonomy and under the authority and oversight of the ASD. The ASD would create a decentralized system of autonomous schools buttressed by the principles of market driven school systems and the policy logic of standards-based reform. This logic presumed that stringent accountability expectations would motivate and guide LTPs to leverage knowledge assets to rapidly improve teaching and learning in schools. Further, the ASD would empower and provide LTPs space and full responsibility to do the very work that they are, in principle, capable of doing: managing the educational domains of activity to promote school improvement (Bulkley, Henig, & Levin, 2010).  In effect, the ASD would be loosely coupled to the educational domains of work in the priority schools under its watch.

By contrast, Empowerment Prep, was designed to independently manage and lead school turnaround. It forwarded a theory of change and an approach to school improvement that directly addressed the five educational domains of instructionally focused systems (Peurach et al., 2019) and built organizational capacity to run a system of schools. This seasoned charter school operator had experience in independently running a network of charter schools in a different state, a pre-existing design for managing all of the educational domains, and a central hub office to lead and guide a network of schools in Tennessee. To be sure, EP arrived to Tennessee with a comprehensive approach to operate and improve the priority schools it was authorized to run.

However, while these knowledge assets were created for and previously used successfully in a different context than the Tennessee's ASD, it was uncertain whether and how these knowledge assets would transfer to this novel, complex, and uncertain context.

In some ways, this hybrid strategy that fused these two organizations together in the joint pursuit of school turnaround created synergies to dramatically improve schools. The ASD was premised on leveraging knowledge assets of highly capable LTPs to autonomously drive the work of school improvement, and that is precisely what EP was experienced in doing. The organizations' different theories of change and approaches that attended to different aspects of school turnaround could, in principle, create a cohesive strategy.

However, as this study suggests, the story of EP and the ASD was not such a perfect union and various complications arose. For instance, while school operator autonomy was promised by the ASD and desired by EP, the autonomy was bounded by set of operating and legal conditions that constrained EP's educational work in some ways. EP had autonomy to run their academic program, hire teachers, and manage their own finances, but all of that work would be done under a certain set of conditions that defined and bounded some of EP's processes (e.g., restrictions on student enrollment, uncertain school matching and transition process, operating under an external LEA [the ASD]), and goals (e.g., ASD accountability expectations). In this sense, EP operated under bounded autonomy shaped by the district's operating conditions and strategy. These conditions directly and indirectly impacted EP's educational work.

Given this, findings from this study suggest that, in practice, some elements of EP's strategy and the educational domains of school turnaround were not fully coordinated with this particular uncertain, complex context. Points of incoherence surfaced through the interactions between the ASD's strategy, EP's strategy, and the broader environment. Through activity in the

performance management domain, EP:TN noticed these, and leaders adapted some aspects of their approach to better coordinate it with the realities of the salient features of the contextual environment. This included, for example, creating tighter alignment between the instructional design and the state standards and assessments, streamlining and codifying high-leverage, efficient strategies for student recruitment and community engagement, reorganizing the network-wide organization structures to afford EP:TN autonomy to operate in this unique context, building system-level leadership capacities to manage the complex and large scope of work, and more. These changes begin to suggest the kind of continuous learning and adapting that EP:TN did to manage their performance and attempt to improve their approach and to better align it the local context during the course of this study.

**Organizational Learning Imperative in School Turnaround**

What emerges from this study is the organizational learning involved in the complex work of turnaround in this novel, turbulent context in which EP:TN was working. This case presents a story of how one external, nongovernmental organization, Empowerment Prep, organized and managed the educational work in a novel, uncertain, and complex hybrid state/NGO model for school turnaround. EP, an experienced organization with a comprehensive school model and well-resourced central hub organization to support schools and their implementation of that model, was a strong case for an LTP operating schools in the ASD.

However, EP was new to this context and would be using their pre-existing knowledge and resources in this new context. Much of the knowledge that they brought with them to Tennessee was useable in this ASD context, and EP's initial school design, for example, was intentionally more open-ended to allow for context-specific implementation to precisely account for the unique contextual differences in schools.

Still, EP:TN leaders reported ways that they had to learn about this context (e.g., the standards, the political environment, state laws, local community, the school takeover and transition process). They also offered numerous examples over the three-year study (2014-2017) of how they bridged, adapted, and refined their approach in small, incremental ways (e.g., tweaking the professional development schedule) and large ways (e.g., adopting new curricula) to create greater coherence between their approach, the ASD hybrid model, and the surrounding environment. This learning and these adaptations reflected the organization's commitment to continuous improvement and long-held understanding that school turnaround will follow a gradual change trajectory. EP:TN leaders also described the learning and adaptations critical work to support organizational improvement efforts to help reach the external (e.g., state accountability) and internal (e.g., EP's mission, sustainability) expectations they sought to meet.

While leaders described the critical importance of learning and adapting, this work created new demands and uncertainties. It required finite organizational resources, and there was not guarantee that adaptations would lead to improvement. Indeed, changing something does not necessarily mean improving it. Still, learning, and performance management more broadly, were key activities in school turnaround in the ASD context and high-stakes accountability climate. Taken together, this study starts to suggest a learning imperative for school turnaround.

**Constraints on the Learning in School Turnaround Work**

This study also suggests that EP:TN did some learning and adapting, despite a set of conditions in a new context that did not necessarily support such learning and, in some cases, complicated and presented hurdles to doing it. While EP:TN managed those conditions and complications to still learn and adapt in this context, these conditions made the work more

complex and urgent. These conditions and complications arose from the federal policy context of Race to the Top, ASD, and the broader context in which they worked in Tennessee.

**RTTT**. First, the Race to the Top federal grant competition established expectations for school turnaround and created pressure and urgency for immediate improvement. This political imperative for rapid improvement began at the inception of RTTT and the rapid nature of the launch of the initiative and rapid expectations for states to create proposals for sweeping education reform (a 6-month window for the first-round applicants, like Tennessee). This political imperative continued with the ways in which it (and past federal policies) defined school turnaround and the accountability expectations for improvement in three to five years. This trickled down to the ASD, creating urgency for the organization to improve schools under its oversight and also shaping the kinds of accountability expectations it set for the LTPs directly responsible for the educational work of improving student outcomes. This trickled down to the LTP school operators and created pressure for them to promote rapid improvement in schools, which afforded them little time to learn and adapt their program in ways that, according to past research and experience, typically unfold when implementing a program in a new context.

**The ASD.** Second, and relatedly, it was not just that these constraints were externally created by RTTT and the macro policy context, but the ASD also posed constraints for EP:TN's learning. First, the ASD set ambitious goals that reflected RTTT expectations but specifically forwarded an expectation that their priority schools that were performing in the bottom five percent in the state would be in the top 25 percent in five years. This created pressure for the LTPs responsible for the educational work needed to improve those outcomes. Such stringent time expectations gave EP:TN little time to learn and adapt. Further, accountability expectations centered on narrowly defined goals focused on student outcomes, namely student achievement

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on standardized tests, and did not include other metrics, such as capacity for learning and continuously improving. Implicit in the exclusion of such matter is that the ASD and RTTT did not necessarily put a premium on learning as a critical outcome or metric of school improvement.

Second, the ASD did not have sustained formal social mechanisms or structures to support LTP learning, such as networked improvement communities. Instead, the ASD created a loose confederation of autonomous school operators that had their own theories of change and approaches to managing the educational domains of work for the schools in the district. Further, the ASD delegated large portions of performance management to LTPs. Accordingly, LTPs, like EP:TN, were responsible for their own learning and continuous improvement processes. Taken together, the ASD did not fully support LTP learning between 2014-17, and in some ways, constrained it. These constraints mirrored the constraints in the largely policy context of RTTT.

**The context.** Finally, the local contextual conditions in the policy and social environment also constrained learning. For instance, EP:TN leaders had to navigate two sets of changes to state standards: first when they expanded to Tennessee and again in 2016 when Tennessee adopted new standards and assessments. As accountability expectations and EP:TNs own instructional design were tightly tied to standards, such changes made it hard for the organization to create coherence in their approach and also made it hard to learn the standards of this context when those standards kept shifting. Further, state testing issues delayed release of the 2016 state assessment results, making it hard for EP:TN to gather accurate data about student progress and gauge the alignment of their instructional system (curriculum, assessments) to the new standards. All of this constrained EP's ability to learn, adapt, and improve.

Taken together, EP:TN attempted to manage these constraints to learning, as findings suggest that leaders worked to make adaptations in an attempt to improve, particular in the final

year of the study. Indeed, findings show that EP:TN encountered some complications and the

work of turnaround proved to be uncertain and complex, much like EP:TN leaders anticipated

and their implied theory of change reflected. EP:TN leaders reported multiple ways that they

learned and adapted to their new environment in an effort to better align their approach to meet

the realities of the new environmental context. EP:TN did all of this work despite working a

context which did not necessarily support it or account for it.

**Considering capabilities**

Reasoning about this from a different angle, this all suggests that this LTP in this hybrid

state/NGO arrangement managed an enormous scope of educational work and possessed an

immense combination of capabilities to run turnaround schools in a statewide school turnaround

district. EP not only brought a tremendous among of knowledge but also continuously learned,

refined, and iterated their knowledge, skills, and approach in an effort to better align it to this

new environment. EP:TN was not alone in adapting its approach for this context. For instance,

Glazer, Massell, and Malone (2015, 2018) also find that a sample of operators working in the

ASD also encountered similar experiences and engaged in some degree of learning and adapting.

Indeed, this presents a picture of the complex, uncertain, multifaceted, interdependent work of

school turnaround and the role that organizational learning likely assumes in it.

These findings potentially raise questions about a key assumption undergirding the theory

of change of this statewide turnaround district in this study and also policies that emphasize the

use of external partners to lead school turnaround efforts. Undergirding such reforms is a tacit

assumption that there will be a sufficient number of capable LTPs able and willing to engage in

this work to support sustained, large-scale school turnaround. However, this study presents

findings that call into question such an assumption given the complexity and uncertainty of

school turnaround work and the learning likely required in it. Are there enough LTP school operators that possess the necessary capabilities and desire to work in such a complex, demanding context that constrains the very learning that is likely critical in such contexts?

**Reconsidering a policy context to support work of learning in school turnaround**

Everything that has been cited here raises some new questions about the work of school turnaround and what a political context might be that actually would support it. This raises a question: If the educational work of school turnaround is, in part, about organizational learning in the ways that were conjectured and discovered and that type of learning and adaptation is at odds with the policy environment, what could the policy context be that could support the kind of learning context that we are talking about?

While a comprehensive reimagination of omnibus federal policy for school turnaround is beyond the scope of this dissertation, some priorities for the policies and politics of school turnaround emerge from this analysis. These include: time, legitimizing learning, resourcing learning, and incorporating learning into evaluations.

One priority is *time:* providing sufficient time (and patience) for organizations engaged in this work to learn, understand, and adapt in a complex, uncertain turnaround environment. Policies might reflect an understanding that school improvement in new contexts takes time and unfolds in gradual, non-linear ways. A second priority would be to design policies such that they *legitimize learning.* Policymakers could consider finding ways to value learning as an asset, directly including it in policies, and incentivizing as a critical piece to education reform.

A third priority would be *resourcing learning.* This could include providing general resources (funding earmarked for such efforts) or creating collaborative opportunities, like networked improvement communities, to directly support learning. These resources could be

used to develop organizational infrastructure to support and guide learning activity. Continuous improvement requires strategies, resources, and designs, much like instruction or professional learning. Policymakers could consider how to support these kinds of efforts.

A final priority would be to design policies that *incorporate learning in evaluations*. Accountability expectations and evaluations of performance set by RTTT and the ASD narrowly defined goals around student outcomes and did not include a broad swath of other critical work that LTPs did, including learning. As this study starts to show, complex work, such as school turnaround, in complex environments likely requires continuous organizational learning and adaptation in an effort to create coherence between the program and the context. Statewide school turnaround districts and those that work within them potentially could benefit from additional yet different forms of formative and summative evaluation to help create conditions for improvement (Peurach, Glazer, & Lenhoff, 2016). Policymakers could consider extending evaluation frameworks to support learning and build a foundation for continuous improvement.

These priorities would begin to support an imperative for learning in school turnaround work in federal policies. How to design policy that does those things is another matter that extends beyond this study; however, the aforementioned potential priority areas could be considered by policymakers as they seek to address the persistent problem of improving the nation's 5,000 federally designated "priority schools." This work of improving persistently underperforming schools is complex, uncertain, and interdependent with the context in which it occurs. It likely requires organizations to learn and adapt in order to continuously make improvements to ensure that all students to have access to equitable learning opportunities. To support this, additional thought on how we design these environments to facilitate and resource learning could support those efforts.

# Appendix
# First to the Top Legislation

**PUBLIC CHAPTER NO. 2**

**FIRST EXTRAORDINARY SESSION**

**SENATE BILL NO. 7005**

**By Kyle, Woodson, Gresham, McNally, Berke, Kelsey, Tate**

Substituted for: House Bill No. 7010

By Michael Turner, Lois DeBerry, Harry Brooks, Naifeh, Fitzhugh, Maddox, Williams, Dunn

AN ACT to amend Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 49, Chapters 1, 2, 3 and 5, relative to education.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE:

SECTION 1. This act shall be known and may be cited as the "Tennessee First to the Top Act of 2010".

SECTION 2. Tennessee Code Annotated, Section 49-1-602(f)(1)(C)(ii), is amended by deleting the existing language and by substituting instead the following language:

Removing the school from the jurisdiction of the LEA and placing the school under the jurisdiction of the "achievement school district" established by the Commissioner of Education pursuant to § 49-1-614.

SECTION 3. Tennessee Code Annotated, Section 49-1-602(f)(1)(C), is further amended by adding the following language as newly designated subdivision (v):

Notwithstanding any provision of the law to the contrary, the commissioner shall have the authority to choose for the school the plan of alternative governance to be developed and implemented.

SECTION 4. Tennessee Code Annotated, Section 49-1-602(g), is amended by deleting the following language:

If the school does not meet the performance standards of the state board by the end of the fourth year of improvement status, the school may be placed in the fifth year of improvement status (Restructuring 2 — Alternative Governance). During the fifth year of improvement status:

and by substituting instead the following language:

If the school does not meet the performance standards of the state board by the end of the fourth year of improvement status, the school may be placed in the fifth year of improvement status (Restructuring 2 — Alternative Governance). During the fifth year of improvement status or at any time a Title I school meets the U.S. Department of Education's definition of "persistently lowest achieving schools":

SECTION 5. Tennessee Code Annotated, 49-1-602(g)(2)(E), is amended by deleting the existing language and by substituting instead the following language:

Implementation of the plan for governance, selected from options provided by the commissioner or the specific plan chosen by the commissioner; provided, however, that in the case where the plan for alternative governance is implemented, the LEA shall continue to be accountable for the match required by the funding formula for students served. In addition, the LEA shall continue to provide such support services as identified by the commissioner or designee.

SECTION 6. Tennessee Code Annotated, Section 49-1-602(I)(1)(A), is amended by deleting the existing language and by substituting instead the following language:

Assume any or all powers of governance for the LEA, including, but not limited to, assigning the LEA, or individual schools within the LEA, to the achievement school district. However, in the case of the commissioner assuming governance, the LEA shall continue to be accountable for the match required by the BEP funding formula for students served.

SECTION 7. Tennessee Code Annotated, Section 49-1-606(a), is amended by deleting the second sentence of the subsection in its entirety.

SECTION 8. Tennessee Code Annotated, Section 49-1-606(b), is amended by adding the following sentence at the end of the subsection:

The estimates of specific teacher effects may also be made available to the state board approved teacher preparation programs of individual teachers. The estimates made available to the preparation programs shall not be personally identifiable with a particular teacher.

SECTION 9. Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 49, Chapter 1, Part 6, is amended by adding the following language as a new § 49-1-614:

(a) For the purposes of this title, the "achievement school district" is an organizational unit of the Department of Education, established by the commissioner for the purpose of providing oversight for the operation of the total program for individual schools or LEAs, pursuant to § 49-1-602.

(b) The commissioner shall have the authority to contract with one or more individuals, governmental entities or nonprofit entities to manage the day-to-day operations of any or all schools or LEAs placed in the achievement school district, including, but not limited to, providing direct services to students.

(c) The individual, governmental entity or nonprofit entity contracted with to manage schools or LEAs that have been placed in the achievement school district may apply to the commissioner for a waiver of any state board rule that inhibits or hinders the ability of the school or LEA to achieve the required adequate yearly progress benchmarks. Notwithstanding the provisions of this subsection (c), the commissioner shall not waive rules related to the following:

(1) Federal and state civil rights;

(2) Federal, state, and local health and safety;

(3) Federal and state public records;

(4) Immunizations;

(5) Possession of weapons on school grounds;

(6) Background checks and fingerprinting of personnel;

(7) Federal and state special education services;

(8) Student due process;

(9) Parental rights;

(10) Federal and state student assessment and accountability;

(11) Open meetings; and

(12) At least the same equivalent time of instruction as required in regular public schools.

(d)(1) The individual, governmental entity or nonprofit entity contracted with to manage schools that have been placed in the achievement school district shall have the authority to determine whether any teacher who was previously assigned to such school shall have the option of continuing to teach at that school as an employee of the managing entity. Any teacher not given that option shall remain an employee of the LEA, subject to the provisions of § 49-5-511. Moreover, any teacher who accepts that option shall have the right to return to the employ of the LEA should the managing entity later determine not to continue to employ such teacher, subject to the provisions of § 49-5-511.

(2) With the exception of the provisions protecting teachers' rights to accumulated sick leave, retirement benefits, pension and tenure status within an LEA, the provisions of Tennessee Code Annotated, § 49-5-203, and the Education Professional Negotiations Act, compiled in Title 49, Chapter 5, Part 6, shall not apply to teachers who accept the option of continuing to teach at a school placed in the achievement school district.

(e) After a school or LEA that has been placed in the achievement school district achieves the required adequate yearly progress benchmarks for two consecutive years, the commissioner shall develop a transition plan for the purpose of planning the school's or LEA's return to the jurisdiction of the local board of education. Implementation of this plan shall begin after the school or

LEA achieves the required adequate yearly progress benchmarks for three consecutive years. The plan must be fully implemented and the transition must be completed after a school or LEA achieves adequate yearly progress benchmarks for five consecutive years.

(f) Notwithstanding the provisions of any law to the contrary, the commissioner shall have the authority to remove any school or LEA from the jurisdiction of the achievement school district at any time.

(g)(1) Absent other funding, the achievement school district shall use state and local funding identified above to operate a school placed in alternative governance and to implement new initiatives and programs as appropriate. Such state and local funding may be used to implement new initiatives and programs to the extent that any increase in recurring expenditures are funded additionally so as not to create a financial burden on the LEA when the school or LEA is removed from the achievement school district.

(2) To the extent that such state funds are not used to support a school or LEA in the achievement school district, they shall be allocated to a state reserve fund to be distributed to an LEA only upon approval of the commissioner.

(3) To the extent that such local funds are not used to support a school or LEA in the achievement school district, the LEA shall allocate such funds to a special BEP reserve account until the school or LEA is placed back under the jurisdiction of the LEA. It is the legislative intent that such funds be used only for non-recurring purposes.

(h) Any individuals, governmental entities, or nonprofit entities contracting with the commissioner to manage the operation of any school under this section shall provide timely information to the LEA and director of schools regarding its operation of such schools, including, but not limited to, matters relating to employment of personnel at the school as provided for in subsection (d). The LEA may continue to support the educational improvement of the school under the direction and guidance of the commissioner and in accordance with any contracts entered into in accordance with this section. In addition, any individuals, governmental entities, or nonprofit entities contracting with the commissioner may voluntarily work with the LEA in providing to the schools professional development or technical assistance, instructional and administrative support, and facilitating any other support that may be beneficial to academic progress of the school.

(i) Any contracts to manage schools or LEAs that have been placed in the achievement school district shall require expenditure reports for funds received and expended pursuant to such contracts. Such reports shall be provided to the Department of Education and comptroller of the treasury for review.

(j) No state funds, other than funds held within the special reserve account pursuant to subsection (g)(2), shall be expended on schools or LEAs placed in the achievement school district unless specifically appropriated in a General Appropriations Act.

SECTION 10. Tennessee Code Annotated, Section 49-1-302(d)(1) and (2), are amended by deleting those subdivisions in their entirety and by substituting instead the following:

(d)(1) There is hereby created the "teacher evaluation advisory committee". The committee shall consist of fifteen (15) members. The Commissioner of Education, the executive director of the State Board of Education and the chairpersons of the Education Committees of the Senate and the House of Representatives shall be members. One (1) member shall be a K-12 public school teacher appointed by the Speaker of the House of Representatives and one (1) member shall be a K-12 public school teacher appointed by the Speaker of the Senate. The remaining nine (9) members shall be appointed by the governor and shall consist of three (3) public school teachers, two (2) public school principals, one (1) director of a school district, and three (3) members representing other stake-holders interests; provided, that at least one (1) member of the committee shall be a parent of a currently enrolled public school student. The membership of the committee shall appropriately reflect the racial and geographic diversity of this state. The Commissioner of Education shall serve as the chairperson of the committee. All appointments to the teacher evaluation advisory committee shall be made within thirty (30) days of the effective date of this act.

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(2) The committee shall develop and recommend to the board, guidelines and criteria for the annual evaluation of all teachers and principals employed by LEAs, including a local-level evaluation grievance procedure. This grievance procedure shall provide a means for evaluated teachers and principals to challenge only the accuracy of the data used in the evaluation and the adherence to the evaluation policies adopted pursuant to this subdivision. Following the development of these guidelines and criteria, the board shall adopt guidelines and criteria. The evaluations shall be a factor in employment decisions, including, but not necessarily limited to, promotion, retention, termination, compensation and the attainment of tenure status.

(A) Fifty percent (50%) of the evaluation criteria developed pursuant to this subdivision (2) shall be comprised of student achievement data.

(i) Thirty-five percent (35%) of the evaluation criteria shall be student achievement data based on student growth data as represented by the TVAAS, developed pursuant to Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 49, Chapter 1, Part 6, or some other comparable measure of student growth, if no such TVAAS data is available.

(ii) Fifteen percent (15%) shall be based on other measures of student achievement selected from a list of such measures developed by the teacher evaluation advisory committee and adopted by the board. For each evaluation, the teacher or principal being evaluated shall mutually agree with the person or persons responsible for conducting the evaluation on which such measures are employed. If the teacher or principal being evaluated does not agree with the measures used, the person or persons responsible for conducting the evaluation shall choose the evaluation measures.

(iii) Notwithstanding subdivisions (i) and (ii) above, if a particular teacher's or principal's student growth data, as described in subdivision (i) above, reflects attainment of a specific achievement level, to be recommended by the teacher evaluation advisory committee and adopted by the board, then such student growth data may, at the choice of the individual being evaluated, comprise fifty percent (50%) of their evaluation.

(B) Other mandatory criteria for the evaluations shall include, but not necessarily be limited to, the following:

(i) Review of prior evaluations; and

(ii) Personal conferences to include discussion of strengths, weaknesses and remediation; and

(iii) Relative to teachers only, classroom or position observation followed by written assessment; and

(iv) Relative to principals only, additional criteria pursuant to § 49-2-303(a)(1).

(3) The policies adopted pursuant to subdivision (2) shall be effective no later than July 1, 2011, in order to be implemented prior to the 2011-2012 academic year. Prior to the implementation of these policies, the existing guidelines and criteria for the evaluation of certificated persons employed by LEAs shall continue to be utilized.

(4) The evaluation procedure created by this subsection shall not apply to teachers who are employed under contracts of duration of one hundred twenty (120) days per school year or less or who are not employed full-time.

(5) The committee shall be subject to the governmental entity review law, compiled in Title 4, Chapter 29, and shall terminate on July 1, 2011, unless continued or extended by the general assembly.

SECTION 11. Tennessee Code Annotated, Section 49-2-303(a)(1), is amended by deleting the subdivision in its entirety and by substituting instead the following language:

Each director of schools shall employ principals for the public schools. The employment contract with each principal shall be in writing, shall not exceed the contract term of the current director of schools, and may be renewed. The contract shall specify duties other than those prescribed by statute and shall contain performance standards including the requirement that the principal's annual evaluation be based on student achievement data, with a significant portion, as defined by the guidelines and criteria adopted by the board in accordance with § 49-1-302(d)(2), being student growth data as reflected in teacher effect data and TVAAS data, as such data is developed pursuant to Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 49, Chapter 1, Part 6. Other standards that may be considered in the evaluation shall include, but not be limited to, other benchmarks for student proficiency, graduation rates, ACT scores where applicable and student attendance. The contract shall provide for consequences when the standards are not met. The performance contract may provide for bonuses beyond base salary, if performance standards are met or exceeded. Reasons for the nonrenewal of a contract may include, but are not limited to, inadequate performance as determined by the evaluations. A principal who has tenure as a teacher shall retain all rights of such status, expressly including those specified in § 49-5-510.

SECTION 12. Tennessee Code Annotated, Section 49-3-306(a)(1), is amended by adding the following language at the end of the subdivision:

In the alternative, an LEA may submit to the commissioner its own proposed salary schedule, subject to collective bargaining where applicable. Implementation of such a salary schedule shall be subject to approval by the commissioner and the state board. In no case shall a salary schedule adopted pursuant to this subdivision (1) result in the reduction of the salary of a teacher employed by the LEA at the time of the adoption of the salary schedule. Any additional expenditure incurred as a result of any such salary schedule shall be subject to appropriation by the governing body empowered to appropriate the funds.

SECTION 13. Tennessee Code Annotated, Section 49-5-512, is amended by deleting the existing language in its entirety and by substituting instead the following language:

(a) A tenured teacher, who receives notification of charges pursuant to § 49-5-511, may, within thirty (30) days after receipt of the notice, demand a full and complete hearing on the charges before an impartial hearing officer selected by the board, as follows:

(1) The teacher shall give written notice to the director of schools of the teacher's request for a hearing;

(2) The director of schools shall, within five (5) days after receipt of the request, name an impartial hearing officer who shall be responsible for notifying the parties of the hearing officer's assignment. The hearing officer shall direct the parties or the attorneys for the parties, or both, to appear before the hearing officer for simplification of issues and the scheduling of the hearing, which in no event shall be set later than thirty (30) days following receipt of notice demanding a hearing. In the discretion of the hearing officer, all or part of any prehearing conference may be conducted by telephone if each participant has an opportunity to participate, be heard, and to address proof and evidentiary concerns. The hearing officer is empowered to issue appropriate orders and to regulate the conduct of the proceedings;

(3) For the purposes of this part, "impartial" means that the selected hearing officer shall have no history of employment with the board or director of schools, no relationship with any board member and no relationship with the teacher or representatives of the teacher;

(4) All parties shall have the right to be represented by counsel, the opportunity to call and subpoena witnesses, the opportunity to examine all witnesses, the right to require that all testimony be given under oath and the right to have evidence deemed relevant by the submitting party included in the record of the hearing, even if objected to by the opposing party;

(5) All witnesses shall be entitled to the witness fees and mileage provided by law, which fees and mileage shall be paid by the party issuing a subpoena or calling the witnesses to testify;

(6) The impartial hearing officer shall administer oaths to witnesses, who testify under oath;

(7) A record of the hearing, either by transcript, recording, or as is otherwise agreed by the parties shall be prepared if the decision of the hearing officer is appealed, and all decisions of the hearing officer shall be reduced to writing and included in the record, together with all evidence otherwise submitted;

(8) On request of either party to the hearing, witnesses may be barred from the hearing except as they are called to testify. The hearing may be private at the request of the teacher or in the discretion of the hearing officer; and

(9) At appropriate stages of the hearing, the hearing officer may give the parties the full opportunity to file briefs, proposed findings of fact and conclusions of law, and proposed initial or final orders. The hearing officer shall within ten (10) days of closing the hearing, decide what disposition to make of the case and shall immediately thereafter give the board and the teacher written findings of fact, conclusions of law and a concise and explicit statement of the outcome of the decision.

(b) The director of schools or other school officials shall not be held liable, personally or officially, when performing their duties in prosecuting charges against any teacher or teachers under this part.

(c)(1) If the affected teacher desires to appeal from a decision rendered in whole or in part in favor of the school system, the teacher shall first exhaust the administrative remedy of appealing the decision to the board of education within ten (10) working days of the hearing officer's delivery of the written findings of fact, conclusions and decision to the affected employee.

(2) Upon written notice of appeal, the director of schools shall prepare a copy of the proceedings, transcript, documentary and other evidence presented, and transmit the copy to the board within twenty (20) working days of receipt of notice of appeal.

(3) The board shall hear the appeal on the record and no new evidence shall be introduced. The affected employee may appear in person or by counsel and argue why the decision should be modified or reversed. The board may sustain the decision, send the record back if additional evidence is necessary, revise the penalty or reverse the decision. Before any findings and decision are sustained or punishment inflicted, a majority of the membership of the board shall concur in sustaining the charges and decision. The board shall render its decision on the appeal within ten (10) working days after the conclusion of the hearing.

(4) Any party dissatisfied with the decision rendered by the board shall have the right to appeal to the chancery court in the county where the school system is located within twenty (20) working days after receipt of the dated notice of the decision of the board. It shall be the duty of the board to cause the entire record and other evidence in the case to be transmitted to the court. The review of the court shall be de novo on the record of the hearing held by the hearing officer and reviewed by the board.

(5) The director of schools shall also have the right to appeal any adverse ruling by the hearing officer to the board under the same conditions as set out in this subsection (c).

SECTION 14. The Teacher Professional Development Fund is established, into which only federal monies shall be deposited, for the purposes of improved teaching, pedagogical skills, and classroom instruction.

SECTION 15. The Department of Education shall annually report to the general assembly the amount of Race to the Top funds awarded to each local education agency and achievement school district.

SECTION 16. If any provision of this act or the application thereof to any person or circumstance is held invalid, such invalidity shall not affect other provisions or

applications of the act which can be given effect without the invalid provision or application, and to that end the provisions of this act are declared to be severable.

SECTION 17. This act shall take effect upon becoming a law, the public welfare requiring it.

PASSED: January 15, 2010

RON RAMSEY
SPEAKER OF THE SENATE

KENT WILLIAMS, SPEAKER
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

APPROVED this 16th day of January 2010

PHIL BREDESEN, GOVERNOR

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