

A Tale of Two Turnarounds:

Corporate ideology, community organizing,
and the hidden curriculum of whole school reform

by

Sydney Ann Lewis
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INTRODUCTION

When I began thinking about my senior thesis in the spring of my junior year, I had no doubt that I wanted to write about public education. The impulse to research and write about school reform is inextricably bound up with my own identity and background as both a student and a child of teachers in public schools. My mother, a special needs teacher, and my father, a music teacher, both work in an underperforming school district in Atlanta. My childhood was spent in schools that ran the gamut from the mostly-white, middle-class neighborhood school touted as the district's success story to schools plagued with disintegrating buildings, high rates of teacher and principal turnover, and underfunded special education programs. At my high school, students from the former archetype, myself included, were isolated in "gifted" classes, while the other 75% of students—mostly low-income minority students—filled the "general" classes. The school was known for its "diversity," but our classes were effectively segregated because of tracking. Our dropout rate was staggering; those students from the 75% who managed to graduate were funneled into community colleges.

It was always clear to me that my academic achievements were only partially my own. Being tagged as "gifted" didn't mean that I was any smarter than my peers, it meant that I was born onto the "gifted" track. I didn't realize how startling it would be to matriculate at an elite private liberal arts university—where many of my peers were the accomplished and sophisticated graduates of famous prep schools—from my inner-city public school in Atlanta, but the clear differences between the two worlds to which I belong gave me a sense of clarity about my identity and my commitment to work for equality in public education. During my years at Wesleyan, I worked as a tutor, Family

Resource Center intern, and teacher's assistant in the local elementary school, and taught with a summer preschool program for two consecutive summers. Every time I was assigned an open-ended research project, I chose to write about education reform; every conversation led me back to public education. I chose to write a senior thesis simply because I could not look away from the enormous achievement gap that conserves a gulf between my two worlds.

After thinking and learning about education so intensely during the past several years, I have begun to think more critically about what it means to be a "reformer." I find myself confused with the web of research, projects, programs, initiatives, laws, and models for school reform, and I scramble to remain informed in the debates over teacher evaluation and training programs, common learning standards, alternative school models, vouchers and school choice, new curricula, and standardized testing. I am frustrated when the rhetoric of reform seems to contradict things that I know to be true from my own upbringing in public schools. It seems that the world of education reform is overflowing with new and innovative projects, plans, and initiatives that each respective reformer believes will cure the cankers of public schools and equalize education for all American children.

In my frustration at being unable to make sense of "reform" in spite of a tenacious devotion to improving education, I decided that I wanted to examine the motives, strategies, and ideology behind school reform. I chose to focus on the phenomenon of school turnaround, an increasingly common practice of revitalizing low-performing schools by replacing teachers and principals to produce rapid, dramatic gains in student achievement, which I describe at length in Chapter 3. I had recently become closely involved with two urban public school communities, both of which seemed to

provide unique and compelling examples of turnaround. I developed a qualitative case study of those two schools—Macdonough School in Middletown, Connecticut and Jumoke Academy Honors at Milner School in Hartford, Connecticut—to explore the elements of school turnaround reform in historically under-performing urban schools and locate the turnaround approach within a larger discussion of the ultimate purpose of education and the ideology behind modern school reform. By contrasting an official turnaround school with a traditional neighborhood school that has shown dramatic improvement in what I will call “informal turnaround,” my aim was to identify the qualities specific to each example, examine the community response to each, and identify the distinct ideologies implicit in both formal, state-mandated turnaround and informal, community-generated turnaround.

During my ethnographic research, I looked closely for reforms that address factors both within and outside schools to improve student achievement. I used parents’ and teachers’ responses to school turnaround to elucidate the ways that turnaround reform affects school communities. I reviewed some quantitative measures of student achievement (that is, standardized test scores), but I found that, due to the recent introduction of the Common Core State Standards and the ongoing development of new state standardized tests, there was no set of quantitative data that would allow me to compare changes over time or across schools. I ultimately decided that an analysis of test scores would not be a useful tool for my study.

As I worked on my final analysis chapter, I found a clear theme that I had not anticipated. I noticed that the turnarounds had radically different beginnings, and that the nature of the catalysts for each turnaround had a profound effect on their communities’ responses. The resulting study is not an evaluation of turnaround reform,

rather, it is an interrogation of the *meaning* of school reform, a deep analysis of the ideology, motives, and goals behind school turnaround, and an examination of the ways that communities both affect and are affected by sweeping changes in their schools.

OVERVIEW

My research question, ultimately, is twofold. First, the *ideological*: how can we identify and understand the hidden curriculum implicit in school turnaround efforts? Second, the *practical*: what are the specific elements of turnaround reform in underperforming urban schools?

The ideological inquiry takes a macro view of reform by locating turnaround within the matrix of national school reform and working to identify the ideological implications of a hidden curriculum. The practical inquiry takes a micro perspective, considering the explicit curriculum of a turnaround reform agenda and identifying the specific school-level factors that turnaround targets. This dichotomy—the macro, ideological focus on the hidden curriculum versus the micro, practical focus on the explicit curriculum—helps to develop a definition of school turnaround and situate it within a larger discussion of education reform.

In my first chapter, I will situate my research questions within a discussion of ideology in education and the history of education reform. I will describe what I consider to be the three major ideological perspectives on the basic purpose of public education: 1) to train specialized workers who will insure the United States' reputation as superpower among nations in technological and industrial development, 2) to increase social mobility and promote social equality, and 3) to perpetuate class hegemony through the teachings of a hidden curriculum. In the final section of this chapter, I discuss critical pedagogy, a somewhat radical philosophy of education that suggests the potential to liberate schools and students from the hidden curriculum.

The second chapter will trace the history of recent education reform, including a discussion of education reform milestones including the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, the A Nation at Risk report of 1983, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, and the Race to the Top Act of 2009. I will describe the ways that current reform attacks the ever-widening socioeconomic and racial achievement gap by identifying failing schools—most of which are located in urban areas and serve largely poor, minority populations—and creating incentives and consequences to impel improvement. Building upon the theories explicated in the first chapter, I will work to uncover the hidden curriculum implicit in recent reform and develop a definition of a contemporary reform ideology, which I term “corporate ideology.”

In the third chapter, I will expand upon the notion of “school turnaround” reform, an increasingly common reform practice that builds on the comprehensive whole school reform of the 1990s, and situate it within the context of the corporate reform ideology that I developed in the preceding chapter. I will suggest a discrepancy between that ideology—which presumes that inequality stems from in-school factors like “low standards,” oppositional school culture, and sub-par teachers and can be ameliorated by the introduction of free market principles—and the alternative perspective that inequality stems from factors outside of schools, like poverty, home environments, parenting, after-school and summer time, social networks between parents, and early childhood education. I will argue that turnaround is a potential point of convergence because it operates within the corporate reform ideology and federal, state and district-level systems, but also grants schools an unusual degree of autonomy to create initiatives that target school communities’ specific needs, including non-academic, outside-school needs. I will develop a list of the specific factors targeted by school-level

reform, both inside and outside of schools, and review crucial research regarding each factor.

The fourth chapter addresses the methods I used to conduct research in the two schools that I studied. I explain the reasoning behind the design of my study, my selection of case studies, and my formal methodology. I also describe the actual process of conducting research at the schools. The fifth and sixth chapters are devoted to the careful presentation of my qualitative data and extensive discussion of my two case studies, Macdonough School in Middletown and Jumoke Academy Honors at Milner School in Hartford. In my seventh and final chapter, I provide a close analysis of the findings from my case studies. Finally, I give a brief statement of the implications of my research.

I encourage the reader to notice the dichotomy I have highlighted—a macro, ideological perspective versus a micro, practical perspective—as well as three central conceptual frameworks—sets of questions, claims or areas of focus—introduced in each of the first three chapters. The first chapter begins with several questions about the explicit and implicit purposes of public education and goals of school reform. The second chapter ends with three key claims that characterize contemporary reform ideology. The third chapter outlines four major target areas that might be considered in school turnaround. I will clearly state each of these three frameworks in the conclusion of each respective chapter, and I will revisit them in the final analysis of my case studies in order to determine the ideological implications of turnaround school reform and examine the specific practices implemented in efforts to “turn around” low-performing schools.

CHAPTER 1 / IDEOLOGY

Sociologists approach the study of public education from both macro and micro perspectives: first, examining the ways that social forces generate stratification between and within schools, and second, considering the effects of stratification on individual student achievement (Arum et al. 2011). Because differences in achievement and educational attainment tend to determine students' future occupational attainment, success in the labor force, and earnings, stratification in schools has huge implications for the degree of upward social mobility available to disadvantaged populations.

The sociology of education, however, draws into question that assumption: *is* the purpose of public schooling to eradicate social inequality and enable movement between class lines, or do schools actually reproduce class disparities? When reformers claim that public schools are “failing,” what is the purpose that they are failing to accomplish? When reformers endeavor to “turn around” schools, what is the desired endpoint of the turn?

This chapter works towards an understanding of dueling ideologies regarding the purpose of education in order to develop a lens through which I will interrogate the motives and goals of school turnaround. I will first introduce the contemporary era of education reform with a description of its catalyst, the 1983 report *A Nation at Risk*, which assumes that the purpose of education is to preserve the position of the United States as a superpower in industrial, scientific and technological development. I will explore arguments supporting early reformer Horace Mann's famous claim that education is “the great equalizer of the conditions of men,” highlighting text from education laws of the past century that purport to transform education into a vehicle for

social mobility. Using the arguments of several social theorists and sociologists of education, I will then discuss the liberal egalitarian view of education as an equalizing institution. I will address an argument that construes public education as a means for training efficient and specialized workers in a capitalist economy and propose that public schools use a “hidden curriculum” to reproduce and transmit existing social inequality. Finally, I will introduce a theory of critical pedagogy, which suggests a new avenue for putting an egalitarian ideology into practice.

When I turn to a discussion of turnaround school reform in subsequent chapters, I will seek to identify a hidden curriculum in my case studies. I will analyze the hidden curriculum of turnaround both on a macro level, by considering the federal, state, and district policy and reform initiatives that systematically influence the structure of schooling and lead to turnaround reform, and a micro level, by identifying the individual school-level factors that turnaround efforts target. The macro view constitutes my focus on ideology in turnaround, and the micro view accounts for my analysis of the specific elements of turnaround.

FALLING BEHIND: A NATION AT RISK AND THE IMPERATIVE FOR REFORM

In 1983, President Reagan’s National Commission on Excellence in Education released *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*, which reported that the failure of the public education system was an urgent national problem akin to a threat of war (ANAR 1983). The report urges public schools to follow the commission’s recommendations on content, standards and expectations, teaching, leadership and fiscal support, and is widely considered to be the impetus for the movement in education

reform that has continued to expand over the subsequent decades. According to the report,

Our once unchallenged preeminence in commerce, industry, science, and technological innovation is being overtaken by competitors throughout the world. This report is concerned with only one of the many causes and dimensions of the problem, but it is the one that undergirds American prosperity, security, and civility...the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people. What was unimaginable a generation ago has begun to occur—others are matching and surpassing our educational attainments. (ANAR 1983:5)

The findings of *A Nation at Risk* assume that the basic purpose of education is to promote economic competition in the global market. They suggest that the public school system had been sound in the era of the Space Race and the National Defense Education Act, when the nation was cognizant of the looming ascent of other growing world powers, but had undergone an “unthinking, unilateral educational disarmament” that was sabotaging the nation’s standing among international competitors in the fields of mathematics, science and technology. Terrel Bell, Reagan’s Secretary of Education and the creator of the National Commission on Excellence in Education, later said that the report initiated “the quest to shape education into the super-efficient enterprise that it must become if America is to keep its proud place of leadership in the marvelous Information Age of this decade and beyond” (Bell 1993). The report asks that American citizens collectively turn their attention to the crisis in education and claims that public support for reform is best characterized simply as “the honorable word ‘patriotism’” (ANAR 1983:17).

Because it presumed that the crisis in education could be eradicated quickly and painless with the complete adoption of its recommendations, the report generated a reform milieu with the expectation of “results.” In their lauded review of the past

century of school reform, Larry Cuban and David Tyack suggest that in the years following *A Nation at Risk*, efforts to improve American education took the form of the rapid, erratic adoption of policy elites' haphazard reform proposals (1995). Calling ANAR a "diatribe," they argue that public school reform sets unrealistically high expectations, overestimates the possibility of education being a panacea for social change, and scapegoats teachers when they are unable to deliver the results demanded. Because the expectation of demonstrable results requires that there be a rubric of expectations and a means for evaluation, the reform initiatives stimulated by *A Nation at Risk* increasingly focused on enforcing learning standards and testing mandates.

It is important that the most famous call for education reform has the implicit goal of stimulating innovation and productivity on a *global* level. The report suggested that patriotism demands unflagging support for the report's recommendations and that the school system—its teachers, principals, and students—was responsible for the failure of the United States to compete in global markets. The ideology behind *A Nation at Risk*, then, believes that the ultimate purpose of the public education system is to secure the nation's reputation as international superpower. As I will discuss later, *A Nation at Risk* marks the beginning of the contemporary reform era and is a crucial example of the legislative link between public education and the health of the United States' economy in global markets.

THE GREAT EQUALIZER

Efficiency is but one of the educational goals of the American school system; democratic equality and social mobility are also held up as the egalitarian purposes of education (Labaree 1997). In the ideal system that American education is celebrated as,

schools generate social mobility and limitless opportunities for children to achieve the elusive American dream. The theory of status attainment, pioneered by Blau and Duncan's study of mobility within the American occupational structure, suggests that schools effectively moderate the association between an individual's social origin and occupational attainment. Status attainment theory supports the notion that schools *are* the source of mobility between status groups and social classes.¹ By highlighting the role of schooling in mediating individuals' inheritance of status, status attainment theory supports an egalitarian ideology of public education.

Though the ethos of *A Nation at Risk* demanded reform for the sake of global competitiveness, the report also points to the egalitarian belief that public schools act as agents of equality. That perspective, hearkening back to 19th century reformer Horace Mann's famous claim that education serves that "the great equalizer of the conditions of man," considers public schooling to be a vehicle for social mobility and a means for eliminating social inequalities (Mann 1848). *A Nation at Risk* addresses that ideology:

All, regardless of race or class or economic status, are entitled to a fair chance and to the tools for developing their individual powers of mind and spirit to the utmost. This promise means that all children by virtue of their own efforts, competently guided, can hope to attain the mature and informed judgment needed to secure gainful employment, and to manage their own lives, thereby serving not only their own interests but also the progress of society itself. (ANAR 1983:4)

To defend the claim that reform tacitly presumes the purpose of education to be to equalize opportunity and afford disadvantaged children the ability to transcend class boundaries, it is useful to examine the legislative initiatives that impacted public education over the past several decades.² In each major moment in education reform, it

¹ Weber highlights the separation between social class and status group, but I believe that status attainment theory accounts for both of those constructs.

² Each of these sources will be discussed at length in the second chapter.

has been assumed that the purpose of public education is to produce high educational achievement for *all* children. Each case problematizes “the achievement gap,” a term which refers to dramatic and widespread disparities in student achievement based on race, socioeconomic status, or special needs, and charges schools with the responsibility of narrowing those gaps. The achievement gap has widened considerably over the past several decades as a result of increasing income inequality, residential segregation, and class-based limitations in access to educational resources (Duncan and Murnane 2011).

The responsibility of the school system to provide fair and equal education opportunity to all American children was reinforced repeatedly with a number of legislative milestones throughout the twentieth century. The Supreme Court’s 1954 ruling in the *Brown v. Board of Education* case, by overturning the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision, declared that segregated schools were inherently unequal. The unanimous decision assumed that the purpose of public schooling was to equalize, and specifically demanded integration as a necessary measure for creating equity among black and white students. In 1965, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act was passed as part of President Lyndon B. Johnson’s War on Poverty. ESEA was enacted to specifically deliver financial resources to schools serving underprivileged children and included specific provisions for low-income and bilingual students (ESEA 1965, Brady and Thomas 2005). In 1972, President Richard Nixon said in a message to the Congress that “Conscience and the Constitution both require that no child should be denied equal educational opportunity” and “efforts to provide equal educational opportunity must now focus...on assuring that the opportunity is not only equal, but adequate” (Nixon

1972).³ The Equal Educational Opportunities Act was passed shortly thereafter, amending the Elementary and Secondary Education Act by creating a clear definition of the right to equal educational opportunity (EEOA 1974). The well-known Equality of Educational Opportunity report, published in 1966 and colloquially known as the “Coleman Report,” sought to explain poor minority students’ lagging academic achievement and discovered that family backgrounds, rather than school resources, best predicted student achievement (Coleman 1966). Though the report challenged the assumption that in-school factors had the potential to override inequalities in students’ backgrounds, it still took for granted the notion that schools were *supposed to* achieve equality.

Again, the scope and responsibility of public education as an equalizing force expanded in 1975 with the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, which not only insured equal access to public schools for children with disabilities, but required schools to work with parents to create individualized educational plans to meet the needs of students in special education programs (EAHCA 1975). The Act was amended and reauthorized a number of times, including a 1990 amendment to rechristen the law as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and a 2004 amendment that clarified special needs students’ right to a “Free Appropriate Public Education,” including early intervention services (IDEA 1990). This legislation, coupled with the 1974 EEOA decree that no state could deny equal educational opportunity on the basis of gender, race, color, or nationality, established public education as an institution legally bound to provide equal schooling to *all* American children.

³ This message to the Congress was given to address controversy over busing children across districts to achieve integration.

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act was reauthorized a number of times in the past several decades, repeatedly reinforcing the imperative for public schools to provide equal educational opportunities and narrow achievement gaps. The 1994 reauthorization, the Improving America's Schools Act, increased Title 1 funding, which provides schools with extra resources to meet the needs of economically disadvantaged students, and included provisions for school choice programs and public charter schools as a way to give families access to an increased number of school options (IASA 1994). The equalizing purpose of the 2001 reauthorization, No Child Left Behind, is stated clearly in its complete title: "An act to close the achievement gap with accountability, flexibility, and choice, so that no child is left behind" (NCLB 2001). Finally, President Barack Obama's 2009 reform initiative, Race to the Top, promoted uniform learning standards, charter schools and other alternative school models, new systems for teacher evaluation, and school turnaround reform projects as measures to narrow the achievement gap (RTTT 2009).

Though various reform approaches and initiatives have come in and out of vogue, narrowing the achievement gap has consistently been the motive behind education reform legislation.

THE HIDDEN CURRICULUM

Though Horace Mann's 1848 report as Secretary of the Massachusetts State Board of Education arguably remains most famous for his claim that public education would be "the great equalizer," an alternative interpretation suggests that Mann's objective was more accurately to control a growing class of immigrants (Mann 1848,

Bowles and Gintis 2007). Public education, in this view, is most useful as an institution for assimilating abject populations into the fabric of mainstream, dominant society.

This section diverges from an egalitarian ideology of public education as a bulwark of social equality. My discussion here turns to the “hidden curriculum,” the tacit teachings that promulgate the norms, values and practices central to the existing social order (Giroux and Penna 1979, Apple and King 1977). The process of socialization carried out by schools, coupled with the curricular content transmitted through instruction, constitutes the reproduction of an unequal social order (Apple 1978). Through the hidden curriculum, public schools assimilate children into society, transmit the differential cultural and social capital of status groups, produce laborers to perpetuate the capitalist social order, and selectively sort students into occupations.

Socialization, cultural and social capital, and social closure

Schools reflect the norms of dominant society and reproduce social inequality. To act as legitimate representatives of the state, public schools adopt their organizational structure based on the institutionalized laws and values that govern society, even if those norms do not serve the specific educational needs of students (Boli et al. 1985). Schools take for granted a social ideal that dictates the ideas, behaviors and practices inherent in their society and effectively transmit that ideal to pre-social children (Durkheim 1956). The transmission, which appears in organizational, disciplinary and curricular practices, forces children to internalize social norms in preparation for adult society. On an individual level, the school socialization process prepares children for the demands of social life and labor. On a societal level, this sort of methodical assimilation impresses the authority of those in power upon children and ensures a degree of homogeneity, conformity, and docility among members of society.

Just as they transmit the norms of society, schools also transmit the norms of status groups. Within the singular social ideal there exist independent groups, distinguished on the basis of shared social ties, prestige, conventions, tastes and styles (Weber 1978). The boundaries of those groups indicate “social closure,” the quality of certain status groups that allows them to maintain a monopoly over scarce resources and exclude non-members. In the context of schooling, a theory of status groups informs conflict theory, which posits that education creates stratification and constrains admission to certain occupations and status groups (Collins 1971). Public schools thus increase the influence of credentialism and meritocracy in employment and provide a device for excluding access to status groups by increasing social closure.

The work of Pierre Bourdieu expands upon the conflict theory of social closure and credentialism by introducing the notion of cultural capital, the set of styles and tastes that delineate status groups and are transferred from parents to children. Markers of cultural capital include education, skills, language and style of speech, physical appearance, group membership, family structure, social networks, cultural practices, and place of residence (Bourdieu 2007). Bourdieu suggests that schools reproduce the social order because they expect students to arrive at school with the background knowledge inherent in the dominant culture, and thus allow the dominant class to monopolize access to educational resources:

In short, an institution officially entrusted with the transmission of the instruments of appropriation of the dominant culture which neglects methodically to transmit the instruments indispensable to the success of its undertaking is bound to become the monopoly of those social classes capable of transmitting by their own means, that is to say by that diffuse and implicit continuous educational action which operates within cultured families...confirm their monopoly of the instruments of appropriation of the dominant cultural and thus their monopoly of that culture. (Bourdieu 1977:58)

In the case of schooling, parenting style and home environment are crucial components of cultural capital that influence children's access to educational resources. Social capital, a quality of social structures that exists in relationships and facilitates actions of social actors, is also an important factor that dictates status attainment through schooling (Coleman 1989). The nature and implications of social relationships, as differentiated among status group boundaries, influences access to educational resources and in turn determines status attainment (Lin 1999). In schools, social networks take the form of relationships between adults—parent-to-parent, parent-to-teacher, and teacher-to-teacher—which function as educational resources themselves (Lareau 2000). Because the organizational structure and pedagogical practices of public education reflect institutionalized social norms, traditional schools favor the “concerted cultivation” characteristic of white middle-class parenting as opposed to the “natural growth” philosophy more common in low-income, non-white parenting (Lareau 2003, Lareau and Weininger 2003).⁴ Stratification in education, then, occurs because “while implicitly favoring those who have already acquired the linguistic and social competencies to handle middle-class culture, schools take as natural what is essentially a social gift” (Apple 1978:31).

If student achievement is assessed without attention to salient differences in cultural capital, then, students from white middle-class backgrounds appear to far surpass their non-white low-income peers. In this way, because cultural capital is differentially rewarded in schools, cultural capital far outweighs educational and economic capital in determining status attainment. An alternative reading of status attainment, per the findings of Blau and Duncan, similarly aligns with the conflict theory

⁴ See Chapter 3 for an in-depth discussion of Annette Lareau's relevant work.

of social closure: although education *moderates* the association between social origin and occupational attainment, access to educational resources is *predicted* by social origin. Status determines the caliber of an individual's schooling, which in turn determines eventual occupational attainment. In this interpretation, though schools do reliably moderate the correlation between original status and adult status, the mark of one's original status group is indelible.

A theory of the hidden curriculum, then, suggests that the purpose of schools is not to increase social mobility, but to increase social closure. Charles Tilly explains this phenomenon as "opportunity hoarding," suggesting that the public school system is one example of an institution designed to systematically exclude subordinate groups from accessing precious social resources (1998). In the case of schooling, the elite "hoard" access to private schools and higher education in order to ultimately perpetuate existing class stratification in society. Tilly also discusses the way that schools adopt an organizational structure that reflects and reproduces institutionalized norms, defining that tendency as the "emulation" of dominant social norms. By reproducing an exclusive social ideal, differentially rewarding cultural and social capital, sustaining boundaries between status groups, and maintaining unequal access to educational resources, public schools reproduce social hegemony and actually *prevent* social mobility.

Sort, sieve and select: Producing a workforce

Because they alone distribute the credentials that qualify workers for various occupations, schools also function both as the training grounds for future workers and the machine that preserves the capitalist order (Bowles and Gintis 1975, 2007). Though schools claim to simply transmit knowledge, "the content of specific lessons is relatively

less important than the experience of being a worker” (Apple 2012:54). According to Bowles’ and Gintis’ theory of social reproduction, schools reproduce the status quo of a social structure that controls laborers in the interests of the capitalist class (1975). The capitalist class, which tends to pursue its interests through the state and educational policy, has a clear motive to produce loyal, obedient and skilled laborers and protect the social order that ensures its privilege.

The very institution of public education came into existence as a result of social and economic changes in the transition from a rural society to an industrial economy, which so radically changed the nature of work that it became necessary to prepare children for the workforce en masse rather than at home (Ravitch 2000). The rise of wage labor and competitive markets in a capitalist economy created a need for public schools for children who had traditionally been educated at home. The new public education system held the promise of a universal liberal curriculum that could provide children with options beyond the occupations and social classes of their parents, but had the power to differentially train students for certain occupations. Early public schools used a uniform curriculum of recitation, repetition, memorization, patriotism, moral behavior, and public speaking to provide children with the skills that would later allow them to be obedient, productive and hard-working members of society.

Schools are not only geared towards producing workers, but they also reproduce the occupational structure that stratifies social classes. Jean Anyon’s study of elementary schools concluded that entire schools were ideologically devoted to a single vocational track, while others were designed to produce future doctors, lawyers and other professionals (Anyon 1980). At “working-class” schools, academic work was mechanical, rote, and involved minimal decision-making or critical thinking; at “middle-class”

schools, academic work allowed some decision-making but emphasized the importance of correct answers; at “affluent professional” schools, academic work was creative, expressive and independent; at “executive elite” schools, academic work was about developing sophisticated intellectual thought and analytical skills. The hidden curriculum that Anyon identified not only reproduced the norms and ideals of dominant society, but differentially prepared students to relate to the process of production in certain ways that would dictate later occupational attainment. To accomplish social reproduction, then, the public school system works as a sieve that evaluates the social, intellectual and moral fitness of students and selectively sorts them into certain occupations (Sorokin 1959).

CRITICAL PEDAGOGY

If the hidden curriculum is in fact as pervasive as the previous section suggests, it seems impossible for schools to generate mobility between status groups as per the promise of an egalitarian ideology. In spite of reform efforts that champion equity in schooling, public education seems to reproduce social hegemony at the behest of capitalist interests. According to the theories of hidden curriculum, the achievement gap is not a byproduct but rather a goal of the system—that is, schools are structured to differentially reward status and perpetuate class stratification.

Theories of critical pedagogy suggest respite from the oppressive reproduction of hegemony in schooling. The approach seeks to equip students to actively construct knowledge, recognize inequality and oppression, and deconstruct norms (McLaren 1995, hooks 1994). Instead of creating a passive, homogenous citizenry accommodated to the capitalist division of labor, critical pedagogy claims to produce a politicized citizenry concerned about social justice and aware of exploitation and privilege in society

(McLaren 1998). If students are empowered to recognize the forces that oppress them, they can liberate themselves from hegemony and begin to devise a new social order on their own terms. In radical departure from school practices that indoctrinate obedience, patriotism, citizenship, deference to authority, and faith in the laws of capitalism, critical pedagogy encourages students to question and deconstruct the social norms that bound status groups. The tenets of critical pedagogy—critical thinking, democratic decision-making, student-centered learning, and problem-posing—directly contradict the values of self-restraint, cooperation and conformity implicit in the hidden curriculum of traditional schooling.

Early 20th century reformer John Dewey laid the groundwork for a theory of progressive education that was built on an appreciation for diversity, experience, democracy and student-centered instruction (Dewey 1938). His philosophy promoted the belief that children were natural learners and schools were institutions meant to harness and foster children's innate drive to explore, imagine and solve problems; natural human development was threatened by institutional control but perhaps augmented by schooling that strengthened the ability to reason. He advocated for the heterogeneous grouping of students to generate dialogue amongst learners of different beliefs, abilities, backgrounds, and interests. Progressive education upheld a commitment to the development of critical thinking skills through student-centered, explorative, hands-on experiential learning. Dewey believed that the school represents a microcosm of society and thus could be a laboratory for democracy; students, like adults, must meet unexpected obstacles or problems and their abilities are best measured by the innovative solutions they are able to use to grow and learn from challenging experiences. To the progressive educator, learning is necessarily social and interactive, and academic

education must be coupled with a socio-emotional curriculum to facilitate the development of socially aware, informed, and engaged young citizens:

When the school introduces and trains each child of society into membership within such a little community, saturating him with the spirit of service, and providing him with instruments of effective self-direction, we shall have the deepest and best guarantee of a larger society which is worthy, lovely and harmonious (Dewey and Dewey 1915).

Dewey's experience-based pedagogy redistributes power in the classroom to promote analytical student-centered learning and allow students to learn through direct, interactional experience with their immediate world. Because teachers shape students' experiences, however, they control the educational environment and dictate the terms of learning. Though Dewey's experience-based education introduced a somewhat radical notion of student-generated learning, it retained practices that transmitted social norms and values to assimilate children into society.

Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, the seminal text of critical pedagogy, implicates the "banking" style of pedagogy that pervades traditional education and Dewey's theory of teacher-led, experiential learning (1970). In the banking model, teachers are the holders and distributors of information; students are not consulted in the construction of the educational program and must blindly and passively receive the knowledge offered to them. Freire develops a theory of "problem-posing pedagogy" to recast the teacher and student in a new non-hierarchical cooperative relationship. Problem-posing, in contrast to banking, engages students and teachers as "co-investigators" in a dialogue that allows students to actively engage with questions and seek answers such that reality is a process fueled by all participants. By asking

provocative questions and guiding students in their own process of questioning, inventing, and re-imagining, a problem-posing teacher is able to teach in a way that is student-generated, relevant, and memorable. A problem-posing paradigm not only allows students to take control of their own learning, but also encourages critical engagement with the taken-for-granted social norms that are subliminally instilled in a traditional schooling model. If students are equipped to think generatively and analytically, developing what Freire calls critical consciousness, the skewed power relations of the classroom and the society that it represents will be made visible and students will become able to overthrow the system that oppresses them.

Crucially, the promise of critical pedagogy can be realized only if it is a program designed by the “oppressed.” If a movement for liberation—or, in this case, a movement for reform in a low-performing school—is not developed by the community that it affects, it only serves to reproduce a social structure that implicitly favors the “oppressors.” Earlier, I suggested that the capitalist class, which has unparalleled clout in the field of education policy, stands to benefit from the implementation of a hidden curriculum that reproduces existing social stratification. The tenets of critical pedagogy complement that argument: when members of the dominant class design a program to supposedly liberate the oppressed (in this case, communities of low-achieving students), the program will be unequivocally oppressive.

Culturally responsive pedagogy is a contemporary model for progressive pedagogy that knits together several tenets of progressive, student-centered, problem-posing critical pedagogy (Ladson-Billings 2009). When schools fail to recognize and account for cultural differences—that is, differences in cultural and social capital between status groups—children from dominant status groups appear to perform better,

which ultimately reproduces existing social stratification. Culturally responsive pedagogy acknowledges the variation in cultural and social capital among status groups and capitalizes on students' unique experiences, abilities and skills, creating an educational environment that promotes individuality and scaffolds existing knowledge instead of imposing the expectations of dominant, mainstream cultural norms.

Critical pedagogy represents a new spin on the “great equalizer” ideology of education: instead of allowing for mobility between status groups in a stratified society, critical pedagogy dismantles stratification itself. It adopts a loose coupling theory of student learning, which recognizes a dynamic and multidirectional relationship between resources, teacher training and socialization, pedagogy and content coverage, student learning, and pervasive societal norms (Gamoran et al. 2000). Critical pedagogy points out that student learning reflects not a simple relationship between teacher input and achievement output, but rather the composite effects of the explicit curriculum and school resources as well as status group origin and the content of a hidden curriculum. By highlighting the myriad factors that influence learning, critical pedagogy calls upon students to recognize social stratification and thus actively liberate themselves from an oppressive social order.

I believe that critical pedagogy suggests two major possibilities for an ethical school reform to actually fulfill the promise of the egalitarian ideology. First, reform that is designed and led by the community that it affects will transfer power from the oppressors to the oppressed. So long as the oppressors are in control, the hidden curriculum continues to pervade reform initiatives. Second, a problem-posing, culturally responsive pedagogy removes the autocratic influence of the teacher, makes instruction relevant and relatable, and enables children to recognize inequality and oppression. In

these ways, critical pedagogy represents an ideological framework with the potential to escape the hidden curriculum and accomplish the equalizing purpose of education.

CONCLUSION: IDEOLOGY, THE HIDDEN CURRICULUM, AND CRITICAL PEDAGOGY

I began this chapter with three guiding questions:

- 1) Is the purpose of public schooling to eradicate social inequality and enable movement between class lines, or do schools actually reproduce class disparities?
- 2) When education reformers claim that public schools are “failing,” what is the implied purpose that they are failing to accomplish?
- 3) When reformers endeavor to “turn around,” what is the desired endpoint of the turn?

I hope to have established a contentious relationship between two ideological stances about the purpose of public education, one which champions the role of schools as the “great equalizers” of a stratified society and one which characterizes the school system as an instrument with which the dominant capitalist class systematically reproduces social hegemony. I have shown that reform legislation exclusively uses the language of the first ideology—an egalitarian ideology that clings to the equalizing purpose of education—and have suggested that the egalitarian rhetoric of reform effectively conceals a hidden curriculum that tacitly governs the reform agenda. The turn to critical pedagogy has additionally suggested the possibility of reprieve from the hidden curriculum.

When I turn to my case studies, I will apply the analytical lenses of these questions: What is the desired endpoint of the “turn” in turnaround reform? Is there a detectable hidden curriculum couched in the egalitarian rhetoric of reform, or is there evidence of a critical pedagogical approach that defies the hidden curriculum?

CHAPTER 2 / CONTEMPORARY REFORM

The previous chapter detailed disparate ideologies of education and argued that an egalitarian rhetoric conceals the reproduction of hegemonic class stratification in schools. The implicit purpose of schooling, according to theories of the hidden curriculum, is to socialize children into future roles as social actors, members of status groups, and laborers in a capitalist economy. Critical pedagogy, however, suggests that it is possible to reclaim the power of education to equalize society by teaching students to deconstruct the oppressive social norms that preferentially privilege certain status groups.

This chapter is the link between the two vantage points from which school turnaround might be studied. The first—the macro, ideological view that examines the hidden curriculum—was discussed in the previous chapter, and the second—the micro, practical view that examines the explicit curriculum in school-level turnaround reform—will be discussed in the following chapter.

In this chapter, I will continue to move towards my focus on school turnaround by examining ideology in the larger context of current education reform. I will return to a list of recent laws and reports, which I used in Chapter 1 to highlight the egalitarian promise of reform rhetoric, and discuss the specific initiatives sparked by each milestone in education reform. Next, using the theories laid out in Chapter 1, I will evaluate the ideological implications of current reform trends. Finally, I will suggest three major claims of contemporary reform ideology; these constitute this chapter's central conceptual framework. In the next chapters, I will work to identify those three claims within the practice of school turnaround.

FROM ACCOUNTABILITY TO COMPETITION: RECENT REFORM LEGISLATION

For the purpose of this discussion, the contemporary reform era began with the 1983 report *A Nation at Risk*. Because that report garnered unprecedented attention to a “crisis” in American education, I propose that its release marked the beginning of contemporary reform. The report’s claims and recommendations suggested that schools, teachers and principals were the culprits in the large-scale failure of the public school system and that it was feasible to expect schools to produce rapid, dramatic results with the adoption of the commission’s specific reform recommendations. In this section, I will show how those ideas characterize contemporary reform and trace the gradual infusion of a market economy ideology into reform legislation.

1983: A Nation at Risk

The findings and recommendations of *A Nation at Risk* are grouped into the categories of content, expectations, time, and teaching (ANAR 1983). The report claimed that secondary school curricula had been diluted to the point that students were opting to take a general program of study rather than vocational or college preparatory tracks and were receiving too many credits in elective areas at the expense of core content areas. Noting a lack of rigor and discipline in schools, it suggested that low expectations in graduation requirements, course load, and amount of homework had generated an extreme lack of motivation for academic achievement. The findings also suggested that time was used ineffectively in classrooms and on homework and that American students spent significantly less time on academic work than students in other

nations. Finally, the commission found that the teaching profession lacked rigorous requirements, prestige, and qualifications in subject content.

As a whole, the report holds school officials, teachers, and curriculum developers accountable for the mass decline of the public school system. It focuses almost exclusively on secondary schools, claiming that teachers are under-qualified and that schools are satisfied with mediocre student achievement. It suggests that by extending the time students spend on schoolwork, increasing the requirements of courses and diploma programs, and improving teacher quality, the decline of schools can be curbed. In the case of *A Nation at Risk*, the causes of poor student achievement are all rooted in school practices, and, put simply, the solution is to dramatically increase standards for teachers and students.

1994: Improving America's Schools

The 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act was reauthorized as the Improving America's Schools Act in 1994 to address the persistent gap in student achievement between middle-class children and those from low-income families (IASA 1994). The act revisited many initiatives of the original legislation, increased Title I funding for high-need schools, promoted the coordination of non-instructional social service programs to supplement school reform, decried the use of low-level tests for evaluation, and demanded intensive and sustained professional development for teachers.

The act was in many ways a variation on a theme in terms of its call for higher standards and accountability, but also introduced a novel direction for reform. It reported that equal opportunities for low-achieving students could be made available through the creation of school choice systems, the decentralization of decision-making,

and the development of public charter schools. Earmarked funds were made available to school districts that formed systems of choice by allowing parents to select the in-district public school that their child would attend. Decentralization required that school leaders be granted a degree of autonomy from restrictive requirements in order to determine the necessary means to improve student achievement. The movement for publicly-funded and privately-operated charter schools, a relatively new innovation in school reform, represented the confluence of school choice and decentralization. The first public charter law had been established in Minnesota in 1991, but the charter era effectively began with the provisions of Improving America's Schools in 1994 (Briggs et al. 1995).

A new ideology in education reform was beginning to emerge. Building upon the notion that increased standards and accountability could impel improvement in public schools, the new ideology introduced “choice” as a solution. If schools persistently failed, new charter schools would form in their wake and parents would be given the option to move children to other schools. If those persistently failing schools gradually emptied as a result of school choice, they would face closure. Charter schools had even more incentive to produce results: if *they* failed to increase student achievement, despite their freedom to employ innovative and experimental techniques, they too would face closure.

With the introduction of charters and choice, the institution of public education was transformed into a market: “buried in the thinking of choice advocates is the analogy of the marketplace, where competition for private goods and services leads to both consumers and businesses profiting” (Cuban 1990). Parents and students—the consumers in the new market—were allowed to selectively utilize schools—the commodities—based on their needs and desires. Schools of choice were effectively

forced to compete for families' patronage. In line with the laws of a market economy, the transformation dramatically decreased government intervention in schools and turned over control of public schools to the forces of supply and demand. Demands to improve student achievement by raising standards and increasing accountability remained, but school reform had been transformed by a new market ideology.

2001: No Child Left Behind

The 2001 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act under the second Bush administration echoed previous incarnations of the law in its call for fairness and equality in educational opportunity and continued to expand the market ideology in public education (NCLB 2001). No Child Left Behind, the colloquial title of the reauthorization, created the ultimatum that schools reach minimum proficiency levels for all students by adopting rigorous state standards, conducting high-quality assessments, implementing accountability systems for schools, districts and teachers, increasing the demands of teacher preparation and professional development, and meeting the specific educational needs of typically low-performing populations (low-income, minority, bilingual and special education students). The report re-emphasized "accountability," presuming that low student achievement was a result of the diluted standards and tolerance for mediocrity that *A Nation at Risk* alleged.

The law created a system of imperatives, rewards, and consequences that formalized the market forces introduced with school choice and public charter laws. If schools produced the results demanded by newly heightened standards, they were granted more freedom and autonomy; if they failed to meet expectations, school leaders faced the loss of control over organizational, curricular, pedagogical, and hiring decisions. To assess progress in meeting the goal of 100% proficiency on state-

administered standardized tests, schools were required to report annual scores for 3rd-8th grade students in order to determine whether or not the school met a threshold for “adequate yearly progress” (AYP), a measure of school quality used to identify “failing” schools. States reported data organized by district, school, and demographics including race, socioeconomic status, English language learner status, and special education status. If schools failed to meet AYP standards for two consecutive years, they lost control over decision-making and became subject to reform measures dictated by districts and states. The act spurred the development of dozens of alternative school models offered as options to reform failing schools. By offering parents the option of moving children to different schools when neighborhood schools failed to meet AYP and prompting a surge in public charters, No Child Left Behind expanded choice and competition nationwide.

2009: Race to the Top

President Obama and Secretary of Education Arne Duncan introduced the Race to the Top initiative as yet another system of incentives to reward and punish schools based on standardized testing data and compliance with federal reform mandates (Duncan 2009, RTTT 2009). The program established four key areas of reform: development of rigorous standards and assessments, adoption of data systems to provide information about students’ needs, support for teachers and principals, and increased emphasis on targeted interventions to turn around the lowest-performing schools.

The reform program set in place by Race to the Top was marked by a nuanced application of the market ideology that had developed over the past several decades. The initiative was a contest to encourage states, districts and schools to compete for resources. The market ideology that had decreased government intervention in its reign over No Child Left Behind systems of choice was *repurposed*; this time, schools were

forced to produce results not only to retain “consumers,” but also to qualify for federal funding.

Other aspects of the program *retracted* the market ideology and the competitive attitude that had pervaded public school reform. Its commitment to *support* teachers and school leaders contradicts the findings of *A Nation at Risk*, which blamed low student achievement on educators’ low standards rather than institutional factors like teacher training, professional development and allocation of resources. *Race to the Top* also promised *increased* federal control in reform efforts in the lowest-performing schools, suggesting that high-need students would be excluded from the market ideology that controlled systems of choice. A focus on the lowest-performing schools also echoes the ethos of the original 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which established Title I as a formal system for increasing resources and support for high-need, low-income students.

Race to the Top was a compromise between the *laissez-faire*, free market ideology of recent legislation and the more liberal promise of increased government intervention to improve education for the most disadvantaged students. It seems that there are two distinct funding schemes in federal reform law: while the corporate ideology rewards states and districts with increased funding for adhering to federal reform mandates, the Title I approach funnels funds directly to the lowest-performing schools. Especially in the context of President Obama’s campaign promises to combat poverty and strengthen social services for those in need, *Race to the Top* symbolized a somewhat unexpected coming-together of the two in its pursuit of equality in public education.

CRITIQUES OF CONTEMPORARY REFORM

This section engages the commentary of several scholars of education to pinpoint the ideology and hidden curriculum of contemporary reform. I avoid an evaluative lens in order to skirt controversy over the effectiveness of reform. It is important to note, though, that evidence-based arguments can be found to support or dispute nearly every reform initiative undertaken in the past several decades. Most studies that evaluate effectiveness of charter schools, systems of choice, teacher evaluation systems, and formal learning standards utilize standardized test data; an opposing faction of reformers criticizes the validity of test data and highlights adverse effects of high-stakes tests themselves. Some charter schools have been found to be truly transformative and successful in raising student achievement, while others admit to stagnant or even decreased achievement. School-level reforms like decreased class sizes, professional development programs, specialized instruction, curricular and pedagogical changes, use of data, and social services to target non-instructional factors have been investigated and reviewed with no clear consensus about the effectiveness of specific initiatives.

The fact that school reform is so closely scrutinized and widely disputed is a quality of contemporary reform in itself and a source of my own frustration. When reforms fail to produce results, they are criticized, abandoned, and replaced, indicating yet another layer of the market ideology of the contemporary reform era. The field of education, today, is dominated by “reform myths”—arguments of varying validity that complicate reform efforts (Greene 2005). Because of the controversies that preclude any clear consensus about the purposes or outcomes of specific reforms, I omit any in-depth

discussion of *evaluation* and instead focus on the *ideological* underpinnings of contemporary reform.

Though school turnaround reform is a crucial component of contemporary school reform, I have chosen not to begin a discussion of turnaround here. Instead, I hope to establish a definition of a contemporary reform ideology that will act as a lens through which I will analyze school turnaround in the following chapter.

Rapid, dramatic progress and “results”

Contemporary reform has two central assumptions: first, that it is feasible for “failing” schools to produce rapid, dramatic improvement and second, that standardized test scores are an inarguably valid measure of school quality. The former has made Americans infatuated with fads and ill-considered ideas proposed by business leaders, leading to the rapid, erratic adoption of thousands of haphazard reform proposals (Ravitch 2010, Tyack and Cuban 1995). It has been suggested that No Child Left Behind, in particular, promotes the notion that schools can be cured by adopting one of the alternative strategies offered to failing schools and thus overestimates the potential of formal interventions to turn schools around (Brady 2003).

The latter—contemporary reform’s faith in testing data “results”—has increased the influence of standardized testing, which narrows curricula, focuses on low-level skills, inappropriately assesses English language learners and special needs students, and gives schools an incentive to exclude low-scoring students from schools (Darling-Hammond 2007). High-stakes standardized testing has different effects on school culture and instruction for high-performing and low-performing schools (Diamond and Spillane 2004). Efforts to raise test scores in low-performing schools are driven by the school's objective of shedding its negative reputation and target certain students, classes

or grades whose scores have the potential to change the school's status. Test-based accountability systems in high-performing schools, however, allow teachers to use data diagnostically to give attention to specific students with the objective of reaching mastery level school-wide.

The contemporary reform attitude, as established by *A Nation at Risk*, is equally committed to the beliefs that 1) it is possible for schools to turnaround and 2) reform must produce significant quantitative results to be considered effective.

School reform or societal reform?

Throughout my discussion of the friction between the egalitarian ideology and theories of the hidden curriculum, the question is suggested: do schools affect society, or does society affect schools? An egalitarian view, one that expects public schools to equalize opportunity, narrow the achievement gap, and generate social mobility between status groups and socioeconomic classes, indicates that schools dictate social stratification. *A Nation at Risk* espoused that belief by holding schools responsible for a societal crisis. An ideology of the hidden curriculum, on the other hand, suggests that existing social inequality determines stratification in schooling.

Critics argue that contemporary reform, blindly accepting the egalitarian view, works to change *schools* instead of changing *society*. They point to evidence that unequal childhoods—differences in sociological constructs like cultural and social capital as well as prenatal health, early childhood education, parental employment, healthcare, home environments, cultural norms, and access to other resources—create inequality in students' skills and abilities as they enter school (Lareau 2003). By assuming that all children enter school as *tabula rasa* and that student achievement is a simple function of school and teacher quality, contemporary reform takes for granted the values, practices

and norms specific to a middle-class ideal and implicitly discriminates against children from low-income or minority backgrounds (Apple 1978, Tough 2008). Uniform learning standards and testing requirements fail to acknowledge culturally specific norms and histories of oppression against certain groups, and therefore replicate inequality (Giroux 2009). This critique of the corporate approach suggests that current reform totally ignores the out-of-school factors associated with the achievement gap and thus neglects the possibility that the disadvantaged students in "failing" schools might stand to benefit more from non-instructional initiatives tailored to the culturally specific needs of their communities (Duke 2012). According to Linda Darling-Hammond, reform that focuses on raising standards and improving in-school factors without equalizing funding for schools is doomed to fail (2007).

This perspective suggests that policymakers use school reform as a way to avoid responsibility for deeper and more complicated issues of income equality. Schools could not realistically be expected to eradicate poverty and inequality, and imposing the goal of equalizing society represents the evasion of public responsibility for social reform (Katz 1976). The ideology of contemporary reform, because it holds schools responsible for narrowing the achievement gap and ameliorating social inequality, cleverly postpones initiatives to attack social inequality at its source. In spite of the oft-quoted platitude "it takes a village," contemporary reform holds schools accountable with no equivalent accountability system for communities and states (Berliner 2006). In doing so, it overestimates the possibility of public education as a panacea for social change and positions the public school system to continuously fail at its supposed mission to equalize society (Tyack and Cuban 1995). This perspective demands that education policymakers shift attention from schools' culpability for the achievement gap to the

federal government's culpability for the economic policies that have contributed to the growth of the income gap (Duncan and Murnane 2011).

Privatization: the "post-public school" era

Other critics argue that contemporary "reform" is merely a guise for the large-scale dismantling of the public education system (Watkins 2012). Diane Ravitch, whose comments as both a scholar and policymaker have sparked debate for decades, suggests that contemporary reform *intentionally* sets public schools up for failure (2010). She argues that the introduction of choice and competition signal the gradual privatization of public schools and that No Child Left Behind, in creating a 2014 deadline for all schools to achieve 100% proficiency, effectively set in place an expiration date for public education. Contemporary reform impels the privatization of public schools by producing evidence that public schools are failing and suggesting that choice, vouchers and charter schools will revolutionize education (Ravitch 2013, Berry 2013). Alternatives to traditional neighborhood school systems transfer responsibility over schools from public governance to private control and force schools to compete for funding and students in the same way that businesses compete for consumers. If the trend of privatization continues, the corporate reform era will be followed by the post-public school era (Ladson-Billings 2013).

Further, as I have shown, contemporary reform blames teachers and principals for school failure and names business leaders the new experts in public education. Policy elites, consultants and the administrators of charter schools take control over decision-making for public schools and effectively remove the influence of and public respect for teachers (Barkan 2011). In this line of thinking, the implicit objective of contemporary reform is to displace educators and destroy public schools altogether.

CONCLUSION: CORPORATE REFORM IDEOLOGY

Contemporary education reform, I propose, is better termed “corporate reform.” Its proponents argue that low student achievement can be blamed primarily on factors within schools’ control, and that market-based incentive systems provide a solution to the problems that riddle public schools (Greene 2005). Corporate reform adopts the language of democracy and the rhetoric of an egalitarian ideology of education, but, as I’ve shown, actually represents a movement to shape society to fit the economic interests of corporations (Watkins 2012). The corporate ideology labels failing schools and imposes standards, tests, and accountability systems without consulting the communities affected by reform initiatives. According to Paulo Freire’s critical pedagogy, the oppressed can only be liberated if they dictate the terms of the liberation. A movement for liberation—in this case, a plan to turn around a school—that is designed and implemented by the oppressors will reinforce existing oppression. School reform “which begins with the egoistic interests of the oppressors (an egoism cloaked in the false generosity of paternalism),” then, will simply serve to reproduce a social structure that lends unequivocal authority to the oppressors (Freire 1970:54).

To summarize the arguments of this chapter, there are three major claims inherent in corporate reform ideology:

1. It is possible to quickly fix failing schools and provide valid quantitative proof of rapid improvement.
2. It is the responsibility of schools, not society, to eliminate the achievement gap and in turn reduce social inequality. If stratification in schools persists, schools are failing.

3. Public education should be governed by market forces. Business leaders, not educators, are qualified to lead education reform and schools will only be motivated to improve if they are forced to compete for resources and “consumers.”

Corporate reform ideology, in spite of a professed egalitarian objective, strives to sate demands for education reform by promoting a laissez-faire, free market education system that requires little government intervention and requires schools to compete against each other for resources. By transforming public schools into private commodities, corporate ideology puts business leaders in control of education. In several ways, corporate reform is an anti-teacher ideology: from *A Nation at Risk*'s original scapegoating of teachers and principals as the cause of the “crisis” in education to the anti-union ethos of recent charter legislation, contemporary reform has pointed fingers at “bad” teachers and shifted authority over reform to non-educator elites.

A contradiction appears between the egalitarian rhetoric of contemporary reform efforts and the three claims that I suggest are the defining characteristics of corporate reform ideology. Because reform laws and leaders claim to be pursuing the equalizing goal of education, the deregulation and laissez-faire principles of corporate reform ideology come to be associated with the egalitarian ideology of education. Corporate reform has thus come to be known as a highly democratic and egalitarian approach to improving public education. Support for charter schools and school choice, hallmarks of the corporate reform ideology, is closely associated with income inequality; those who are marginalized by stratification in schools have become the most vocal advocates for corporate reform (Corcoran and Stoddard 2006). The tacit reproduction of social hegemony, then, is perhaps even more effectively concealed by a reform rhetoric that

purportedly represents democracy, equality and liberty. This analysis, in one interpretation, reveals an inherent contradiction between capitalism and democracy and suggests that the legitimate foundations of opportunity have been corrupted by the hidden curriculum (Brown 2003). On the other hand, perhaps the coupling of democracy and the free market represents a neoliberal reimagining of the meaning of equality in a capitalist society (Scott et al. 2002).

To return to an argument in my first chapter, members of the most privileged and dominant groups in society have a specific interest in producing a passive, obedient laboring class. To protect their place of power, the capitalist class—or, in this case, the business leaders taking over the field of education—will shape a system of education that perpetuates the existing inequalities of the social order. The school system—and, perhaps, the field of school *reform* as well—functions as a way for upper-class or capitalist interests to preserve the status quo without violating the sacred American value of democracy (Swartz 2012).

CHAPTER 3 / SCHOOL TURNAROUND

This chapter first discusses the history of school turnaround reform, also called whole school reform or comprehensive school reform, and identifies markers of the corporate ideology inherent in the concept of turnaround. I then address the ability of turnaround projects to use increased autonomy and funding (from federal, state and district reform incentive systems) to identify and meet the culturally specific needs of communities instead of imposing the norms of dominant society. I develop a list of specific factors that have been found to affect student achievement and suggest ways that school-level turnaround reform could systematically address those areas of need.

The conceptual framework established in this chapter is a set of four major areas for reform—organization and school climate, culturally responsive pedagogy, school readiness, and parent involvement—that might be targeted in turnaround reform. This constitutes the micro view of turnaround reform by considering the explicit curriculum of the specific school-level reform initiatives that are put into practice.

WHOLE SCHOOL REFORM AND SCHOOL TURNAROUND

School turnaround was included in No Child Left Behind legislation as an option for schools designated as “failing” and grew in popularity during the tenure of Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, who led turnaround efforts in Chicago prior to his appointment in the Obama administration (Gewertz 2009). Under the turnaround model, schools must replace principals, screen and rehire staff, implement new governance structures, and adopt comprehensive reform measures including curriculum changes, professional development, and extended learning time, all at the behest of policy-makers at the district or state level.

Though it gained popularity in the past decade, school turnaround was originally introduced in public school reform beginning in the 1990s (Meyers 2012). New American Schools was launched in 1991 to implement whole-school reform as an alternative to the recent barrage of piecemeal reforms that had not stimulated the dramatic change they promised (Berends et al. 2002). In 1997, Congress sanctioned whole-school reform under the Comprehensive School Reform Development Program, which provided federal grants to low-performing schools to develop and implement research-based whole school reform plans (Education Commission of the States). In 2009, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan sparked a rebirth of whole-school reform when he called for the turnaround of the nation's 5,000 lowest performing schools (Gewertz 2009). Over 8,500 public schools nationwide are currently using research-based comprehensive school models (Education Commission of the States).

The central premise of turnaround is the belief that improvement in student achievement required the reconceptualization of traditional practices of learning and teaching (McChesney 1998). Though New American Schools presumed that there was a single unifying design for high-quality schools that could be systematically implemented to dramatically improve student achievement, subsequent turnaround efforts have flexibly adjusted school design to meet needs specific to the communities they target. Educators, policy-makers and reformers have yet to identify a single framework for turnaround that is reliably successful on a large scale (Herman 2012). Turnaround is better understood as a procedural approach to school reform rather than a reform model in itself, because actual turnaround projects vary based on a number of factors.

There are, however, similarities among turnaround reform ventures. Those common elements include dramatic changes in school leadership (whether by

changing principal or by existing principal embracing fundamental change), consistent goals for data-driven improvement of instruction, proof of early visible progress, efforts to build a committed staff (Darwin et al. 2008), as well as benchmark tests to monitor students' progress and mastery, targeted academic interventions, school-wide focus and increased instructional time spent on math and literacy, extended school days, and scheduled teacher planning time during the school day (Darwin et al. 2008). Five attributes of reform—specificity, authority, power, consistency and stability—have been found to affect the fidelity of implementation, immediate effects, and lasting changes of comprehensive school reform (Desimone 2002).

THE IDEOLOGY BEHIND TURNAROUND REFORM

School turnaround reform exemplifies the corporate reform ideology. It presumes that persistently low-performing schools in poor urban communities can produce rapid and dramatic gains with sweeping changes in leadership, organization and teaching staff. Turnaround grants control to a new leader or leadership entity under a contract with a school district, requires a comprehensive “turnaround plan” not unlike a business plan, and promises results. The turnaround approach suggests that teachers and principals are to blame for low student achievement and that they must be removed in order for schools to improve. The expansion of turnaround reform, because it creates jobs for charter franchisers, educational management companies, and foundation-funded nonprofit organizations, suggests a new and lucrative direction for education reformers in the private sector (Karp 2010).

To evaluate the corporate ideology inherent in turnaround reform, I return to the three principles that I identified as the central beliefs of corporate school reform.

1. First, the expectation of rapid, dramatic “results”: to measure effectiveness, school turnaround efforts are required to produce results in the form of significant, demonstrable gains on standardized tests.
2. Second, the belief that schools should be held responsible for stratification: because turnaround promises to improve schools by reorganizing and rehiring, presumes that low student achievement can be attributed to inefficient organization and poor instructional practices rather than social inequalities.
3. Finally, the market ideology: turnaround is a component of the corporate reform agenda, operates under a business model, and is usually led by consultants or business people rather than educators. Turnaround plans adopt the venture capitalist model for innovation; if efforts to turn schools around failed to produce results, the company or organization leading the reform efforts would lose their contract.

SCHOOL-LEVEL REFORM: ATTACKING THE LOCI OF INEQUALITY

Though turnaround is a critical component of the corporate reform approach, it also holds the promise of liberating struggling schools from the high-stakes standardized testing and teacher contract stipulations that constrain school-level reform in traditional public schools. Turnaround reform has the potential to grant schools and local communities the autonomy to develop a reform agenda specific to the needs of the school population.

There are a variety of conceptualizations to explain differences in student achievement and systematically address those factors. A black box model, which posits

that student learning is a simple function of economic inputs including school expenditures, facilities and equipment, and teacher credentials, does not account for disparities in school readiness, home environments and parenting, and families' access to educational resources. Black box theory gives way to the nested layers approach, a more comprehensive framework that links student achievement to resources. In this model, student learning is a function of pedagogy and content coverage, which are influenced by school-level resources like time, material and skills. Contemporary loose coupling theory traces the dynamic and multidirectional relationship between resources, teacher training and socialization, pedagogy and content coverage, student learning, and pervasive societal norms (Gamoran et al. 2000). Loose coupling theory suggests a reform approach that accounts for the confluence of all factors affecting learning, including instructional and organizational *within-school* factors as well as social and economic disparities *outside schools*.

Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory also contributes to loose coupling theory and its implications for reform. Ecological systems theory describes child development as a complex confluence of interactions between several levels of environment ranging from the microsystem of a child's biological basis for cognition and behavior to the mesosystem of school-level and family-level factors to the ecosystem that comprises communities, culture, and society (Bronfenbrenner 1979, 1986, 2009). Systems theory somewhat mediates the debate between nature and nurture that guides the study of child development; because development occurs in the interaction between nature and nurture, the two are inseparable. According to Bronfenbrenner's theory, because it is impossible to disentangle in-school factors from the web of other multi-level factors that affect children's cognitive and emotional development, school reform

must expand its purview of education and address out-of-school factors including early childhood education, after-school and summer learning, parenting and home environments in order to improve academic achievement (Berliner 2006). Education reform efforts are often concentrated on in-school factors such as class size, teacher qualifications, curriculum and academic standards, incentives, and evaluation when perhaps the causes of low performance—and perhaps the site of viable, efficient reform—lies outside of schools. Perhaps reform efforts in high-poverty areas should be focused on improving the educational opportunities available to low-income children at every stage of development, beginning at birth (Duncan and Murnane 2011).

Schools of the 21st Century, a reform model pioneered by Edward Zigler of the Yale University Bush Center in Child Development and Social Policy, is an example of comprehensive approach that links schools with non-academic services designed to promote the optimal development of children (Finn-Stevenson et al. 1995). The model reflects the finding that out-of-school factors like school readiness have critical effects on student achievement. The comprehensive reform model includes year-round school-based early childhood education programs for children ages 3-5, school-based before- and after-school and vacation care for children ages 5-12, as well as family support and outreach services like home visiting, health care, referrals, adult and family literacy programs, prenatal services, and outreach for community day care providers. The 21st Century Model synthesizes the body of research that promotes school readiness as a reform priority and derives a comprehensive school reform model to address out-of-school factors that affect student achievement.

In this section, I discuss several factors both within and outside schools that have been found to have salient effects on student achievement and the ways that turnaround reform might address those factors.

Within schools

Within-school differences exist in organizational and instructional areas. Organizational factors include teacher collaboration and relationships, school climate and culture, and leadership style. There are far fewer instructional factors relevant to turnaround reform; though turnaround schools are freed from many requirements, they still must adhere to state learning standards and must meet federal proficiency requirements on standardized tests. I have chosen to focus on a single instructional factor: the implementation of culturally responsive pedagogical strategies.

Organizational factors

The effects of organizational factors are most visible in school climate, which encompasses students', teachers', school personnel's, and parents' individual experiences and perceptions of school safety, responsiveness, and community in the school environment. Over the past three decades, school reform has increasingly regarded school climate as a crucial area for improvement with the potential to decrease student absenteeism, increase students' motivation to learn, lessen the negative influence of low socioeconomic status on academic achievement, and contribute to students' sense of personal well-being and belongingness in a school community (Cohen et al. 2013). School climate research grows out of Bronfenbrenner's classic ecological systems theory and loose coupling theory, which map the influence of several levels of environmental circumstances on individual outcomes.

The presence of caring adults who form positive, responsive relationships with students has been linked to student engagement, attachment to school community, appropriate behavior, classroom participation and favorable academic outcomes. Student achievement is also promoted by the inclusion of evidence-based social, emotional, civic, ethical, and service-learning education programs, which might engage culturally responsive pedagogical practices (Durlak et al. 2011). Further, academic achievement and students' personal development are contingent on students' feelings of safety in their school environment (Devine and Cohen 2007). Schools with clear, supportive and well-enforced norms and rules are better equipped to combat physical violence and bullying (Gottfredson et al. 2005).

Team-like relationships and democratic, collaborative decision-making also have significant effects on both school climate and student achievement. Elements of team-like staff relations are also linked to teacher retention, especially in schools with large populations of low-income, minority students. Teacher turnover is lower in schools where teachers perceive themselves to have greater autonomy, trusting and collaborative relationships with colleagues and the ability to participate in school-level decision-making, and sufficient resources and facilities. Higher rates of teacher turnover are linked to lower student scores in English language arts and math, especially in schools with more low-performing and black students, even after controlling for changes in distribution of teacher quality (Loeb et al. 2012).

Democratic and collaborative decision-making also suggests an alternative to current accountability strategies that place full responsibility on teachers and students and allow the state to abdicate culpability for improving low-performing schools. By calling upon administrators, teachers, parents and community members to identify

inequalities in access to educational resources and develop strategies to meet students' culturally specific needs, laissez-faire market-based "accountability" systems could be replaced with a dialogical process of reforming schools (Lipman 2004).

The role of principals in turnaround reform is also crucial, yet nuanced: leaders must be able to quickly earn the trust of the community and build positive staff relationships. Associations have been found between achievement and principals' support of teacher work, teachers' sense of efficacy and responsibility, and engagement of teachers in making structural and curricular changes (Lee and Smith 1995). In a study of teacher retention, the most salient factors affecting first-year teachers' decisions to leave teaching were administrative support, student behavior, safety of working conditions and district policy (Boyd et al. 2010). Some research, however, indicates that team-like, collaborative staff relations are threatened by principals' top-down control based on personal reform agendas (Bennett 2012). The pressure to produce "results" in the accountability culture of corporate reform often compels principals to control schools tightly, decreasing the possibility for instructional innovation by teachers (Barth 1991). Principals of turnaround schools are charged with the nuanced responsibility of organizing and leading a school with virtually no existing order, which presumes a high level of control, and yet focusing on staff management practices that empower teachers, allow for creativity in classroom teaching, and promote democratic decision-making.

Research about successful school leadership—second only to classroom teaching as an influence on student learning—focuses on staff motivation, commitment, and working conditions to improve teaching and achievement rather than strong-arming top-down reform plans that might fail to take into account the context of a school's turnaround. During the early stages of school turnaround, considered the crisis

stabilization stage, leadership focuses on building vision, setting direction, improving communication, and building the foundation for development of new cultural norms. Successful school leaders implement a repertoire of practices through patterns of responsiveness rather than dictation; they are sensitive to the historical context of the turnaround and craft policies and practices to meet the specific needs of the school population. Especially in turnaround schools facing the challenges of lagging achievement rates and drastic staff changes, successful school leadership carefully considers the context of turnaround and focuses on improving teacher motivation, commitment, and working conditions to in turn improve teaching and learning (Harris et al. 2008).

Teachers' perceptions of school climate are also key indicators of the quality of teaching and learning taking place in classrooms. When teachers feel supported by the principal and other teachers, they feel more committed to their work, have the sense that they have the ability to positive affect student learning, feel more connected to the school community, and experience less emotional exhaustion. Trust, collaboration and "team-like" relations among school staff are conducive to school-level reform that improves student achievement (Bryk and Schneider 2002).

Cohen et al. point out in their comprehensive review of school climate research that, despite the proven importance of positive school climate for student achievement, the education reform movement lacks a clear definition of school climate or a consistent, effective approach for improving school climate (2013). Moreover, critics suggest that school reform at the state and federal level has, over the past decades, increasingly focused on elements of reform that actually undermine the development of positive school climate: the rise of standardized testing encroaches on teachers' ability to

incorporate culturally responsive non-academic educational programs, school choice systems fractures school community and relationships between teachers and families, and rigorous teacher evaluation creates feelings of competitiveness, suspicion, and inadequacy among school staff (Ravitch 2010).

Culturally responsive pedagogy

The report "Equality of Educational Opportunity," widely known as the Coleman Report, famously suggested that variation in student achievement was most closely associated with disparities in home backgrounds and socioeconomic status (Coleman 1966). The report suggested that, because students' backgrounds most significantly dictate their academic achievement, schools actually perpetuates inequality because they fail to recognize and account for the socioeconomic disparities in students' starting points. Further, teachers' preconceptions, expectations, and evaluations of students might reflect racial bias on the basis of both actual difference in student abilities' and backgrounds and also ungrounded stereotypes that actually might perpetuate and even widen the racial achievement gap (Ferguson 2003). A truly equalizing pedagogy, then, identifies, validates and caters to cultural differences that might affect student achievement.

Progressive pedagogies offer an alternative to reform approaches that perpetuate the hidden curriculum and exacerbate inequality. John Dewey laid the groundwork for a theory of progressive education that was built on an appreciation for diversity, experience, democracy and student-centered instruction (Dewey 1938). He advocated for the heterogeneous grouping of students to generate dialogue amongst learners of different beliefs, abilities, backgrounds, and interests. Progressive education upheld

a commitment to the development of critical thinking skills through instruction that focuses on student-centered, explorative, hands-on experiential learning. Dewey believed that the school represents a microcosm of society and thus could be a laboratory for democracy; students, like adults, must meet unexpected obstacles or problems and their abilities are best measured by the innovative solutions they are able to use to grow and learn from challenging experiences. To the progressive educator, learning is necessarily social and interactive, and academic education must be coupled with a socio-emotional curriculum to facilitate the development of socially aware, informed, and engaged young citizens (Dewey and Dewey 1915).

Paulo Freire extends Dewey's commitment to dialogue and experience by suggesting a "problem-posing" pedagogy, within which reality is a process fueled by student and teacher participants alike (1970). By asking provocative questions and guiding students in their own process of questioning, inventing, and re-imagining, a problem-posing teacher is able to teach in a way that is student-generated, relevant, and memorable. If students are equipped to think generatively and analytically, developing what Freire calls critical consciousness, the skewed power relations of the classroom will become obvious and students will be able to overthrow the system under which they were oppressed. Critical pedagogy, another rendering of Freire's problem-posing and Dewey's progressive experiential education, is characterized by a student-centered, experience-based approach that seeks to equip students to actively construct knowledge, recognize inequality and oppression, and deconstruct norms (McLaren 1995, hooks 1994).

Gloria Ladson-Billings' culturally responsive pedagogy provides a contemporary model for progressive pedagogy that knits together several tenets of progressive,

student-centered, problem-posing critical pedagogy (Ladson-Billings 2009). Pointing out that "color-blindness" effectively ignores cultural difference and discriminates against some students, Ladson-Billings suggests that teachers' and administrators' failure to recognize cultural difference can be ameliorated by the implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy that capitalizes on students' experiences, abilities and skills to nurture self-esteem, promote individuality, and scaffold existing knowledge instead of imposing the expectations of dominant, mainstream cultural norms. Race-blindness, she suggests, is in fact race dysconsciousness. In her study of "Dreamkeepers," exceptional teachers in disadvantaged schools, Ladson-Billings found that the culturally responsive teaching that her subjects exhibited achieved a number of goals: it made lessons more relatable and engaging, it created a sense of camaraderie between teachers and students, and it allowed students to actually identify personally with otherwise rote academic tasks.

The Central Park East schools, founded by Deborah Meier, promote a philosophy of "Habits of Mind," which are neither abstract ideologies nor simplistic instructions for behavior and rather provide a framework through which students can reason through any problem or situation (Meier 2002). Teachers use the Habits of Mind to reinforce curricular concepts taught in the classroom and remind students to use the principles to solve social, ethical, and intellectual problems of their own. When students make mistakes, administrators do not simply reprimand, rather they ask students to arrive at their own conclusions about their own behavior. Students are not inculcated with meaningless chants and mantras, rather they are encouraged to use the Habits of Mind in an engaged, dialogical way reminiscent of Freire's problem-posing pedagogy. The Habits of Mind help to achieve CPE's project of including students as capable,

participating authority figures in their own education. By incorporating culturally responsive pedagogy and recognizing the abilities of students rather than suspecting or predicting failure, the school vests its students with the power and motivation to learn. At CPESS, routines are modified to fit ever-changing needs rather than expecting students to fit into a fixed structure that does not allow for innovation. Instead of treating students and teachers as pawns to be controlled and manipulated, exceptional schools honor the successes of their teachers and provide them with comprehensive support systems that encourage engaging, culturally responsive, problem-posing pedagogy.

Outside schools

Families' socioeconomic status and the imbricated disparities in cultural capital affect not only parents' perspectives on family-school dynamics and involvement in schooling, but also suggest significant differences in home environments, parenting practices, and preschool experience linked to socioeconomic status (Lareau 1987). Low socioeconomic status (SES) is associated with smaller gains on math and reading tests in kindergarten and first grade, especially when clustered with other elements of socioeconomic stratification including parental educational background and factors of parenting and home environment (Cooper 2010). Another crucial area of research suggests that achievement gaps grow primarily during out-of-school time, including the summer months, providing further evidence that out-of-school factors predominantly affect disparities in student achievement (Broh et al. 2004). In this section, I focus on both school readiness factors—maternal health, home environments, early childhood education or childcare, and parenting practices—and parent involvement.

School readiness

A number of factors influence socioeconomic disparities in school readiness. Low-income children “tend to be less healthy, to have weaker preschool experiences, to have only one parent, to move frequently, and have unstable educational experiences” (Orfield and Lee 2011). Low-income households to have fewer books and toys and hear fewer words during the first five years of their lives, all symptoms of poverty that predict later delays in literacy development (Bradley and Caldwell 1984).

The quality of early childhood education or daycare program also impacts school readiness. High-quality early childcare, characterized by safe facilities with developmentally-appropriate materials and consistent, responsive providers, predicts higher levels of cognitive and language development (Bates et al. 1994). Participation in high-quality center-based childcare programs as compared to licensed family childcare homes (which, though often more convenient, tend to have less qualified providers) is strongly related to cognitive development as measured by tests of school readiness, pre-academic skills, and language acquisition (Belsky et al. 2007). High quality of childcare provider also corresponds to fewer future social and behavioral problems as reported by children’s teachers. When quality, quantity and type care is stable over time, these positive effects are especially strong. Low-quality, earlier age of entry and long or increasing hours—typical of low-income childcare environments—predict aggressive social behavior and lower scores on cognitive and language assessments. Disparities in early childhood education have dire implications for low-income children, who are more likely to be in childcare for longer hours in low-quality care with unresponsive and unqualified providers.

In addition to these findings of childcare effects, though, measures of parenting quality proved to be a stronger predictor of school readiness, later achievement, and positive ratings of behavior. In *Unequal Childhoods*, Annette Lareau identifies two distinct styles of parenting and home environment that stratify students before they even enter kindergarten (2003). Lareau draws on the sociological notion of cultural capital, which accounts for the set of non-economic personal characteristics that constrain individuals' social class and mobility. Markers of cultural capital include education, skills, language and style of speech, physical appearance, group membership, family structure, social networks, cultural practices, and place of residence (Bourdieu 2007). Parenting style and home environment, Lareau suggests, are crucial components of cultural capital. Whereas traditional schooling tends to favor the concerted cultivation characteristic of white, middle class parenting, these schools strive to recognize and account for diversity of backgrounds, including the accomplishment of natural growth model of low-income, non-white parenting to shape pedagogy (Lareau 2003).

Economist James Heckman argues that education reform offers the greatest and economic returns when spending is directed at mitigating inequality in children's cognitive, linguistic, social and emotional development during early sensitive periods for development in the preschool years (Heckman 2006). Investment in early childhood education is more economically efficient than interventions during and after schooling, providing a 16% rate of return on federal dollars spent on education in the form of reduced prison spending and lower crime rates. Favorable developmental outcomes are linked to early cognitive and non-cognitive skills that are facilitated by regular and varied environmental stimulation. The Perry Preschool Program, a 2-year intervention in Ypsilanti, Michigan that provided home visitation and morning preschool programs for

disadvantaged black children between 1962 and 1967, found that though the Perry treatment children performed no better on IQ tests than the control group, they were more likely to graduate from high school, receive higher salaries, and own homes (Schweinhart et al. 1988, Barnes et al. 1993, Barnett et al. 2005). The Perry findings indicate that, by focusing on non-cognitive development during the preschool years, reform efforts could significantly improve long-term outcomes for children from disadvantaged families.

Potential reform efforts targeting school readiness might take the form of outreach programs for parents, collaboration with local early intervention agencies, or formal early childhood education programs offered in schools.

Parent involvement

Factors including school culture and climate, leadership, goals, and teacher relationships are all facilitated by increased levels of parent involvement (Chubb and Moe 1988). All other factors being equal, schools are more likely to develop effective organizations if parents are more involved, cooperative and informed (measured, for example, by parent-teacher organization membership and parent-teacher communication). If, theoretically, parents in low-performing schools increased involvement to the level of parents in high-performing schools, measures of school quality would increase 50th percentile to 79th percentile.

In another in-depth ethnography of two public elementary schools in California, Lareau also identified ways that parent involvement in schooling varies with socioeconomic class (Lareau 2000). Borrowing again from Pierre Bourdieu's frameworks of social and cultural capital, Lareau identified class-related patterns of parent

involvement and tested several hypotheses to explain the variation. Importantly, teachers at both schools had similar expectations and requests of parents, primarily focusing on the “three Rs”: reinforcing the curriculum, reading at home, and responding to teachers’ requests. Teachers welcomed and encouraged parent involvement, but notably did not seem to prefer a "partnership" with parents, as previous research has suggested, and resented some parents' efforts to monitor and influence their children's education.

Through her observations and interviews with parents and teachers at a school in an affluent area, Lareau found that middle-class parents’ involvement in schooling was characterized by interconnectedness. These parents (almost exclusively mothers), most of whom were friends with other parents in the classroom and had flexible schedules conducive to frequent school visits and volunteer shifts, viewed education as a holistic, continuous process that extended beyond the school day. They closely monitored their children’s progress, sought out information about special programs or other educational options for their children, and evaluated their children in comparison to classmates. Though teachers at this school encouraged that parents support teaching by reading at home and interpreted parent involvement as supportive, Lareau found that the intensity of middle-class parents’ involvement was linked to heightened stress and pressure on children, especially low-achievers.

The pattern of parent involvement in a predominantly working-class community, meanwhile, was marked by separation. Parents deferred to teachers' professional expertise, often appeared nervous or anxious in interactions with teachers, rarely had social ties to other parents or teachers, had almost exclusively non-academic complaints and concerns, and usually did not have specific information about curriculum or their children's progress. Working-class parents considered education to be contained within

school walls and school hours, and did not consider themselves to play an active role in schooling. Children from working-class families, then, experience what Lareau calls a single educational career, meaning that children's success in school is negotiated on the basis of student ability, diligence, and performance, and is not influenced by parent involvement. Class-related differences in parent-school dynamics were especially stark for the families of children who were struggling in school. In affluent families, parents were more aware of students' progress and were able to increase their involvement at the school and emphasis on academic enrichment at home when children were falling behind.

After evaluating several explanations for class-related variation in patterns of parent involvement in schooling, Lareau found that parents did not vary in the value they placed on education, nor did teachers vary in their expectations or treatment of parents. The most viable explanation for variation in parent-school dynamics was social class, which affects parents' ability to help their children with schoolwork, see themselves as equals to teachers, and speak confidently and assertively with school staff. Lareau also found a parallel between class variation in nature of work and parents' conceptions of their role in schooling. Affluent parents, whose jobs tended to extend beyond the workday and require work at home, considered schooling to be an interconnected, continuous effort shared between school and home; working-class parents, whose jobs required only official work hours, saw a sharp separation between school and family life. Social networks characteristic of parents in affluent communities but virtually nonexistent among working-class parents proved to be a crucial cultural resource that affluent families employed to be closely involved in their children's schooling.

Joyce Epstein, who has written extensively on the importance of parent involvement in schooling, promotes the development of partnerships between schools and families, and identifies six elements of successful partnerships: 1) parenting and maintaining supportive home environments, 2) communication between teachers and parents, 3) parent volunteering in schools, 4) homework help and other activities for learning at home, 5) parent decision-making, and 6) community-school collaboration (Epstein 1996). When teachers are committed to taking into account class-based differences in parents' involvement style and consciously working to incorporate parents into the classroom, parents rate teachers more favorably, feel more qualified to help their children, increase interactions with children at home (Becker and Epstein 1982; Epstein 1986). Teachers in smaller, self-contained classrooms are more likely to maintain close communication with parents, and schools in which teachers are more similar (culturally and educationally) to colleagues and parents tend to have stronger parent involvement practices (Epstein and Dauber 1991).

Others have found that parent involvement (homework help and school volunteering) does not significantly affect academic performance, but it effectively reduces students' behavioral problems, which may contribute to eventual cognitive and academic gains (Domina 2005).

Parent involvement programs that focus on increasing minority parents' social and intellectual capital—that is, strengthening parents' social ties and providing knowledge about the school's practices and their children's performance—improve parents' ability to organize and make change in the educational system as collective and individual actors (Bolivar and Chrispeels 2011). Similarly, school-linked community programs structured to mobilize parent networks in low-income minority schools have

the potential to reduce family stress and improve parents' social capital, cultural and linguistic competencies, levels of inclusion in school community, and feelings of efficacy (Alameda-Lawson and Lawson 2012).

CONCLUSION: IDEOLOGY AND ELEMENTS OF TURNAROUND REFORM

In this chapter, I hope to have defined school turnaround and further clarified the two separate frameworks I use to consider turnaround reform in my two case studies.

First, the macro, ideological lens: What is the ideology of each example of school turnaround? What are the ideological differences between an informal turnaround school and an official turnaround school? Do turnaround ideologies align with corporate reform ideology?

Second, the micro, practical lens: What are the specific elements employed in turnaround efforts? Where does school turnaround locate the root of inequalities in student achievement, and what measures are taken to narrow the achievement gap? Do turnaround plans focus on factors within schools or outside schools? Do the specific efforts of turnaround schools fall into the four categories—school organization and climate, culturally responsive pedagogy, school readiness, and parent involvement—that I have defined in the previous sections?

The following chapter discusses the research methods I used in my ethnographic research. The next two chapters are each dedicated to a careful description of each of my case studies. The final chapter revisits both the ideological and practical questions that I have posed and provides a careful analysis of my case studies through both frameworks.

CHAPTER 4 / METHODOLOGY

RATIONALE

Turnaround reform, which I defined in Chapter 2 as a crucial piece of corporate reform ideology, overhauls low-performing schools to demonstrate rapid, dramatic improvement. With the same parents and students but entirely new teachers, organizational strategies, and school leaders, turnaround schools attempt to make significant changes that will stimulate gains in student achievement. Previous research, which I summarized in the final sections of Chapter 3, indicates that the most crucial areas to target are school organization and climate, culturally responsive pedagogy, school readiness, and parental involvement.

I am particularly curious about the ways that turnaround efforts foster relationships with families and address disparities in school readiness and parent involvement. Annette Lareau's studies of socioeconomic disparities in child-rearing practices and parent involvement patterns indicate that populations of low-income, non-white students have culturally specific needs that influence learning (Lareau 2000, 2003). Because turnaround efforts target low-income, minority communities, it seems crucial that those schools develop practices to address important out-of-school factors that influence achievement. Because parents' feelings of belongingness, efficacy and trust in the school community are crucial to student learning, the effects of turnaround are mediated by the consequences of reform on the school community and family-school relationships.

Though school turnaround is considered by many to be a panacea for education reform, it is important not only to examine effectiveness of the practical components of

reform but also to consider the hidden curriculum and reform ideology that underlies school turnaround efforts. This study works to identify the elements of school turnaround reform, analyze the community response to reform measures, and distinguish the ideological underpinnings of turnaround by collecting qualitative data at two turnaround schools. One school represents an official, formal turnaround, as dictated by the state department of education and the school district. The other is an example of informal turnaround achieved by a dynamic principal *without* the dramatic reorganization and rehiring process characteristic of formal school turnaround. Both have undergone sweeping changes in areas including school organization, staff, policies, leadership, and parent outreach. By comparing two turnaround projects with clearly distinct origins, this study seeks to identify the differences in practices and ideology that are unique to each.

SAMPLE

The sample is drawn from two schools in central Connecticut. The schools differ in size, location, and turnaround status: Macdonough is a small elementary school in a small city district that was been unofficially turned around by a change in leadership several years ago, Milner is a larger K-8 school in a large city that has been overtaken by a charter consulting organization in an official turnaround project that began in 2012. Milner is operated by Family Urban Schools of Excellence (FUSE), a charter organization that oversees several other schools in the Jumoke network. Because the school is still a member of the Hartford Public Schools district, however, school control is shared between the district office, FUSE, and the Milner administration. Milner is the first Jumoke school under district control; existing Jumoke charter schools are under the

direct control of FUSE. Macdonough, in contrast, is one of eight elementary schools in the small Middletown Public School district.

Both schools are located in neighborhoods with mostly poor, non-white populations; both are historically low-performing schools and therefore targets for large-scale mainstream education reform efforts as dictated by legislation like No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top. Both are unique examples of school revitalization that are supported by mainstream education reform and yet freed from restrictive policies that encroach on school-level control. Both are neighborhood schools in high-poverty areas. Both schools have a history of low performance and frequent turnaround of principals. Because these schools share characteristics including high percentage of students qualifying for free and reduced price lunch, low test scores, low levels of parent involvement, et cetera, all of which are common to “failing” schools as identified by AYP standards, they represent similar schools nationwide that become targets for “turnaround” reform efforts.

Milner closely resembles a whole school reform model that was designed to meet the needs of low-performing African American students in urban schools and was evaluated in 2000 by a team of researchers from the American Institutes for Research and Yale University’s Bush Center in Child Development and Social Policy (Desimone et al. 2000). The CoZi model integrates Edward Zigler’s Schools of the 21st Century model, which includes an early childhood education program, before- and after-school programs, and family support programs, and the James Comer School Development Program for school management and collaborative decision-making. The study found that parent involvement and school climate improved over the one-year evaluation period, but student achievement scores remained unchanged. In my case study of Milner

School, I will consider several of the same elements discussed in the CoZi study to determine whether or not there is uniformity between results in whole school reform efforts.

It is important to admit that the designation of Macdonough as an “informal turnaround” is all my own. To my knowledge, Macdonough has never been termed a “turnaround” school by the state of Connecticut or Middletown Public School system. I decided to use the school as a counterexample because I perceived the sort of “rapid, dramatic improvement” that is the goal of formal school turnaround reform in predominantly low-income urban school communities. Further, Macdonough had been named a “Success Story” by the Connecticut Coalition for Achievement Now (ConnCAN) in 2009, which provided further evidence that the school had undergone rapid and dramatic change *without* an official designation as a turnaround school (Pionzio 2009).

The sample intentionally includes one official and one unofficial turnaround school in order to identify 1) practices and ideologies that are only present or possible in one paradigm or the other and 2) common practices and ideologies present in both turnaround. This method is useful because it will help to elucidate the distinction between formal turnaround and unplanned, informal school-level innovation. I hope to identify differences in the ideology implicit in the two case studies in order to identify the ideology that characterizes formal school turnaround.

I also hope to make claims about the specific elements of turnaround reform. Previous literature indicates that factors like parental educational background, family income, preschool experience, and home environment are the best predictors of the socioeconomic and racial achievement gap. This research suggests not only that children

from working-class non-white families begin school at a disadvantage to middle-class white peers, but also that schools serving marginalized student populations might combat disadvantage by instituting policies that address salient out-of-school disparities. The choice of two neighborhood schools allows the study to focus on school practices that are uniquely tailored to the specific needs of communities. By extending the reach of reform beyond the classroom, both schools acknowledge that regimented academic instruction alone cannot counteract the pervasive effects of social inequality and instead develop practices that promote effective organizational strategies, positive school culture, culturally responsive pedagogy, school readiness, parent involvement and a collective sense of belonging in a cohesive, supportive school community. It is crucial to this study that both schools are neighborhood schools; because the vast majority of their students have similar home environments and backgrounds, the schools stand to benefit markedly from the development of community-specific reform efforts that might depart from national education standards.

METHODS

To investigate the elements and ideology of turnaround reform, I developed an ethnographic research plan for observations and interviews at each school. My research plan called for observations of each first and fifth grade class at each school for two one-hour sessions each. In-class observations would provide insight regarding pedagogy, parents' role in the school day, teacher-teacher relationships, teacher-student relationships, student behavior and classroom discipline, and a general sense of school and classroom collegiality.

I also included interviews, which would be useful to further elucidate parents' and teachers' understanding of the turnaround and their responses to the changes implemented. Interviewees would be asked to describe classroom practices, teacher-parent relationships, level of involvement that teachers request of parents, level of involvement that parents demonstrate at school, and parents' reasons for becoming engaged (or not) in the school community. From the qualitative data gathered in interviews and observations, I hoped to glean an overarching sense of pedagogical practices, school community and climate, and parent-school dynamics.

For reasons that I describe extensively in Chapter 5 and 6, I found it impossible to follow my research plan. I conducted interviews and observations as planned at Macdonough School, but I was unable to gain access to Milner School. Instead, I used publicly available sources, including the formal needs assessment, turnaround plan, and internal audits of the Milner turnaround as well as articles from local news sources. I was also able to use field notes from observations at Milner that I conducted in 2012 for a separate project, as well as the transcript from an interview I conducted with the CEO of the charter network that operates Milner.

INTERVIEWS

My interviews, though guided by general questions, took the form of informal conversation and lasted approximately 30-45 minutes. I used the following questions as a guideline and asked follow-up questions as needed.

- Please describe your involvement at Macdonough. How long have you been involved in the school community, and in what capacity?
- Whether drawing from personal experience or secondhand accounts, can you describe perceptions of the school (in terms of academics, school climate, school

organization and leadership, parent and family support,) before the arrival of Principal Jon Romeo?

- What changes have taken place during Principal Romeo's tenure? What sets Macdonough School apart from other Middletown Public Schools?
- How do teachers work together at Macdonough? How to teachers and administrators work together?
- Describe student attitudes about school.
- How are parents involved in the school?
- How does Macdonough engage parents and families?
- What else could be done to engage and support parents?
- What school events take place at Macdonough?

CHAPTER 5 / MACDONOUGH

This chapter describes and explores the history of Macdonough School, temporally locating a moment of turnaround in the transition to the current principal, Jon Romeo. Over the past several years, I have worked at Macdonough as a tutor, as a teacher's assistant in the kindergarten and first grade classrooms, and as an intern in the Family Resource Center. I also have worked with the Wesleyan-affiliated program Kindergarten Kickstart since its pilot session in summer 2012.

Macdonough has always been a striking model for education reform, to me, because of the unique way that teachers and school leaders work together collegially and amicably to address the needs of an ostensibly challenging school population. I had heard rumors about the dire condition of the school before Principal Romeo's arrival, but I also knew that Macdonough had been named a "Success Story" by the Connecticut Coalition for Achievement Now (ConnCAN) in 2009 (Pionzio 2009). I wondered if Macdonough had undergone a de facto "turnaround." It seemed clear that rapid, dramatic progress had occurred in a historically underperforming school, whether or not it had been initiated intentionally by the school district, the state, or some reform effort.

To determine what made Macdonough a turnaround and how it differed from formal turnaround schools, I conducted interviews and observations in the school. To be sure, my research process was aided by my familiarity with the community. I first spoke to Principal Romeo about my thesis research in a casual conversation during the spring before I began research; when my fall semester began, I emailed him again formally asking for permission to conduct research. He and the Elementary Instructional Support Teacher, Mary Beth Brick, who acts as a de factor vice principal, declined my

request to interview teachers, saying that they didn't feel comfortable asking anything extra of the teachers considering that they were under increased pressure due to the adoption of the Common Core State Standards and a new teacher evaluation program. Both Romeo and Brick, however, were willing to be interviewed, as well as school secretary Kelli Swan, Family Resource Center site coordinator Nikki Belton and program coordinator Amy Waterman, community organizer and parent Izzi Greenberg, and several parents involved in the Family Resource Center's Parents in Action program.⁵ I was also permitted to conduct several hours of observations, primarily in first and fifth grade classrooms and in the main office area.

The following chapter, drawing from my own qualitative observations and interviews, seeks to illuminate several themes to understand Macdonough's recent transition as an example of school turnaround reform.

MACDONOUGH SCHOOL

Macdonough is a small elementary school located in Middletown's North End neighborhood, a few blocks from Main Street and the city's commercial district. Middletown, a small city of roughly 50,000 located between New Haven and Hartford, is also home to Wesleyan University, Middlesex Community College, Middlesex County Hospital, and Connecticut Valley Hospital, the state's expansive mental hospital. The town is largely populated by the descendants of freed slaves and Irish and Italian immigrants who sought manufacturing jobs during the 18th century, many of whom settled in North End tenements. The North End is the last remaining urban neighborhood in Middletown and is known for high rates of unemployment,

⁵ Not all interviewees are formally quoted.

homelessness, and drug abuse. Residents generally report that the neighborhood has a notoriously bad reputation.

In 1997, the North End Action Team (NEAT) emerged from a task force that the city sponsored to respond to negative conditions in the community. According to its website, NEAT represents “a grassroots effort to develop resident-driven leadership to assess problems, determine priorities, and develop solutions to neighborhood issues” (neatmiddletown.org). The group’s initiatives include a mentoring program for college-bound teenagers, music and hiking youth programs, an arts center partnership with the local university, homebuyer classes, tenants’ rights programs, housing redevelopment, general neighborhood revitalization efforts, voter registration drives and “meet the candidates” nights, cooking classes, community gardens, a farmers’ market, and support for a local food pantry. The non-profit organization is funded by local banks, city and state government, and several associated grants. Officers and advisory board are all popularly elected, and NEAT’s constituency includes residents, local businesses, arts and community organizations, and property owners.

The three-story Macdonough school building stands on a street surrounded by early 20th century two- and three-story houses, most of which are divided into several units. Though almost all students live within walking distance of the school building, there is one bus that picks up students on the outskirts of the school zone. The school is a few blocks away from Main Street, the city’s commercial district, and a bridge that connects to a neighboring town. The NEAT office, the Salvation Army, and a community arts center funded by the university are all within a few blocks, as well as several restaurants and other local businesses. Behind the school there is a large open field, a fenced-in play-scape and swing set for younger children, and a larger playground

for older students. There is also a blacktop with basketball hoops and a painted map of the United States.

Macdonough serves 248 students in kindergarten through fifth grade, with each grade level divided into two classrooms. The local YMCA operates the Kids Korner before- and after-school program, which is available to low-income families for a reduced fee, as well as an in-school preschool classroom. Until it recently lost funding, the preschool was operated by a local community college. The Family Resource Center (FRC), a state-funded program that supports parents and families in the community, occupies a spacious classroom adjacent to the gymnasium and cafeteria on the basement floor of the building. The FRC director oversees both the Macdonough site and a site at another Middletown school. There is an additional employee who works in the Macdonough FRC full-time. The FRC provides play groups, recess and lunch enrichment programs, parent programs such as “Raising Readers,” home visiting, fitness classes with childcare for parents, monthly field trips, and monthly clothing recycling event that allows families to donate, shop for, and swap gently-used items. The FRC also sponsors the Parents in Action program, which recruits parent volunteers to take on tasks like copying, collating, and laminating for teachers. During the summers, the YMCA and the local Oddfellows Playhouse host a circus camp at the school building.

Wesleyan University’s Office of Community Service partners with the school to place students in tutoring and mentoring positions. For the volunteering programs WesReads, WesMath, and WesWrites, student volunteers sign up for weekly one-hour sessions working in classrooms or pulling out small groups for extra one-on-one work. Other groups operate after-school programs and groups focused specifically on teaching science or music. Students enrolled in sign language classes at the university offer weekly

sign language lessons at Macdonough. On Fridays before home games, the football team visits the students during recess. During the summers, a psychology professor supervises a student-taught, student-designed full-day preschool program for children entering kindergarten in the fall. The summer preschool program targets children who have not had a high-quality early childhood education background before they enter kindergarten, and is designed to strengthen social and emotional skills, build early literacy and numeracy, and provide opportunities to practice planning, organizing and decision-making in preparation for longer, more demanding school days. The program also works to promote close parent-teacher relationships in later grades by including parents in the classroom and helping families feel comfortable and welcome in the school community.

Visitors to the school are required to ring a buzzer upon arrival, and the school secretary, Kelli Swan, is able to check a video monitor and unlock the front door from her desk in the office. Visitors and volunteers sign in and out in the office. Kelli sits behind a desk in the middle of the office area; to her right there is a coffee station, the school's laminating machine, and teachers' mailboxes, to her left is the principal's office, a small connecting conference room, and one of the school's copying machines. The school nurse's office is located in an adjoining room. Also on the main floor, there are two kindergarten classrooms, two first grade classrooms, a multi-purpose room used for special needs instruction, a media center with an adjoining multi-purpose classroom, and the office of the Elementary Instructional Support Teacher (EIST). On the second floor, there are two classrooms for each grade level 2nd-5th, as well as a computer lab and teachers' lounge. The cafeteria, gym, preschool, art classroom, and Family Resource Center are located on the basement floor.

The following sections are based on qualitative data from interviews with school administrators and parents. Macdonough is used as a case study for an unofficial turnaround model, an underperforming urban school that has demonstrated rapid, dramatic positive change *without* the label of turnaround reform. Macdonough has not received the media attention, state recognition, additional funding, or external consulting that official turnaround reform typically garners; instead, Macdonough's turnaround was fueled by the arrival of a new principal and the implementation of several school-level reform initiatives, many of which focused on strengthening school community, improving morale, and using data to ensure that individual students' specific needs are met. The next section describes perceptions of the school before the transitional period and makes an argument for the designation of Macdonough as an unofficial turnaround. Each subsequent section culls from interview data to explicate a series of general themes that together constitute this case of school-level reform.

MACDONOUGH'S "TURNAROUND"

Prior to Principal Jon Romeo's arrival at Macdonough in 2007, Macdonough School and the surrounding North End neighborhood were infamous for the poverty, crime, and drug abuse associated with urban blight. Kelli Swan, who was hired as secretary in November of 2008, recalled her perception of Macdonough's reputation as a Middletown resident:

As a resident of Middletown I was always hearing how Macdonough was going to close. I'm not sure how true that actually was, but from what I see now and what I hear now it is totally a different place, comfortable to work in, more of a community, a big family.⁶

⁶ Kelli Swan, personal interview, November 8, 2013, Macdonough School.

Mary Beth Brick joined the Macdonough staff at the end of September 2001, replacing a 5th grade teacher who had left Macdonough only weeks into the school year. Brick, who had previously held substitute and part-time teacher roles at other Middletown schools, taught 5th and 3rd grades at Macdonough before shifting to a new role as Elementary Instructional Support Teacher (EIST). As EIST, Brick works closely with Principal Romeo to support teachers and interventionists. She coordinates data team meetings, testing, and specialized instruction for students who are performing below grade level. Brick is one of few teachers who remain from the years prior to Jon Romeo's tenure as principal. According to Brick, perceptions of the school before Romeo's arrival were largely negative:

I've honestly heard it referred to as "a zoo." A lot of behavior problems on top of the fact that we were a very very low-performing school. When we as a staff were all together with the district, we heard a lot of negative comments about the school. It was hard to listen to.⁷

North End Action Team founder and previous director, Izzi Greenberg, also a Macdonough parent, recognized the school's startling underperformance when she began researching schools during her pregnancy with her first child.⁸ Though NEAT had been focusing on housing and other community initiatives, Greenberg turned her attention to the faltering neighborhood school. She uncovered the school's recent history and discovered an alarming attrition rate for teachers and principals, which Romeo described in terms of the dearth of experienced long-time teachers at Macdonough:

Angela Spaman [has been at Macdonough for] 37 years. And the next person below Angela—I think if you went to most schools it would be 32 years, or 30, or 25—but the one right below Angela is Mary Beth and she's 14 years. For a lot of years, twenty-something years, people wouldn't stay here. Just like the

⁷ Mary Beth Brick, personal interview, November 8, 2013, Macdonough School.

⁸ Izzi Greenberg, personal interview, January 14, 2014, Middletown, CT.

principals wouldn't stay here, teachers wouldn't stay here, and I think the working conditions weren't great, behavior or the kids wasn't great, resources weren't great, whatever it was, and so people started to leave.⁹

Brick also recognized that Macdonough was being incentivized as a “stepping stone”:

There was a huge problem with leadership. We had a couple [principals] who really tried hard. I don't think they always had a clear vision and I don't think they meant to stay. I think it was kind of a stepping stone. It was kind of a starter school for them. I never felt like anyone was personally invested in fixing things. The principals and teachers would use it to get hired. They'd teach here for a couple of years, get their tenure in and then put in for a transfer.

It appeared that Macdonough was being used as a holding pattern for new educators; the district recruited teachers and principals by promising a transfer or promotion after an obligatory stint at Macdonough. Greenberg organized a group of community members that began to pressure the school district to focus on Macdonough, by far the lowest-performing school in the district, and replace the current principal with a new leader who would prioritize the school's future over his or her own career. The attitude about the school population had been “these kids can't learn,” according to Romeo, and the committee sought to hire a principal who believed in Macdonough students and would implement whatever measures were necessary to ensure academic success.

The district and the NEAT committee selected Jon Romeo, previously a principal at a large Willimantic school serving a high-poverty, majority Hispanic population, to be Macdonough's next principal beginning in the 2007-2008 school year. As a non-Spanish speaker, Romeo felt that he was not the most effective leader at his previous school, and he had begun to research openings for positions closer to his home. A position first became available at Farm Hill, another Middletown school with a

⁹ Jon Romeo, personal interview, November 8, 2013, Macdonough School.

more affluent population, but Romeo chose to forgo the opportunity in favor of an urban, high-poverty school:

I was looking in New Haven and Hartford but as soon as [Macdonough] opened up I was like, that's it, that's where I want to be. It had the characteristics I was looking for. One of them was close to a university, because in Willimantic we worked with UConn. The bonus to this one was that it was downtown, we had the downtown businesses and the North End Action Team. It had a reputation as like, oh my god, the North End, it's so dangerous, but it just couldn't have been more perfect for me and that's why I ended up coming here.

Romeo recognized the problem of high teacher and principal turnover rates, and emphasized his passion for urban education:

I think the problem was that before I got here, there were five or six different principals in those last seven years. The principal right before me, she might have been here for two, two and a half years and that was the longest. And then this one left, and that one, no one really wanted to be here. When I interviewed, someone from the Board of Ed said, if you spend a couple of years at Macdonough we'll put you at one of the good schools. And I was like, weren't you listening? This is my dream, I want to be here. They couldn't imagine, not even the teachers could imagine, why would anyone want to be here. It's a high-crime area, a high-poverty area, and I think it's not seen as a really desirable place. But there are things this school has that are the envy of every other school. The only thing the other principals don't envy are parents and kids. But they envy the resource center and the health center and the preschool, and the people I have, each one of the key people, like the nurse, Mary Beth, secretary, food service, every person I have I think is great at what they do. So when I go to principal meetings and they're complaining about their secretary, their EIST, like I think to myself, I'm surrounded by such great people, I would never leave this place. This is my dream here.

Jon Romeo arrived at Macdonough as an enthusiastic and experienced urban principal determined to prove that poor children could achieve the level of academic success that others had believed only possible for students in affluent neighborhoods. Past principals had been disparaging or even frightened of the North End neighborhood and reluctant to admit parents into the school community, according to Romeo:

I'll start with parents and families. They weren't allowed in. Like literally. It was someone's job to be at the door and not let parents in. My first year here, parents were very skeptical, saw me as not like part of the community, like you're the principal. The principal before me, who I'm not very big on, she used to get

walked out to her car by the custodian because she was scared to go outside. The idea that the principal is getting escorted outside, what a message that sends.

Romeo demonstrated his faith in the community in his commitment to producing academic gains despite the challenges of high-poverty urban education. Greenberg suggested that Principal Romeo has a competitive streak, which drives him to create and maintain high expectations for student success, analytically determine students' needs, and equip teachers and parents to meet those needs. Principal Romeo said that he believes in every child's ability to succeed, and considers it his responsibility to figure out the combination of resources and instruction that will enable every student to achieve academic success. Even before he began his first year as principal, community members and stakeholders recognized that he was a seasoned educator with a refreshing spirit of hope for a school and neighborhood that many Middletown residents and other educators had previously considered to be hopeless.

EMPOWERING AND VALUING TEACHERS

In the past, teachers at Macdonough never planned to stay—it was commonplace for new, inexperienced teachers to accept placements at Macdonough and immediately apply for a transfer to a different school. Macdonough was a place for recent graduates to test and develop their teaching skills in a challenging environment before moving on to a more comfortable, positive school environment. According to Izzi Greenberg, Macdonough had long been neglected by the school district because of the general, unspoken attitude that “Macdonough kids couldn't learn.” Because it was difficult simply to recruit teachers to work at Macdonough, there was little concern about placing inexperienced teachers with the high-risk students who were not expected to show academic improvement.

Romeo describes his initial focus on making Macdonough an appealing place to work:

I think the first thing is the staff knew that I wanted to be here, I feel that that made the difference. The other thing is that some people—who didn't think that these kids could learn or these parents deserved to be respected—left when they realized that poor attitude and poor work ethic weren't acceptable. After people left, they were replaced with people who wanted to be in urban education. And even Mary Beth, there was a point where Mary Beth, my first year, was talking about going somewhere closer to home and I mentioned a school, and she said, "No, I want a school like Macdonough." When I heard that, I was like, "Oh, she's a keeper." I feel that most of our staff wants to be here now.

In recent years, teachers have begun to request transfers *to* Macdonough from other schools, a trend that indicates a radical shift not only in the school's reputation, but in working conditions and teacher morale. The staff continues to be relatively young and less experienced, compared to schools that have had teachers on staff for decades, but Mary Beth Brick points out the silver lining of hiring brand-new teachers:

[High turnover] is what got us many newer teachers. It's good and bad, because you have a very young staff that doesn't necessarily know everything that's going on in the district but they're fresh out of college and they're ready to go and they have great attitudes.

To make Macdonough a welcoming, inclusive and supportive community for teachers, Romeo works flexibly with faculty to accommodate their needs and constraints. Teachers' own children often visit the school during evening school events or days when teachers have gaps in childcare, and Romeo has created part-time positions for teachers with young children. Brick also suggested that teacher retention has improved because of policies that Principal Romeo has implemented:

He wanted to make this a place where teachers stayed, because he knew that it was so difficult to teach here, he knew what a negative perception we all had, he knew how much easier it would be if we were in a more affluent district, you know, a lot of us were at the point where we were starting families, and he just wanted to make it good for us. Very supportive, we never worry about if our kid is sick. Other teachers at other school are panicking, like oh my god, what am I going to do, what am I going to do, here it's not even an issue, you know it's

going to be taken care of. The same if we can't attend a meeting after school, we don't ever feel like we're going to be reprimanded because of it. His philosophy has kind of been like, right now it might be a struggle for them, they might not be able to come to some of the stuff because they have a little baby at home, but in a couple of years you're going to have this person who can go above and beyond all the time. I think we're putting an investment in.

By accommodating teachers' personal needs, Romeo develops a school community that has "a family feel," according to Brick. The teachers feel valued because their leader is willing to make whatever adjustments are necessary to keep them at Macdonough. According to Romeo, he and Brick also support teachers by maximizing instructional time:

In all aspects, we just cater to the teachers, for things big and small. The third grade students are taking a standardized test next week to identify gifted and talented students, and they get a stack of test booklets and in each booklet the kid has to bubble in their information. We can't let our kids do that because it can impact scoring or something. In every other school the teachers do that, here Mary Beth does it. They might not recognize how lucky we are that at our school she bubbles it in. I think her philosophy, and it's shared by me, [is that] there are some things that the teachers can delegate. The teachers are the ones making instructional decisions. She would rather they use their time to look at student work and plan instruction than to sit there bubbling things in. She looks at how she can make their time more efficient, how she schedules things. If the district gives us a form to be filled out for like the data teams, Mary Beth will think about how we can automate that form. We just try to make it more palatable for the teachers.

Beyond accommodating teachers' personal and professional needs, Romeo also demonstrates his respect for teachers by intentionally celebrating their accomplishments, both personal and professional, at faculty meetings and school-wide events, according to Brick. Whereas in the past teachers felt discouraged and rarely stayed at Macdonough for longer than a year or two, Brick says that the school has truly become a supportive place to work, especially because Principal Romeo demonstrates the dedication and work ethic that he expects of his teachers:

You just feel good about being here. It does help, because it is hard to work in a district that's struggling in a school that's struggling academically. It really just

does feel like a family, and I think some of that really does come from the leadership. The attitude here is that anyone will do anything no matter what. We would never say, "that's not in our job description" or "you want us to come to summer school?" This is the staff that comes even when the district isn't providing for it, and that's because we see him. Jon always is above and beyond, he's always here on the weekends, he's always here in the summer. When you see your leader doing that, it definitely makes you feel like that's a good thing to do. If he was out of the building every day at 3:30, that would set a different tone.

SCHOOL COMMUNITY, RELATIONSHIPS, AND SCHOOL-WIDE EVENTS

Specific initiatives to improve teacher morale and encourage the “family feel” that several interviewees described are complemented by a totally inclusive approach to family involvement. Before Principal Romeo arrived, parents were discouraged from visiting during the school day and did not feel welcome in the school building. Mary Beth Brick describes the previous visitation policy and the changes since Romeo’s arrival:

Parents were just basically not allowed in the building, they had to have appointments, and that made a cold feeling for the parents, they didn't feel supported. He just got rid of that completely, parents are always welcome.

To foster a community and a sense of belonging for students, teachers and parents alike, several formal events and programs have been created, including a Flag Day celebration, Dr. Seuss Day, Turn Off the TV Night (an evening event during which families forgo TV-watching to play games and make crafts together), Apple Harvest Night, Literacy Night, and ice cream socials. On the day before Thanksgiving, the cafeteria staff provides a special Thanksgiving dinner, which Brick says is an important event for cultivating a cohesive sense of community:

Our amazing lunchroom staff prepares the turkey dinner for all the kids at the same exact time and we all eat in the gym, they bring all of the cafeteria tables into the gym. It's amazing. Huge, huge pain in the neck for the cafeteria staff, but they do it, and the teachers go down and they serve and the kids go through and everyone eats and once. That's a really fun thing.

Romeo also mentioned the Thanksgiving feast as an example of the dedication of the Macdonough staff and his own commitment to creating school traditions:

We all sit together and the kids look forward to it. When we interviewed our head custodian I told him it's going to be a lot of work here because we do things for the kids, and the Thanksgiving feast is the perfect example. Wednesday across the district is cold sandwiches because the kitchens can't make this elaborate meal the day before a break, they need time to clean everything and shut it down, but our people do it for the kids, which is great.

The most prominent school-wide event is the monthly “SURFS Up” assembly.

SURFS, which stands for “self-responsibility, understanding, respect, fairness, and safety” is Macdonough’s unique positive behavior program created under the district’s Positive Behavioral Instructional Supports (PBIS) program. At the beginning of every school year, students learn about and discuss each of the SURFS values and ways to exhibit positive behavior in the classroom, hallway, cafeteria, specials classrooms, and outdoors. When teachers “catch” a student behaving positively, they reward the child with a SURFS card, which some teachers allow to be redeemed for small prizes at the end of each week. Every month, each teacher selects one or two students who have demonstrated positive behavior, and those kids are honored at that month’s SURFS assembly.

SURFS assemblies provide a regular and structured opportunity for parents to become increasingly comfortable in the school building, strengthen school-based social networks by mingling with teachers and other parents, and support their children. The entire school community is welcome at the assembly, and often many community members, extended families, and Wesleyan volunteers attend as well. During the assemblies, Principal Romeo leads the school song (“Knowledge is Power”) and recognizes students who have won contests or awards as well as teachers who have finished graduate school and competed in running races. Brick says that Romeo “just

uses [SURFS assemblies] to celebrate anything good that's going on in the school in general or in the community.” Romeo believes that the assemblies are important not only for the opportunity to reinforce standards for behavior and celebrate accomplishments, but also for building community by creating traditions:

The big thing is the SURFs up assembly. I'm big on traditions. I love traditions, I love them in my family, and I want to have them here. We do the SURFs Up celebrations once a month. It's a whole school celebration. Those are a special time.

When students are being honored for SURFS or another accomplishment, their parents are specifically encouraged to attend and are invited up to the stage when their child is recognized. The decision to welcome families to the stage with their children is important and intentional, according to Brick:

The whole family comes up, that's the last thing, that's how [Mr. Romeo] ends them, he has the teachers stand up in the front and then he calls everyone and any family member - because he feels strongly that it's not just the kid who's behaving, it's the whole family and the priorities they have, it's a family effort, so they come up and they're recognized too. I think the SURFS assemblies are a huge part of the welcoming atmosphere, he puts a lot of work into those and I think that's a great thing for parents to come to and feel involved in the school.

An important factor in the Macdonough community is the school's unusually small size. Not only do staff members know most children by name, but many know students' immediate and extended families. To ensure that every child had trusted adults at Macdonough to check in with them and get to know their families, Romeo instituted “Macdonough Connections.” Each year, every class list is posted and the faculty and staff initial next to the name of any child they know personally. Eventually, it becomes clear which children are well-connected—the ones with several adults who can vouch for them—and which children don't necessarily have many connections. Each teacher reviews his or her class list and selects students who would benefit from an additional adult connection. Those students' names are again posted and any staff or faculty

member—teachers, custodians, paraprofessionals, interventionists—can sign up to mentor a child. Mentors are asked to check in with their “connections” every week, whether it be visiting their classroom, joining them for lunch, or touching base with their families. Macdonough Connections is an additional way that Romeo makes the school community feel like family, according to Brick:

I think it goes back to that family attitude, I think [the kids] know that they're loved and they're valued and we know that they're amazing. I've heard some very sad stories about some of our kids who move to other schools and are always referred to as 'the Macdonough kids' in a very negative way, and I think that's just sad. We're very defensive of our kids. They're very respected. It's a mutually respectful attitude. We expect them to respect us, so it's just given back to them. It is a very close school, and I think the kids really like it here. We've had new kids come in and we ask them, 'what do you like about this school?' And they say, well, you like us, you're nice to us, you know my name. It's an important thing.

Because Macdonough is a small school and most students live in the surrounding community, parents and teachers have a unique opportunity to communicate regularly and informally at morning drop-off and afternoon pick-up times. There is one bus that picks up children who live outside of the North End neighborhood, but the vast majority of students walk to school with their parents. After school, teachers and Mr. Romeo walk outside with their students and, according to Romeo, “teachers are very apt to go outside and interact with families.” He believes that Macdonough’s size, the proximity of the school to students’ homes, and informal after-school interactions are crucial:

One of the things that I've never had before is just knowing the families so well. And part of it is just because you see them so much, part of that is that it's a neighborhood school and it's a small school. For the most part, if I go outside and I see someone I don't recognize, I can go up to them and say "who are you here to pick up? I'm the principal." It goes back to the thing about the trust. What a feeling that you are here for the first time and the principal recognizes you're not a regular but makes an effort to go up and see you. I think that the idea that [a fifth grade student’s younger sister], she's three, and she's known in our school. I think that's because we're a small school and we're a neighborhood

school. So I think that's definitely possible. Also, I think initiatives are much easier to implement in a small school. I think about a cruise ship that needs to turn very slowly, or a big ferry or something. A small school is more like a motorboat, I can get everybody together and say, "we need to go this way" and we can do it. At a bigger school, it's just tougher to implement change in a bigger school than in a small school."

Kelli Swan, especially, sees most students regularly and often acts as a liaison between parents and teachers. She has grown to know every child *and* their connections, which allows her to have trusting relationships with families:

I took two of the fourth graders down to Amazing Grace [Food Pantry] to take the food [donation from a food drive] and they were like "do you know all the teachers in this school?" and I was like "yeah, I do know all the teachers." And it just hit me that I bet I know by face and name 99% of the kids. There are a couple that I'm still not familiar with, but by next year I'll know who all of them are. I like to get involved. I love to be involved in everything that's going on at the school. I want to do kindergarten orientation. I want to know the kids. I want to make sure they're where they need to be. I want to be able to help them. I just love knowing everybody. Even with the parents, I want to know when I have to call home for some reason, who am I talking to and am I talking to the right person, that kind of thing. I know parents, I know siblings, I know uncles. Oh yeah. I just feel it's helpful to know all that.

On "Walking Wednesday" mornings in the fall and spring, teachers stand on every corner in the neighborhood and walk to school with students. Many children who usually ride the bus will be dropped off on the walking route to join their teachers and classmates. Often, local firefighters or police officers will attend, and many parents join the walk to school. In the middle of August, two weeks before the school year begins, teachers also do "neighborhood walks" to visit every Macdonough family. During the walks, parents receive books to read at home and information about registration, upcoming open houses and their child's assigned classroom teacher. Regular and informal contact with students' families helps teachers to create a welcoming environment for parents, according to Swan:

I think trying to get parents involved, letting them know what is available to them, that really has been what brought it all together. It just makes people feel

comfortable. Maybe that's the thing, just making people feel comfortable. They feel at home, they feel like they can be here and get the information that they need and help for their kids, that kind of thing. Everybody's involved, they're welcome to be involved in anything they want to be. If they have suggestions, they're definitely taken into consideration, and most of those suggestions are implemented. Everybody's welcome to attend, if you can't that is perfectly fine. But everyone is welcome to attend anything that's going on. Our policy is, it's open door, but please call and let us know you're coming first kind of thing. We will not turn away a parent if they want to participate in a classroom. We have a bring-a-special-person-to-lunch day, the first Friday of every month, but I'm like, come in anytime. You can have lunch any day of the week if you want to. I think parents feel, they know they can come here and participate if they want to.

Students' and parents' feelings of belongingness are palpable, to the point that the school has become a hub for families' social life and even a safe haven for many students, according to Swan:

Kids love being here. I will say, oh, have a good weekend, it's a long weekend, Monday's no school, and they're like oh, no, no school on Monday? Breaks my heart, I'm like, can I open the school so they can come to school?

FAMILY RESOURCE CENTER

Macdonough's Family Resource Center (FRC), one of hundreds across Connecticut and other states, is an additional hub for fostering parental involvement and a "family feel." The philosophy of Family Resource Centers, based on Dr. Edward Zigler's "Schools of the 21st Century," is that public education can be supported by a broad spectrum of family support, early childhood education, parent training, and supplementary programs that promote healthy development. The program specifically targets families who have young children who will attend Macdonough in the future with the intention of familiarizing families with the school and ensuring that children are prepared to be successful when they begin kindergarten. Site coordinators for the FRC are responsible for planning play groups and parent support groups, parent education groups like "Raising Readers," field trips, interest groups for school-age children, visits

and lessons provided by other social service agencies, and providing information about local resources for healthcare and childcare. The FRC also has a home visiting service.

Over recent years, the hallmark of the Macdonough FRC has become “Parents in Action,” a parent-driven, FRC-facilitated program for parent volunteership. Several times a week, parents convene in the FRC classroom to work together on tasks for teachers (another example of Principal Romeo’s belief in delegating non-instructional tasks). Those parents are able to become familiar with the community during the school day, assist teachers, and develop a strong social network between parents. Romeo credits the FRC with the expansion of parent leadership among parents who were previously unlikely to have a large presence in the school:

Our Family Resource Center has transformed. There was a time our school was run by the PTA but now the parents running the school look like our kids. They're the ladies down in the FRC that are diverse racially and diverse socioeconomically and they're empowered to do whatever needs to be done. And I would think that for the average Macdonough parent to know that the in group of parents isn't just a group of white, middle-class women, but it's people who look just like them, it's their neighbors. I think that's awesome. I love that about it.

“TEAM-LIKE” STAFF COLLABORATION

The total overhaul of the school-wide schedule, one of Jon Romeo’s most successful and tangible changes, allowed teachers to have common planning time with their grade-level counterparts every day. Brick says that this move changed the way that teachers collaborated and communicated about students’ progress and curricular or instructional decisions:

The collaborating is huge. Having the time and realizing it's valuable is important. It's changed the way that we work together. I've heard other schools where they feel almost protective of what they have and they don't want to share what they have, and that's just not the case. We share what we have. He had a huge focus on common planning time for teachers. People in the past had said

there's just no way to do it, but he made it work, he made it a priority that the teachers had time to work together at the grade level.

Swan also described her perception of teachers working together as a team:

As far as sharing how they do things, you're constantly hearing people at the copier saying "oh, what do you have there?" of course they have lunch and everything together so they'll share maybe what the plans are for the day, what they plan on using for whatever lessons they're planning for the day. But you're constantly hearing, "Oh, that is cute, can I use that?" You know, or "look what I'm going to use, do you want to use it?" Or in the hallways, you're always hearing that. I think everybody in the school totally works together. Not only are the paras [paraprofessionals] working with the teachers, but I think the teachers definitely collaborate very well.

Though it's unclear whether teachers' friendships have been born out of formal professional collaboration or if the social networks among teachers have *enabled* the kind of team-like collaboration that happens at Macdonough, the informal social relationships forged between teachers are important, Romeo says:

They interact socially really well, probably better than most schools, I think they're very close friends. I went into Mary Beth's room this morning and she was crying. One of our teachers had gotten some bad medical news about her nephew, they came and told me and then they told Mary Beth and she was devastated by this. That was because they're such a close-knit group. They don't just work together, most of them are very close friends. I don't see any of the teams close the door and not work together, although we have some grade levels that are, like kindergarten, they're like a married couple. First grade, I think the same thing. Second grade, Jukins and Paul haven't been together for so long but I think they're good. Third grade, I think Theresa and Julie, you know all these people I'm talking about, I think they're really good. They work together. I think they're a really good team.

Teachers often attend FRC-sponsored after-school fitness classes and also work together to plan baby and wedding showers, holiday parties, teachers' breakfasts and monthly birthday parties for teachers. Mr. Romeo's personal passion for running has fueled student athleticism as well as much of the socializing between teachers, according to Brick:

As far as socially, I know something that is very near and dear to Jon's heart is running. In school there's a running club for the kids but also a lot of the teachers have started running. That's a big social push for them. They do a lot of

5Ks together, and every year we run the Hartford half-marathon together as a relay, so that's a bonding thing.

NONTRADITIONAL CLASSROOM SET-UP AND SCHEDULE

Perhaps Romeo's greatest victory was his re-working of the school-wide schedule to accommodate other changes that he made. Instead of teachers all teaching the same subject at the same time every day, Romeo staggered the day for each grade level so that each class would be doing something different at every time of the day. According to Romeo, teachers were initially skeptical, but accepted the change on condition:

I said, if you let me decide when you teach reading, I'll get you a second person in the room. And so they bought into that. I mean, Mary Beth was the union person, she wasn't thrilled with it, but she bought into it. They were like, you can't teach reading last, you know. I said, yes, you can if you have a second person in there.

By adjusting the schedule, Romeo made it possible for interventionists, paraprofessionals, and volunteer tutors to support teachers throughout the day. Additional support for teachers is one of his top priorities, as evidenced by the following anecdote:

John Ferrero, who's a fourth grade teacher, we recruited him from Farm Hill. The idea that a Farm Hill teacher would leave to come here, that's just, no one ever thought. When he first came here, he told me that he was overwhelmed by the number of people in the classroom. All of the sudden you have college students and interventionists and the whole thing. I observed his class the other day, and it's like a choreographed dance in there. Everyone knows what they're supposed to do, whether it's the college student or the paraprofessional teacher, everyone is very purposeful in there, and I feel like that's a difference. When you're trying to manage this by yourself, it's hard. But when you have all this support, it's easier.

USING DATA FOR INDIVIDUALIZED INSTRUCTION

Yet another gear in the scheduling machine is the use of data to promote student mastery, for two major reasons: 1) teachers have common planning time to develop, analyze, and review pre-assessments and post-assessments, and 2) the presence of

additional teaching staff in every class allows teachers to craft several simultaneous lessons designed for students' level of content mastery. "Data teams" were a new district-mandated practice that began around the time that Romeo began, but he tweaked the basic system to complement his changes to the schedule.

Each two-teacher grade-level pair works together as a "data team," sometimes assisted by the Elementary Instructional Support Teacher, to "code" each student based on performance on pre- and post-assessments. Using a system that Romeo and Brick created, the teachers mark each student on a spreadsheet as Tier 1, Tier 2, or Tier 3.

According to Romeo,

We code kids black, grey and white for Tier 1, Tier 2 and Tier 3. Tier 1 are kids who are at grade level, Tier 2 are kids who are kind of on the edge, and Tier 3 are kids who need support. Every time we assess kids, formatting would change, so you would see white, white, grey, grey, black, and you'd say oh okay, this kid's making progress. And then you see, like, this kid's white, white, grey, white, white. So it would just jump out at teachers that that kid's not making progress, and it would allow the teachers to really focus on why they aren't making progress.

Romeo clearly is an analytical, business-minded problem-solver—when he and Brick review the data collected by teachers, they identify children who are struggling and work to eliminate any stressors or distractions that could be impeding academic progress. Romeo's approach reflects both his belief that every Macdonough child is totally capable of learning, because he looks for unexpected non-academic solutions for Tier 3 students, and his faith in his teachers, because he aims to address every non-instructional area in order to free up the teacher to focus on academics. He explains the intervention strategy:

One of the big ones was attendance—if a kid isn't here they can't learn—or behavioral, or medical, or family involvement. So we would look at these factors and if a teacher said, a kid is not learning because of attendance, then we'd attack the attendance, we'd fix that, if it's behavior, we'd work on that, because we have the school-based health center we can get kids counseling, whatever they needed. And if it was family involvement, parents weren't helping with homework or

whatever it is, we'd get the Family Resource Center to help. With attendance, we look at things with this idea of Tier 1, Tier 2, Tier 3, so with attendance, Tier 1 is something that the classroom teacher can control. For instance, if a kid is late, and they're missing the beginning of reading instruction, a Tier 1 result would be to call the parents, send a note home, get a classroom incentive. If the Tier 1 thing isn't working then it goes to Tier 2. And Tier 2 could be me, like making a phone call. And Tier 3, just the resources we have, it could be a visit from the family resource center, a counselor. I'm going to work directly with you to fix that problem. And it's the same thing for behavior. It's just different people who can support. The data teams really help to isolate those kinds of things so that the teacher is only focused on instruction. I feel like looking at data made a big difference, and I think that the fact they were working with each other made a big difference.

Macdonough's six specialists, who rotate throughout the twelve classrooms, dramatically increase the teacher-to-student ratio and allow teachers to tailor instruction to the specific needs of each tier group.

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Because Macdonough is an urban school close to several local businesses and a major liberal arts university, the school is able to maintain several important community partnerships through support services from the local YMCA, a mentoring program, relationships with local businesses, and several volunteer programs through Wesleyan University.

Through the mentoring program, prominent community members and local politicians, fire fighters, and police officers are matched with Macdonough students through a system similar to Macdonough Connections. Mentors visit their mentees regularly and often develop close relationships with mentees' families, teachers, and classmates. The former mayor of Middletown, who became a mentor several years ago, has since been visiting a fourth grade classroom for half of the school day every Friday to facilitate small group lessons.

Izzi Greenberg says that the role of mentors in the Macdonough community isn't accidental; Romeo has strategically recruited mentors who are influential in local politics in order to create an impervious support system. If Macdonough is threatened by district mandates that could upset the milieu that he has cultivated, the mentors come forward to defend the school community that they have become intimately involved in.

Local businesses have also been incorporated into the Macdonough community. Once a month, a local diner, O'Rourke's, sponsors the "Pancakes with the Principal" program, for which Romeo chooses two or three students who have displayed exceptional behavior to have a special restaurant breakfast with him. The long-time owner of O'Rourke's sets up a special table and often joins the party for breakfast. A local bike shop has also donated restored kids' bicycles, helmets, and bike locks to be given to students who have had good behavior and who teachers believe could benefit from being given a bicycle. The nearby community health center also provides in-school services for enrolled students, including a dental program and mental health counseling.

Macdonough has a formal relationship with the local YMCA, which facilitates the before- and after-school program "Kids Korner" and operates a preschool classroom in the Macdonough building. A grant allows Kids Korner to be offered to free and reduced-price lunch (an indicator of low socioeconomic status) families at reduced cost. At Kids Korner, children participate in enrichment activities, work on homework with mentors, and have a snack. The preschool, which can accommodate 15 students, is beneficial because it brings children and their families into the school community even earlier, according to Brick:

I think we're so fortunate because so many of our kids come in without having any kind of daycare, preschool, anything like that, and it's very very difficult to transition into everything a kindergartener is asked to do these days. Having [the

preschool] here onsite is so much nicer because those kids come into kindergarten thinking this is their school already, they know the cafeteria, they know the playground, they know everything. We have a lot less behavior, transition issues with those kids because they've already been here.

Through a partnership with Wesleyan's Office of Community Service and Center for Community Partnerships, Macdonough hosts hundreds of college students as volunteers every week. Romeo's predecessors were wary of volunteers' presence and did not work to develop a partnership the way that Romeo has, according to Brick:

We had limited Wesleyan support prior to Jon coming here, and once Jon came he made it a focus, he recognized the value of having community involvement from any aspect we could get, and this was a huge resource. It is a lot of adjusting on the staff's part because it's sometimes difficult to have other people and just be comfortable with other people in your classroom and to know that it's okay and it's not evaluative of them and they're not judging you, it's just a big adjustment. But through his leadership it's been easy to do that, it's just blossomed into hundreds of volunteers every semester, it's amazing, the kids love it, the teachers love it, hopefully [volunteers] like it. It's just very beneficial to have someone to work with small groups of kids in your classroom or pulled out.

The programs WesReads and WesMath train volunteers to provide in-classroom and pull-out support during reading and math lessons. As previously described, Romeo uses data to delineate three levels of student mastery. Building upon that system, he has also created an instructional framework that begins with a whole-class lesson and transitions into more personalized, small-group work that allows teachers and specialists to focus attention on Tier 2 and Tier 3 students. Wesleyan students and mentors, who are ostensibly less experienced than teachers and specialists, are charged with facilitating small group lessons for Tier 1 students (those who are at or above grade level). The system allows struggling students to have focused, personalized instructional time with those teachers most able to produce academic gains, and also allows students who have already mastered content to avoid boredom and move on to creative applications of concepts. Other programs recruit volunteers to teach sign language, music, and even

creative writing. On Fridays before home games, the Wesleyan football team visits the school.

During the spring of 2012, Professor Anna Shusterman and a team of Wesleyan undergraduates in the psychology department developed an innovative 5-week summer preschool program based on evidence that children who have not had rich, high-quality early childhood education experience tend to experience academic and behavioral challenges when they begin school. With the help of Greenberg, Romeo and the Family Resource Center, Kindergarten Kickstart had its first year of operation during the summer of 2012, utilizing the unused preschool classroom at Macdonough. The program received the local Liberty Bank Early Literacy Grant during the following year to continue operations for three subsequent years, and has demonstrated significant gains on school readiness measures. The role of Wesleyan volunteers at Wesleyan is crucial, according to Romeo:

I don't want to over exaggerate, but just instructionally there's a lot. They're such a part of the fabric of our school now. But the principal before me didn't want Wesleyan students here. I was amazed by that. It's just been great.

CONCLUSION: THE MACDONOUGH TURNAROUND

Because the Macdonough turnaround emphasized the four target areas that I discussed in Chapter 3, my findings support the claim that organization/climate, culturally responsive pedagogy, parent involvement and school readiness constitute the four major areas for reform efforts in a low-performing urban school community. To meet children's culturally specific needs, Romeo developed a detailed system for using data diagnostically and encouraged teachers to forge personal relationships with students' families. To foster positive school climate and collaborative, team-like relationships

among teachers, Romeo redesigned the schedule to allow for common planning time, supported teachers' social activities and celebrated teachers' personal accomplishments, and accommodated teachers' specific personal needs. To welcome parent involvement and incorporate parents into the social fabric of the school community, Principal Romeo instituted an open-door policy, created school-wide events open to the community, supported the Family Resource Center, interacted informally with parents and family members, and developed the Macdonough Connections program to ensure that every student and family had a personal connection to a staff member. Finally, to address out-of-school factors and school readiness, Romeo collaborated with the school-based preschool program, the Family Resource Center, the local YMCA's summer and before- and after-school programs, local businesses, and several departments at Wesleyan University.

Because the Macdonough turnaround happened without the publicity or scrutiny of a formal federal, state or district school reform initiative, it is difficult to evaluate its ideological substance in the same way that I have examined ideology in other examples of reform rhetoric. Though I learned from my interviews that the major goals of the changes were to improve the neighborhood's reputation and create a safe haven for children, there *is* no "reform rhetoric," no website, no turnaround plan or contract, no mandate, no mission statement. The Macdonough turnaround, however, was not accidental or coincidental—it was initiated, designed, and implemented by grassroots community organizing. The North End Action Team committee, which was comprised of Macdonough parents and community members and formed in response to the school's low performance and negative reputation, initiated the turnaround by appealing to the district for a new principal. The same committee selected Jon Romeo after a

preliminary district selection process. When Romeo arrived and began to make changes at Macdonough, those changes were designed to engage teachers' and parents' voices in the reform phase. As parents became more and more involved, the Family Resource Center "Parents in Action"—the demographic make-up of which closely matches the student demographics—developed and effectively replaced the Parent-Teacher Association as a parent leadership group.

I found that the Macdonough turnaround defied each of the three central claims of corporate reform ideology. First, there was no formal imperative to produce rapid, dramatic results. Though the district and community members ostensibly hoped for positive change, there was no explicit timeline or expected outcome. There was not a "model" to be implemented or a large-scale reform agenda to carry out. Principal Romeo and the Macdonough teachers would not be removed if they failed to raise test scores. Because the turnaround was not concerned with "producing results," Romeo did not experience the high-pressure, urgent milieu of other ventures in school reform and had far more autonomy to implement the measures that he believed would best meet the community's needs.

Second, the Macdonough turnaround did not promote the notion that it was the school's responsibility to alleviate the effects of poverty in the community. Romeo and other staff members explained their hope that Macdonough would be a safe and empowering place for students, but no one said that they expected the school to be the source of social mobility for its students. In fact, because the turnaround originated with the work of the North End Action Team, it seems that the Macdonough reform was one of many priorities (among housing, food security, health care, et cetera) for the community organizers. Romeo also prioritized non-academic factors like school

readiness, out-of-school time, and parent education, indicating his commitment to empowering and respecting teachers by removing their responsibility for non-instructional issues. Where the corporate reform ideology holds educators responsible for stratification in schools *and* society, the Macdonough turnaround supported teachers and redirected reform attention to non-instructional factors that affected student achievement.

Third, there is no appearance of market forces or non-educator elite leaders in the Macdonough turnaround. As I've said, the turnaround was not a formal, mandated reform attempt with the imperative to produce certain results in a certain time frame. The school is not a member of a system of choice, so it serves only the families who live in the immediate residential neighborhood. Perhaps most importantly, the leaders of the Macdonough turnaround were Jon Romeo, a seasoned urban educator with no background in business, policy, or development, and the members of NEAT, all community members and parents.

Izzi Greenberg told me in a personal interview that Jon Romeo had a competitive streak: he *wanted* to produce results and prove to the community, district, and state that Macdonough students were capable of high academic achievement. Despite Romeo's personal motivation to produce rapid, dramatic improvement, the bedrock of "turnaround," the Macdonough turnaround eludes each of the three major ideological currents of corporate school reform. Instead, it employs a culturally affirming, pro-teacher, community-based reform strategy that represents a movement for liberation initiated, designed, and implemented by the community that it affects.

CHAPTER 6 / MILNER

Jumoke Academy Honors at Milner, often shortened to JAH-Milner or simply Milner, is a K-8 school in Hartford Public Schools (HPS) district. HPS is a system of school choice, so parents play a role in selecting their children's schools. The school was named after Thirman Milner, a civil rights activist who became Hartford's first black mayor in 1981. The 3-story brick school building is located in the notorious poor North End area of the city and has a "history of poor student achievement," according to an audit conducted during the summer of 2012. The school serves about 425 students, though the enrollment changes frequently. More than 95% of Milner students qualify to receive free and reduced-price lunches under the federal school lunch program (eligibility for free and reduced-price lunch is a common indicator for low socioeconomic status). 25% of students are not fluent in English (called English language learners or ELLs) and 12.1% of students have special needs. The population is extremely transient: according to the audit, 427 new students (not including kindergarten students) enrolled at Milner in a three-year span.

HPS rebranded Milner as a Core Knowledge Academy during the 2007-2008 school year and attempted to improve student achievement by implementing the core knowledge curriculum. Effort to improve Milner seemed to fall flat, unfortunately, and student achievement continued to lag behind state and district averages. Despite the fact that Milner is a member of an open choice program, virtually no families from outside of the immediate community select the school as one of their ranked options, a testament to pervasiveness of Milner's negative reputation. Nearly the entire student body comes from the neighborhood technically zoned for Milner; parents either opt to stay at the

neighborhood school for convenience or neglect to fill out applications for the open choice program and their children are, by default, registered at Milner.

In the months before school began in the fall of 2013, Milner underwent a second “turnaround.” As one of the lowest-performing schools in the state, it was named a member of the state Commissioner’s Network, accepting \$1-1.5 million in additional state funds and three years of state intervention. HPS also designated Milner as a reform priority by enlisting Family Urban Schools of Excellence (FUSE), a charter network born out of the Jumoke Academy charter schools’ success in Hartford, to operate the school. Milner became an unusual hybrid of a traditional public school suddenly under the auspices of a progressive charter model: though it was a HPS school, subject to the teachers’ union and district control, and an option in the system of open choice, all instructional, organizational, staffing and leadership decisions would be made by FUSE officials.

CONDUCTING RESEARCH AT MILNER

During the spring of 2013, only a few months into JAH-Milner’s inaugural year, I was offered a volunteer position through Achieve Hartford!, an education advocacy nonprofit group, as a blogger for the turnaround. The organization’s executive director, Paul Holzer, connected me to the FUSE office at Milner and helped me set up an initial interview with CEO Dr. Michael Sharpe. I visited the school several times over a roughly two-month span, observed two classes, met informally with the Family Resource Center coordinator and a few teachers, and spoke to a FUSE representative to develop an understanding of the turnaround school’s status.

Before I had even finished enough posts to make the blog public, my work was interrupted. A teacher who I had requested to interview had contacted HPS to confirm that my research had been formally approved by the central office (which it had not). Paul quickly got in touch with his HPS contacts and sent me the necessary paperwork to apply for permission to conduct research at an HPS school, at which point it became clear that the project was not going to be able to continue in the remaining weeks of my semester. Over the summer, I assembled my application to submit to the HPS Communications and Research Department, including my thesis proposal (which had been approved by the Wesleyan Department of Sociology), an extended description of my research goals and rationale, and the amount of time requested for teacher interviews and classroom observations. I also was asked to provide a description of how my project would benefit the district; I explained the format of the blog and suggested that it could become an important resource for parents, community members and policy makers interested in the progress of the turnaround from the perspective of someone familiar with the school.

In early September, my application was submitted and I received confirmation that it was being processed by the office of the Chief Research and Assessment Officer (CRAO) at HPS, who had recently transitioned into the position from Chief Academic Officer. I met with the CRAO in mid-September. During our meeting, she initially seemed guarded and skeptical of my credentials. Her demeanor changed radically when I eventually mentioned that I was a child of public school teachers and a product of an inner-city school in Atlanta, indicating a wariness of “outsiders” unfamiliar with a school system like Hartford. When she had a better understanding of who I was and where I came from, she seemed to immediately become warmer and more comfortable speaking

to me. I left our meeting feeling encouraged and hopeful that my application would be approved quickly and planning to begin research at Milner in October.

From the end of September until December, I emailed and called the CRAO and several other HPS officials almost weekly inquiring about the status of my application. I was told repeatedly to expect a response the following week. No response came. I contacted Paul Holzer for help and he reached out to his contacts at HPS. Finally, in January, I received a short, impersonal letter denying my application because my project did not offer any substantive benefit to the district. After several months of being told fairly confidently that my request would be approved, I was left without the backbone of my ethnographic research. My thorough case study of Macdonough as an informal turnaround school was suddenly useless because I no longer had a formal turnaround model to explore contrast between the two.

Rather than abandoning Milner as a second case study, I instead gathered the information I could access. I was able to use field notes from my observations at the school last year. I also drew heavily from the interview transcript from my conversation with FUSE CEO Dr. Michael Sharpe. For further insight into parent and teacher perspectives about the prospect of formal turnaround and qualitative and quantitative data about the transition, I reviewed Operations and Instructional Audits of Milner from July 2012 (before the first year as JAH-Milner) and December 2012 (the mid-year report from the first turnaround year). The audits, which were required assessments of schools entering the Commissioner's Network, were each conducted during a two-day period of intensive classroom observations and interviews with principals, parents, teachers, and community members. Both audit documents are publicly available and easily found through an Internet search. I also curated a collection of Hartford Courant articles and

various blog posts about the school and the turnaround. The following section draws from those resources to describe the history and reputation of Milner School, the implications of Milner being a neighborhood school in a high-poverty area the process of initiating a formal turnaround project, the areas of focus identified for the turnaround, and the results of and responses to the changes implemented since Milner became Jumoke Academy Honors at Milner.

MILNER SCHOOL PRE-TURNAROUND

The July 2012 audit reported that Milner had had a history of extremely poor academic achievement and was well known for its shoddy reputation among other Hartford schools. Despite evidence of improvements in school culture and climate, gains in student achievement associated with the 2007-2008 implementation of the Core Knowledge curriculum were not significant. According to the audit, the curriculum was not executed with fidelity:

Training and implementation of the model took place, but as staff turnover occurred, less staff had a working knowledge of the model and adequate instructional time dedicated to implementation was not noted.

When Milner was re-established as a Core Knowledge Academy in what would now be referred to as “turnaround,” several other changes were effected in addition to the curriculum adoption. Community partnerships were established with Catholic Charities, which provides support staff and before- and after-school programs for students, and the Village for Children and Families, an agency that works to reduce truancy rates. Both programs offer “appealing content and opportunities for positive interactions with quality adults” and the auditors found evidence that the programs had significantly improved school culture and climate. During the Core Knowledge curriculum implementation, Milner also grew from a K-5 school to a K-8 school

“without the capacity in the school to effectively support the educational needs of these expanded developmental levels,” according to the audit. High rates of teacher turnover and absenteeism, student truancy, and remarkably low test scores made Milner one of the lowest-performing 5% of schools in the state.

Analysis of the interviews and school observations at Milner resulted in seven major themes:

Family and community connection: At the time of the audit, a core group of about 20 parents were found to be involved in the school governance council, parent-teacher organization, and Family Resource Center. Those parents saw their roles in the school as important and meaningful, and regarded the principal highly. Despite a professed commitment to the community and programs like GED and ESL classes, parent institutes, and morning meetings for parents, the school has not made durable connections with most families. Additionally, most parents considered Milner to be a low-quality school and did not want their children to remain enrolled. There was no clear system for reaching out to families or evaluating the effectiveness of family and community outreach efforts.

School environment: In this area, most accounts alluded to a positive change in school environment associated with the implementation of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) and the development of partnerships with community agencies that provided services and support staff. There was a clear sense of apprehension among parents, teachers, and students regarding the major upcoming changes anticipated with the turnaround. The auditors described many teachers' feelings about their work at Milner as “more of a calling than a career” and reported that many teachers felt sad about leaving the school and anxious about being placed in new

positions. One parent said that she was concerned that she did not have a voice in determining the future of the school and community.

School leadership: The principal was generally considered to be an effective leader in spite of persistently low student achievement. Parents, community partners, teachers, and students described the principal as available, accessible, responsive, flexible, aware and capable of handling complex situations. Also, importantly, the auditors reported that the principal's "roots in the community" gave him significant credibility and a high level of trust with families. The central district office found the principal to be focusing on non-instructional matters (i.e. school culture, climate and community) and not allotting adequate attention to improving academic achievement.

Teachers and staff: The audit cited high rates of teacher turnover, low staff attendance, and inadequate professional development as having significant negative effects on student achievement. Further, there was no consistent methodology for teacher evaluation. Teachers seemed dedicated to the school and saw themselves as stabilizing influences for students. Teachers requested more support for behavioral and emotional issues in the classroom than for instructional problems.

Use of time: The audit found that learning time was compromised by non-instructional factors such as behavioral interruptions and low student attendance. The implementation of the Positive Behavioral Instructional Supports program, however, slightly remedied the situation by decreasing the rates of suspension and discipline referrals.

Curriculum and instruction: It seems that the implementation of the Core Knowledge curriculum was incomplete; teachers did not understand how the elements of the initiative fit together and reported that it was not possible to accommodate the

curriculum within class time constraints. It was also reported that the school had no resources available for differentiation and did not provide individualized small group instruction. Classes were large and there were few paraprofessionals or instructional assistants in classrooms.

Use of data: Despite a professed interest in and commitment to using data, the school has no streamlined system for collecting, analyzing, and effectively using data about student achievement. There was a lack of focus on benchmarks, no evident training or technology available for data collection, and no indication that data was considered in organizational decisions.

THE COMMISSIONER'S NETWORK

Connecticut's achievement gap—the discrepancy between low-income student performance and non-low-income student performance—is the largest in the nation, according to data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress. Governor Dannel Malloy formally declared his commitment to ameliorate inequality in education by announcing the “Year for Education Reform in Connecticut” in his 2012 State of the State address. Rolling out a comprehensive plan to increase student performance and narrow the state's achievement gap, Malloy identified six broad areas to improve public education: access to early childhood education, intensive interventions in the lowest-performing schools and districts, increasing access to alternative school models like magnets and charters, removing “barriers to success,” improve teacher quality and reforming systems for tenure, and delivering resources targeted towards low-performing districts.

To accomplish two of the reform plan's goals, the Commissioner's Network was developed as a system to aggressively improve student achievement in the state's lowest performing schools and districts. The Connecticut State Board of Education adopted the guidelines for the Network on July 11, 2012, permitting State Commissioner of Education Stefan Pryor to select up to 25 low-performing schools to join by July 1, 2014. The Network is built to generate partnerships between the state, school districts, local stakeholders, and reformers associated with private charter companies, consulting groups, and nonprofit organizations in order to develop and implement intensive, transformational turnaround plans in category four and category five schools. Admission into the Commissioner's Network was reserved for schools in the bottom 5% of Connecticut schools that developed turnaround plans approved by the state. Turnaround committees would be established by local boards of education and consist of the Commissioner, parents, teachers, and district administrators and superintendents. The process for turnaround, which the guidelines dictate should be overseen and advised by the committee, would require an operations and instructional audit of the turnaround school (to be used as a "needs assessment" for turnaround) as well as the development or selection of a turnaround plan. The committee would also be responsible for monitoring and supervising implementation of the plan. All operations and instructional audits would evaluate before and after school programs, school-based health centers, Family Resource Centers, gifted and talented programs, summer school programs, length of school day and year, teacher retention rates, percentages of special needs, English-language-learner (ELL), and low-income students, truancy rates, curriculum, programs in the arts and physical education, school psychologists and social workers, professional development, teacher evaluation programs, availability of resources, and use of

technology to determine the extent to which the school had established family and community connections, a positive school environment, effective leadership, effective teachers and staff, effective use of time, needs-based curriculum and instruction, and effective use of data to inform decision-making.

Network schools were to be expected to demonstrate increases in student and teacher attendance, proficiency in math and reading, school performance index, graduation rate (where applicable), course passage rate, and teacher performance level, as well as decreases in student truancy and disciplinary measures. They would be provided with \$1.5 million in state funds in addition to local funding.

A June 22, 2012 press release from the Commissioner’s office announced that the Connecticut State Department of Education had invited four districts—Bridgeport, Hartford, New Haven, and Norwich—to develop turnaround plans in order to qualify for entry into the first cohort of the Network. Milner (then Core Knowledge Academy at the Thirman L. Milner School) was chosen as the Network turnaround for Hartford Public Schools.

JUMOKE ACADEMY

On August 6, 2012, barely a month before the school year was slated to begin, Family Urban Schools of Excellence (FUSE) submitted a turnaround plan for Milner that was quickly approved by Hartford Public Schools and the Commissioner’s Network. FUSE was born out of Jumoke Academy, one of Hartford’s most celebrated charter schools, which was founded by educator and activist Thelma Ellis Dickerson in 1997 to combat the racial and socioeconomic achievement gap in a high-poverty community. “Jumoke,” meaning “the child is loved,” was adopted from a Nigerian tribal language

and became the guiding principle for Dickerson’s family-oriented, child-centered reform approach. Since 1997, Jumoke has grown from a K-3rd elementary school of 125 students to four schools serving 575 children from pre-K through middle school. After the Jumoke Academy charter schools received accolades for demonstrating leaps in student achievement, Jumoke expanded to become the FUSE charter network. The FUSE website describes the philosophy of the Jumoke schools:

FUSE believes in the power of transformational educational practice. Hallmarks of the Jumoke model are a “whole child” approach that includes social and emotional support, personalized interventions, academic assistants in every classroom, strong family outreach, diverse enrichment opportunities, and an affirming culturally responsive curriculum.

According to FUSE CEO Dr. Michael Sharpe, Dickerson’s son, the Jumoke-Milner partnership had been developing for several years. Current superintendent Christina Kishimoto and her predecessor, Steven Adamowski, had begun to focus on failing schools several years before Commissioner Pryor and Governor Malloy began the Commissioner’s Network initiative. Jumoke officials had had knowledge of the Network before it was formally announced, Sharpe said, and had been working with HPS to be able to present a complete Milner turnaround plan when the Commissioner’s office began accepting applications.

THE TURNAROUND PLAN

The Commissioner’s Network mandates that districts conduct an operations and instructional audit of each Network school to identify areas of need for the turnaround plan. Because the Milner population “closely mirrors” the circumstances of students whose performance has increased under the educational leadership of Jumoke Academy, Jumoke and HPS entered into a partnership to “replicate systematically...the comprehensive education strategy developed and implemented successful at Jumoke

Academy.” In addition to implementing the Jumoke design, the turnaround plan expanded upon reform initiatives in the major domains identified by the audit:

Family and community connection: Parent Academies and school-wide events would be held to educate parents and welcome them into the school community. Every Milner parent would immediately become a member of the parent organization and each classroom would recruit at least one room parent. The principal would adopt an open-door school visitation policy and develop a program for community outreach and parent communication. Regular parent-teacher communication as well as Family Resource Center outreach initiatives would be strengthened to improve attendance and at-home academic support for students. A preschool classroom would also be added.

School environment: Much of the Jumoke design is based on creating a “community of distinction” and treating students as “scholars” to encourage a sense of pride and respect for academic work. To create this school culture, Jumoke planned to require students to wear uniforms and implement a strict attendance policy. The plan also includes a diversity celebration, a “blazer ceremony” to welcome students entering into the upper school, and additional support for the community-school partnerships begun in the 2008 turnaround. The school culture approach “One Voice” would be implemented to create a sense of safety, high expectations, and consistency and an understanding that cultural, developmental, social and emotional learning are crucial for academic success. Jumoke also pledged to foster additional relationships with community partners and create academic supports for after-school program staff. According to Sharpe, discipline would be handled through a system of “student management” based on “clear expectations, consistency of practice, regular teacher conferences, and a new code of behavior.” Because Jumoke believes that “it is important not simply to discipline

but to have conversation,” students who were disruptive would be referred to a scholar development room to process and develop strategies to prevent further discipline referrals.

School leadership: Based on the finding that the principal seemed more committed to and successful in fostering school culture than raising student performance, Jumoke recommended a leader who will focus on instruction to raise achievement. After hiring a highly-regarded, experienced principal who had demonstrated performance gains with a similar school population, Jumoke would also work to promote teacher empowerment, integrate the “data team” and “curriculum coaching” models, and fully train teachers, staff, parents, students and leaders in the Jumoke model. The Jumoke turnaround would create parallel school leadership—there would be a principal and administrative staff *as well as* a FUSE management staff, to be housed in the school building.

Teachers and support staff: To address teacher and staff effectiveness, Jumoke planned to create a rigorous teacher selection and retention system, hire curriculum coaches to empower teachers, and provide additional resources in classrooms by hiring academic assistants and appointing room parents. Every current teacher at Milner would be offered the opportunity to re-apply to teach at the school, but there would be no guarantee of re-hiring. Besides strategies for the hiring process, the initiatives in this area are primarily directed towards teacher empowerment and support.

Use of time: Most of the funding from the Commissioner’s Network was reserved to employ an academic assistant for each classroom in order to maximize teaching time and allow for specialized, small-group instruction. The plan also calls for a strategy to delegate non-instructional tasks to other staff members to free teachers to focus on instruction. Saturday Academies and extended school days would be instituted to

increase instructional time. At the time of the application submission, the committee was still considering options for providing summer instruction through either an extended calendar or a structured summer session.

Curriculum and instruction: To address the problems associated with the transition from K-5 to K-8, teacher turnover and instructional inconsistency, and dearth of resources, Jumoke recommended a restructuring of the school into separate lower and upper schools to create developmentally-appropriate policies and strategies for each, as well as a limit of 22 students per class, a program and bilingual specialist for ELL students, Common Core aligned curriculum, and a focus on effective, teacher-driven professional development.

Use of data: The turnaround plan included a student assessment strategy based on a framework developed by teachers, Jumoke leadership and HPS that would effectively use technology to support learning objectives and align data reporting with district and state measures. Teachers would be trained to equip themselves with data in the form of tests/quizzes, individual student conferences, projects and presentations, and frequent writing samples. Teacher-generated data would be supplemented with standardized test scores and scores on other normed tests as well as students' attendance and discipline records.

Though publicly available information about the turnaround does not provide insight into the process of selecting the Jumoke application, education blogger Jonathan Peltó suggested in a post that HPS had forgone a stipulation in Hartford municipal code that requires a competitive solicitation process in cases when a contract exceeds \$25,000. Because the Milner contract awarded FUSE \$345,000 per year for managing the charter,

Pelto claims that the contract itself is illegal and insinuates that Hartford had unfairly favored Jumoke in the search for a turnaround plan.¹⁰

Pelto and others also criticized the JAH-Milner partnership because of stark differences between the Jumoke Academy population and the JAH-Milner population. According to Pelto and the nonprofit news outlet The Connecticut Mirror, the Milner population has a higher poverty rate, more special needs students, and more students not fluent in English than Jumoke Academy. The differences in demographics can be seen below:

	Milner	Jumoke Academy
Poverty rate	95%	66%
English language learner (ELL)	25%	<1%
Special needs	11%	4%

(Pelto 2012)¹¹

Responding to concerns that Jumoke would be unable to meet the needs of the Milner population, Sharpe pointed out the turnaround plan's core commitment to educate the whole child and provide resources to meet all of students' needs. Under the sixth domain identified in the needs assessment and turnaround plan, additional bilingual and special needs teachers would be hired to create a program for ELL and disabled students.

Parents voiced another concern about the turnaround plan at community meeting several months before Jumoke was officially granted the contract to manage Milner. In spite of low student achievement and the school's negative reputation, the attending parents defended the teachers and principal at Milner and argued that the

¹⁰ I did not find any additional information to support or refute Pelto's claim, but I felt that it was a relevant piece of information to describe responses to the Milner turnaround.

¹¹ These numbers came directly from Pelto's blog, though he did not list a source for the data. I found several sources myself that all listed slightly different rates for each of these measures, but this chart is roughly equivalent to the averages that I found from other sources.

faculty and staff should be retained. To address those parents' comments, Sharpe promised that all teachers would be invited to re-apply but also admitted that most would likely opt to transfer out, saying "it would just not be honest and truthful if I made a blanket commitment." Because of the tumult associated with a major transition in school management, organization and staff, Jumoke chose to focus primarily on school culture and family-school relationships during the inaugural year of the JAH-Milner turnaround.

RESULTS AND RESPONSE

A mid-year audit was conducted in December 2012 using the same framework as the pre-turnaround operations and instructional audit. The executive findings were as follows:

Family and community connections: Parent and community perception of the school had improved drastically and families felt welcomed by school staff. There had been several social events for families as well as Parent Academies designed to help parents to support learning at home. The community partnership with Catholic Charities continued to be strong and the after-school program has become aligned with academic standards.

School environment: Efforts to improve school climate have primarily taken the form of the school uniform policy, a culture of celebrating diversity, and a strict attendance policy. There are high expectations for student behavior and school rules are designed to create a consistent, structured school environment. Students are generally more respectful and well behaved than reported in the previous audit, but all respondents said that more could be done to improve school climate and culture.

Leadership: Teachers reported feeling empowered by professional development opportunities, support from Room Parents and Academic Assistants, and the flexibility they are permitted in designing curriculum and planning instruction. Respondents also indicated that the in-school FUSE office provided valuable resources, focus and support. Staff and parents, however, did not understand why there were so many staff members in the school and were not aware of the roles of additional staffers.

Teachers and support staff: Jumoke conducted a structured hiring process and required staff to make a 3-year commitment to teach at JAH-Milner to reduce teacher turnover. Michael Sharpe also indicated that the hiring process took into account the cultural background of applicants in order to form a teaching corps that would be able to meet students' culturally specific needs and communicate effectively with parents. Five teachers were re-hired from Core Knowledge Academy at Milner and 27 new teachers were hired, as well as Academic Assistants for each class. The Jumoke model also has implemented an integrated system for instructional planning time for teachers, performance evaluation (using the Teachscape model), and professional development to provide feedback and oversight. Teachers responded that they appreciated coaching and feedback from the evaluation tool, but the integrated teacher support system has not been fully implemented yet.

Use of time: Quality instructional time was increased through extended days, six Saturday Academies, and academic enrichment during the after-school program. The turnaround committee had not yet chosen an option for adding additional days to the calendar. Targeting attendance and behavior has also helped to create more quality instructional time. The addition of Academic Assistant has also helped teachers to maximize instructional time. According to a CT Mirror article, first-grade teacher Holly

Moya, one of the five teachers remaining from the previous faculty, commented “last year I had 24 students by myself. This year I have 17 with an assistant. The extra help is huge. I’m very grateful.”

Curriculum and instruction: Here, the primary goal was to implement the Common Core State Standards. Bilingual staffing has doubled. The leadership structure has also shifted from pre-k-5th grades and 6th-8th grades to a single leadership structure providing pre-k-8th oversight. Though the turnaround plan called for a school-within-a-school approach to better address developmentally appropriate needs of children in lower and upper grades, respectively, the auditors did not find that that approach had been utilized.

Use of data: Leaders and teachers both agree that there is a focus on identifying and addressing individual students’ needs through the use of data, but reported that the data team process had not been fully implemented. Most teachers and staff did not have knowledge of school or grade-level targets or an accountability plan.

Sharpe’s feedback about the early stages of turnaround emphasized the ways that Jumoke had already transformed school culture and student attitudes. He said that the uniform policy, which used some funds from the Commissioner’s Network budget to purchase uniforms for every student, was a point of focus because it encouraged students to practice behaving in a professional, respectful, confident way and reminded them of their identities as “scholars.” The blazer ceremony, he added, was an important transition for middle school students because it created a way to include the entire school community, including families, in a moment of pride for each advancing student. During the ceremony, students accept the “mantle of scholarship” in the presence of teachers, family members, and other students. The stricter attendance policy also fosters a sense of professionalism and scholarship, and is a crucial way for teachers and

Academic Assistants to make regular contact with parents. According to Sharpe, “staff members have offered to do just about anything to help kids get to school.”

Sharpe added that parents have been positive about the turnaround. The compliance rate for the uniform policy was surprisingly high, and parents seemed enthusiastic about enforcing the policy with their children. Parents were also satisfied with the discipline policy. In previous years, students could leave classrooms or the school building without an adult knowing; now, students’ whereabouts are monitored carefully and there is an expectation that students will be present for class. Parents reported feeling that their children were safer after the turnaround. Sharpe said that parents have been appreciative that the school “takes care of their kids.” A May 2013 Hartford Courant article reports that as the first turnaround year came to a close, parents who attended a “community conversation” felt that the school environment had changed, hallways were noticeably less chaotic, and students were proud of being “scholars.” One parent, however, said that the administration sweeps problems under the rug. Another was angry because she had received extremely frequent calls about her kids’ behavior.

Despite the focus on culture and climate, there have been significant gains in performance on standardized tests as well. According to a Commissioner’s Network press release, the percentage of students scoring at or above goal on the Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT) reading section increased for grades 8 and 8. A press release by education advocacy group Connecticut Coalition for Achievement Now (ConnCAN) also reports that Jumoke experienced modest gains in CMT scores in the first year of operations: “The percent of students at goal at Jumoke grew overall by 1.8 percentage points from the previous year. Particularly bright spots in the scores included a 22.2

percentage point increase in 6th grade writing scores and an 11 percent jump in 7th grade math results. However, achievement declined by 6.7 percentage points overall for Jumoke's 4th graders, and 6th and 8th grade math decreased by 6.9 and 4.6 percentage points, respectively.”

CONCLUSION: THE MILNER TURNAROUND

From the information that I was able to gather, I am able to make several important conclusions about the elements of turnaround. First, the reform phase was preceded by years of extremely low morale among teachers, parents and students who felt that the district had neglected the school because of a belief that the students were incapable of high achievement. Jumoke CEO Michael Sharpe said that Milner had had “a culture of failure.”¹² In spite of low morale, however, the previous principal had fostered a positive school culture and was popular among teachers, parents and students. When the Commissioner's Network and Hartford Public Schools contracted Family Urban Schools of Excellence to lead the Milner turnaround, parents were hopeful at the prospect of dramatic improvement, but also angry and concerned at the removal of a principal and teachers that they trusted and valued.

Second, the measures undertaken in the turnaround reach all four of the areas that I addressed in Chapter 3 and were definitively focused on community development and meeting students' specific needs. Jumoke prioritized parent involvement by strengthening its Family Resource Center and implementing Parent Academies, a room parent system, and school-wide events open to the community. The choice to seek teachers whose cultural backgrounds matched the culture of the community indicates a

¹² This quote is borrowed from Booker Evans, a student at Trinity College who interviewed Michael Sharpe for an academic assignment and generously shared his research with me. His work is properly cited in my list of references.

commitment to culturally responsive pedagogy. The addition of Academic Assistants also allows for specialized instruction tailored to students' specific needs. Finally, the Family Resource Center, the school-based preschool program, and the before- and after-school services offered by Catholic Charities demonstrate Jumoke's commitment to school readiness and intervening in non-academic, out-of-school areas that affect student achievement. I found that the initiatives to use data effectively and implement an integrated teacher support system had not yet been carried out, but it is possible that those elements would be more fully developed in subsequent years.

The ideological implications of the Milner turnaround are less clear. The purpose of education, as espoused by Family Urban Schools of Excellence, is to "prepare children to successfully compete in the global marketplace, overcoming any cultural, social or economic challenges." This mission statement evokes the goal of global competitiveness emphasized in *A Nation at Risk*, and also emphasizes the social mobility objective of the egalitarian ideology. "Successful competition in the global marketplace," however, also echoes the claim that the hidden purpose of schools is train workers, selectively sort students into predetermined occupational tracks, and ultimately reproduce divisions between status groups and social classes (Sorokin 1959, Anyon 1980, Apple 2012). I did, however, find evidence of culturally responsive pedagogical strategies, which perhaps represents the promise of critical pedagogy to reveal oppression, dismantle exclusive social ideals and norms, and allow students to defeat the social hegemony traditionally transmitted through the hidden curriculum.

My conclusions regarding the ideology of the Milner turnaround revisit critical pedagogy scholarship and the claims I have made about corporate reform ideology. First, it is important to note that the principles set forth by Paulo Freire and the movement for

critical pedagogy do not only apply to literal pedagogical practices in classrooms. Critical pedagogy also offers a framework for “liberation” which I believe can be repurposed for “reform.” If liberation that is initiated, designed, and carried out by the oppressors is inherently oppressive itself, then school reform measures that are initiated, designed and carried out by non-educator, non-community member elites will also be inherently oppressive.

The leaders of the Milner turnaround are all members of a high-earning, professional upper class: Governor Dannel Malloy’s base salary is \$150,000, Commissioner of Education Stefan Pryor’s is \$185,000), and Hartford Public Schools superintendent Christina Kishimoto’s is \$231,000.¹³ Malloy has no background in education. Pryor completed the Yale Teacher Preparation program, but has no background as an educator. Pryor was a founder of a New Haven charter school that has since expanded into a network of charter schools in New York City, Hartford and Bridgeport; his background outside of public education was primarily in economic development. Kishimoto’s background in education is limited to her roles as a consultant, administrator, policy developer, and budget official. Sharpe worked at Jumoke Academy for four years before he became CEO in 2003, though it is not clear what his role was before his appointment. Interestingly, it seems that each of the leaders have somewhat humble origins, which they evoke to indicate their qualifications for humanitarian work: Malloy suffered from learning and physical disabilities during his childhood in Stamford, Connecticut, Pryor is the child of two former public school teachers, Kishimoto grew up in the Bronx, and Sharpe is the son of Jumoke founder Thelma Dickerson, a civil rights leader and former Hartford educator. Each of the four

¹³ I was not able to find Family Urban Schools of Excellence CEO Michael Sharpe’s salary, but Hartford Public Schools contracted the private non-profit management group for \$345,000 per year.

leaders has a similar story: they were born into middle-class families, some with parents who were public school teachers, and overcame socioeconomic hardships to become influential advocates for school reform in disadvantaged areas.

It would be extreme and insurgent to call the leaders of the Milner turnaround “oppressors,” but it is clear that they are members of a socioeconomic class that benefits from current social stratification. To recall the arguments I made in Chapter 1, the leaders of the turnaround have a vested interest in the public school system’s ability to reproduce dominant social ideals and class-based disparities in status, cultural and social capital, and occupational attainment.

Further, the Milner turnaround is situated in a matrix of school reform that is marked by corporate reform ideology. Jonathan Peltó has suggested that the education reform bill designed by Malloy and Pryor is “the most anti-teacher, anti-union, pro-charter school” bill of any Democratic governor in the nation (Peltó 2014). Though it also addresses non-corporate reform factors like early childhood education and state intervention in the lowest performing schools, the bill emphasizes the corporate reform measures of alternative school models (following the options for “failing schools” created by No Child Left Behind) increased funding granted only to districts that “embrace reform” (the central premise of Race to the Top).

Hartford Public Schools is also particularly committed to corporate reform. During Christina Kishimoto’s tenure as superintendent, she has developed Connecticut’s first district-wide all-choice system, a cornerstone of corporate reform ideology. By letting the consumers—parents—choose their commodity of choice—schools—school choice permits market forces to govern the school system. Kishimoto has also implemented new school designs including an Engineering and Green Technology

Academy, an Insurance and Finance Academy, a Nursing Academy, and a Law and Government Academy, suggesting the institutionalization of Jean Anyon's finding that certain schools prepare their students for predetermined occupational tracks (Anyon 1980).

In this context, "turnaround" itself concretizes each of the principles of the corporate reform agenda. First, it affirms that it is feasible for schools to demonstrate rapid, dramatic progress—the very definition of turnaround. Second, by firing teachers and replacing the existing administration, the Milner turnaround suggests that the persistent poverty in the school's neighborhood can—and should—be ameliorated by the school. This reinforces the corporate reform tenet that it is the responsibility of schools to equalize society. Third, it employs a free market ideology to oversee the fate of the school, contracts a private management firm to design and implement the reform, and puts non-educator elites at the helm of the reform. Further, JAH-Milner received a \$100,000 federal grant to aid the turnaround partnership, indicating that the school benefitted from Race to the Top's incentive-based federal funding scheme.

Earlier, I suggested that turnaround reform represents a confluence of corporate reform and an alternative anti-corporate progressive reform approach, which supports and empowers teachers, locates the source of inequality in societal stratification rather than schools, and address non-academic factors to improve student achievement. Because turnaround is a patently corporate reform initiative and yet prioritizes cultural affirmation, teacher-parent relationships, and out-of-school factors, my findings support the claim that turnaround represents a coming together of two ideologies. Ultimately, however, because teachers, parents, students and community members were not the leaders of the Milner reform, the turnaround represents a manifestation of corporate

reform ideology and disallows stakeholders from dictating the terms of their own “liberation” from social hegemony.

CHAPTER 7 / ANALYSIS

Before I begin to analyze the elements and ideology of my two disparate examples of turnaround reform, it is useful to return to the three conceptual frameworks laid out in the first three chapters.

First, in terms of ideology and the purpose of public education, I asked the fundamental question: Is the purpose of public schooling to eradicate social inequality and enable movement between class lines, or are schools meant to actually reproduce class disparities? Important concepts in this chapter were the egalitarian ideology of education, the hidden curriculum, and critical pedagogy.

Second, in my discussion of the ideology of reform legislation since *A Nation at Risk*, I suggested that there were three central claims assumed by the corporate reform ideology: first, it is possible for reform to produce rapid and dramatic results in the form of standardized test score gains; second, it is the responsibility of schools themselves to counteract stratification in society; third, the best way to equalize education is to let market forces and businesspeople govern the public school system.

Finally, the third chapter addressed the history and definition of school turnaround, situated turnaround within the contemporary corporate reform ideology, and detailed four broad potential areas of reform for turnaround efforts (organization/school climate, culturally responsive pedagogy, school readiness and other out-of-school factors, and parent involvement).

It is also crucial to begin with the disclaimer that my findings are by no means evaluative of the success of either turnaround. Success in schooling is a measure inconsistently defined and constantly contested; a conclusion about the success of school

reform must be predicated on a determinate interpretation of the basic purpose of public education, which, as I've shown, is still up for debate. Further, scores on standardized achievement tests are often assumed to be an objective quantitative measure of school quality. If this is the case, then success of a reform still could be measured in several ways: by considering gain scores as a representation of a school's relative improvement, by comparing scores between students of different demographics to evaluate the extent to which the reform equalizes achievement between groups, or by comparing a school's test scores to state or district averages.

I offer this critique of an evaluative model based on test scores: perhaps performance on standardized tests does not accurately represent students' mastery of course material or development of skills crucial to informed participation in the American economic or political systems. Put simply, perhaps tests measure something irrelevant to the equalizing, empowering, democratizing project of public education. Perhaps acceptable performance on standardized tests simply represents the degree to which a student can adhere to the narrow scope of knowledge contained in the tests. Perhaps a student who performs well on tests might actually have less strong critical thinking skills and creative abilities than a student who has lower scores on standardized tests. Perhaps the low-income and non-white students who are coached through test preparation are ultimately oppressed by public schools that are subjected to the threat of punitive consequences for substandard scores—and maybe that's the whole point.

For those reasons, my analysis almost entirely bypasses the measure of standardized tests scores as a useful tool for evaluating school quality. There are several additional factors specific to my cases that rendered standardized test scores ineffective for my study. First of all, changes in test scores over the past several years at both Milner and

Macdonough are largely affected by the transiency of the student body, due to redistricting, families relocating, and parents opting to send their children to other school options. Second, as I was reminded by Hartford's Communications and Research division, the Milner turnaround has thus far focused primarily on school culture, rather than attempting to raise test scores in its first years of operation, and is far too new to have produced measurable results even if test scores had been a focus. Finally, an analysis of test scores is not a useful tool for this study because the recent implementation of the Common Core State Standards and sweeping changes in state tests have interrupted trends in student achievement on standardized tests at schools and districts across the nation.

A simple statistical analysis of quantitative test score data also would not do justice to the qualitative efforts of the two turnaround projects. Both turnarounds focused on improving school culture, teacher morale, parent and family involvement, and specialized instruction. Though metrics have been developed to gauge those factors, I believe that quantitative indicators are at best a partial and incomplete measure of the multi-faceted components of school communities, relationships, pedagogy, and ideology. By abandoning test scores as an accurate measure of school quality, I open up a more discerning and worthwhile discussion about the ideological principles of school turnaround reform, the specific initiatives undertaken by whole-school reform efforts, and the effects of a reform agenda on the community that it sets out to change.

ELEMENTS OF REFORM: TURNAROUND SIMILARITIES

I begin with a discussion of the specific initiatives undertaken by the turnarounds in the four major areas I identified: instruction, pedagogy, school readiness, and parent

involvement. Within this framework, I found similarities between the two schools, indicating that there is in fact a degree of uniformity in whole-school reform programs targeting low-income, non-white low-performing urban schools.

Similarities in instructional reforms were apparent; both turnaround schools adopted an approach of delegating non-instructional tasks to non-teacher staff and shifting student-teacher ratios to allow for specialized, small-group instruction. Macdonough principal Jon Romeo described in detail the way that data was used to identify factors that were impeding student achievement and seek resources (the FRC, the Elementary Instructional Support Teacher, the school nurse, et cetera) to “attack” non-instructional areas of need so that teachers could focus on instruction. Teacher’s assistants—Wesleyan student tutors, mentors, interventionists, paraprofessionals—were also placed in each classroom to cater to the needs of each “tier” of students’ mastery levels and to free teachers’ time. At Milner, the additional state funding from the Commissioner’s Network was used to hire academic assistants to add a full-time second teacher in each classroom. The Milner turnaround plan did not include an explicit system for using data in the way that Macdonough did, but the document stated an intention to develop a consistent method for collecting and using data to identify students’ needs. Both schools’ strategies for improving instruction intended to alleviate strain on teachers and provide specialized instruction by lowering student-to-teacher ratios. Though there was no clear evidence of critical pedagogy or culturally responsive pedagogy being put to use in classrooms, both the FUSE CEO and Principal Romeo expressed an interest in having teachers and parent leaders who “looked like our kids,” indicating a commitment to affirm and incorporate the culture of the community.

The schools also focused on fostering a cohesive school community and creating a comprehensive support services for families. Both Milner and Macdonough depended on programming and outreach from their Family Resource Centers. Both also made an effort to strengthen community partnerships: for Macdonough, relationships with the YMCA, Wesleyan University, the Community Health Center, the North End Action Team, and local businesspeople and politicians; for Milner, Catholic Charities and an agency that managed student truancy. Both schools worked to improve school readiness by supporting and increasing access to preschool programs in their schools.

Both turnarounds also devoted energy to improving school climate, developing a sense of pride in the school for students and teachers, and including parents in school activities and events. At Macdonough, the SURFS Up! program and monthly SURFS event functioned as a system for managing student behavior and incorporating families into the school community. At Milner, events like “culture night” worked to create continuity between students’ home environments and the school community. Macdonough teachers and officials forged relationships with families by speaking to parents informally at pick-up and drop-off, which was made possible by the small size of the neighborhood zoned for the school. The Milner turnaround created a formal system for teacher-parent interaction by instituting the room parent policy and a series of Parent Academies.

IDEOLOGY: TURNAROUND DIFFERENCES

In fact, the only salient differences in the two turnarounds were associated with the development and context of the reform initiatives themselves rather than the details of the reform agendas. Though the schools both had a history of low student

achievement and negative school climate, the official Milner turnaround was prompted by state intervention and the de facto Macdonough turnaround was spurred by grassroots community organizing.

Because Milner had been identified as one of the lowest-performing schools in the state and had received widespread recognition as a persistent “failure,” its turnaround was a high-profile investment in whole-school reform on both the state and the local level. The school’s reputation influenced the process of turnaround for several reasons: first, the project was under intense scrutiny; second, Jumoke was required to submit a competitive turnaround proposal to vie for the Milner contract; third, the challenges of the first turnaround year were compounded by especially low morale among teachers, students and parents.

Milner also came with the baggage of a previous turnaround attempt that failed and was quickly abandoned. When the Core Knowledge curriculum was adopted in 2008 in an attempt to improve and streamline instruction, teachers felt that they did not have enough training, materials, resources, support or time to implement the program. The turnaround resulted in no clear improvement, left the legacy of a failed and short-lived attempt at reform by a district that otherwise neglected Milner, and reinforced the school community’s sense of hopelessness.

The genesis of the Macdonough turnaround was quite the opposite. The school had languished in a neighborhood that was regarded by town residents as a lost cause and had received little attention from the school district despite its history of low student achievement. Instead of a formal, publicized turnaround project initiated from the state or even district level, the Macdonough turnaround began in the community that it affected. Neighborhood residents spearheaded the North End Action Team task force

that appealed to the school district for a new principal, and the same committee of community members and parents selected Jon Romeo from the candidates chosen by the district in a preliminary hiring phase. The Macdonough turnaround also followed a quick succession of several unpopular principals, but there was no legacy of a previous attempt to formally “turn around” the school. When the road to reform began, the community was mobilized and energized about the possibility of positive change because they had organized to fight for it; they were committed to the unofficial turnaround from the start.

The roots of each turnaround initiative also affected the extent to which certain elements of both could be put into practice. Because Romeo succeeded a wildly unpopular principal and was selected by neighborhood residents from a pool of applicants pre-approved by the district, he began his first year as principal with some degree of trust from the community. His focus on developing relationships between the school and students’ families was facilitated by a level of existing community involvement generated by NEAT prior to his arrival. The Milner turnaround, because it was an imposed reform agenda designed with little to no input from the community, had to overcome the additional obstacle of a school community left reeling from the demolition of its existing structure. Parents expressed concern for the teachers forced to leave Milner and resented the dismissal of a principal who had been popular among parents and teachers. The community’s disappointment and skepticism ostensibly interfered with the ability of new leaders and teachers under Jumoke Academy Honors at Milner to forge the close, trusting relationships that the turnaround plan dictated.

There is a slight but nuanced distinction between the ways that the two plans dealt with the issue of staffing at a school in transition. Romeo explained that, in his

opinion, Macdonough's low performance was a result of low morale and a belief that "Macdonough kids couldn't learn." He demanded an immediate and sweeping change in attitudes from the Macdonough teachers. Every child at Macdonough *could* learn, Romeo maintained, and it was the school's duty to provide every resource necessary to meet every child's needs both inside and outside the classroom. The same was partially true at Milner, and the turnaround plan included a stipulation for only re-hiring those teachers who would be committed to a no-excuses, every-child-can-succeed philosophy. At Macdonough, however, Romeo made an effort to retain the teachers who already worked at the school, indicating that he did not question teachers' *abilities* and instead wanted to target teachers' *commitment*. The Milner turnaround plan, on the other hand, totally re-staffed the school, indicating that the committee doubted the competence of the existing teaching staff. Romeo also continued to empower teachers by working flexibly with them to accommodate their personal and family-related needs. Macdonough teachers reported feeling respected and valued, and thus motivated and supported to go the extra mile for their students, throughout the turnaround process. When new teachers were hired to work at Milner and five existing teachers were rehired, they began their new positions with a sense of urgency. Those teachers who were hired would be expected to produce results or would be replaced with someone else who could, in keeping with the competitive corporate framework attached to a turnaround project held accountable for demonstrating rapid and significant gains in student achievement.

My own process of conducting research at the two schools also serves as a key piece of evidence that illustrates the distinction between a small, grassroots, community-oriented informal turnaround and a district- and state-controlled, high-publicity formal

turnaround under a charter model. Though I began my case studies with the intention of conducting observations and interviews in the same format at each school, the research methods that I used to investigate the two schools of focus ultimately did not align for reasons I have discussed at length in the previous chapters. The interviews that I conducted personally at Macdonough and the auditors' reports of interviews at Milner are equally informative; my field notes and conclusions from observations at Macdonough are comparable to the auditors' analyses of observations at Milner—and yet the processes of collecting each set of data were strikingly different. The respective sets of data I have collected for each case study are viable for an analysis of informal and formal school turnaround because both draw from ethnographic observations and interviews with stakeholders, but the obstacles I encountered in collecting qualitative data at Milner indicate a notable wariness of being studied or evaluated. The fact that I am able to integrate newspaper articles and blog commentaries about the JAH-Milner turnaround speaks to the publicity and scrutiny of a formal turnaround project undertaken in partnership between a private charter network and a urban public school district. There is very little commentary on the Macdonough turnaround publicly available, but several community members were eager to share their perspectives.

Although my analysis does situate the two data sets in a way that allows for parallel analysis of each case, the respective research processes I undertook are themselves crucial data points. At Macdonough, I was readily welcomed into the school several years ago as a volunteer and again, recently, as a researcher. The principal took the liberty of arranging interviews and directing me to potential interviewees. The teachers whose classes I observed and the stakeholders I interviewed all seemed comfortable answering my questions and were excited to hear more about my research

project as it progressed. When I first visited Milner, the FUSE office staff was receptive and helpful, but teachers and school administrators seemed like they did not expect me to be there and were not sure if they could trust me—similar to the response I got from the HPS CREO. Even though I had been recruited by Achieve Hartford!, a partner of HPS, the school district was quick to prohibit my research when the central office found out that I had been observing and conducting interviews without permission. Obtaining permission to conduct research required a complicated and lengthy application process, arguably meant to deter researchers, which required me to explain the potential benefit to the district. The process was made even more difficult by the central office officials' failure to respond in a timely manner to my application, emails, and phone calls. It was clear that HPS did not want me researching at Milner, perhaps for fear of a distracting presence in a high-pressure school or because the school was already under such intense scrutiny. In my meetings with the CREO, however, I got the sense that she was afraid I would be evaluating the turnaround; she pointed out several times that the JAH-Milner turnaround was brand-new and could not be expected to have shown results so early in its transformation. Despite my insistence that my work was ethnographic rather than evaluative, she insisted that my research did not belong at Milner.

Though each school turnaround shared a commitment to fostering community partnerships, Milner did so in a controlled and limited way while Macdonough seemed to readily solicit and welcome collaboration from any source. The Milner turnaround incorporated the existing partnerships (e.g. Catholic Charities) but did not make any apparent effort to seek other relationships with community organizations. The Macdonough turnaround developed the relationship with the local YMCA that the school had established previously, and also developed collaborative programs with local

businesses (like the restaurant that hosted Pancakes with the Principal and the bike shop that sponsored SURFS Up!), local politicians and other leaders who serve as mentors, and the local university. The Milner reformers ostensibly had access to similar resources—there are several local colleges and universities and countless local businesses—but did not choose to expand the school’s community partnerships beyond those that already existed.

There are two major implications of Macdonough’s enthusiasm for community partnerships. First, it allows access to resources not provided by the school district, and second, it ensures that the Macdonough leadership has the respect and support of the local community and that the school has deep roots in its neighborhood. The fact that Milner exists as a school operated by non-community residents and independent from other businesses and organizations in the community suggests not only a strengthening of the hierarchical division between authority figures (teachers, principal, FUSE officials) and the parents, students and other community members, but also indicates a wariness of or disdain for the community itself. A school designed entirely by a charter network without input from its community is a space in which marginalized people (the poor and mostly non-white families whose children attend the school) are subject to the imposed values and expectations of a dominant, paternalistic authority. When a dominating structure like the Milner turnaround plan is implemented at the behest of district and state mandates in a community already marked as abject and “failing,” a new paternalistic order is created, one in which the community members are meant to express compulsory gratitude towards and submit to the new imposed order.

Unsurprisingly, I found that the community far better receives a turnaround reform agenda that is led by community members themselves than an agenda imposed

by the state, district, or a contracted charter group charged with the task of “fixing” a blighted school. Parents’ and students’ reluctance to trust outsiders was apparent in both turnarounds. At Milner, the new staff members and leadership were mistrusted by the community, especially because the school community had respected the former principal and teachers who had been wrested from the school in the turnaround. At Macdonough, despite the fact that Romeo was outsider in a community that he was meant to lead, he had the support of the North End Action Team that selected him. His firm commitment to validating and incorporating the existing culture of the school community also lowered the barriers to creating trusting, collaborative relationships with teachers and parents.

The origins of the two respective turnarounds affected efforts to incorporate parents and families into the school community. Programs like Macdonough Connections, SURFS Up!, and the series of after-school family events indicate Romeo’s commitment to forging connections between teachers, staff, and parents. The Milner turnaround plan shared this commitment, but it was not clearly put into practice. Instead, by extending the school day, adding Saturday Academies, and limiting parent involvement in classrooms to a single room parent, the Milner turnaround effectively increased the time that students spend away from home and also formally dictated the parameters of parent involvement.

Annette Lareau argues that patterns of parent involvement in middle-class schools follow patterns of *interconnectedness* while parent involvement in low-income schools is marked by *separation* (2000). Interestingly, parent involvement at Macdonough School appears to be interconnected and parent involvement at JAH-Milner seems to be quite separate from instruction and school culture, despite the fact that both are

underperforming schools serving low-income, mostly-minority populations. Every day, parents at Macdonough are involved in classrooms, participating in parent and play groups in the Family Resource Center, volunteering as lunch and recess monitors, attending after-school fitness classes in the gym, visiting students for lunch, meeting informally with Romeo, planning book fairs and school events, et cetera. This sort of comprehensive, interconnected parent involvement style allows parents to forge relationships with teachers and other parents, become comfortable and feel a sense of belonging in the school environment, and observe instruction in order to support students' learning in the home.

In the area of instructional reform, I found uniformity in the prioritization of data-driven, specialized, small-group instruction. Both turnarounds expressed an interest in customizing each student's instruction to his or her own needs as determined by careful collection and analysis of data. This imperative was facilitated at Milner by the addition of Academic Assistants in each classroom, funded by the \$1 million grant from the Commissioner's Network. Macdonough lacked the publicity and state support that the Milner turnaround had, and instead accomplished its goals for instructional reform through the implementation of a thoroughgoing system of data teams and tiered instruction. Without the funding to hire an additional teacher for each classroom, Romeo created a system for specialized instruction by tweaking the school's schedule to place one interventionist in each classroom for each lesson. Volunteers from the university and the mentoring program acted as the third source of teaching for the tier of students who were at or above grade level. The Milner turnaround, though it demonstrably decreased the student-to-teacher ratio, had no such framework for using data or structuring small-group instruction with fidelity. Even if the Academic Assistant

initiative *did* enable the specialized instruction that the Milner turnaround demanded, it was not a victory of the Jumoke model but rather a simple result of a sizable surge in funding. Macdonough, on the other hand, made use of a variety of resources and strategic restructuring to tailor instruction to students' individual needs.

Both schools demanded a certain sort of attitude of positivity and dedication from its teachers. Romeo admitted that some teachers left Macdonough by choice because they were unwilling to adapt to the demands of a new leader when he arrived; he asked for the trust and full participation of the remaining teachers to carry out his reform initiatives. In return for their agreement, he facilitated the development of collegial, collaborative, team-like relationships between staff members. He made teachers feel valued by celebrating their achievements at staff meetings and SURFS Up! events, he accommodated their needs and fostered a “family feel” by allowing them to bring their own families into the school community, and he encouraged them to share lessons and information through the data team system. According to my formal and informal discussions with teachers and other staff members, teacher morale skyrocketed. Romeo made it clear that he would go to all lengths to keep members of his “team” at Macdonough—in one case, he worked out an arrangement that allowed a first grade teacher to teach only in the mornings so that she could be at home with her young children in the afternoons.

In contrast, at the beginning of the turnaround at Milner, nearly the entire faculty was made up of teachers new to the Milner community with little to no social connections with other teachers or parents. Those teachers who had been hired were celebrated as superior and capable of dramatically improving student achievement; it follows that they would feel a sense of competition and pressure to produce result rather

than empowerment and accommodation. From the information I gathered, I speculate that while Macdonough teachers felt that their jobs were secure and their work valued, the new Milner teachers likely felt the sense that they had to earn their place at the school.

IDEOLOGY AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR SCHOOL TURNAROUND

As I made clear in the conclusion sections of the Macdonough and Milner chapters, the two case studies implemented similar reform strategies but had opposite ideological approaches. The Macdonough turnaround defied every claim of corporate reform ideology, while the Milner turnaround hinged on the three central principles of corporate reform. There are also significant implications of the vastly different origins of each turnaround; Macdonough's turnaround was initiated, designed and implemented by community members while Milner's turnaround was initiated, designed and implemented by non-educator, non-community member business elites.

The brevity of my study, the scope of my research questions, and various restrictions that impeded my observations and interviews prevent me from making any valid claims about the specific teachings of a hidden curriculum in either school, but it is safe to say that dominant social ideals, norms, behaviors, practices, and knowledge transmitted by the hidden curriculum could be identified in either school. Both schools employed some teachings of critical pedagogy, but neither adopted an instructional approach designed to highlight inequality and dismantle oppressive class hegemony in society. To extrapolate from a theory of the hidden curriculum, though, the corporate reform ideology behind formal school turnaround indicates an attempt to protect the status quo cleverly hidden under the egalitarian rhetoric of democracy. Macdonough's

unofficial turnaround, on the other hand, lacks the rhetoric *and* the corporate reform ideology, and thus represents a grassroots movement to incite positive change in the community based on the specific needs and activism of community members themselves.

To borrow the language of Paulo Freire (1970) and the movement for critical pedagogy that followed his teachings, Milner was a liberation controlled by the oppressors, whereas the Macdonough turnaround was a liberation pioneered by the oppressed themselves. Freire suggests that leaders who impose their own decisions, values, and rules upon the oppressed, even under the guise of compassion or goodwill, actually perpetuate oppression because the oppressed remain in the captivity of the dominant system. Within this framework, the Macdonough turnaround represents a liberating pedagogy, one that is developed by the people who are oppressed under the dominant system. To apply the basic tenets of critical pedagogy, a turnaround that actually liberates the oppressed can *only* begin with the sort of grassroots organizing that prompted the Macdonough turnaround under the terms set by community members rather than individuals in positions of power from *outside* the community.

CONCLUSIONS

Put simply, the clearest conclusion of my work is that formal, mandated turnaround is set apart from informal turnaround not by the specific reform elements that it uses, but by its expression of corporate reform ideology. Macdonough and Milner are both historically low-performing urban schools serving predominantly low-income, minority students, and both addressed school climate and organization, culturally responsive pedagogy, parent involvement and school readiness in their community-oriented “turnarounds.” Macdonough, however, defies corporate reform ideology on all counts: it lacks the egalitarian rhetoric common in high-profile, high-stakes school reform; it was not influenced by pressure to produce rapid, dramatic results; it did not charge schools or teachers with the responsibility of ameliorating social inequality; and it did not employ market forces or non-educator elites in its reform measures. The Milner turnaround, on the other hand, was led by non-educator, non-community member elites and took the form of a business partnership between a private company and a public school system. Parents and teachers were the leaders of the Macdonough reform; parents and teachers were not consulted in developing the Milner turnaround plan.

This work echoes the findings of other studies of school reform. A long-term, comprehensive study of school reform in Chicago between 1990 and 1996 suggested effects of large-scale reform efforts (Fine et al. 1997).¹⁴ Initiatives that took the form of bureaucratic management excluded parents and community members, the researchers found, and the strength of the reform movement actually came from grassroots community organizing. The Chicago reform had penetrated deeply into the city and had

¹⁴ Notably, this was an era of reform prior to No Child Left Behind and now-Secretary of Education Arne Duncan’s appointment as CEO of Chicago Public Schools.

gained widespread support because it was a broad-based social movement rather than a series of isolated attempts to “fix” schools. It redefined reform as an ongoing, constantly-evolving process that engaged educators, policy makers, parents and community members. Barth (1991) also wrote about the importance of often-neglected relationships between teachers, parents and administrators for school reform, which proved to be one of the most important factors distinguishing Milner’s formal turnaround from Macdonough’s informal turnaround. My research supports Barth’s vision as well as findings that emphasize the importance of social networks between parents, democratic and team-like collaboration among teachers, and supportive relationships between teachers and principals (Lareau 2000, Bryk and Schneider 2002).

There are other salient logistical differences that might explain my findings. In terms of the practical elements of turnaround, Milner received additional funding from the state and from the federal government, allowing the turnaround to install Academic Assistants. The simple fact of increased resources, rather than a uniform turnaround reform agenda, might explain the differences in school climate, specialized instruction, and collegiality of staff relationships. Additionally, the ideological character of the Macdonough turnaround could be attributed simply to the size of the school and its city; perhaps community organizing and interconnected parent involvement styles are in fact enabled by the closeness and smallness of the community.

I do maintain my claim that formal school turnaround represents a coming together of corporate reform ideology and an alternative anti-corporate progressive reform approach, which supports and empowers teachers, locates the source of inequality in societal stratification rather than schools, and address non-academic factors to improve student achievement. Turnaround also breaches one major part of the

corporate ideology; because it is a reform strategy mandated at the federal, state, or district level, it rejects the laissez-faire, anti-intervention attitude of corporate reform.

My research suggests the possibility of a school turnaround approach that further departs from corporate ideology and might hold the promise of a truly equalizing reform. If a movement for turnaround is demanded at the state or district level, reformers should look to the communities being targeted to collaboratively develop plans for turnaround. Rather than replacing the teaching staff and administration at schools designated for turnaround, reform efforts should engage teachers and administrators in the process of assessing needs and creating a plan for turnaround. Reformers should also create opportunities to cultivate an interconnected style of parent involvement, as suggested by Annette Lareau and supported by my findings.

By comparing an official turnaround and an informal turnaround, I have shown that it is not necessary for whole school change to be presented as a high-stakes, high-profile venture under the banner of “school turnaround.” It is possible for schools to implement the specific elements that I have found in each of my case studies without being designated as formal turnarounds. In fact, the “turnaround” designation might undermine reform efforts that foster school culture and community and positive relationships between teachers, students and families.

The corporate reform ideology is alive and well in the ever-growing movement for turnaround in low-performing urban schools. In some ways, turnaround represents an amalgam of the corporate approach and an alternative traditional neighborhood school approach, but it is most clearly defined by the impact of competition, choice, and interventions by non-community member, non-educator business elites. Whole school reform that grows out of corporate ideology fails to engage the communities that it

targets, and thus erects nearly insurmountable barriers to the egalitarian reform agendas that they implement. An improved model for school turnaround will return to the model of a traditional neighborhood school rooted in its community, emphasize cultural affirmation, parent involvement, and positive relationships between adults in the school community, and call upon parents, teachers and community stakeholders to take control of turnaround reform in their schools.

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