



TITLE A Turn from the Worst: Leadership Influences on the Successful Turnaround of a High-Poverty School

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OBJECTIVE The purpose of this case study was to explore the phenomenon of school turnaround leadership and to identify the specific attributes of a turnaround leader by conducting an inquiry of leadership actions within the real-world context of a school transformation.

METHODOLOGY

The researcher conducted this qualitative case study in a suburban Florida public school district. The school district of focus served 39,260 students within 39 schools. The overall student population of the district had 61 percent of students on free or reduced lunch status and a minority rate of 59 percent. The total number of teachers working in the district was 2,748. The case study concentrated on one public elementary school (Grades preK–5) within the district of focus that experienced the school turnaround phenomenon. The school that served as the focus of this case study served 488 students who were taught by 38 teachers and led by two school administrators. The student population of the school included 89 percent of students on free and reduced lunch and a 73 percent minority rate. The school served 32 percent of its population with English for Speakers of Other Languages. The researcher conducted the study using a sample of 15 teachers and two school administrators who experienced the school turnaround phenomenon. In addition to these interviews and review of various documents, a random sample of teachers (N = 15) completed the Leadership Practices Inventory (Observer).

KEY FINDINGS

The author offers these recommendations for school leaders and districts that are provided the opportunity to turn around a school from low performance to high performing: (1) An effective turnaround leader creates a focused vision with high expectations for results; (2) School districts need to seek school turnaround leaders who possess personality traits that include trust and compassion for people; (3) School leaders who accept a turnaround assignment must recognize and empower people who

can serve as leaders on the school campus; and, (4) The successful school turnaround process must take place within a positive school culture that takes in a family like atmosphere amongst the staff.