



A Force for Greatness: Building Accountable, Data Driven Leaders and a Practice-Sharing Culture in the Birmingham City Schools

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A Force for Greatness: Building Accountable, Data Driven Leaders and a Practice-Sharing Culture in the Birmingham City Schools

Doctor of Education Leadership (Ed.L.D.)

Capstone

Submitted by

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in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
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“If you win in Birmingham, as Birmingham goes, so goes the nation.”
(Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth, 1963)

Dedication Page

This capstone is dedicated to those who love, challenge, and inspire me...

To **Bree**, my partner, my rock. What a journey it has been! To think it all started on a bench, in front of a fountain on North Campus. Setting off on careers in Atlanta, and within short order, marriage, a dog, a home. Then came two beautiful, lively (did I mention exhausting) boys that filled our home with so much energy and love. Suddenly and to our surprise, Harvard called, and we moved to Boston. Just two short years later, we moved back South to Birmingham. Thank you for always supporting my dreams, as crazy as they sometimes seem. I am better when we are together - and love you with all my heart.

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To my **brother and my sister**, look how far we have come. I am so encouraged by the lives you are leading and excited to see what the future holds for all of us!

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Abstract

The city of Birmingham and its schools have experienced a tumultuous history – from a school system born out of deep-rooted segregation and racist policy, to one disrupted and transformed by the relentless and heroic efforts of Civil Rights leaders. Ensuing decades within the school system saw a period of white flight, declining enrollment, and the increase in a population of students socially and economically disenfranchised. The district entered the 21st century in crisis, experiencing seven different superintendents during the first two decades of the century. Yet, amidst this mountain of challenges, hope abounds.

In the past three years, under the leadership of Superintendent Dr. Lisa Herring, 75% of schools in the district improved by at least one letter grade as identified by the Alabama Department of Education (Seale, 2019). In October 2019, the local electorate overwhelmingly approved an ad valorem tax that translates to \$30 million dollars per year applied to the district's bottom line. This vote represents an impressive feat in a fiscally conservative state and a time when other Alabama county electorate rejected similar tax proposals. According to internal polling data, the Superintendent's approval rating is above 80%. This number is extraordinary in a time when only 36% of Americans express confidence in public schools (Calderon, Newport, & Dvorak, 2017). Birmingham City Schools is turning around. This capstone tells the district's story.

In 2019, as a doctoral resident in the Harvard Ed.L.D. program, I was invited to join the Birmingham City Schools executive team to lead one arm of the district's turnaround efforts - designing and implementing a comprehensive accountability and support system for school leaders. The intention of the School Accountability Reviews (SARs), was three-fold. First, build the data analysis muscles of Principals. Second,

create the intentional space for leaders to share best practices, be held accountable for individual school data, and receive district support. Third, begin to shift the culture of the district from one of complacency to one of practice-sharing and strategic action.

This capstone explores how I approached the challenge of developing and implementing a statistical or “stat” model of continuous improvement within Birmingham City Schools. I relied on historical examples of effective stat model implementation in school districts across the United States as well as current research on improvement science, relational trust, and adaptive leadership to guide the process. In conclusion, I provide recommendations for how Birmingham City Schools can leverage what was learned and continue to accelerate school turnaround.

Introduction

Birmingham City Schools: Historical Context

Located in Birmingham, Alabama, Birmingham City Schools (BCS) is the fifth largest school system in Alabama. The district serves approximately 22,000 students across 42 school sites. Birmingham City Schools serves a student population that identifies as approximately 90% African American, 9% Hispanic, and <1% White. 100% of schools qualify for Title I funds.

Birmingham City Schools have experienced decades of turmoil, reverberating from the impact of the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling in 1954's *Brown v. Board of Education*, which ended segregated schooling practices throughout the nation. Orfield, Frankenberg, Ee, and Ayscue (2019) share that the 65th anniversary of the Brown ruling represents three decades of almost unchecked racial and economic segregation. The authors find that nationally, black students attend schools with a combined black and Latino enrollment averaging 67%, and remind us that segregation has been shown to have powerful negative relationships with pervasive success indicators such as achievement, college success, long-term employment, and income for students of color .

The *Brown* ruling has been felt in similarly pernicious ways in the city of Birmingham. In 1969, Superintendent Raymond Christian led the full dismantling of the dual school system that had existed in the city since 1884. Dual systems of education existed across the United States prior to the *Brown* ruling and were defined as public education systems that operated separate and distinct schools for students who were White and children who were African American. This unification led to school closings and vacant buildings as the school system executed its integration plan. A district staff

member told me that as of 2016, 12 vacant schools were still being held as surplus property. As in other parts of the country, a mass exodus of white residents ensued, lasting for three decades and well into the 21st century. To underscore the impact of this white flight - in 1970, the school system had an enrollment of 70,000 with 13 high schools and 77 elementary schools. Fifty years later, Birmingham City Schools enters the 2019-2020 school year with 48 fewer schools and a decrease in student population of 48,000 students (Patterson & Slocum, 2019). Additionally, the system has experienced increased enrollment of students who are socially and economically disenfranchised, inter- and intra-racial school governance controversies, and shrinking legal, political, and financial commitments from federal, state, and local governments (Loder, 2006).

While Birmingham City Schools' student population remains almost entirely African American, the racial make-up of the city has shifted within the last decade. Birmingham's population is 73.4% African American. Notably, the Birmingham City Schools teaching staff of 1,500 is 79% African American and 81% female with 93% of these teachers meeting the federal designation of "highly qualified" under No Child Left Behind (NCLB) (Lanahan & Weyburn, 2013). These statistics are an anomaly in the state of Alabama as well as in the United States. In the state at large, 33% of public school students are African American., compared to 19% of their teachers (Powell Crain, 2017). Nationally, roughly 82% of public school teachers are white (U.S. Dept. of Education, 2016).

Since 2009, Birmingham City Schools has had seven superintendents, 28 school board members, and one state intervention. Ten different individuals have led the district over the last 18 years (Edgemon, 2017). One of the primary root causes of the turmoil

was local board governance. Due to concern about the Birmingham Board of Education, the State Department of Education voted to intervene in the operations of the Birmingham City Schools (Gray 2019). During the period of state intervention in 2013, central office personnel were reduced by over 35% . Entire departments were eliminated. Staff who worked there during that time told me that the leadership change and large reduction in force created a school organization void of systems and stability.

Birmingham City Schools, according to staff I spoke with, lacked standard operating procedures and coherence, as well as an adult culture defined as apathetic, damaged, fearful, and skeptical. Prior to the arrival of the current administration, external stakeholder perception of the district was one of mistrust, lack of confidence, and pervasive low expectations. Outcomes for BCS students have historically been among the worst in the state of Alabama.

Another challenge experienced in Birmingham and statewide, is teacher retention. In 2019, the state of Alabama commissioned a Teacher Shortage Task Force, a task force on which the Superintendent of Birmingham sits. The shortage was recently contextualized by Tanesha Childs, a second-year art teacher in the school district. Ms. Childs was repeatedly asked by her students during her first year of teaching if she would be returning, and told reporters,, “[The students] are used to teachers not coming back” (Powell Crain, 2019).

Against this backdrop, Superintendent Dr. Lisa Herring arrived in May 2017. The chaotic state of the school district at the time could best be embodied by the fact that during her interview process, a bomb threat was called into the central office. Another

candidate for the position was so unnerved by the threat that he removed his name from consideration for the position (Johnson, 2017).

Superintendent Herring brought 20 years of experience in education to the position. Prior to her arrival in Birmingham, Dr. Herring served as Deputy Superintendent of Academics for the Charleston County School District in Charleston, South Carolina, as well as Chief Academic Officer, Associate Superintendent for Instructional Support and Executive Director of Student Support Services in the district. Her immediate position prior to Birmingham becoming Superintendent of Birmingham City Schools was Chief Academic Officer for Jefferson County Public Schools in Louisville, KY. She brought a distinguished record of accomplishment and success from these positions, having established a laser focus on access and equity for all students, increased student achievement, and a highlight on rigor and access for college and careers. She created an environment of engagement through personalization, teacher development and student voice and choice.

Dr. Herring hit the ground running in Birmingham. During her first year in office, she led BCS through its first full district accreditation process. On July 17, 2018, BCS district officials announced that AdvanceED awarded full accreditation status, with no conditions, to the district.

Birmingham City Schools: “A Force for Greatness”

During her first two years as Superintendent, Dr. Herring and her executive team worked with internal and external stakeholders to design and implement a five-year strategic plan, *Force for Greatness 2018-2023*. The team conducted a “listening and learning tour,” hosted multiple community forums, and reviewed survey data feedback to

determine the roadmap for the strategic plan. Ultimately, the team galvanized around four strategic pillars, defined as:

Pillar I: Student Excellence

- All BCS children are prepared for productive citizenship, college, career, and life. Graduation rates increase as students in all schools meet or exceed proficiency in grade level reading, math, and other subjects required for graduation.
- Students are co-creators of personalized academic and life goals whose voices are heard in the learning process as they develop strategies for perseverance and problem solving.

Pillar II: Team Excellence

- Instructional leadership at the district and school levels is stable and of high quality.
- BCS will recruit, engage, develop and retain high-quality employees in all categories.

Pillar III: Stakeholder Trust

- Through increased communication efforts and channels, parents, families and community members are better informed; more engaged and have an increased impact on decision-making.
- BCS schools and district employees have positive perceptions of services and communication across the district.

Pillar IV: Effective Systems and Planning

- We maintain or increase student enrollment.
- We look forward with a multi-year financial and facilities plan that encompasses enrollment, revenue, facility condition and need

Within these four pillars, the team agreed that four district priorities would address Pillar I: Student Success. These priorities were updated for the 2019-2020 school year. The four priorities are:

- **Priority 1:** We use standards-aligned resources and aligned formative assessments in planning and instruction.
- **Priority 2:** We maintain a culture of data driven instruction that is supported by a meaningful professional learning strategy.
- **Priority 3:** Our instructional leaders across the district engage in consistent rhythms of professional learning to improve the quality of instruction in every classroom.
- **Priority 4:** We support the whole child through strong collaborative best practices and procedures and by building positive relationships that foster an

environment where each child in our schools is healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged academically (see Appendix A for strategic plan).

Implementation of the strategic plan paid early dividends for Birmingham City Schools. In January 2019, the state released School and District State Report cards. According to the Alabama State Department of Education website, the state report card uses verifiable data indicators to inform all stakeholders of the well-rounded education students receive in Alabama. The reports are offered at the state, system, and school level. On the 2018 District Report Card, Birmingham City Schools significantly reduced the number of schools with an “F” rating from 22 to 5, representing a 75% decline (Seale, 2019).

Also, in October 2019, Birmingham residents voted “overwhelmingly” to renew the ad valorem tax earmarked for city schools (*Birmingham Times*, 2019). In Alabama, an ad valorem tax is a property tax based on the market value of property in Alabama on October 1st of the current year. 3-mills of the tax are distributed annually to the Public-School Fund. Local municipalities can also pass an additional ad valorem tax for local purposes. The ad valorem tax in the city of Birmingham generates an estimated \$30 million or 14 percent of the school system’s annual operating budget. The money goes directly into the general fund and renews with approval every 25 years. Internal public opinion polling commissioned by the school district in conjunction with the tax vote illustrated an overwhelming positive perception for Dr. Herring.

Moving Beyond the List: BCS in Turnaround

On Friday, November 1st, 2019, the Alabama State Department of Education released the results of the annual Failing School List. The Failing Schools List is mandated by the Alabama Accountability Act and represents the bottom six percent of

public Alabama schools based on the proficiency rates of three standardized state assessments: English, reading and math. Beginning in the 3rd grade, students are tested in reading and math, and during the 11th grade, students take the American College Test (ACT). In 2019, BCS decreased the number of schools on the failing list from 20 to 16. It is important to note that the Failing School List is separate from the State Report Card in that it ranks schools compared to each other rather than comparing them all to a benchmark. While the number of “F” rated schools (as indicated by the State Report Card) was reduced to 5, 16 schools within the district remained on the Failing School List.

Dr. Herring recognized the need to put this list into perspective for the community. In conjunction with the release of the Failing School List, Dr. Herring organized a press conference to address the list. At the press conference, Dr. Herring stated, “We are not a failing school system. We recognize there is work to be done. We are a turnaround district, and we will not be satisfied until every scholar in our district is highly successful” (L. Herring, personal communication, August 2019). The shifting culture, strategic plan, and commitment to turnaround would become the frames that would shape my residency.

The Residency & Framing the Strategic Project

I entered Birmingham City Schools as a Harvard doctoral resident on July 1, 2019. My official title within the School District was Special Assistant to the Superintendent. Colloquially, however, I was commonly introduced as “Harvard Resident.” In both instances, my role within the organization was broadly defined. I was housed in the Superintendent’s suite and provided access to most of the meetings on the

Superintendent's calendar. I was expected to work closely with the Interim Chief Academic Officer and the Office of Academics & Accountability. Dr. Lisa Herring described the problem the incoming resident should tackle as follows:

The Harvard resident in Birmingham City Schools must address the critical need to establish data and statistical analysis protocols for the school system (to include each individual school) in order to monitor and improve the academic performance of the organization. Birmingham City Schools is guided by a five-year strategic plan that is currently in year two. The problem of practice aligns with Pillar One: Student Success and Pillar Two: Effective Systems and Planning. The resident will be responsible for developing, implementing and monitoring a data analysis protocol for school academic support and accountability. The School Accountability Review (SAR) launch is a project/protocol designed to establish/identify data performance patterns, generate academic accountability language and interventions with school leaders and inside schools. The framework is also designed to evaluate the effectiveness of how district departments support schools. The result of this project should not only align with the district's strategic plan, it should help launch an ongoing, sustainable best practice for monitoring student achievement at the school and district level. (L. Herring, personal communication, September 6, 2019)

Additionally, Dr. Selena Florence, the Interim Chief Academic Officer, defined the work of the resident as follows:

The resident will address a lack of accountability for our instructional leaders that has led to low student achievement in Birmingham City Schools. In the past, we have reviewed data at the end of the year or when the State Department sends the lists of Failing Schools. The School Accountability Review (SAR) process will require schools to stop at specified points throughout the year to analyze data, discuss the strategies implemented, determine next steps, and outline the support needed for their individual school. The resident's strategic project will assist us with creating a systematic process that holds instructional leaders accountable for the work that they do every day and for how that work impacts student achievement. The School Accountability Review will provide a level of accountability for our school leaders that they have not previously had. (personal communication, September 6, 2019)

Because of the broad definition of my role, I utilized the district strategic plan and instructional priorities; research on adaptive leadership, improvement science,

educational stat models, and relational trust; and communication with the Superintendent and Office of Academics and Accountability to capture and define my strategic project (see Appendix A & B for strategic plan and district instructional priorities). In early conversations with executive cabinet members and principals, I learned that a culture of complacency and low expectations had existed historically within Birmingham City Schools. As such, Dr. Herring charged me with developing a comprehensive school support and performance management system and lead a team in a full district implementation of the process. Known locally as School Accountability Reviews (SARs), the process would be modeled on similar initiatives that were executed in places such as the School District of Philadelphia and Chicago Public Schools.

Dr. Herring recommended that the BCS stat model should follow a format similar to the NYPD system known as CompStat. To support the process, she introduced me to Chief Patrick Smith and Deputy Chief Darnell Davenport of the Birmingham Police Department. The theory underlying the CompStat model is that the real-time analysis of data, facilitated by executive leaders, can lead local leaders to better decision-making, greater attention to daily performance data, and ensuring that areas of high need are recognized and supported in a timely manner. I further discuss CompStat as well as my relationship and support from the Birmingham Police Department in the Review of Knowledge for Action and Project Description sections of this capstone.

The SAR process was designed to be driven by the school district's Student Information System and Data Dashboard, which is an integrated assessment and analytic tool that facilitates deep data dives and conversations across schools and along multiple lines of inquiry. Ultimately, to meet the unique needs of the school district, I was charged

with developing the individual data composites. Our School Accountability Review (SAR) process looked at select intervention, formative assessment, attendance, and discipline data. These large metrics uncovered deeper-rooted metrics to analyze/discuss (one such example that arose during the SAR process was teacher retention).

The adaptive work of the project would be designed to serve as a tipping point to begin to shift the culture of the organization (specifically around the role of Principals and the relationship between Principals and central office) from one of complacency to one of supported accountability. Several frameworks were introduced to staff to support this adaptive work that I will share in the RKA section of this capstone. The strategic project would include two SAR meetings during the school year, with rigorous after-action reviews to ensure fidelity of implementation and just-in time support. Corollary support would be provided by The Division of Academics & Accountability in the form of quarterly school site visits.

During my time as resident, I focused on addressing the following practice-based research question: How can an urban school district utilize data analysis to improve management and performance while simultaneously shifting the district to a positive, supportive and practice-sharing culture?

Review of Knowledge for Action (RKA)

With the release of the Alabama State Department of Education 2019 A-F Report Card, Dr. Herring stated, “We are a district in turnaround. We are not a failing district. We are making progress and heading in the right direction” (personal communication, October 18, 2019). The focus of my strategic project while I was a resident was to build coherence around a data analysis strategy designed to ignite this turnaround work. As such, my Review of Knowledge for Action (RKA) has several components. First, I will examine the content of my strategic project and the practical research that informed its construction. I will look at practical research around stat models and their implementation both inside and outside of the school context. Next, I will examine the process of the strategic project through the lens of improvement science and adaptive leadership. Finally, I will examine research around coherence, data analysis, and relational trust to understand compelling work preceding mine.

Research from this vantage point provides a road map for how school districts can successfully implement a turnaround strategy for continuous school improvement. Charles Payne (2008) shared the sentiment that still holds true over a decade later: we have seen so much education reform in the 21st century, and yet so little has changed. How do we disrupt this narrative, utilize research and practice, and build capacity within educators to sustain turnaround and fuel transformation? This chapter concludes with my Theory of Action, which I will utilize in subsequent chapters to analyze the results of my strategic project.

Using Performance Data for Accountability: CompStat

The origin of the Birmingham City School's School Accountability Review process comes from the CompStat model. Police Commissioner William Bratton and the New York City police department began implementation of CompStat in 1994 to combat rising crime. CompStat emerged from broken window theory, which posits that the best way for the police to combat crime is to begin by managing relatively low-level offenses (Wilson & Kelling, 1982). Importantly, many low-level offenses disproportionately occurred in lower socioeconomic and minoritized communities (Skogan, 1990).

CompStat is short for Computational Statistics and became the centerpiece of the NYC police department's reorganization efforts. Paul E. O'Connell (2001) notes that the model was "based upon the concept of continuous improvement of performance... and the ability to manage and control change. In other words, the department was seeking to institutionalize the organizational learning process" (p. 8)

The CompStat initiative in New York City was incredibly successful at reducing crime. From 1993 to 1998, New York City's burglary rate declined 53 percent, reported robberies declined 54 percent, and the murder rate declined a staggering 67 percent (Silverman, 1999). CompStat transformed the New York City police department into a learning organization that could transform based on data (O'Dell and Grayson, 1998). The success quickly proliferated the process to police precincts throughout the country.

While successfully reducing crime rates in New York City, The CompStat process had protracted negative consequences. Police commanders were responding to a process that, while drastically reducing crime, could be weaponized by department leadership and used to punish, embarrass and coerce precinct commanders into both more forceful and

unethical policing practices. The precinct commanders responded to this pressure by over policing minority communities. This overreliance on data-driven statistics resulted in a \$75 million settlement against the NYPD for more than 900,000 unlawful criminal summonses (Giacalone & Vitale, 2017).

Many of the unlawful summons transpired as a result of a corollary NYC police department policy developed at the time known as “stop question frisk,” or SQF for short (Hanink, 2013). Because the data culled from the CompStat meetings was generated as a result of a “broken windows” philosophy (and actualized through SQF), racial profiling became rampant in the city of New York. This led not only to blatant instances of implicit bias, overt racism, and unlawful criminal summons, but also caused the NYPD to lose legitimacy with racial and ethnic minority communities, losing their cooperation and compliance (Hanink, 2013).

In terms of accountability, K-12 education followed a similar pattern as the New York City police department over the same 20-year span. The introduction of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in 2002 marked/created/began/drove a movement towards greater accountability through high-stakes testing. This shift had a disproportionately adverse effect on African American students. In particular, the high-stakes test movement harmed African American students through limited improvement in dropout rates, increased student apathy, and more punitive discipline policies (Thompson and Allen, 2012). Beyond the implicit bias and racism the high-stakes movement generated, the immense pressure put on districts to perform also led to ethical lapses that in the most extreme case, landed educators in prison for cheating on state assessments (Fantz, 2015).

Reflecting on these lessons, when a stat method is implemented within a school district context, it is critical to articulate the value proposition from the onset. Much care must be paid to the criteria selected for review, their potential impact on the organization, and how they might trigger the implicit biases of the organization. The stat model is a vehicle for school improvement, and by proxy a vehicle of student improvement. It should not be branded as a technical compliance effort. Additionally, accountability must be balanced with a strong sense of support, and shared between the school and district. Schools need to know that the “why” behind the stat model is improving all students, not just improving the numbers for show. I will discuss ways that districts can build this dynamic later in this RKA.

CompStat became a part of the fabric of the city of Birmingham during the period of my residency. Chief of Police Patrick Smith was hired by the Birmingham police department in June 2018 and, with the advice of Deputy Chief Darnel Davenport, began execution of the CompStat process in April 2019. By November, the department was reporting an 11.1% decrease in homicides since inception of the program the previous April (D. Davenport, personal communication, November 2019). Police officials attributed the decrease to multi-faceted, methodical approach to policing, something Davenport called “community-focused, data-driven crime suppression,” (Robinson, 2019).

O’Connell (2001), studying the implementation of CompStat in New York City as well as its proliferation in cities across the United States, offers guidelines for the successful implementation of the CompStat process. He shares a three-stage framework

for the implementation of the CompStat process - The Design, Implementation, and Meeting stages. O'Connell defines the parts of each stage as such:

Design Stage:

1. Articulate organizational mission/vision and realign organizational structure to facilitate the meeting of goals and objectives.
2. Have a modern organizational and informational technology in place prior to implementation.

Implementation Stage:

1. Select performance indicators through a collaborative and fluid process.
2. Identify equivalent units for comparison.
3. Review and refine indicators.
4. Compile timely and accurate data.
5. Share all data and information compiled by the stat unit with field units well in advance of the stat meetings.
6. Hold "mini" CompStat meetings.

Meeting Stage:

1. Hold stat meetings at a convenient time and place.
2. Require key personnel to attend and participate.
3. Schedule meetings frequently.
4. Record all meetings.
5. Prepare profiles for each presenting unit.
6. Maintain a professional and productive atmosphere.
7. Engage in meaningful and constructive dialogue.
8. Use the stat process to manage organizational knowledge.
9. Encourage active participation in the meetings by all members of the dais.
10. Review and utilize all information compiled.
11. Understand organizational ends as well as means.
12. Interpret data intelligently.
13. Engage in a continuous process of inquiry.
14. Ensure accountability of field managers.
15. Conduct a review after each meeting.

(O'Connell, 2001, pp. 29-33)

O'Connell (2001) notes that the stat model is never constant and should be continuously modified and perfected. Based on the Design-Implementation-Meeting framework, I identify the following six fundamental, essential principles:

1. Articulation of organizational mission/vision and realignment of organizational structure to facilitate the meeting of goals and objectives;
2. identification of business practices and key performance indicators;
3. collection of accurate and timely information;
4. meaningful data analysis and dissemination of results to all levels of the organization;
5. development of effective tactics and rapid deployment of resources; and
6. relentless follow-up and assessment.

CompStat Goes to School: The Philadelphia SchoolStat Model

In November 2005, the School District of Philadelphia (SDP) launched the SchoolStat performance management program, which applied tenets of the CompStat model through the lens of a large, urban school district, in collaboration with the University of Pennsylvania's Fels Institute of Government. SchoolStat required principals from each of its 270 traditional public schools to attend monthly stat meetings with their Regional Superintendents (Patusky, Botwinik, & Shelley; et al 2007). The SchoolStat team, which included Fels Institute staff and students as well as members of an SDP regional superintendent's team, identified the data measures that would be used, designed composite graphs, and created the monthly meeting format. Implementation of the program took place over three years. Fifteen pilot elementary schools implemented the program during the 2003-04 school year. After a regional roll-out the next year, SchoolStat achieved full-scale implementation in school year 2005-2006 across the district's 270 traditional public schools.

The School District of Philadelphia's stat model had two main components: stat data and stat meetings, defined as follows:

Data Component:

- A. Instructional Key Performance Indicators
 - a. *Six Week Benchmark Tests* - The percentage of questions answered correctly by students on benchmark tests. The District administers benchmark tests in math, reading, and science approximately every six weeks to students in grades three through eight and to students in particular high school courses.
 - b. *Reading levels* - The percentage of students at target reading level as indicated by teacher administered assessments.
 - c. *Student Support* - The number of students who are referred to Tier 2 of the Comprehensive Student Assistance Process (CSAP) as compared to the number of permissions to evaluate students' eligibility for special education services.

- B. Attendance Key Performance Indicators
 - a. *Staff daily absence rate* - The average daily absence rate for teachers and non-teaching school staff.
 - b. *Student daily attendance rate* - The average daily attendance rate for students.

- C. Climate Key Performance Indicators
 - a. *Serious Incidents* - The number of serious incidents reported, including assaults; weapon, drug, and alcohol offenses; acts of vandalism; accidents and illnesses; and other serious rule violations.
 - b. *Suspensions* - The percentage of students suspended.
(Patusky et al., 2007, pp. 11-12)

Meeting Component:

SchoolStat meetings occurred on a tiered basis. At the highest level, the Chief Academic Officer facilitated two meetings per month, with six of the twelve regions attending each meeting. Each region in turn facilitated an additional two to six meetings each month with small groups of principals they supervised. Each set of meetings followed a standard agenda. The facilitator (a chief academic officer or regional superintendent) would display the KPI data on a large screen and lead a data conversation aimed at achieving the following:

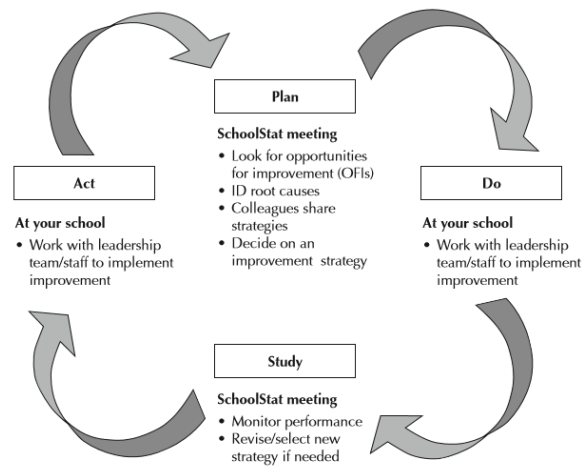
1. Analysis
2. Problem Solving
3. Follow-Up
4. Evaluation

The materials needed for each meeting included the PowerPoint and a facilitator’s briefing memo. The intent of the meeting was illustrated through a Plan-Do-Study-Act cycle modified for SchoolStat, depicted in Figure 1, below.

Figure 1

The PDSA Model Adapted for SchoolStat

Figure 1: The PDSA Model Adapted for SchoolStat



www.businessofgovernment.org

Note: Image from Patusky et al. (2007), p. 19

SchoolStat Impact

Patusky et al. (2007) found that median school performance improved on all but one of the seven SchoolStat indicators, represented in Table 1 :

Table 1*Median Annual School Performance on SchoolStat Indicators, 2003-2007*

KPI	SY 2003- 2004	SY 2004- 2005	SY 2005- 2006	SY 2006- 2007
Suspensions per 100 students	6.379	5.653	6.008	3.737
Student Absence Rate	7.85%	7.61%	7.98%	7.06%
Short-Term Teacher Absence Rate	4.15%	3.88%	3.68%	3.14%
Long-Term Teacher Absence Rate	2.12%	1.88%	1.97%	1.82%
Violent Incidents per 100 students	0.919	1.038	0.909	0.909
Median Rates for Spring Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) Administration				
Students scoring basic or below (Literacy)	68.10%	65.36%	63.23%	
Students scoring of basic or below (Math)	71.99%	58.39%	56.34%	

Note: Table reproduced from Patusky et al. (2007), p. 27.

As Patusky and his colleagues found, only violent incidents per 100 students failed to improve as part of the SchoolStat implementation. Additionally, the researchers learned significant lessons from four years of experimentation with SchoolStat in the School District of Philadelphia:

Figure 2

Lessons Learned from Stat Program Implementation in Philadelphia

Lessons for the Stat Program's Leaders

1. Strong leadership is required to initiate and sustain a stat program.
2. The goal of "continuous improvement" applies to the program as well as to the organization.
3. Don't let the perfect be the enemy of the good.
4. Stat programs are flexible and can be adapted to fit different contexts.
5. An external partnership can be an effective vehicle for program implementation.
6. The stat program needs to be given time for development, implementation, and results.

Lessons for the Stat Program's Designers

1. Begin the KPI selection process with a clear understanding of the relationship between the outputs and outcomes of the organization.
2. When choosing KPIs, keep quick wins in mind.
3. You can (and should) build the stat program around the technical capabilities you currently have, while identifying and working toward the technical upgrades you want.
4. There can be benefits to conducting stat meetings with groups of participants.

Lessons for the Stat Program's Facilitators

1. Don't assume participants know how to use the data.
2. Facilitators must both motivate and monitor.

Note: Image from Patusky et al. (2007), p. 40

Practice-Driven Data: Lessons from Chicago Public Schools

Moeller et al. (2018) studied Chicago Public Schools' use of data to drive school improvement between 2006-2017. They found that there was no singular practice that helped drive improvement efforts in the city's school system; rather, systems were founded in professionalism, context was appreciated, and autonomy was recognized.

Moeller et al. (2018) distill five lessons from Chicago's example: Prepare, Focus, Make Meaning, Strategize, and Disrupt.

The lessons are clear for any school district that wishes to use data to engage in continuous school improvement. First, you must build the capacity of the organization to both understand the data and have authentic and transparent conversations about the data. Next, districts must recognize that time and resources are finite, and, as such, prioritize indicators that drive improvement. Third, there must be shared accountability and

ownership of the data. Fourth, it is critical that the appropriate data points are used in conjunction with the appropriate time of year. Finally, as the data reviews expose inequity, the district must shift practices to better address the opportunity and resource gaps between groups of students.

Following these guidelines, Chicago Public Schools saw marked improvement in numerous subgroups of students. Moeller et al (2018) found that between 2006-2017, the district saw a 28-percentage point increase in the proportion of freshmen on-track to graduate. The high school graduation rate increased by 18 percentage points, and ACT scores also rose. College enrollment rate rose by 14 percentage points. These improvements were not a product of the stat model implementation alone; multiple initiatives were integrated in the district's strategic plan that begot these results. Stanford researchers Sean F. Reardon and Rebecca Hinze-Pifer (2017), studying test score growth among Chicago Public School students from 2009-2014, found CPS improved from third to eighth grade at a rate faster than 96% of districts in the United States. While unable to attribute the growth to a single factor, they included out-of-school factors (quality of pre-school, safety of neighborhoods, after school programs) and instructional improvements (school leadership, instructional methods, school climate) as likely contributing factors (Reardon & Hinze-Pifer, 2017). Utilization of data was not called out as a specific reason for the results, but CPS did deploy data strategies in all three instructional areas identified as probable contributors.

The successes in Chicago and Philadelphia have clear implications for the work Birmingham City Schools chose to undertake. Almost as valuable as the achievement gains are the networks that are generated as a result of deeply analyzing select indicators.

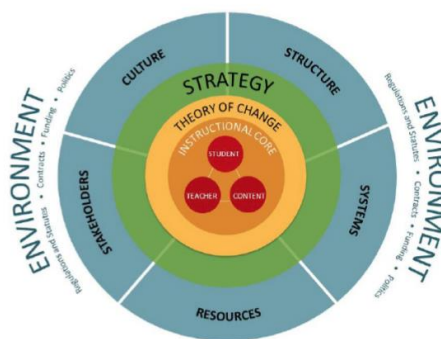
Indeed, educators within Chicago public schools noted that the most important lesson they learned from using practice-driven data was that the data provided was only as helpful as the conversation educators generated around it (Moeller et al., 2018).

Strategy and Coherence

Several iterations of educational stat models implemented over the past decade have taught us that these models do not stand independent; rather, they are integrally aligned to a school district’s strategic plan. Stacey Childress et al. (2011) define strategy as the set of actions a district takes to provide capacity and support to the instructional core with the objective of raising student performance district wide. The Public Education Leadership Project (PELP), a joint initiative of the Harvard Graduate School of Education, Harvard Business School, and nine urban school districts launched in 2004, with the purpose of improving management and leadership competencies of public school leaders in order to drive greater educational outcomes.

Figure 2

The PELP Coherence Framework



Note: Figure reproduced from Childress and Marietta (2008).

The PELP Coherence Framework is designed to help district leaders identify the key elements that support a district-wide improvement strategy, bring those elements into a coherent relationship with the strategy and each other, and guide the actions of people throughout the district in the pursuit of high levels of achievement for all students (Childress, Elmore, Grossman & King, 2011). Coherence, as defined through the lens of the PELP Coherence Framework, is a way to ensure that the various parts of a school district work in concert to support implementation of an articulated strategy. As noted by Childress et al (2011), the framework assists with achieving coherence by:

1. Connecting the instructional core with a district-wide strategy for improvement
2. Highlighting district elements that can support or hinder effective implementation
3. Identifying interdependence among district elements
4. Recognizing forces in the environment that have an impact on the implementation

The instructional core, theory of change, and strategy serve as the foundational layers of the PELP Coherence Framework. In direct center of the framework is the instructional core, which centers teaching and learning as the most critical work a school district undertakes. The instructional core is built on the principle of the instructional triangle. The instructional triangle is a triadic understanding of instruction that visualizes the relationships between content, students, and teachers. Referring to the instructional core, Cohen and Ball (1999) note, “We focus on the interactions among teachers and students around educational material, rather than seeing curriculum alone or teachers alone as the main source of instruction... Instructional capacity -- the capacity to produce worthwhile and substantial learning -- is a function of the interaction among these elements, not the sole province of any single one” (p. 121).

Once a district aligns its actions with the instructional core, it can develop a theory of change that will link the mission and vision of the organization to the strategy it will use to achieve this end. A theory of change focuses strategy development by limiting the range of choices to those actions the district believes will have the most significant impact, and is often articulated as an “If... then” statement (Childress, Elmore, Grossman, & King, 2011).

It is important to note that Birmingham City Schools was one of the nine urban school district participants in the PELP Summer Institute in July 2019. In this unique summer institute that is coordinated jointly by the Harvard Business School and the Harvard Graduate School of Education, school districts can adapt proven management concepts to the unique challenges of the school district. The institute enhances both individual and group leadership skills, and provides the tools and insight to execute a strategy that elevates performance. In the summer of 2019, BCS began their third year of partnership with PELP. The strategic problem of practice that the district brought to PELP that summer was that the district had not adequately defined the principal’s primary role as one of instructional leader. Additionally, district leadership had not provided a consistent and sustainable set of evidenced based guidelines and expectations.

From this problem of practice, and through work at the PELP Institute, the district developed a working theory of action for the 2019-2020 school year. First, they determined to define the role of the principal as one that is an instructional leader and provide a set of district wide evidence based instructional expectations and deliverables. Next, the district sought to create collaborative feedback channels between instructional superintendents and principals to identify school and leadership needs. The district would

provide consistent, on-going professional development at the school site. Additionally, the district would allow Principals to develop their school's instructional strategies aligned to the district framework including the feedback of key stakeholders. Finally, district leadership would consistently provide feedback and coaching on principal implementation any of the above. The district believed that if all of these actions occurred with fidelity, we would remain on track to ensure that 75% of schools would be rated a "C" or higher on the state report card by 2023, one of the benchmark outcomes of the district's strategic plan "*Force for Greatness 2018-2023*. While the School Accountability Review process had not been developed at the time of the summer PELP institute, the work completed at PELP would become a road map for the strategic project.

Indeed, the district's theory of action informed and heavily influenced my own theory of action for the strategic project. Due to this strategic focus, I referenced the PELP Coherence Framework during School Accountability Review (SAR) sessions. I wanted to ensure that principals could see a clear relationship between the data they shared at the SAR session and its impact on the instructional core. Therefore, SAR sessions included a component that allowed principals to modify their instructional approach to drive positive change in the metrics. Throughout the process, principals would be engaged in a feedback and coaching loop to support continuous improvement.

Improvement Science

At its most basic and human level, improvement science is not some set of specialized studies carried out exclusively by external researchers. Learning to improve demands the active, full engagement of educators... Participants in an improvement network form a collegueship of expertise -- academic, technical, and clinical -- deliberately assembled to address specific problems. All involved are now improvers seeking to generate strong evidence about how to achieve better outcomes more reliably.

Bryk, 2015

School Turnaround is not a new concept. The public education system has been in a state of reform since the release of the *A Nation at Risk* report was released in 1983. Decade after decade, reforms have stalled, come short of expectations, or downright failed. Bryk (2015) suggests that the common idiom of going fast and learning slow must be disrupted to truly see improvement in our schools. He suggests a shift toward learning fast to implement well. How does one learn to improve? Further, how can it be operationalized? Anthony Bryk et. al. (2015) suggests six ways:

1. Make the work problem-specific and user-centered;
2. Focus on variation in performance;
3. See the system that produces the current outcomes;
4. We cannot improve at scale what we cannot measure;
5. Use disciplined inquiry to drive improvement; and
6. Accelerate learning through networked communities

Bryk introduces an Improvement Paradigm that operationalizes the ideal of learning to improve. The paradigm focuses on task and organizational complexity while recognizing the need to understand the individual context of each classroom. The improvement research calls for data as a way to understand how well a process works. Data should not be used for the purpose of ranking individual schools. In this way, it helps a district understand if the initiatives or processes undertaken are actually improvements (Bryk et al., 2015).

The improvement paradigm recognizes the value and importance of learning networks. Data should be cultivated, calibrated, shared and discussed in a way that all can benefit from the learning. It is following this road map where quality outcomes can be achieved reliably and at scale. The improvement paradigm was foundational to the design of School Accountability Reviews in BCS.

Adaptive Leadership

When Dr. Herring shared her vision for my strategic project as resident, my first reaction was that it felt incredibly technical in nature. Throughout the course of the project, as I encountered challenge and set-back, I recognized my greater challenge was driving adaptive change. I soon recognized the danger of treating an adaptive leadership challenge as a technical one. Heifetz and Linsky (2017) state, “Indeed, the single most common source of leadership failure we’ve been able to identify...is that people, especially those in positions of authority, treat adaptive challenges like technical problems (p. 14). They provide a clear distinction between technical vs. adaptive challenges. Technical problems can be solved with existing knowledge and procedures. Adaptive challenges do not have easy answers. Heifetz and Linsky (2017) continue, “We call these adaptive challenges because they require experiments, new discoveries, and adjustments from numerous places in the organization or community” (p. 13). Adaptive work requires a leader to assist an organization in shifting expectations, rather than satisfying individuals. The work generates resistance because it challenges an organization’s habits, beliefs, and values (Heifetz and Linsky, 2017). The Adaptive Leadership Framework developed by Heifetz and Linsky offers a compelling way to analyze the successes and challenges of my strategic project. As such, I will discuss the framework in great detail within the analysis section of this capstone.

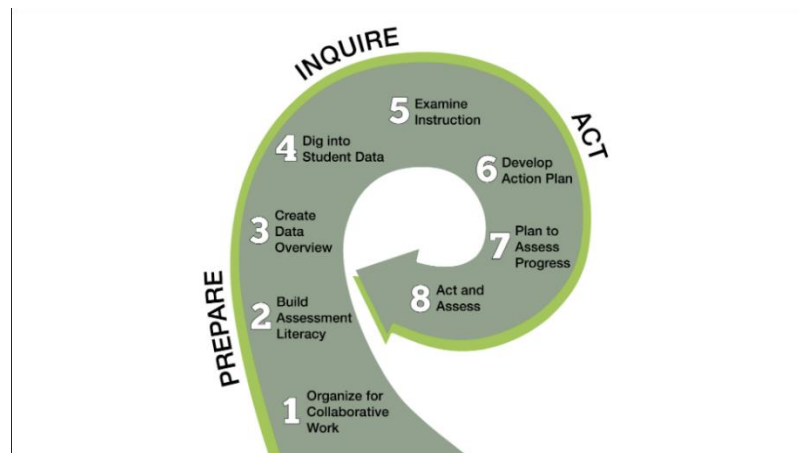
Data Wise: A Road Map for Structuring Improvement

To improve at scale, systems must exist that can be leveraged by an entire organization to drive continuous improvement. Once such process originates from the

Data Wise Project at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Data Wise supports educators in using collaborative inquiry to drive continuous improvement of teaching and learning for all students across three main phases – Prepare, Inquire, and Act – as shown in figure 4.

Figure 4

Data Wise Swoosh Model of Continuous Improvement



Note: Image from *Boudett, City, and Murnane (2013), p. 5*

During the preparation phase, schools engage in activities required to establish a foundation for learning around various forms of student data and assessment. This includes the structure for data analysis, organizing for collaborative work, and providing the school team with assessment literacy so that results are interpreted accurately. During the inquiry phase, schools examine student data and student work as well as classroom instruction. In the final phase, schools act on what they have learned (Boudett, City, & Murnane, 2013, p. 6).

Underlying the Data Wise process is a systematic way of thinking about the work. This foundation is referred to within the Data Wise process as the ACE Habits of Mind.

The three ACE Habits of Mind are:

1. Shared commitment to **A**ction, assessment, and adjustment
2. **I**ntentional Collaboration
3. Relentless Focus on **E**vidence

Analyzing data effectively requires a shared commitment to action, assessment, and adjustment as educators work through the stages of the Data Wise swoosh. Intentional Collaboration requires deliberate planning prior to execution of the work. Finally, a relentless focus on evidence is critical to establishing trust. Throughout the strategic project, I tried to infuse the ACE Habits of Mind. While not explicitly introducing the Data Wise continuous improvement process to the district, I implicitly structured the project around its core elements. I saw the School Accountability Review project as setting the stage for the district to explore a more comprehensive continuous improvement process in the future. I will explore this line of thinking more in the Implications for Site section of this capstone.

Relational Trust in Schools

A growing body of literature exists that posits the idea of social trust as essential for meaningful school improvement to transpire (Bryk and Schneider 2003). Researchers Bryk and Schneider (2003), in a longitudinal study of reform in the Chicago Public Schools, find that for school improvement efforts to bear fruit, all stakeholders within an organization must hold up their own end of the bargain. This statement is true for all levels of the organization. The authors state, “Regardless of how much formal power any given role has in a school community, all participants remain dependent on others to achieve desired outcomes and feel empowered by their efforts (Bryk and Schneider,

2003, p.41).” Districts that do this well have high degrees of what Bryk and Schneider call *relational trust*, or “the connective tissue that binds individuals together to advance the education and welfare of students (p. 44). Relational trust can be achieved through four specific considerations:

1. Respect
2. Personal regard
3. Competence in role responsibilities
4. Personal integrity

(Bryk & Schneider, 2003)

These four considerations informed not only how I oriented myself to the strategic project, but also how I positioned the expectations of both executive leadership and principals. Recognizing the value of relational trust, I sought to explicitly develop activities on the front end of the project that would create this trust. In this way, I felt there would be more opportunity to advance the initiative.

Utilizing the practical research on educational stat models as well as a conceptual understanding of adaptive leadership, improvement science and relational trust and how they inform school turnaround efforts, I was ready to develop my theory of action and begin implementation of the strategic project.

Theory of Action

My theory of action seeks to utilize practice driven data and the principles of improvement science and relational trust to support Birmingham City Schools continuous improvement.

If:

- We align the **School Accountability Review practice** with the strategic plan and clearly articulate the roles and responsibilities of school leaders and district stakeholders within the initiative and...
- We provide a consistent set of evidence-based expectations and deliverables centered on the **instructional core**...
- We provide consistent and **systemic professional development, to build the capacity** of the organization to analyze data and....
- We embed **psychological safety** to allow for honest and transparent dialogue around the data and...
- We co-create **trust** to allow Principals to modify their school's instructional approach and intervention support models aligned to the feedback of key stakeholders derived from project initiative meetings

Then:

- Birmingham City Schools will create a sustainable feedback loop that will positively affect culture and climate and drive continuous improvement efforts within the school district.

So:

- That Birmingham City Schools can realize its strategic vision of 75% of schools rated a "C" or higher on the state report card by 2023

(For more detailed information on the state report card ratings, please see Appendix C)

Strategic Project Description

I began my residency with Birmingham City Schools on July 1, 2019. I was the first resident from the Ed.L.D. program to be placed in Birmingham and so there was ambiguity for me and for the district. In early conversations with Superintendent Herring, it became clear that the strategic project must support the district's ongoing turnaround work and be palatable to the nine-member board of education. I entered as Dr. Herring began her third year in Birmingham. Schools were improving. It was critical that the district capitalize on this early success and accelerate improvement.

For an overview of the leadership actions I took to catalyze support for the School Accountability Review process during my first 6 months in residency, see Appendix C.

Project Identification

When I first arrived in July 2019, one of the first problems I chose to focus on was the culture of complacency, low expectations, and mistrust that existed within Birmingham City Schools. It was clear that any new strategic initiative needed to balance accountability with support. The culture crystallized on the second day of my residency. I was sitting in a Board of Education small group meeting. Suddenly, the school's attorney entered the room, walked over to my chair, and whispered in my ear, asking me to step outside. One of the board members was concerned about discussing sensitive material in front of an outsider, and texted the attorney to request my exit. On the third day of residency, I learned that my position as resident would need to go back before the board so that my benefits could be approved. One board member asked that I meet with her for several hours before the meeting prior to the vote. She had researched the Ed.L.D.

program and was concerned that my strategic project might lead to the proliferation of charter schools in the district. By sharing my professional background in public schools and early ideas for the project, I was able to gain this board members initial trust (and my benefits approved). This interaction had implications for my project. It struck me that for the project to be successful, it would be important to build trust so that the initiative could gain acceptance at both the school district and school level.

I shared this interaction with Dr. Herring, and it helped solidify options for the strategic project. Dr. Herring charged me with developing a comprehensive school support and performance management system. The theory underlying the model is that real-time data analysis leads to better decision-making and ensures that areas of high need are recognized and supported in a timely manner. To support building instructional leaders, the process would involve a critical after-action review component that would require principals to model and provide evidence of using data strategies from the SAR review. This component ensured that principals became adept at analyzing data while also increasing their skill as instructional leaders.

Building Capacity for Turnaround

Once the project was identified, I began to assemble my team. One challenge I ran into quickly was that my position was housed within the Office of the Superintendent. While this gave me power and positional authority, it was also isolating, as the Office of the Superintendent was very lean. As such, I had to form a team cross-functionally. Within the first several weeks of residency, I organized a team consisting of “Gabriella,” the Interim Chief Academic and Accountability Officer; “Peter,” the Executive Director

of Assessment, Accountability and Research, and the instructional superintendents.¹ This cross-functional team leveraged both the support and accountability functions of the project. The instructional superintendents would provide guidelines to ensure alignment with current instructional expectations. Peter, the ED of assessment, would serve as a content expert and could assist in both acquiring data and building capacity. Finally, Gabriella would co-lead and support the project to provide legitimacy in her role as interim CAO.

In early meetings with Peter, the ED of Assessment, Accountability, and Research, we determined that the SAR process would be driven technically by the school district's Data Dashboard and Student Information System. The Data Dashboard is powered by Power Schools' *Performance Matters*, an integrated assessment and analytic tool that creates the opportunity to engage in deep data dives and data conversations across schools along multiple lines of inquiry. The school district planned to transition their Student Information System to the same platform in June 2020. Holistically, through an adaptive lens, the team agreed to design the SAR process to help shift the organizational culture from complacency to accountability. We decided to host one SAR meeting in the fall, one in the spring, and one in the summer, although much research recommends more regular, frequent data examinations. The senior leadership team determined that Dr. Herring should lead these initial reviews, since historically, initiatives championed and led by the Superintendent had greater degree success and continuity. Dr. Herring's calendar was full and finding whole days to schedule SAR reviews was challenging. The senior team decided to limit the amount of scheduled reviews to a fall

¹ Names have been changed

and spring session. The After-Action Review component of the project (held between each SAR) would help serve as additional capacity to the project. In future versions of the project, more frequent reviews could be led by department heads. I will speak more to this reality in the analysis and implications section of this capstone.

The launch of the School Academic Review process occurred in July. During the District Administrative Retreat, I had the opportunity to present the first high-level overview of the SAR alongside Peter. Strategically, I requested an opportunity prior to this professional development session to introduce myself to Principals and district leadership. I hoped an opportunity to share a small part of my professional and personal story could begin to build both competency and social capital within the district.

The primary objectives for the summer professional learning session, which would form the foundation of the work to come, were as follows:

- Understand what a School Academic Review process is and why the district will engage in this process during the 2019-2020 school year
- Review the research behind the stat model approach to school improvement
- Explain to Principals what to expect in the months ahead and how they can distinguish between several accountability and support mechanisms (School Academic Review, School Site Visits, how to access core team support)

The measures that were identified for the School Accountability Review primarily derived from the accountability measures featured on the Alabama State Report Card; however, during the summer professional development sessions, Principals were asked to help determine which measures were critical to be included in the process. There was consensus that the State Report Card measures were a good starting point.

Also, during summer professional development session, Principals were introduced to the concept of tipping point leadership. Tipping point leadership (Kim and Mauborgne 2003) explains how organizations can bring about rapid improvement and lasting change with limited resources. Tipping point leadership requires leaders to overcome four hurdles. First is the cognitive hurdle. To get past this hurdle, leaders must come face to face with the problems they face. We explained the School Accountability Review process would make school data more transparent and require leaders to face this data in a public way.

The next hurdle that leaders face is the resource hurdle. Principals have limited time and resources. To address this hurdle, we explained to principals that the School Accountability Review would focus on prioritized leading indicators aligned to the State Accountability system. These indicators would serve as a place for principals to commit their time and resources in the upcoming school year.

The third hurdle that principals should expect to encounter is the motivational hurdle. We explained that the performative aspect of the School Accountability Review would address this hurdle. The prospect of presenting a school's data composite in front of colleagues, district staff and Executive Cabinet was scary for some Principals. It was certainly reason to prepare and ensure that each Principal could intelligibly speak to the data.

Finally, the fourth hurdle we explained would need to be overcome for this process to be successful was politics (both internal and external). The clear support from the Superintendent would help silence opponents of the process. This support would also help gain the buy-in of the board of education. I planned to formally address the board

regarding the project in October 2019. As principals became more comfortable with the process, opposition should disappear, or at least be reduced, and the process should become part of the fabric of the culture within Birmingham City Schools.

We concluded the professional development session with a data activity. We provided principals with a scavenger hunt for high-level achievement data using the data dashboard as well as interrogate the data. As they were locating the data, principals were asked to turn and talk while answering the following questions:

- Were you able to locate the desired information?
- Do you feel you will be able to hold critical conversations like this with your teachers? Why or Why Not?
- What do you feel will be the most difficult part of this process?

In pairs and small groups, the conversations were rich and productive. Then, Peter brought the group back together as a whole. The session went off the rails quickly. It could aptly be described as releasing data grenades into the center of the room. We decided to try and model a hypothetical SAR process with one Principal in the room. Peter randomly pulled up a school's previous year's state assessment data. A principal was cold called and asked several critical questions about the data. The principal immediately became defensive and began to explain context about her school. When another principal interjected the first principal exclaimed, "You can't say anything; you have a specialty school and not the same kids as me". Amid an impending uproar, the session ended. It was clear that adequate capacity must be built to both understand the content and process of the project as well as the need to build the conditions that would allow principals to be authentically vulnerable.

Interestingly, when we reviewed feedback for the session, 100% of Principals surveyed found the process “Useful” or “Very Useful.” It was clear from the professional development session that Principal recognized the need to establish the SAR process. However, how could we account for the anxiety that had erupted in the room during the presentation? A closer review of the survey data showed only 30 out of 42 schools completed the survey. Those that were most fearful of this new process probably chose not to complete the survey. More trust would need to be built to gain full buy-in from principals. Also, the questions on the survey as well as an activity during the session illuminated the challenge that lie ahead. One of the questions following the professional development asked: “What next steps would you like to see?” Responses included:

- Additional Training
- Implementation/Follow-Up (to counter a history of professional development implemented in the summer with no additional steps)
- Improving Relationships with Stakeholders (concern that this process would serve as a “gotcha” and would influence evaluations and the non-renewal of principals)

Additionally, we conducted a S.W.O.T. analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) after reviewing the SAR process. Overall, principals thought this type of transparent process was necessary to positively affect and drive student achievement. They saw an opportunity to collaborate and seek support from the district office. One weakness that arose from the analysis was the need to build capacity. Finally, a threat that was prevalent in many discussions with principals was the need to feel psychologically safe as they engaged in the SAR process. To address these concerns, I ensured that I visited each group and spent time talking with both the group and the individual leaders. I noted the concerns and ensured that they would be addressed as the team developed the project. These helped turnaround many attitudes in the room. The results of the S.W.O.T.

analysis were presented to Principals at the August Principals' Meeting and influenced next steps in the life of the project.

CompStat Comes to Birmingham

Coinciding with my arrival to Birmingham, The Birmingham Police Department began implementation of the CompStat process. During the first six months of implementation, violent crime was reduced by approximately 11% in the city (personal communication). In late August 2019, Deputy Chief Darnell Davenport invited me to the Birmingham Police headquarters to share additional information about the process. He also invited me to attend the first citywide CompStat meeting (see Appendix D for pictures) to be held the following day. Prior to this meeting, Chief Davenport had been hosting local precinct CompStat meetings. He called these meetings Daily Crime Control Meetings. He explained that these meetings helped uncover where people were not engaged. During the meeting, he remarked, "This process will literally change your organization" (Davenport August 20, 2019).

From BPD's first Quarterly CompStat Review, I was able to learn both the content and protocols that were driving the improvement in the BPD's crime statistics. During the meeting, I watched closely to learn the content and structure of the meeting. I also learned how the composite could be adapted for use with principals in an educational context. Deputy Chief Davenport served as the facilitator for the event. The Chief of Police and Assistant Chief of Police sat in the center of a U-shaped set of tables. Detectives sat at the tables to the right and the Precinct commanders sat at the tables to the left. Patrol officers from each precinct that were not on active duty sat in chairs behind the main table.

After Deputy Chief Davenport opened the meeting, each precinct commander came to the front and presented a data composite for their precinct. They also shared preventative and enforcement strategies they implemented to address the data. After the presentation, the Chief and Assistant Chief engaged each Precinct Commander in a series of questions. One question that Chief Patrick Smith asked each precinct commander: “What strategies have you seen be effective and how do you know they are effective” (Smith, August 21, 2019). The answers from precinct commanders varied based on the specific challenge they were facing; however, I quickly realized that many of the strategies were proactive attempts to address the data that was presented. For example, in one precinct, the commander noticed a cluster of burglaries. To address the cluster, he re-assigned a patrol car to monitor a street that was seeing an increase in burglaries. This re-assignment almost eliminated burglaries in subsequent periods of time. Chief Smith also used this line of questioning to understand the directives and support precinct commanders were receiving from central command. He specifically asked if the directives were clear and if training (if needed) was provided. In one, case a precinct commander noted that he needed more training. Deputy Chief Davenport responded to the request, “It’s coming” (Davenport, August 21, 2019).

At the conclusion of BPD’s CompStat meeting, Chief Patrick Smith addressed everyone in the room. He stated:

We have started the CompStat process because I want to know what is working and what is not working to reduce crime. We should all know where we stand. We serve the community and should work hard to meet our goals. This process helps us stay true to our central focus - addressing, reducing, and preventing crime. This whole thing is about accountability and making sure we stay focused on our goals. It will help us close the

gaps. If you want to see change, you need to be about change (Smith, August 21, 2019).

Chief Smith's words immediately triggered thoughts of the instructional core in my mind. The SAR process should help BCS's leaders make their central focus the instructional core. Intent focus on indicators that influence the instructional core would be critical to the district's success. Ultimately, the BPD protocol and processes significantly informed the process our team introduced to Birmingham City Schools' administrators during the fall semester 2019.

ACT Scores & Alabama Literacy Act Inform Urgency & Strategic Project

Another major event in August was the release of the school district's spring 2019 ACT results. The data was troubling. In English, 24% of students were ranked as proficient (compared to 43% at state level). Reading was 8% proficient (27% at state level), Science 4% proficient (20% at state level). The lowest number was Mathematics, in which only 3% of BCS students were rated as proficient compared to 18% at the state level (internal communication). Dr. Herring convened a meeting of top cabinet officials to discuss the results. Dr. Herring stated emphatically, "These results are an academic curse we must break. We must literally destroy and rebuild systems which are not getting results" (Herring, August 15, 2019). The meeting was important in informing specific criteria that would be utilized in the School Accountability Review process. It also underscored the urgent need of the strategic initiative. A plan was developed to ensure all 8th, 9th and 10th graders would have exposure to the PreACT. The PreACT, targeted to grade 10, gives students practice for the ACT which is typically administered in grade 11. The PreACT also gives students an estimated ACT score and can be used as an indicator

for college and career readiness. Financial resources were allocated equitably across all schools so that the district would have universal participation of all three-grade levels in the PreACT for the first time. This PreACT data would become a key indicator within the School Accountability Review process to drive continuous improvement.

In a second meeting of cabinet officials in late August, the stakes were increased, and the impact was felt on my strategic project. At this meeting Dr. Herring asked, “How do we push-in with an accountable intent” (Herring, August 23, 2019)? She noted that a full turnaround of Birmingham City Schools expanded well beyond the reach of the high schools. She pointed to the Alabama Literacy Act (2019-523) that requires all students in Grade 3 to demonstrate sufficient reading skills for promotion to fourth grade beginning in the 2021-2022 school year. Dr. Herring stated, “We have to make all Principals accountable, build change and celebrate at the same time. Those who can lead will” (Herring, August 23, 2019). During this meeting, the title of the strategic project shifted from School Academic Reviews to School Accountability Reviews. The project would be designed to build a sense of urgency in leadership. The indicators utilized for the SAR would be select attendance, discipline, formative assessment, and intervention data. The first School Accountability Reviews would be held in November.

BCS Prepares for School Accountability Reviews

During the August and September district principal meetings, the Academics and Accountability team continued to build capacity for the School Accountability Reviews in November. Dr. Herring made it very clear to principals at the August principals’ meeting that the process would have a strong focus on accountability. Although the presentation slides still referred to the process as School Academic Reviews, Dr. Herring

introduced the process while speaking to Principals as “School Accountability Reviews”. She said the process would be grounded in accountable talk. She stated, “This work is hard enough, I will treat you with dignity; however, if you are not ready to do this work, we need to have a conversation” (Herring, August 29, 2019).

During both the September and October Principal meetings, the Academics and Accountability team had an opportunity to build content and process understanding for Principals. To ensure the SAR would result in productive problem-solving conversations, we introduced the Ladder of Inference as a tool for better group reasoning.

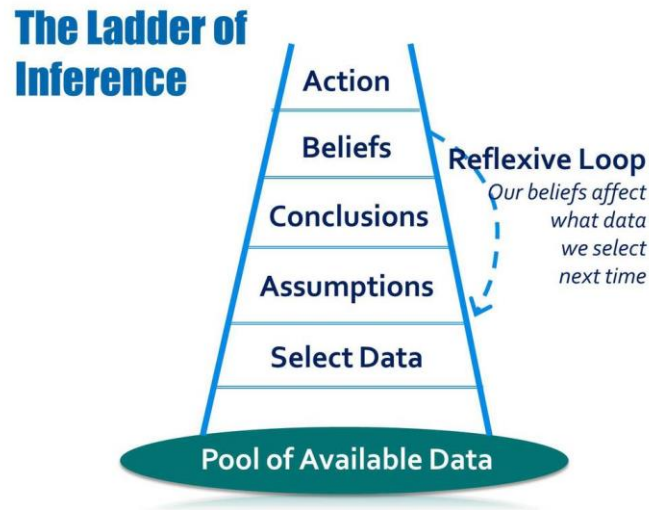


Figure 4: Ladder of Inference

By using the Ladder of Inference to guide our thinking during the School Accountability Review process, we shared the belief that all would have a better understanding of each individual school’s context and find the best solutions while overcoming resistance to change.

Next, we provided Principals with a definition of the process. We defined School Accountability Reviews in Birmingham City Schools as a management-accountability,

problem-solving methodology, and support process. The process would engage leaders in understanding, discussing and supporting best practices in instruction and operations that lead to positive student outcomes. Once defined, we shared the methodology that would guide the process (see appendix C). At the beginning of the SAR, Principals would explain the strategies/processes implemented to arrive at the current data. Afterwards, the panel would ask questions to determine what actions the school planned to take next to address challenges. Additionally, the panel would question who would be held accountable for ensuring fidelity of implementation. Accountability would ultimately be shared by both building leadership and the district team, depending on the nature of the request. Finally, principals would have an opportunity to share what they need from outside of the school in terms of support to realize success. At the September meeting, principals were broken into groups where they had an opportunity to practice the process via simulation. Numerous principals shared their appreciation for this introduction to the process (internal survey, September 2019).

In late September, the Academics and Accountability team organized the first full live simulation of a School Accountability Review. Anthony Oliver, Principal of Green Acres Middle School, presented a sample composite in front of his peers (see appendix F). During this fishbowl activity, Principals engaged in a notice and wondering activity that covered the following elements:

- Adherence to SAR norms
- Evidence of shared accountability
- Principal speaks to identified data sources

Again, Principals shared appreciation for the process. They also shared trepidation for their own data presentations as the Fall SAR crept closer (personal communication).

School Accountability Reviews - Phase I

In late October, the Academics & Accountability team provided one last high-level overview of the SAR process and protocols. Embedded in the October Principals' Meeting were two hours of data analysis professional development utilizing the formative assessment and intervention sources that would be reviewed during the November SAR. Between August and October, Principals received professional development on each leading indicator in the November SAR. By mid-November, each school leader indicated they felt adequately prepared to engage in the first SAR (internal survey, November 2019).

Over the course of two weeks in November, the Academics and Accountability team facilitated 43 individual School Accountability Reviews, using research-based best practices and practical advice from the Birmingham Police Department. Each school leader was called to present before the Superintendent, Chief of Staff, Interim Chief Academic Officer, as well as the Instructional Superintendents. Presentations began with a 2-3-minute elevator speech about how the school arrived at the current data. Next, the inquiry panel led by the Superintendent asked rounds of questions about each leading indicator for 7-8 minutes. Each SAR concluded with a discussion about how to best support the school's improvement efforts (see Appendices E & F for an example composite and pictures of School Accountability Review Sessions). At the end of each session, Principals took a survey about the SAR process:

1. How prepared did Principals feel to engage in the SAR process?
2. Did the SAR process support the district's commitment to build instructional leaders?
3. Did the SAR process make Principals feel more accountable for their school's data?

4. Did the SAR process improve cross-functional support between the school and central office?
5. Has the SAR process changed the way you think/act within your school building?
6. What suggestions/questions remain regarding the SAR process?

The final component of the Fall phase of the School Accountability Review process was the After-Action Review (AAR), which served as an opportunity to dig deeper into the discussions that were initiated at the SAR. These virtual meetings were purposefully longer as they did not require the Superintendent's attendance. They also set up a second layer of indicator. During the After-Action Review, each principal was required to develop S.M.A.R.T. (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, Time-bound) goals for each leading indicator to discuss at the February SAR. Between early December and late January, I facilitated 43 After-Action Reviews, recording each session for Academics and Accountability team members and the Instructional Superintendents. The After-Action Review was composed of three parts. In the first part, Principals answered the following four questions:

1. What was supposed to happen at your school site following the School Accountability Review (what next steps were identified)?
2. What has happened at your school site?
3. What actions caused the current results?
4. What will you sustain; what will you improve upon?

In the next part of the After-Action Review, Principals set goals for each leading indicator that would be presented and discussed at the February School Accountability Review. Finally, I closed each review with an opportunity to reflect on the process holistically and discuss any continued support needs.

Promising Evidence to Date

This strategic project was an exercise in practice-based leadership. As such, it influenced individual principal practice immediately. At scale, results were mixed at the time of this writing. Returning to my original theory of action:

If:

- We align the School Accountability Review practice with the strategic plan and clearly articulate the roles and responsibilities of school leaders and district stakeholders within the initiative and...
- We provide a consistent set of evidence-based expectations and deliverables centered on the instructional core...
- We provide consistent and systemic professional development to build the capacity of the organization to analyze data and....
- We embed psychological safety to allow for honest and transparent dialogue around the data and...
- We co-create trust to allow Principals to modify their school's instructional approach and intervention support models aligned to the feedback of key stakeholders derived from project initiative meetings

Then:

- Birmingham City Schools will create a sustainable feedback loop that will positively affect culture and climate and drive continuous improvement efforts within the school district.

So:

- That Birmingham City Schools can realize its strategic vision of 75% of schools rated a "C" or higher on the state report card by 2023

The results of my work to date were promising in a few key-ways:

Align Project with the Strategic Plan

It was critical that this initiative align with the strategic plan, complementing current projects rather than becoming "one more thing" for the organization. This alignment was critical for buy-in at several levels. First, it was important that principals understood the motivation behind the project, as they would be the primary participants. I

addressed this stakeholder group primarily through intensive and continuous professional development throughout the course of the school year. Next, it was critical that district level administrators understood and supported the project as they would both participate and be responsible for follow-up accountability. To address this stakeholder group, I aligned the project with the instructional expectations that the district developed at the PELP institute in the summer of 2019. In this way the project clearly aligned to the most important instructional work of the district. Finally, board members needed to know that the time and energy dedicated to the project would also further the district's strategic goals. I made sure to communicate the alignment of the strategic plan and strategic project during every professional development session. Additionally, I was able to present directly to the Board of Education during a Board Retreat in October (see Appendix G for presentation slides).

Data Composite and Deliverables Centered on the Instructional Core

Based on conversations with principals and members of the Academics and Accountability team, I designed a data composite for each school site. Each data composite utilized the same indicators, aligned with the Alabama State Report Card metrics, but contained data unique to the school site. After receiving feedback from the November School Accountability Review sessions, I updated each composite to include data from district intervention tools as well as newly received high school data including PreACT and ACT WorkKeys. In total, I completed 86 unique data composites during this project. I have included one example in Appendix F of this capstone.

Consistent and Systemic Professional Development

Following the summer professional development session that introduced the School Accountability process to the school district, 23 out of 24 Principals surveyed reported that the initiative and the content of the professional development were either above average or outstanding. Additionally, all Principals responded that the initiative and content were “useful” or “very useful.” Through follow-up conversations, it became clear that many Principals were excited about the prospects of the project. One principal stated, “I am excited that this process will put a greater focus on analyzing data in the district.” Another Principal said, “The SAR process seems to incorporate shared decision making which has been absent in the past.” The consensus response from the introduction of the strategic project was that principals were generally enthusiastic and wanted to learn more.

Developing Instructional Leaders Driven by Data

In November 2019, the Academics & Accountability team had the opportunity to facilitate 43 individual School Accountability Reviews. Following the reviews, each principal was invited to complete a detailed survey to capture their experience. 33 out of 35 respondents “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that the SAR prepared the leader to better analyze and discuss achievement, attendance, and discipline data. Additionally, 33 out of 35 Principals surveyed “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that the process made them feel more accountable for their school’s data. While still not accounting for all school sites, the number of principals that chose to respond to the survey increased significantly from the first survey that was conducted after the summer professional development. This

increase was encouraging. The survey asked Principals to share how they think differently about data and instruction following the first SAR. One Principal responded, “I understand that I must be extremely deliberate about the dissection of the school’s data. How we use data drives the school and could very well determine the success or the lack of achievement.” Another Principal responded, “My perception [of SARs] is vastly different now... [the process] pushes you beyond the numbers into the realm of the how and the why of the numbers. It presses you to really consider strategies to change...”

Incorporating Shared Voice & Support:

One encouraging result of the strategic project was that, according to several principals, the School Accountability Review process provided an avenue for the voices of school leaders to be heard and elevated. They saw it as a way to hear each other and felt that the process itself was supportive (even though a stated goal was to hold them accountable). One principal responded to the Post-SAR survey by stating, “Having the opportunity to hear what’s happening in colleagues’ schools was rewarding. I was able to glean many ideas and some answers to our similar challenges.” Another principal shared their belief that the School Accountability Review process was “structured to be a dialogue, not a ‘gotcha’ session...” A third principal stated, “I think that SAR is truly designed to analyze and provide support to schools for improvement.”

Creating a Sustainable Feedback Loop

Another promising mechanism I executed as part of the SAR process was After-Action Reviews. Between December and early February, I conducted 43 After-Action Reviews. Most of these sessions were held online via videoconference; however, as

requested or if my schedule allowed, I conducted them at the school site. These meetings were designed to deepen the improvement conversation initiated at the November School Accountability Review session. They were also designed to measure how the SAR process influenced instructional leadership decisions back at the school site. Through qualitative conversations, principals shared the impact the SAR had on their instructional leadership. In January, one high school principal stated, “The SAR process was a huge awakening for me. It gives you a true picture of the data and is encouraging me to create a culture of teaching and learning. I’m in the classrooms, giving true feedback, making an impact.” Other principals shared similar success stories, and many referenced a new commitment to data deep dives. An elementary principal exclaimed, “We were so committed to fixing our culture after SAR and we haven’t had a single suspension since November.” Part of the feedback loop was also designed to learn the challenges that principals continued to face and where systemic challenges might lie.

In my conversation with a high school principal, we dug into the data around the number of her students who were certified according to the ACT WorkKeys assessments, which measure workplace skills that can affect job performance. Students who successfully complete the three WorkKeys earn a credential that can be used to validate foundational workplace skills. The principal shared her schoolwide plan for student certification, and asked, “Where’s the district plan? The district doesn’t have a plan to support schools of which I’m aware.” This conversation was illuminating and exemplified the reciprocal feedback the project was intended to produce. I shared this response with both the Chief Academic Officer and The Senior Executive Director of Career & Technical Education. The district team indicated that a plan was being

developed, yet the concern was unresolved at the time of the writing of this capstone. The conversation appeared to make the plan a priority for district staff to complete.

Positively Affect Culture & Climate and Drive Continuous Improvement

Early data indicators suggested that the comprehensive process of professional development, School Accountability Review inspections (both preparation and implementation), and robust After-Action Reviews paid dividends. As part of the November SAR sessions, I collected and compared key SAR data points, year over year. In October 2019, the district chronic absenteeism rate had been reduced from 16% to 11% compared to October 2018. The district suspension rate remained static at 7%, but total days suspended had been reduced by 558 days year over year, from 5,000 days to 4,442. This decrease represented an 11.2% reduction in total days suspended year over year. Most encouraging was the early literacy formative assessment data. The district scale score on the 1st grade STAR Early Literacy assessment (Window 2) increased by 140 points, from 519 to 659. The scale ranges from 300-900, encompassing four literacy classifications: early emergent readers, late emergent readers, transitional readers, or probable readers. The 140-point year over year increase showed that the 2019-20 first grade class moved the median score almost a full classification level. The improvements suggested that the School Accountability Review process served as a catalyst for principals to more stringently analyze their data and make instructional and operational adjustments that positively impacted culture, climate, and achievement.

As discussed previously, the team engaged in a very technical process (implementation of a stat model) to drive lasting, adaptive change (shifting mindsets, strengthening Principals' analysis around instructional practices, and establishing a

practice-sharing culture). I was primarily concerned with four early indicators of success: (1) building instructional leaders' content knowledge and capacity to analyze data, (2) establishing relational trust for the initiative and by proxy between the district office and the schools, (3) Creating a sustainable feedback loop for two-way communication between the school district and individual schools, and (4) Improving on key district indicators in the areas of climate, culture, and instruction. As our results demonstrate, we realized early success in all four indicators. However, the success was not pervasive and, in some cases, occurred in pockets. The reviews varied somewhat in quality (i.e. in the leader to adequately respond to the senior leader questions using the data), and it is not yet clear that the initiative will meet its intended goals in all 43 schools.

Still, the early results cannot be undervalued and represent the promise of intentional, support based data analysis and accountable talk. School Accountability Reviews are certain to have a positive impact on Birmingham City Schools in the years to come. The next section explores my current understanding of why these results unfolded the way they did.

Analysis of the Strategic Project

Analyzing the project’s outcomes requires a return to some of the basic understandings I held at the onset of the project, which had informed its development and execution. From the beginning, I understood the project as a very technical one that, through careful capacity building, could bear adaptive change. I will first and primarily analyze the strategic project through the lens of Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky’s Adaptive Framework for Leadership, which seemed most useful and aligned to my theory of action. Then, I will analyze the project through the frame of relational trust. Finally, I will revisit the practical examples in the RKA and compare to implementation within Birmingham City Schools. First, we turn to adaptive leadership. Table 2 illustrates the differences between adaptive and technical challenges:

Table 2

Distinguishing Technical from Adaptive Challenges

	What’s the Work	Who Does the Work?
Technical	Apply current know-how	Authorities
Adaptive	Learn new ways	The people with the problem

Note: Table reproduced from Heifetz and Linsky (2017), p. 14.

Heifetz and Linsky note, “In mobilizing, the adaptive work, you have to engage people in adjusting their unrealistic expectations, rather than try to satisfy them as if the situation were amenable primarily to a technical remedy” (p. 15). In executing the strategic project, I attempted to galvanize the resourcefulness of each education leader, so they would see the SAR process as a tipping point towards the positive movement of the needle towards school turnaround. Indeed, I hoped to disturb the status quo at a rate that

principals could absorb. My own leadership moves in concert with the existing culture of Birmingham City Schools, significantly influenced both the immediate (and projected long-term) impact of the project. In the following sections, I analyze my strategic project according to the five steps of Heifetz' and Linsky's framework:

1. Analyzing the Project from the Balcony
2. Political Analysis
3. Conflict Analysis
4. Reciprocal Analysis
5. Legacy Analysis

Getting on the Balcony

Heifetz and Linsky (2017) describe how it is critical to leave the dance floor during any initiative and get to the balcony. This advice is certainly important with an initiative of the technical nature of the School Accountability Reviews. Sometimes in the technical execution of the project, one does not get a full understanding of the cultural changes that are (or are not) occurring. The authors state, "The only way you can gain both a clearer view of reality and some perspective on the bigger picture is by distancing yourself from the fray" (p. 53). In viewing the strategic project from the balcony, it is also important to visualize one's self on the dance floor while observing from the balcony. The most basic question to ask when analyzing a project is simple: What is going on here? Heifetz and Linsky offer four diagnostic tasks to get beyond one's own blind spots on a project:

1. Distinguish technical from adaptive challenges
2. Find out where people are
3. Listen to the song beneath the words
4. Read the behavior of authority figures for clues

Technical vs. Adaptive Challenges

Heifetz and Linsky (2017) share that:

“you know you’re dealing with something more than a technical issue when people’s hearts and minds need to change, and not just their preferences or routine behaviors. In an adaptive challenge, people have to learn new ways and choose what appear to be contradictory values” (p. 60).

When I entered Birmingham City Schools in July 2019, I was concerned that the strategic project I was assigned was very technical. In essence, I felt I was creating a data analysis protocol to support implementation of the data dashboard; however, I soon learned that the project would face adaptive challenges and could open up a conversation around what equity means and looks like in Birmingham City Schools.

Heifetz and Linsky (2017) also state:

“you can distinguish technical problems from adaptive challenges by a process of exclusion. If you throw all the technical fixes you can imagine at the problem and the problem persists, it’s a pretty clear signal that an underlying adaptive challenge still needs to be addressed” (pp. 60-61).

As I revisit the project, it was executed incredibly efficiently from a technical lens. We were able to build capacity and understanding through targeted professional development. We were able to facilitate 43 School Accountability Reviews. When it came time to hold the After-Action Reviews, it was clear that the problem was not “fixed.” Rather, the After-Action Reviews uncovered gaps both at the school and district level. It was also clear that the heat had been turned up on principals, based on several private conversations I had with principals following the fall SAR. The school district

had a slightly higher number of mid-year retirees and several Principals chose to take an extended leave when Winter Break arrived. This evidence is only corollary in its relationship to the School Accountability Review process; however, these conversations and actions suggested that some leaders were feeling the pain and loss that adaptive change can bring. I believe the SAR process incited at least a small part of the rapidly shifting culture in the district. The other instructional expectations derived from the PELP summer institute in July 2019 probably also played a role.

While it was clear I had identified an adaptive challenge, and had not yet moved all hearts and minds, most Principals reacted positively to the process because it offered the schools a voice. While much of the technical work could be completed in six to ten months, the adaptive work would require sustained (and repeated) practices to truly shift the culture. I will explicitly analyze relational trust later in the analysis section of this capstone.

Find Out Where People Are

Heifetz and Linsky (2017) indicate that “Beyond the capacity to listen, [starting where people are] requires curiosity, especially when you think you already know someone’s problem and what needs to be done” (p. 73). I think one early source of tension was that I failed to truly find out where people were before diving into the project.

Dr. Herring delivered the project charge to me by mid-July. By the end of the month, our team delivered the first professional development to principals at the Summer Leadership Institute. I recall that most of these sessions, though executed with fidelity, were rife with tension. The sessions, though well planned and delivered, failed to include

a critical ingredient - deep listening of the stakeholders. I, along with the Academics & Accountability team, provided a solid research base along with the technical details to support the initiative. I had conducted solid research on the history and context of Birmingham City Schools. **One missing element in my preparation was spending significant time learning how data analysis and accountability metrics had been historically implemented and how these initiatives had landed on teachers and leaders.** Even deeper, I failed to recognize how in the past, initiatives that were introduced at the Summer Professional Institute rarely materialized. I failed to recognize that many in the room might see this project as another one of those initiatives that would never take off. Though early feedback on the project was largely positive, I think I could have added an additional layer of **trust** by spending the first two weeks engaging in a strategic listening campaign.

Instead, the introduction of the initiative proved to be a shock to the system for many. When it came time to “practice” a School Accountability Review at the July Summer Leadership Institute, there was a range of emotions, from suspicion to outright revolt (several people walked out of the presentation when the heat turned up and did not return). Others failed to complete the session survey. If I had taken the time to listen and learn that past efforts to integrate data analysis had been poorly structured and sustained (and at worst weaponized), I might have avoided some of this initial resistance. It is not surprising, then, that the most powerful learning (and well-received summer activity) was the S.W.O.T. analysis our team conducted as part of the Institute. It was the first time within the strategic project that principals had the opportunity to provide their input on

both where the project was headed and where the district had historically been in terms of data analysis.

Listen to the Song Beneath the Words

While I recognized that I did not provide adequate opportunity to deeply listen prior to starting the strategic project, I did see value in tapping into the message below the surface in the action and words of leaders throughout the district. Heifetz and Linsky (2017) state that “after hearing their stories, you need to take the provocative first step of making an interpretation that goes below the surface” (p. 65). This form of analysis resonated with me, particularly, in one interaction I had during the Summer Institute as we introduced the initiative.

We had just completed a jigsaw activity where I introduced some of the research base behind the School Accountability Reviews. One of the articles I shared was about CompStat’s success during a 20-year implementation in New York City. The article struck a chord with several in the audience as it elicited a theme of guilt by association, meaning that using this case study as the foundation for the project might create similar negative impacts within Birmingham City Schools. One principal stated, “I understand that CompStat was successful, but it also alienated communities. I’m worried this initiative will do more harm than good.” Another principal expressed deep concern that the SAR process would be led by an outsider, and someone whose identity markers did not match most students within the district. There was distrust initially in me (and my identity markers). I would have to prove that I did not intend to weaponize the process. These interactions made me realize that trust building would be critical for this initiative to realize any level of success.

Following the summer institute, I made a point to hold 1:1 conversation with principals about the initiative. Strategically, I held these conversations informally, and often at the principal's school site. This structure of conversation began to break down some of the fear and concern for the project (and my own identity's impact on the project). These strategic conversations, along with continued, progressive and detailed professional development, helped for a successful implementation of the project.

Read the Authority Figure for Clues

Heifetz and Linsky (2017) share, "The senior authority will reflect what you are stirring up in the community" (p. 68) In the case of SARs, Dr. Herring conveyed energy and conviction about shifting the complacent culture of the school district. The unease my project unearthed redoubled her commitment to it, which I discovered during a discussion about naming the strategic project. After my initial conversations and professional development in the summer, I wanted to call the strategic project "School Academic Reviews," but Dr. Herring challenged me to push principals into a greater state of discomfort by calling the initiative School Accountability Reviews. After the release of ACT and AP data on August 2019, the name change stuck.

Her signal was that we needed to move fast, perhaps even beyond the capacity of principals. As such, I became intentional about highlighting the support mechanisms of the project. The name was anxiety producing enough for many principals. It became my job to help principals view the project as a source of support. I believed that if they felt supported, they would be more inclined to shift their practice in time (adaptive change). Based on my After-Action Reviews, this hypothesis proved to be true for almost all of our school leaders, 95% of whom showed evidence of shifting practice. This evidence

came in the form of clear-cut ways they shifted their practice and shared this shift during the AAR.

Networks of trust are critical for driving initiatives in any political organization. Heifetz and Linsky (2017) provide six essential aspects of thinking politically in the exercise of leadership:

1. Find partners
2. Keep the opposition close
3. Accept responsibility for your piece of the mess
4. Acknowledge their loss
5. Model the behavior
6. Accept casualties

Finding Partners

The SARs were a central initiative for the administration during my residency. As such, the most critical partner I had in the work was Dr. Herring. Her authority and legitimacy were prime reasons I experienced a high level of success with the project. I recognized that since the Office of Superintendent was very small, the future of the project could be jeopardized if I did not find partners in other divisions. The clear long-term home of the project was in the Division of Achievement and Accountability.

As such, I immediately began working with the Interim CAO Gabriella to gain her support. Thankfully, she responded enthusiastically by providing time during every principals' meeting to build capacity for the project. We collaborated on building the data composites and developing the logistics for the 43 School Accountability Reviews. Gabriella was a powerful partner, but this close relationship presented another type of barrier. In working so closely with her, I failed to create other deep-rooted partnerships

within her division. This failure could jeopardize the future of the initiative if/when either of us depart the district.

In the summer, I worked very closely with Peter, the Executive Director of Assessment and Accountability. We co-built and delivered the summer professional development for the initiative; however, as August turned into September, I found myself having more conversations with Gabriella and fewer with Peter. Early in my residency, I also collaborated closely with the Director of Student Success and the Director of the Student Information System. As the initiative moved closer to the execution phase, I relied less on their input and instead made only data requests via email. Heifetz and Linsky (2017) state:

“Indeed, there can be internal pressures, inside of you, that resist joining forces. Partners might push their own ideas, compromising your own; connecting with them takes time, slowing you down; and working with a group might dilute your centrality - a drawback if it is important that you get credit, or if you want to reassure yourself and others at your competence” (p. 76).

In retrospect, I believe I centralized my own role in the work as it came closer to implementation because I was worried about the project being bogged down in a dysfunctional culture. If I could not get the project off the ground, I assumed, there would be no chance to plant the seeds that might one day bear the fruit of adaptive change. Still, by potentially alienating co-creators and co-contributors to the project, I may have cannibalized my own efforts, especially once my residency concludes. This part of my analysis will strongly inform my implications for site and self, which I discuss in the next section of the capstone.

Keep the Opposition Close

Those who are firmly opposed to one's initiative deserve a healthy amount of one's attention. Heifetz and Linsky (2017) share, "Keeping your opposition close connects you with your diagnostic job... If it is crucial to know where people are, then the people most critical to understand are those likely to be most upset by your agenda" (p. 89). I quickly recognized that because my strategic project had the firm backing of Dr. Herring, the enemies of my project were in some sense of enemies of the administration in general. In broader terms, the harshest opponents were emblematic of the old vs. new culture of Birmingham. The new culture was represented by Dr. Herring and any executive team members she brought from outside the organization after 2017. Any executives who were employed prior to 2017 were referred to as the "old guard."

To combat these potential opponents, I made sure to seek out leaders of the old guard, particularly those who had been in the district for more than a decade. I listened deeply to their feedback, incorporated their suggestions into the project, and made sure their feedback was visible when we held the School Accountability Reviews. I believed incorporating their voice could soften opposition. It could also provide a window of opportunity to capture the hearts and minds of those leaders who sat in the middle.

Accept Responsibility for Your Piece of the Mess

Accepting my own role in the mess was a critical ingredient that I think helped shape and move the strategic project. Heifetz and Linsky (2017) state, "Even if you are new, or outside the organization, you need to identify those behaviors you practice or values you embody that would stifle the very change you want to advance" (p. 90). I made this observation from the balcony very early regarding the aforementioned "us vs.

them” culture. During executive cabinet meetings, the tension was at times palpable. Newer leaders would on occasion scoff at the current state of the district and how, as one put it in a September meeting, “other districts and states have had [similar structural policies] in place for ten years.”

These comments bred resentment in some of the longer-term employees. I think it also created a real barrier to change efforts. To counter this challenge, I tried to make connections to past leadership positions in which I encountered the same challenge. I would then say it was something I wish I had resolved, but I did not. By framing the challenge this way, I sought buy-in from old-guard leaders so we could tackle this new challenge together. We were all implicated, me included.

Acknowledge Their Loss

It was clear that, as with any change initiative, leaders would experience some sense of loss by engaging in the School Accountability Review process. Heifetz and Linsky (2017) share, “People are willing to make sacrifices if they see the reason why” (p. 94). To that end, I think I successfully connected the project to the school district’s strategic plan. There was a simple “why” surrounding the outcomes of the project: we wanted to prove that we were not the failing school district that others had labeled us. Through this project, we could realize the vision of the strategic plan that 75% of our schools would be rated a “C” or higher on the state report card by 2023.

Heifetz and Linsky (2017) go on to attest that

“beyond clarifying the values at stake and the greater purposes worth the pain, you also need to name and acknowledge the loss itself...make explicit your

realization that the change you are asking them to make is difficult, and that what you are asking them to give up has real value” (p. 94).

In this area, I fell short by focusing more on the positive future, and less on the recognition that this new initiative might not align with what was already being implemented in schools. Publicly making this statement could have enhanced trust around the project. For example, selecting a data source to be presented on the composites immediately made it central to the district’s improvement. Due to a lack of coherence, not all schools integrated these data sources into the instructional program with the same level of fidelity. Other schools might be using a data source with fidelity that would not be presented at the SAR inspection. I should have acknowledged these discrepancies up front, understanding that some schools would have to deemphasize instructional programs or data sources they were more comfortable using. It was not a level playing field and this could impact outcomes at the first SAR and beyond.

Model the Behavior

Heifetz and Linsky (2017) note that “symbolic modeling can have substantial impact” (p. 98). While I could not sit in the Principals’ shoes and execute a School Accountability Review, I shared stories of my own experience as a Principal and engaging in a similar process within my former school district. I also shared the real benefits I gained from the process, like moving a former school from “D” to “C” on the state report card, and invited other leaders to share their experience with this type of initiative. One of the Instructional Superintendents, for example, shared her experience with stat models while a Principal at Detroit Public Schools. I think these symbolic modeling opportunities were critical in gaining buy-in for the strategic project.

Accept Casualties

The sixth way one can analyze an initiative politically is by determining the extent to which casualties were accepted. Heifetz and Linsky (2017) state, “Your ability to accept the harsh reality of losses sends clear message about your courage and commitment to seeing the adaptive challenge through” (p. 99). I think this is an area where I fell short. Especially during the After-Action Reviews, I passed up opportunities to publicly address resistance to the initiative and push harder against complacency. At the time, I think I was trying to sustain momentum for the project. I was fearful of individuals who might derail progress. Upon reflection, I think allowing this type of behavior minimizes the effect size of the project. Success requires an equal dose of courageous authenticity and support. I think I too often was imbalanced in my approach – valuing support over accountability. For the most success, I think the scale needs to be balanced.

In the next iteration of the School Accountability Review, I will make sure I execute in this manner. While being more courageous in these meetings might create more vocal detractors, it could also make opponents realize the initiative will be sustained, even with opposition. One course correction I made was preparing Principals for the second round of SARs in the spring. I acknowledged the challenge and the cost of the project. For example, several principals shared with supervisors their desire for leave in part due to “new accountability measures” (internal communication, January 2020).

Orchestrate the Conflict

Conflict is inevitable in an initiative and implementing SARs in Birmingham City Schools was no different. Heifetz and Linsky (2017) note,

“The challenge of leadership when trying to generate adaptive change is to work with differences, passions, and conflicts in a way that diminishes their destructive potential and constructively harnesses their energy. Conflict can be more difficult to control when you are not in a position of senior leadership” (p. 102).

As such, Heifetz and Linsky (2017) offer four ways to orchestrate conflict:

1. Create a holding environment for the work
2. Control the temperature
3. Set the pace
4. Show them the future

Create a Holding Environment for the Work

Heifetz and Linsky (2017) share that through “structural, procedural, or virtual boundaries, people feel safe enough to address problems that are difficult, not only because they strain ingenuity, but also because they strain relationships” (p. 103). One way I attempted to manage the heat of the initiative was by implementing After-Action Reviews, strategically designed as 1-1 meetings. In this way, I hoped to lessen the heat that many principals felt during the School Accountability Reviews. Individual meetings provided participants with the opportunity to identify individual adaptive challenges without having to publicly share with the larger group. The sessions were recorded so senior leadership had access; however, principals felt safer because the holding environment was designed to promote vulnerability. The recording of the sessions came at the request of Dr. Herring and Instructional Superintendents. I felt this was an appropriate step to keep senior leadership in the loop. Still, when I started each After-Action review, I asked for permission of each principal to record the session. All principals complied with the request. In almost every case, principals were very

vulnerable and transparent during these After-Action Reviews. I think if I had designed them differently, this would not have been the case.

Control the Temperature

Another important element of the work was controlling the temperature. Heifetz and Linsky (2017) note, “Any community can only take so much pressure before it either becomes immobilized or spins out of control. The heat must stay within a tolerable range – not so high that people demand it be turned off completely, and not so low that they are lulled into inaction.” The cyclical design of the School Accountability Process was created in a way that I hope had levers built in to control the temperature.

When I introduced the initiative, it was introduced in a way to turn up the heat. Schools would be called to a central location and held accountable for their data. Next, to turn down the temperature a bit, I designed a series of professional learning opportunities meant to provide an advanced comfort level with the project. Principals would not walk blindly into SARs. The heat was turned back up when everyone had to stand in front of the Superintendent and their peers and share their data. Then, the temperature was reduced during the After-Action Review that served as a support function. Constantly adjusting the temperature helped with the success of the initiative.

Set the Pace

The SAR process was designed to drive change at the speed of trust. Heifetz and Linsky (2017) note, “How you pace the work depends on the difficulty of the issue, the tolerance of the community, and the strength of your authority relationships and the holding environment” (p.120). After the strong reactions our summer professional

development induced, I knew we needed additional and deliberate professional development before our first School Accountability Review in November. As such, I made the strategic decision very early to move from quarterly reviews to semester reviews, at least during the first year of the project. We also moved the first review from October to November. By the time we held the School Accountability Reviews in November, Principals were better prepared for and more confident about the process.

Show Them the Future

I found it incredibly helpful to ground the SAR process in the district's strategic plan. I reminded all stakeholders that SARs were one vehicle to realizing 75% of schools as a "C" or better on the state report card by 2023. Heifetz and Linsky (2017) state, "To sustain momentum through a period of difficult change, you have to find ways to remind people of the orienting value - the positive vision - that makes the current angst worthwhile" (p.120). This is an area where I believe I was very successful. I celebrated early wins often and used the After-Action Review portion of the project to re-emphasize how the project fit with the district's vision.

Give the Work Back

It is critical within any strategic project that at some point the work is given back to the constituents, and I focused on this from the onset of the initiative. Heifetz and Linsky (2017) state, "Moreover, shouldering the adaptive work of others is risky...when you take on the issue, you *become* the issue in the eyes of many" (p.123). In the way I presented the SAR Process, it was clear to all participants that each one of them would meet challenges and initiate changes. If I provided all the solutions, I might receive some

praise but most of the underlying issues would be unaddressed. There would be little chance that the progress made could be sustained. It was important to champion the principals as the change leaders.

Intervention is critical in building the organization's structural muscles to handle the load of adaptive change. Heifetz and Linsky (2017) share four types of intervention that constitute tactics of leadership:

1. Observations
2. Asking Questions
3. Offering Interpretations
4. Taking Actions

In leading the School Accountability Review process, I utilized each of these interventions in ways strategically designed to push the organization. I used observations from the balcony throughout each phase of the project. I utilized observation after the SAR inspections as well as throughout the After-Action Reviews. When emotion rose around the initiative, I generally utilized questioning to lower the temperature and understand why the project was creating fear or anxiety. Finally, from a perch on the balcony, and following in-depth conversations with stakeholders, I acted in a deliberate fashion. Heifetz and Linsky (2017) state, "Actions draw attention, but the message and context must be crystal clear" (p. 138). When communicating about the SARs, I always linked the conversation to the strategic plan.

Hold Steady

Finally, it is important to remain unwavering in one's commitment to the strategic project, even when the heat is on. Heifetz and Linsky (2017) state, "The pressure on you may be almost unbearable, causing you to doubt both your own capacities and your

direction. If you waver or act prematurely, your initiative can be lost in an instant” (p. 141). There was tremendous pressure from the authorizing environment to move fast. Indeed, the entire residency experience would only last ten months. Still, I was hyper focused on practicing leadership in a way that Heifetz and Linsky (2017) describe as “disappointing people at a rate they can absorb” (p. 142).

Rather than focusing on the individual, I focused the project on the district’s ongoing structural issues (in which, of course, we all shared some fault). I adeptly utilized a strategy that Heifetz and Linsky (2017) suggest, in which they state, “Getting a group to focus on a tough issue... [can succeed] by speaking in as neutral a way as possible, simply reporting observable and shared data rather than making provocative interpretations” (p. 158). I often delayed interpretation and saved those conversations for dialogue with the Superintendent and Chief Academic Officer. In conversation with Principals, a neutral tone generally produced a richer conversation.

Building Relational Trust

Central to the work of practicing adaptive leadership is building relational trust. Bryk (2003) describes the conditions that foster relational trust, writing, “Trust grows through exchanges in which actions validate...expectations...In this respect, increasing trust and deepening organizational change support each other” (p. 43). Paramount to the SAR process was building trust in several ways. I aimed to create an environment that was set to enable relational trust to grow between those in the system. I wanted to build systems that created trust between the building leaders and myself. Systemically, I aimed to build trust between building leadership and the district office. Holistically, I hoped to build trust between building leaders and trust in the district’s instructional plan.

I relied on the four specific considerations discussed in my Review of Knowledge for Action to build relational trust for the project: respect, personal regard, competence in core role responsibilities, and personal integrity. In all phases of the project, I feel as if I led with respectful discourse. My modeling was then embodied by senior district leadership at the SAR inspections in November. In terms of personal regard, I tried to break down the walls between the school and the Office of the Superintendent. I created a climate of deference, especially during After-Action Reviews, staying neutral (and generally positive) in a way that encouraged Principals to be courageously vulnerable. Finally, in terms of personal integrity, I made a point to execute on support requests made by Principals during the SAR meetings. I wanted Principals to see the initiative as one that realized its intended purpose of both accountability and support. One clear example was a challenge one Principal shared around receiving a laptop cart he had ordered six months previously. After six follow-up emails with the Department of Technology, I was able to secure the computers for the Principal. The Principal now had the support he needed to execute the plan he shared during his SAR session. It was in situations like this that I used trust as a lever to deepen the organizational change.

Analysis from the Lens of CompStat

The RKA section of this capstone provided best practice for the implementation of the CompStat process. O’Connell (2001) shared three stages for a successful implementation of CompStat. These stages are: Design Stage, Implementation Stage, and Meeting Stage. I used this research as a model of design for the School Accountability Review process.

O'Connell (2001) states that in the design stage, one should articulate the organizational mission/vision and realign organizational structure to facilitate the meeting of goals and objectives. Also, districts should have a modern organizational and informational technology in place prior to implementation. Following these recommendations, we made sure to align the strategic project with the strategic plan in all branding and communication of the initiative. Additionally, the data composites were designed using Google classroom, ensuring all leaders had easy access to the data in preparation for the SAR inspections.

During the implementation stage of the CompStat process, O'Connell (2001) shared several best practices. First, leaders should select performance indicators through a collaborative and fluid process. During the summer professional development in July, the team held conversations with principals and senior leaders to determine the most promising indicators. We decided to utilize indicators that aligned to the state report card. Choosing these indicators would also support the goal of the district's strategic plan, ensuring that 75% of schools would be rated as a "C" or higher on the state report card by 2023. Also, I ensured that the indicators were reviewed and refined, as necessary. I also shared the data with principals with a significant amount of lead time so they could adequately prepare for the meeting.

Finally, during the meeting stage, O'Connell (2001) recommends holding meetings at a convenient time and place and requiring key personnel to participate. Participants should engage in meaningful and constructive dialogue and the facilitator should encourage active participation by all members of the dais. A review should then be conducted after the meeting. This became the road map for the strategic project

meetings. We conveniently located the meetings at the Lincoln Professional Learning Center, a central location within the school district. Senior Executive leaders attended all sessions, underscoring the importance of the sessions for principals. As facilitator, I opened each session by encouraging active engagement from all participants. As the conclusion of each session, I conducted an After-Action review.

In summary, Heifetz, Linsky, Bryk, and the literature around practical implementation of stat models in an educational setting offer strategy for exercising adaptive leadership amid a cultural shift. These frameworks are helpful as I analyze my own successes and failures as a leader on influence without formal authority, who was seeking to build the capacity of instructional leadership and positively shift the culture of Birmingham City Schools. As I assess our work to date, I am excited about the incremental progress we have made. Principals tend to speak of School Accountability Reviews more as an opportunity than a threat. I see Principals taking the values and protocols of the School Accountability Review process and, in some cases, beginning to implement Teacher Accountability Reviews at the school level. The process has a long way to go, but the early success is promising.

A Revised Theory of Action

This analysis focused primarily on understanding the results of the School Accountability Review process as a vehicle to drive both technical and adaptive change. The main priorities according to my initial theory of action were to build content knowledge, capacity and relational trust. With that in mind, it is worth revisiting and interrogating the assumptions and gaps within my initial theory of action:

If:

- We align the School Accountability Review practice with the strategic plan and clearly articulate the roles and responsibilities of school leaders and district stakeholders within the initiative and...
- We provide a consistent set of evidence-based expectations and deliverables centered on the instructional core...
- We provide consistent and systemic professional development to build the capacity of the organization to analyze data and....
- We embed psychological safety to allow for honest and transparent dialogue around the data and...
- We co-create trust to allow Principals to modify their school's instructional approach and intervention support models aligned to the feedback of key stakeholders derived from project initiative meetings

Then:

- Birmingham City Schools will create a sustainable feedback loop that will positively affect culture and climate and drive continuous improvement efforts within the school district.

So:

- That Birmingham City Schools can realize its strategic vision of 75% of schools rated a "C" or higher on the state report card by 2023

This theory of action assumed that significant professional development and trust building would create a domino effect, with the technical aspects of the School Accountability process as the tipping point. The results suggest these core competencies were critical to the success of the project; however, they were not enough to secure the

longevity and sustainability of the project. The initial theory of action is a viable first step. However, to ensure ongoing success for the project, a revised theory of action might read:

If:

- *We build a shared vision for the inputs, expectations, and outcomes of the School Accountability Review process and...*
- We align the School Accountability Review practice with the strategic plan and clearly articulate the roles and responsibilities of school leaders and district stakeholders within the initiative and...
- We provide a consistent set of evidence-based expectations and deliverables centered on the instructional core...
- We provide consistent and systemic professional development to build the capacity of the organization to analyze data and....
- We embed psychological safety to allow for honest and transparent dialogue around the data and allow Principals to modify their school's instructional approach and intervention support models aligned to the feedback of key stakeholders derived from project initiative meetings and...
- *BCS consistently and effectively supports actions steps derived from the initiative...*

Then:

- Birmingham City Schools will create a sustainable feedback loop that will positively affect culture and climate and drive continuous improvement efforts within the school district.

So:

- That Birmingham City Schools can realize its strategic vision of 75% of schools rated a "C" or higher on the state report card by 2023

This revision addresses the need for more collective input at the onset of the initiative from all stakeholder groups. The Superintendent had a very clear vision of the expectations for this initiative; however, I could have spent more time with individual principals and schools having conversations around their vision for the project. I could have also spent more time building the initiative within the Office of Academics and Accountability, rather than having it remain in the Office of the Superintendent. In this example, I suspect there would have been less resistance when the initiative began. In

addition, as my residency concludes, the project could remain stable and be supported by the academic Division of Assessment & Accountability.

The revised theory also acknowledges the duality of responsibility that is required for the initiative to be successful. Schools must act on the data to drive continuous improvement. At the same time, the school district must be willing (and able) to support the capacity of these efforts. It is in this reciprocal relationship where the loop of continuous improvement can thrive.

Implications for Self

The implications for myself go far beyond the scope of my strategic project. The residency experience was deeply gratifying as it provided the opportunity to help me make sense of my own leadership style and how I can draw from the rich leadership examples that exist in Birmingham City Schools. When I began the search for a residency site, I was not sure that I wanted to return to a public-school district at the conclusion of the Ed.L.D. program. I had spent 11 years of my career in a district and wanted to explore other parts of the educational ecosystem. During my two years on campus in Cambridge, I had the opportunity to explore various pathways outside of the traditional public-school district. Ultimately, I returned to a school district for residency. In one sense, I recognized the opportunity that exists to operate intrapreneurially within a traditional district. In another, I had the opportunity to be introduced to a truly inspirational leader - Dr. Lisa Herring. I wanted to learn from her example. Her leadership combined with the opportunity to lead intrapreneurial change offered the formula and the opportunity to create lasting impact (it's too soon to claim lasting impact). Multiple themes emerged as I reflected about my own leadership during this residency. I have identified three lessons that I will highlight here:

1. Listen...Learn...Lead
2. Become both the Chief Relationship & Question Officer
3. Use data as a launch pad for courageously authentic leadership

Listen...Learn...Lead

I have a bad habit of jumping into action. I do not mean to downplay the importance of execution. I recognized, however, through the strategic project, that spending more time listening early in the project can help build trust and buy-in. Barry

Jentz (2009), in the article “First Time in a Position of Authority,” shares, “So, it’s critical to your success at the outset that you commit yourself to learning how to communicate to learn, as opposed to communicate simply to persuade, direct, or to inform” (p. 59). By orienting myself in this way, I am more closely aligning my leadership style to the outcomes I sought in the strategic project - that is to say, building the foundation for an effective two-way feedback loop. Jentz is very clear that the leader must be deliberate about setting an expectation for feedback. Upon entering the Ed.L.D. Program, I found that in my own leadership, I often avoided feedback. In my growth as a leader, I have learned to value and embrace feedback, Yet, I have not always built the structures and been explicit enough to ensure that I am constantly and consistently receiving the feedback. In small ways, I have already begun to incorporate feedback into my practice. I have scheduled one on one conversations with the Superintendent as well as the Interim Chief Academic Officer, and Instructional Superintendents. In these meetings, I have asked for feedback in two ways – the progress of the strategic project and my own leadership in general. These conversations have helped me begin to shift my practice. For example, I have made a point to push harder when follow-up is unclear in After-Action reviews and lead with more direct, courageous authenticity.

Another suggestion that Jentz (2009) offers around successful leadership entry is utilizing an executive coach as a thought partner to process feedback received. In reflecting on my own leadership moves throughout the residency, this is a strategy I chose not to act upon even though the resource was available. In hindsight, it is quite possible the executive coach would have recognized that I might not have captured all perspectives in the district before acting on the project. Having this thought partner

outside of the organization could have been incredibly beneficial. I will most certainly deploy this strategy in my next leadership role.

Jentz (2009) also suggests that new leaders consider utilizing an entry plan as a blueprint for navigating the confusion and sometimes chaos of a new leadership position. Jentz states, “Designing an entry plan is a form of imagining - of thinking (and writing) your way through the sequences of contact you plan to have with each of your key constituencies during your first day, first week, first month, first six months, first year...” (Jentz, 2009, p.60). When I revisit the entry plan that I developed for residency, I am encouraged by the blueprint I created. I developed my entry plan in April 2019. At the time, I provided the Superintendent with six residency learning goals:

- Learn how and why the Superintendent’s leadership is critical to the success of Birmingham City Schools and how I, as resident, can contribute to that success
- Understand the challenges an organization faces when looking to scale impactful programs.
- Identify and understand the barriers to scaling a large district initiative
- Gain greater understanding of how a large, urban school district functions by spending time meeting and listening to leaders both inside and outside of the organization
- Lead a strategic project that supports the strategic plan and benefits all students in Birmingham City Schools
- Obtain leadership certification in the state of Alabama

Reflecting on these goals almost one year later, I accomplished almost all of them during the ten-month residency. One lesson that I take away from the utilization of entry plans is that they must be malleable and revisited. At the time of completion, I had a different understanding of what my strategic project would become. When I learned about the project in July, I should have revisited the plan and updated it to reflect the specifics of the strategic project. In this way, I may have captured some of the blind spots that created challenges for the strategic project.

Become both the Chief Relationship & Question Officer

I must be cognizant of the fact that I must give the work back to both sustain and deepen my leadership. I have always oriented my leadership style around building relationships. In this way, I can amass a loyal and committed team dedicated to executing with fidelity. In the past, one step I have missed is engaging in deep, inquiry-based conversations meant to mine the rich human capital resources an organization holds. Through rich, inquiry-based conversation, I can build my own capacity to make decisions with greater legitimacy and authority. I can also build the capacity of teams by aligning projects to individual strengths and areas of expertise. Building my own expertise through expanding my own understanding of the current research base is important. Leveraging the collective experience of my team is indispensable.

Data as a Launch Pad for Courageously Authentic Leadership

One of the most impactful parts of the Ed.L.D. program was the opportunity to engage in work related to adult development. During the first year of the program, I was able to see how I operated within a space that Robert Kegan and Lisa Lahey refer to as the “socialized mind.” Kegan and Lahey, in the 2009 book entitled *Immunity to Change: How to Overcome It and Unlock the Potential in Yourself and Your Organization*, state, “If [the socialized mind] is the level of mental complexity with which I view the world, then what I think to send will be strongly influenced by what I believe others want to hear” (p.17). To truly be a transformational leader, I needed to build the cognitive capacity to more consistently hold a “self-authoring” worldview. Kegan and Lahey refer to the self-authoring world view in this way: “If I view the world from this level of mental complexity, what I ‘send’ is more likely to be a function of what I deem others

need to hear to best further the agenda or mission of my design (pp. 18-19). In this way, I could more decisively act in ways that aligned with my own core values and those embodied by the organization and project. I was not so quick to act in a way that merely calmed, appeased, or pacified conflict.

Engaging in this strategic project, I realized that data and accountability, when deployed in concert with a large helping of trust, could be a powerful tool to promote courageously authentic conversations around both improvement and equity. Holding 43 individual School Accountability Review sessions exposed inconsistencies and inequities in different communities. These reviews provided rich criteria and context to begin difficult conversations around why the system might allow said inequities to occur and how to address and begin to solve them.

Implications for Site

In consideration of how my strategic project unfolded, I have identified the following opportunities for Birmingham City Schools:

1. Rename School Accountability Reviews
2. Implement District Accountability Reviews
3. Build, Align, and Implement a System of Continuous Improvement Districtwide
4. Hire an Executive Director of Continuous Strategic Improvement

What's in a Name?

Principals completed an exit survey after each School Accountability Review session. One plus that continued to appear on many exit surveys was that principals appreciated the School Accountability Review process for the opportunity to share best practice with and learn from their colleagues. Also, principals felt that the process gave them a voice and a seat at the table that existed in a way that had existed in the past. In these two ways, principals shared how they felt incredibly supported by the process. To leverage this feature of the process, I recommend that the district consider re-naming the process – from School Accountability Reviews (SARs) to School Accountability & Support Reviews (SASRs). In this way, both important features of the process are recognized. The name change reflects the true intention of the project – to hold leaders accountable while at the same time developing a practice sharing culture in the district.

Implement District Accountability Reviews

As my residency unfolded, Dr. Herring and senior staff recognized the opportunity for accountability and practice sharing within select central office divisions. Dr. Herring envisioned a District Accountability Review to complement the SAR

process. During the ten months of the residency, the division of Academics & Accountability began developing the data metrics (by department) that could be utilized in a future DAR. Ultimately, existing district wide initiatives and emerging crisis (COVID-19) consumed the availability of the Superintendent and limited the opportunities for a DAR to be executed.

Moving forward, it is my recommendation that the school district consider executing a District Accountability Review during the summer of 2020, dedicating a separate day to each division. The divisions that should present during a DAR are Academics & Accountability, Human Resources, and Operations. The CFO (who in the state of Alabama is appointed and governed by the board of education) should consider implementing a similar process within the finance department.

When it comes time to start the meeting, department heads should assume the position at the center table that principals held during School Accountability Reviews. As in SAR, the division heads would then present their data to the Superintendent, Chief of Staff, Chief Academic Officer, and Instructional Superintendents. I would encourage the district to invite Principals to observe the DAR and assume the position that district support held during SAR – sit at outer tables surrounding the center table. In this way, the district shows schools that accountability is a two-way street. It is important to understand the risks that may exist with each recommendation. One risk in executing the District Accountability Reviews is that it must be ensured that all departments can present during District Accountability Review process. If all departments do not participate, the lack of equity could break down relational trust at the central level.

Build, Align, and Implement a System of Continuous Improvement Districtwide

During my residency, I learned the school district had used a data analysis protocol in the past. This protocol was systemic and pervasive through most of the schools. However, like many systems and processes in the district, this protocol was lost during one of several leadership transitions during the previous tumultuous decade. Upon reflection, the School Accountability Review process was the proverbial tip of the iceberg to signal the school district's re-commitment to a continuous improvement process. It was, as discussed previously, the tipping point.

In the 2013 book *Data Wise: A Step-by-Step Guide to Using Assessment Results to Improve Teaching and Learning*, Boudett et al. share, "We have found the organizing the work of instructional improvement around a process that has specific, manageable steps helps educators build confidence and skill in using data" (p. 5). The School Accountability Review process should be embedded in a larger continuous improvement process. A significant first step would be to ground continuous improvement efforts in the Data Wise Ace Habits of Mind. Boudett et al. (2013) describe the Ace Habits of Mind as a "means of organizing and bringing coherence to the work of improvement..." (p. 6). A shared commitment to action, assessment, and adjustment, intentional collaboration, and a relentless focus on evidence creates a data-driven foundation to guide the improvement work of the district. Spending time in this arena will prepare the district to be responsive and be able to systematically execute new initiatives. The district can then use the ACE Habits of Mind as a foundation for a larger continuous improvement process. The primary focus of the continuous improvement process must be improving and strengthening the instructional core to support raised expectations, rigorous

curriculum, and strong teaching practices. One risk associated with this recommendation is the cost that may be associated with the implementation of a continuous improvement model. A specific program will require curriculum materials and professional development. If cost becomes an issue, it is recommended to begin with the infusion of the ACE Habits of mind within current practices.

Hire an Executive Director of Continuous Strategic Improvement

During the strategic project, it became clear that for this work to be executed with fidelity, someone must lead the work and it should be one of the primary functions of the position. This work must be separate from the work of the current Executive Director of Assessment and Accountability, as this position is intended to coordinate all national, state, and local assessments and provide presentations and reports to the board of education and executive staff. I think it would also be advantageous for the role to continue to operate inside the Office of the Superintendent. This positioning allows the person in the role to work across both the Academic and School divisions to drive change. I learned that what I lacked in capacity as a (sometimes) one-man team was overcome by the organizational barriers I was able to overcome from my position in the Office of the Superintendent.

As a resident, I engaged in over 40 unique school site visits. These visits occurred in the company of various audiences, from the Superintendent, to the Interim Chief Academic Officer, and individually. As I conducted the After-Action Reviews, I learned about many successes as well as challenges each leader faced as they sought to implement best practice strategies following the School Accountability Review session. Several leaders shared how the process had created a sharp focus around data and

instruction that did not exist prior to this school year. One school leader shared how, in response to the SAR professional development in July, she returned to her school and organized an attendance and culture committee that included representation from all grade levels as well as administration. In the past, staff told me, this team was not a full representation of the building. The leader attributed her year over year gains to this deliberate practice. Another leader shared with me her excitement of introducing Teacher Accountability Reviews during a January professional development center. She believed the practice contributed to improvement on formative assessment data as well as the quality of her staff's lesson plans.

In terms of challenges, I learned that technological infrastructure and resources were not equitably distributed across the district. This new information sparked critical conversations at the cabinet level and were part of the impetus for the district moving forward with the development of an equity policy and plan in the spring of 2020.

I was able to support some challenges as I shared exemplary practices I had learned from previous School Accountability Reviews. As one example, an elementary school principal shared that she was struggling with discipline in the gym. During a previous School Accountability Review, another elementary principal described an innovative schedule she had developed which drastically reduced disciplinary rates, particularly in the gymnasium. During the AAR with the struggling principal, I was able to share this innovative schedule. I also video recorded each session with the permission of the Principal, allowing me to share best practices with Instructional Superintendents as well as colleagues who were seeking an answer to a challenge. During an Instructional Superintendents meeting, one I.S. shared that his network was having trouble

implementing an effective intervention period in the early grades. I remembered a conversation with a principal who detailed the structures one grade level in her school had implemented to support intervention, with great success. I was able to share the link with all Instructional Superintendents so they could learn and share about the practice in detail.

During our first Return Campus Visit in September 2019, Dr. Lisa Lahey presented a powerful session to both residents and supervisors around building Deliberately Developmental Organizations. She opened the session with a slide that I have seen on several occasions prior, yet it always resonates. She noted that culture eats strategy for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. If an organization really wants to drive change, it must constantly be developing itself. This occurs at the individual, team, and organization level. The School Accountability Review process truly served as a matchstick to ignite and kickstart a complacent culture. There is clear evidence that the process has contributed to the creation of a stronger organizational culture. Recently, an Instructional Superintendent [said to me/wrote in an email], “Matt, the School Accountability Review process is a game changer. We were not having these data and instructional conversations with school leaders at this level or rigor and complexity prior to the start of this school year” (February 2020). The next step is to build a deliberately developmental organization.

To build a deliberately developmental organization, the district should seek outside support or hire someone whose chief responsibility relates to building and improving organizational culture. One organization the district could consider is Minds at Work. The organization’s propriety Immunity to Change process approach is one tool the

district could employ to move individual, team, and organization goals to success. Referring to the process, Kegan and Lahey (2009) highlight the critical importance of adult development in leading change. They state, “True development is about transforming the operating system itself, not just increasing your fund of knowledge or your behavioral repertoire” (p. 6). Committing to the work of building a Deliberately Developmental Organization within BCS could significantly advance the adaptive work required within this change effort.

Birmingham City Schools would benefit from having a permanent position where the person sits in the Office of the Superintendent with all the advantages of the office. It would lend authorization and legitimacy to the work that I enjoyed during my residency. It would also allow narrative to move between the Office of Academics and the instructional networks. The person in this role could own the School Accountability Review process, begin to build out the District Accountability Reviews process, align and build capacity for a systemic continuous improvement process, and support the development of a DDO. A risk with this recommendation is the cost of an additional staff member within central office. As such, if a position could not be added, I recommend that the work continue within the division of Academics & Accountability, specifically with the Director of Professional Learning. As a currently vacant position, the district has the opportunity to make these recommendations part of the role of the position and not add to any current staff member’s workload.

Implications for Sector

The School Accountability Review process has implications for other school districts that might be interested in implementing this type of stat model to spur turnaround. As such, I have identified the following considerations for the greater education sector:

1. Implement practice sharing to shift practice
2. Take the initiative public
3. Use best practice in action

Practice Sharing to Shift Practice

One of the most powerful reactions that the School Accountability Review process generated in school leaders was the opportunity to both share best practice with senior staff and colleagues and learn about the strategies other schools were implementing that resulted in positive change. The SAR process was designed to encourage practice sharing. It was clear that practice sharing was shifting mindsets of leaders. Practice sharing is often focused on the classroom and between teachers, but this project demonstrates that leaders can equally benefit. Several examples of ways that leaders benefitted included learning new ways to schedule intervention time, innovative human resource practices, and best practice in terms of instructional observation and providing feedback to teachers.

Knowledge is one of the most powerful resources that exists within an organization (Applegate et al., 1996). It is critical for organizations to leverage this resource in a systematic way. As Suhaimee, Bakar, and Alias (2006) write, “Considering the distributed nature of organization cognition, an important process of knowledge

management in organizational setting is the transfer of knowledge to locations where it is needed and can be used” (p. 354).

The School Accountability Review process is one system that can be used to transfer institutional knowledge across an organization. Additionally, the After-Action-Review component of the initiative is a promising extension of the project that reinforces the outcomes of the SAR meetings. The SAR process received the support of the Division of Academics & Accountability and all divisions attended the SAR sessions. These team members also provided follow-up support. These team members also provided feedback and support following the sessions. Thus, this relationship promoted knowledge transfer throughout the district.

Take the Initiative Public

The School Accountability Review Process was generally embraced by the leaders of Birmingham City Schools. It had the authorization and legitimacy of the Superintendent that was critical to the initiative’s success. Still, what might happen to the initiative if leadership at the top was to shift? From my perspective, the fate of the initiative would become more tenuous.

This challenge most certainly could exist in similar districts, as turnaround districts tend to have more turnover in leadership. One way to protect the initiative from top executive leadership change is to make a public commitment to the project. During the strategic project, I had the opportunity to get a public commitment from the board of education when I presented on the initiative during the board retreat. Still, there was additional opportunity for the district to make a public commitment to the project. In August, I worked extensively with the Birmingham Police Department who itself was

implementing the CompStat model. The implementation of the model was generating some local press since the implementation of the program had led to significant crime reduction. Leveraging this interest in the local press, the district could have promoted the district's implementation of the School Accountability Review process and publicly shared some of the program's early success. That said, I could have also gained the permission of the Superintendent to write an op-ed to promote the strategic project and early success.

Best Practice in Action (and Theory)

The implementation of stat models as a lever for continuous improvement is not a revolutionary concept. Numerous public-school districts and city governments have utilized stat models to drive change over the past fifteen years. Examples include Boston Public Schools, Chicago Public Schools, New York City Department of Education, the School District of Philadelphia, and city governments such as Baltimore, MD. With a growing body of evidence that includes a range of outcomes, school districts interested in the implementation of a stat model should visit the practical literature before execution of the practice.

One place that interested school districts might start is within the **RKA** section of this capstone. Much research has been developed in the form of case studies – see Boston Public Schools, Chicago Public Schools, and the School District of Philadelphia. I think there is an opportunity for the academic research community to commit resources to build on the research base. The anecdotal evidence that has been produced over the past decade is strong. A robust research base around the theory that informs the structures,

systems, and practices involved in a successful stat model implementation will only improve the turnaround efforts of school districts.

Conclusion

It has been an incredible privilege to learn under the leadership of Superintendent Dr. Lisa Herring and to support the turnaround efforts in Birmingham City Schools. The initiatives that BCS leaders have undertaken are truly making the school district a force for greatness. It is clear that the executive team is uniformly committed to improvement. When Dr. Herring entered the school district, many news outlets in the community had labeled BCS a failing school district. Under her (and the executive team's) leadership, Birmingham City Schools reduced its number of schools with an "F" rating of the state report card from 22 to 5, representing a 75% decline of schools identified as an F. Birmingham residents recently voted overwhelmingly to renew the ad valorem tax earmarked for city schools. The tax generates an estimated \$30 million annually. Internal public opinion polling commissioned by the school district in the fall of 2019 illustrated an overwhelming positive perception for Dr. Herring. Birmingham City Schools is on the rise.

This strategic project undertaken here is one key lever helping to lead the turnaround efforts in Birmingham City Schools. It is a vessel of knowledge management that both holds schools accountable and promotes effective practice sharing across the district. As these innovative and impactful strategies are shared, the complacent mindset of school leaders has begun to shift. At a time when public school systems like BCS are facing declining enrollment coupled with increased competition and expectations, the need for collective action efforts have never been greater. There is an enhanced need for initiatives that support the whole child and visualize improvement for a lens broader than just the standardized state assessment.

The School Accountability Review strategic project has paid early dividends in accelerating the turnaround efforts in Birmingham City Schools. To continue this trajectory of improvement, the following steps should be considered by the leadership of BCS:

1. Commit to a systematic continuous improvement process
2. Hire someone to lead the work
3. Make the continuous improvement strategy public and build capacity from the classroom to the c-suite

The case for turnaround could not exist in a more important place than Birmingham. From this once bomb battered, segregated city, the greatest non-violent revolution in the history of our nation was born. The battle for the future of its most important resource, its children, endures. Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth, the foremost Birmingham Civil Rights activist, once said, “Birmingham is a great city and its future will be much brighter if all of its citizens will not allow themselves to be overcome by tides of frustration nor consumed by fires of hatred.” The collective action and positive change work that has been initiated within Birmingham City Schools is promising. Birmingham City Schools is turning around.

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Appendix

Appendix A: Birmingham City Schools Strategic Plan 2018-2023

“FORCE FOR GREATNESS”


BIRMINGHAM CITY SCHOOLS STRATEGIC PLAN 2018-2023

<p>MISSION</p> <p>“The mission of Birmingham City Schools is to guide all students to achieve excellence in a safe, secure, and nurturing environment.”</p>	<p>VALUES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">DiversityIntegrityRespectExcellenceCompassionTeamwork	<p>“We are on a quest for excellence in the Birmingham City Schools, and we are proud to introduce the plan that will guide and direct our actions on this journey. ‘Force for Greatness 2018-2023’ is Birmingham City Schools’ new strategic plan, and it will serve as the school system’s roadmap for the next five years. It is focused on ensuring our scholars and educators have all of the tools and resources they need to be successful. We invite you to join the Birmingham City Schools as we are building leaders and impacting the world.”</p>
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PILLAR I: STUDENT SUCCESS

Our long-term goals are that all children are prepared for productive citizenship, college, career, and life. Our graduation rate increases as students in all schools meet or exceed proficiency in grade level reading, math, and other subjects required for graduation. Students are co-creators of personalized academic and life goals, whose voices are heard in the learning process, as they develop strategies for perseverance and problem-solving.

<h4>STUDENT SUCCESS METRICS</h4> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Set a baseline and increase student kindergarten readiness.• Establish baseline for early literacy and numeracy (K-2) and improve over time.• Increase percentage of students meeting annual growth targets in math. (State assessment)<ul style="list-style-type: none">Grade 3 from 42% to 60% (preliminary baseline data)Grade 8 from 48% to 70% (preliminary baseline data)• Increase percentage of students meeting annual growth targets in reading. (State assessment)<ul style="list-style-type: none">Grade 3 from 42% to 60% (preliminary baseline data)Grade 8 from 48% to 70% (preliminary baseline data)• Increase 4-Year high school graduation rate from 77% to 90%. (State Graduation Measure)• Increase the number of schools rated “C” or higher from 14% to 75%.• Increase percentage of students meeting ACT with writing benchmarks in reading from 8% to 20% and from math from 3% to 20%.• Increase percentage of students attending school with less than 15 excused/unexcused absences from 77% to 85%. (Student Attendance Measures)• Increase % of students with WorkKeys score of silver or above from 32.6% to 65%.	<h4>STUDENT SUCCESS STRATEGIES</h4> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Establish and monitor benchmarks in the Profile of a Birmingham City Schools Graduate. (<i>Guided Accountability</i>)• Execute the School Support Framework:<ul style="list-style-type: none">Standards Aligned ResourcesAligned Structures for Data Driven InstructionEarly Literacy/Literacy InterventionInstructional LeadershipSocial Emotional Learning Supports• Strengthen, align and expand strategic partnerships to improve student success.• Engage students in goal-setting and four-year plans.• Expand and continuously improve learning opportunities for pre-kindergarten children.
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BIRMINGHAM
CITY SCHOOLS
BUILDING LEADERS. IMPACTING THE WORLD.

PILLAR II: TEAM EXCELLENCE: Instructional leadership at the district and school levels is stable and of high quality. We recruit, engage, develop, and retain high-quality employees in all categories.

TEAM EXCELLENCE METRICS

- Increase overall teacher retention rate from 81% to 90%.
- Set baseline and increase the percentage of teachers who achieve “applying” or “innovating” rating. *(Teacher Evaluation Results)*
- Increase the number of eligible teachers in the Spring pipeline by 10% annually.
- Increase overall mean on Employee Engagement Survey from 3.60 to 4.10.

TEAM EXCELLENCE STRATEGIES

- Implement a reliable evaluation system for all employees.
- Engage in annual board development.
- Recruit high-quality candidates through recruitment trips and hiring fairs.
- Conduct and use data from exit interviews.
- Execute a reliable onboarding process for all employees, including our new teacher induction program.
- Engage in Phase I and II reorganization, and further reorganization as needed.
- Provide customer service training to frontline employees.
- Mentor new leaders and develop all leaders, including employees who seek leadership opportunities.

PILLAR III: STAKEHOLDER TRUST: Through increased communication efforts and channels, parents, families, and community members are better informed, more engaged, and have an increased impact on decision making. Our schools and district employees have positive perceptions of services and communication across the district.

STAKEHOLDER TRUST METRICS

- Increase parent participation in the Title I Parent Survey from 25% to 30%.
- Sustain 90% parent satisfaction rating on Title I Parent Survey.
- Increase social media followings across all platforms by 15% annually from current followers.
- Increase parent portal usage by 15%.
- Attain 20,000 downloads of the Birmingham City Schools App.

STAKEHOLDER TRUST STRATEGIES

- Regularly engage with partners including the mayor, city, and legislative representatives.
- Engage superintendent’s advisory groups of students, teachers, principals, and parents.
- Invest in technological methods to engage, such as online student registration, the district app, and future opportunities we discover.
- Engage stakeholders through an annual State of the Schools address and ongoing listening and learning tours.
- Monitor and continuously improve safety and security for our stakeholders.
- Engage our Strategic Planning Steering Committee two times each year to monitor progress toward strategic plan goals.

PILLAR III: STAKEHOLDER TRUST: We maintain or increase student enrollment. We look forward with a multi-year financial and facilities plan that encompasses enrollment, revenue, facility condition, and need.

STAKEHOLDER TRUST METRICS

- Increase our average daily membership (# of students) from 24,290 to 25,000.
- Achieve at least 90% or greater satisfaction on the Support Services Survey.
- System-wide, expend 85% or more of federal awards within the year of allocation.
- Achieve 85% or more of key performance indicators (KPIs).

STAKEHOLDER TRUST STRATEGIES

- Develop a capital improvement project plan resulting from the facility condition assessment.
- Develop an operations dashboard of key performance indicators (KPIs).
- Develop standard operating procedures in each department.
- Continue projects to become paperless and increase efficiency, including the use of P-Cards and other financial process improvements.
- Learn about and apply economies of scale to more efficiently use our resources throughout the system.
- Foster feeder pattern development and school redesign to retain our current students and drive increased enrollment.

Appendix B: Birmingham City Schools Instructional Priorities 2019-2020

Birmingham City Schools
2019-2020 District Priorities

Priority 1: We use **standards-aligned resources** and **aligned formative assessments** in planning and instruction.

Priority 2: We maintain a **culture of data driven instruction** that is supported by a meaningful **professional learning strategy**.

Priority 3: Our **instructional leaders** across the district engage in **consistent rhythms of professional learning** to improve the quality of instruction in every classroom.

Priority 4: We support **the whole child** through strong collaborative best practices and procedures and by building positive relationships that foster an environment where each child in our schools is healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged academically.

Report Card Facts

Based on 2018 - 2019 Data

- 4 schools moved from F to D
- 4 schools moved from D to C
- 2 schools moved from B to A
- 29 schools increased in scores
- 67% of schools increased in scores
- 2 schools maintained a B status



Elementary Schools	2016-2017 Score	2017-2018 Score	2018-2019 Score
Avondale Elementary School	63	68	66
Barrett Elementary School	47	69	73
Central Park Elementary School	58	63	66
Charles A Brown Elementary School	54	61	67
Epic School	82	80	88
Glen Iris Elementary School	65	69	70
Hemphill Elementary School	47	56	63
Huffman Academy	56	59	61
Martha Gaskins Elementary School	69	72	79
Minor Elementary School	58	75	69
Norwood Elementary School	65	70	75
Oliver Elementary School	57	73	74
Oxmoor Valley Elementary School	56	74	73
Princeton Elementary School	89	89	87
Robinson Elementary School	58	68	69
Sun Valley Elementary School	73	67	67
Tuggle Elementary School	64	69	67
Washington Elementary School	55	65	68
West End Academy	55	67	59



K-8 Schools	2016-2017 Score	2017-2018 Score	2018-2019 Score
Bush Hills STEAM Academy	56	58	62
Bush K-8	62	63	66
Christian School	86	87	91
Hayes K-8	52	51	55
Hudson K-8 School	54	61	69
Inglenook School	60	62	73
Phillips Academy	89	92	95
South Hampton K-8	62	61	73
Wylam K-8	68	74	73



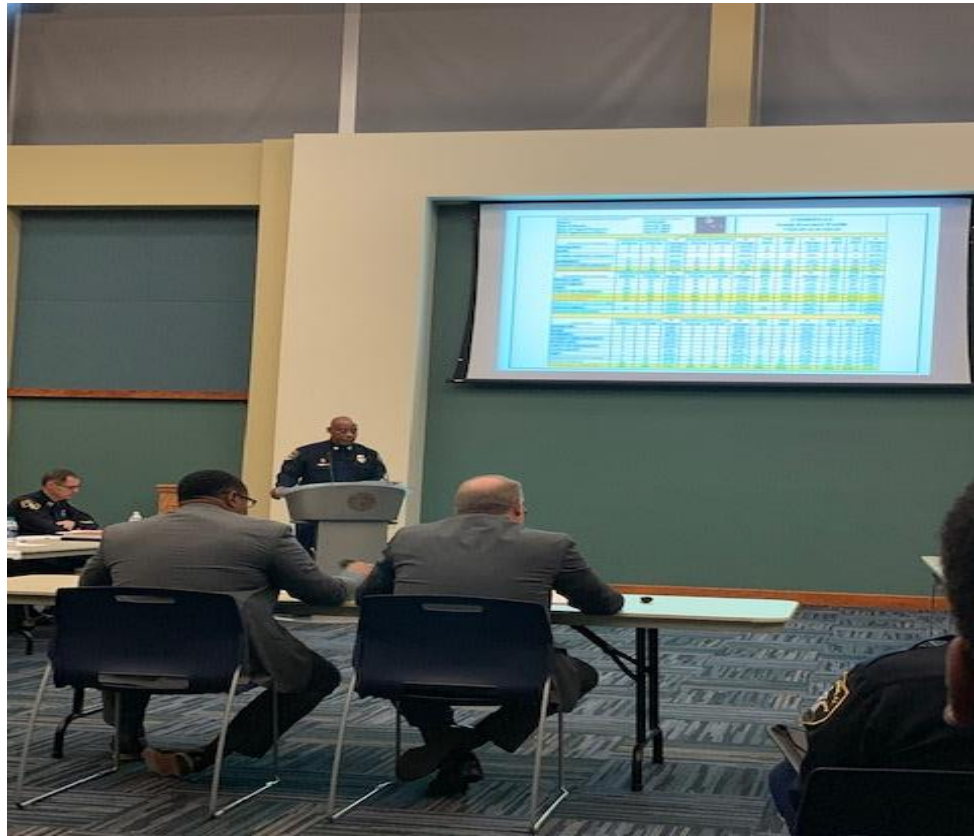
Middle Schools	2016-2017 Score	2017-2018 Score	2018-2019 Score
Arrington Middle School	53	66	57
Bush Hills STEAM Academy	56	58	62
Green Acres Middle School	57	61	57
Huffman Middle School	54	62	65
Jones Valley Middle School	51	62	57
Ossie Ware Mitchell Middle School	55	62	67
Smith Middle School	55	66	63
WE Putnam Middle School-Magnet	57	58	64
Wilkerson Middle School	67	73	75



High Schools	2016-2017 Score	2017-2018 Score	2018-2019 Score
George Washington Carver High School	63	67	68
Huffman High School-Magnet	62	60	66
Jackson-Olin High School	63	62	61
Parker High School	64	63	69
Ramsay High School	90	89	91
Wenonah High School	58	64	67
Woodlawn High School-Magnet	60	62	59

Appendix D: Timeline of Leadership Actions for School Accountability Reviews

July 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stat Model identified as compelling strategy for School Turnaround in Birmingham City Schools • Formed cross-functional team and built shared purpose for work • Introduced School Academic Review process to school leadership and coordinated professional learning at the Summer Administrators' Retreat • Held meetings with instructional superintendents to ensure coherence with district instructional priorities • Held meetings with central office staff across departments
August 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Met with Deputy Chief Darnell Davenport of Birmingham Police Department and attended the city's first Quarterly CompStat Inspection • Provided on-going professional development for the School Academic Review Process via monthly Principals Meeting • Developed early indicators for SAR composite
September 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduced the SAR process to the Board of Education at a Board Small Group Meeting • Provided on-going professional development for the School Accountability Review Process via monthly Principals Meeting
October 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provided on-going professional development for the School Accountability Review Process via monthly Principals Meeting to include data deep dive • Provided updates to the Board about the SAR process at the October Board Retreat
November 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitated first semester School Accountability Review for all 42 school sites within Birmingham City Schools • Administered Fall Survey to principals and district staff to understand the successes and challenges of the School Accountability Review process
December & January 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conducted After Action Review of Fall SAR process in the form of 1:1 interview with Principals, instructional superintendents, and district leadership in order to collect feedback on the impact the process was having on accountability, culture and improvement efforts



Appendix F: Sample School Accountability Review Composite – November 2019

School Accountability Review - November 2019					
Washington K-8 Profile					
Principal - Dr. Antonia Ishman					
Student Enrollment August 2018	Student Enrollment August 2019	Change			
515	490	25			
2017-2018 Report Card	2018-2019 Report Card	Change	% Students Chronically Absent - October 2018	% Students Chronically Absent - October 2019	% Change
65 / D	68 / D	3	13%	4%	9%
Suspension Rate October 2018	Suspension Rate October 2019	% Change	Total Days Suspended October 2018	Total Days Suspended October 2019	Change
9%	10%	1%	193	62	131
# of SWD Students Suspended October 2018	# of SWD Students Suspended October 2019	Change	SWD Suspension Rate October 2018	SWD Suspension Rate October 2019	% Change
12	15	3	20%	24%	4%
STAR Grade 1 2nd Window SS 2018	STAR Grade 1 2nd Window SS 2019	SS Change	% Teachers Receiving Observation & Feedback September 2019	% Teachers Receiving Observation & Feedback October 2019	% Change
484	577	93	N/A	56%	N/A
STAR DATA SUMMARY			SCANTRON DATA SUMMARY		
Scaled Score	Literacy Classification		Scantron Mean Fall 2018	Scantron Mean Fall 2019	Change
300-487	Early Emergent Reader		2332	2539	207
488-674	Late Emergent Reader				
675-774	Transitional Reader				
775-900	Probable Reader				

Appendix G: BCS School Accountability Reviews – November 13, 2019



School Board Retreat October 18, 2019



Agenda

- BCS Performance Update
 - District Turnaround
 - Report Card Data
 - Alabama Literacy Act
 - ACAP
- Accelerated Turnaround
 - School Accountability Review (SAR)
 - Equity and Access



(October 18, 2019)

School Accountability Reviews

Empowering School Leaders,
Accelerating Student Learning,
Improving Schools



Birmingham City Schools School Accountability Reviews (SARs)

Priority 2: We maintain a culture of data driven instruction that is supported by a meaningful professional learning strategy.

- The School Accountability Review (SAR) is a data analysis protocol led by the Superintendent each semester that requires School Leaders:
 - To be accountable for their data
 - To discuss the strategies they have implemented and problem solve to determine their next steps
 - To articulate the support needed for their school from the district office
- SAR utilizes leading indicators - data that can be used to make instructional adjustments throughout the year. For example:
 - Attendance/Absenteeism
 - Discipline/Suspension
 - Report Card/Achievement
- Implementation Inspection & After Action Review



Birmingham City Schools School Accountability Reviews (SARs)

Priority 2: We maintain a culture of data driven instruction that is supported by a meaningful professional learning strategy.

- **Four Characteristics of SAR indicators**
 - Valid for the intended purpose
 - Actionable by schools
 - Meaningful and easily understood by practitioners
 - Aligned with district priorities and strategic plan



University of Chicago Consortium on School Research



Birmingham City Schools School Accountability Reviews (SARs)

Priority 2: We maintain a culture of data driven instruction that is supported by a meaningful professional learning strategy.

SAR Implementation Timeline:

- **July 2019**
 - Introduced SAR Process at Administrator's Retreat
 - Conducted S.W.O.T Analysis to Contextualize Process
- **August 2019**
 - SAR P.D. at August Principals' Meeting
 - Introduced SAR Norms & Expectations
- **September 2019**
 - SAR P.D. at September Principals' Meeting
 - Fishbowl Simulation
- **October 2019**
 - Data Dive at October Principals' Meeting



Birmingham City Schools School Accountability Reviews (SARs)

Priority 2: We maintain a culture of data driven instruction that is supported by a meaningful professional learning strategy.

- **Fall SAR Dates**
 - Elementary Group 1 - November 13th
 - Elementary Group 2 - November 22nd
 - K-8 - November 19th
 - Middle - November 19th
 - High - November 22nd
- **Spring SAR Dates (Tentative)**
 - Elementary Group 1 - February 12th
 - Elementary Group 2 - February 12th
 - K-8 - February 18th
 - Middle - February 18th
 - High - February 19th



Birmingham City Schools School Accountability Reviews (SARs) Fish Bowl Simulation - September 2019 Principals' Meetings



Any Questions

