



Leading and learning in transformation: exploring the relationship between team development and school reform plan implementation in Rhode Island

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Leading and Learning in Transformation:
Exploring the Relationship between Team Development and
School Reform Plan Implementation in Rhode Island

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

Submitted by

Liliana Polo-McKenna

to the Harvard Graduate School of Education
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education Leadership.

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For my pops

“We have not even to risk the adventure alone, for the heroes of all time have gone before us. The labyrinth is thoroughly known. We have only to follow the thread of the hero path, and where we had thought to find an abomination, we shall find a god.

And where we had thought to slay another, we shall slay ourselves. Where we had thought to travel outward, we will come to the center of our own existence. And where we had thought to be alone, we will be with all the world.

Joseph Campbell (1998, p. 123)

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I. Abstract

This capstone tells the story of an external organization, The NYC Leadership Academy, (“NYCLA”) supporting the state of Rhode Island’s approach to system-level transformation through a Professional Development (“PD”) strategy. The Rhode Island Department of Education, through its Office of Transformation, has taken bold steps to develop a transformation strategy that intends to balance accountability and support in service of school and system improvement. In engaging NYCLA in this work, the Rhode Island Department of Education (“RIDE”) signals considerable faith in its educators to lead and take part in the transformation of their own schools.

This capstone also includes the evolution of the professional development strategy between June 2013 and March 2014, and the project’s results to date. It also includes three major bodies of work that have informed and shaped the strategic project, including the role of team learning and development in organizational change; the role of external organizations in the school turnaround space; and an exploration of system turnaround strategy evaluation.

Finally, this capstone provides an analysis of the strategic project’s results in order to propose implications and further questions for system-level turnaround strategy development in relation to my leadership, for NYCLA as the Residency site, and for the sector at large.

II. Introduction

Because when leadership counts, when you lead people through difficult change, you challenge what people hold dear—their daily habits, tools, loyalties and ways of thinking—with nothing more to offer perhaps than a possibility. (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002, p. 2)

It is incredible to think that when the certainty of success is absent and failure is highly probable, school system leaders remain committed to galvanizing communities and inspiring bold and courageous action. State, district, and school leaders of turnaround efforts face the challenge of transforming schools that have been deemed “failures,” often quite publicly, and with, as Heifetz and Linsky state, “nothing more to offer perhaps than a possibility” (Ibid). As a former NYC transfer school principal, I was quite familiar with how we, as a system, so easily attach the word “failure” to systems, schools, and people. The young people at West Brooklyn Community High School were, in many ways, evidence of where our system had not met its commitment to educate; yet despite the labels of “dropout” and “failure”, there they were, steadfast in their commitment finishing school, and most importantly, overcoming what was getting in the way of their success. It was our responsibility to set the conditions to support that commitment.

While transformation was not a certainty, it was a possibility strengthened by increasing my understanding of what young people actually needed. Much like any other change process, the process of change for young people was neither linear nor time-bound; and we learned the most important condition to support our young people was ensuring that the adults were able to mirror that change process, through both personal and professional behaviors. All of this required that I, as the school’s leader, would be willing to transform my own practices and ways of being to set the stage for others.

It was this perspective which framed my entry into my 3rd year of Ed.L.D. Residency with NYCLA and the complex world of school transformation in the state of Rhode Island (“RI”). The Residency offered me a unique opportunity to push and be pushed to think about “the habits, tools, loyalties, and ways of thinking” (Ibid) necessary to transform learning across a system of schools. This capstone offers an analysis of my key Residency project, designing and delivering professional development to transformation schools in Rhode Island. It also explores professional development as a support strategy for transformation, its results, and how these results and insights can inform ongoing transformation efforts in RI and beyond.

NYCLA as an Actor in the Turnaround Space

An educational nonprofit founded with philanthropic funding in 2003 as then-Chancellor Joel I. Klein’s signature school leadership program, NYCLA has trained hundreds of NYC school leaders; in fact, 1 in 6 NYC principals are NYCLA graduates.¹ While many NYCLA graduates went on to start new small schools as part of the New Schools Initiative at the NYC Department of Education, most decided to take leadership roles in existing schools.

With the belief that school leadership is a powerful leverage for school improvement, NYCLA played an important role in changing the face of principal preparation and specifically *who* had access to school leadership. In many ways, as described by Kathy Nadurak, Executive Vice President of Programs, “NYCLA had the authority to not only be an agitator, but to actually begin to shift ideas around school

¹ For more information about NYCLA’s impact in NYC and nationally, please visit:

leadership.” These were not necessarily welcomed changes, and the organization faced resistance, magnified by its relationship with the Chancellor. It opened the door to different levels of experience; it diversified gender, race, and age in the principal pool; and it proposed a new way to prepare and support new principals. I highlight my own experience with NYCLA in the Review of Knowledge for Action section of this capstone.

NYCLA’s National Initiatives (“NI”) team, which I joined through the Residency, did not exist when the organization first started. Given the organization’s success in NYC and its approach to building local capacity to develop programs and carry out the work of principal training and support, it gained national traction in work with districts across the country. In fact, in just over four years it has reached 40 different clients across 26 districts and internationally.

As stated in NYCLA’s proposal to the Rhode Island Department of Education (“RIDE”),

We are committed to delivering high-quality strategic school leadership consulting and training that is customized to the needs of clients. In contrast to the set curriculum developed and imported by other vendors, NYCLA draws on our standards-based method and unique process of curriculum design and delivery to help clients build their capacity to develop school leadership programs responsive to specific local contexts. (NYCLA Proposal for RIDE Academy for Transformative Leadership – RFP #7449587, p. 18)

As I explore NYCLA’s role in RI’s transformation strategy, it is important to recognize the organization’s approach and how it shifted in response to the local RI context.

Residency Context

My Residency with NYCLA has focused on supporting the implementation of RI's school leadership development and support strategies for transformation schools. The Rhode Island Department of Education's ("RIDE") accountability system² categorizes RI's 279 schools into one of six classifications: Commended, Leading, Typical, Warning, Focus, and Priority. Specific to the strategic project explored in this capstone were the 28 most underperforming schools in Rhode Island, categorized as Priority (21) and Focus (7) schools,³ slated for state intervention. This group is a combination of those deemed underperforming under NCLB regulations, as well as schools that fell into low-performing criteria under RI's Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) waiver.⁴

The *Academy for Transformative Leadership* ("ATL") started in 2011 as part of RIDE's Office of Transformation, the programmatic structure proposed in RI's Race to the Top ("RttT") application. Logically, it is the office with which NYCLA works most directly. NYCLA's programs and structures in RI, which I'll refer to as its "network of support" for schools, is multi-tiered across the 3 years of the RttT contract. (See Figure 1)

² For more information please see Strategic Project description

³ To view all classification categories and explanations, please visit <https://www.ride.ri.gov/InformationAccountability/Accountability/SchoolClassifications.aspx>

⁴ For more information about Rhode Island's ESEA Flexibility Request, please visit <https://www.ride.ri.gov/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/Information-and-Accountability-User-Friendly-Data/Accountability/Rhode-Island-ESEA-Flexibility-Request-Approved-05292012.pdf>

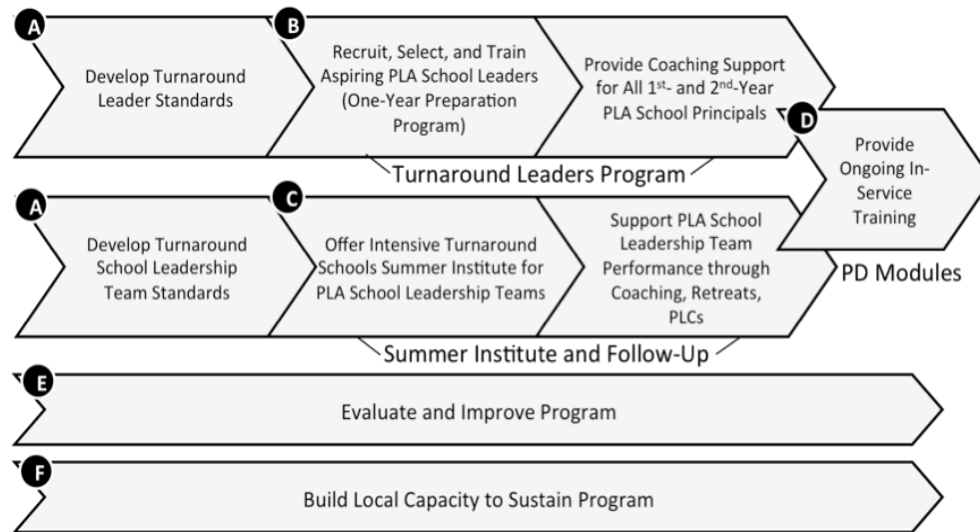


Figure 1. NYCLA’s proposed programs and structures to support transformation schools in Rhode Island. Obtained from NYCLA’s RFP to Rhode Island Dept of Education (2011)

While the focus of my strategic project is the design and delivery of the ATL Professional Development program and its sustainability, my role has spanned NYCLA’s portfolio of work, as I’ve also been a part of designing and facilitating Summer Institute and coaching aspiring and first/second-year principals. As a result, I have been able to experience the organization’s overall strategy.

Backed by research-based tools and strategies from over 10 years of experience in the field, NYCLA acknowledges the context-specific nature of school leadership and is careful to ensure alignment between *what* the client’s priority is (in this case, the state of RI and its transformation schools) and *how* the work should be carried out at each school site. This approach underscores why much of the work in RI has been directly with schools. As an external stakeholder in its role as a contracted organization, NYCLA’s primary entry point has been through RIDE. In fact, the thru line between NYCLA, as an organization implementing the state’s strategy, and transformation schools has been direct in its three major programs: ATL Turnaround Leaders Program, the ATL

Professional Development sessions, and school-based coaching.

School Transformation in RI

While the smallest state in area, Rhode Island's educational landscape is as diverse as any other. The median incomes across districts span from the highest in East Greenwich (\$90,221) to the lowest in Central Falls (\$26,844) (Infoworks, 2013), highlighting the demographic range in an area that is 37 miles from east to west and 48 miles from north to south. With 304 schools serving approximately 142,481 school age children (Kidscount, 2012), there are 54 public Local Education Agencies ("LEAs"), including 32 traditional school districts (single municipalities), 4 regional school districts, 4 state-operated schools, 1 regional collaborative LEA, and 13 charter schools (RIDE, 2013). Among the 54 LEAs, some serve upwards of 30 schools, others as few as 1. Of the 29 lowest-performing⁵ schools in the state, 24 are in urban districts (Central Falls, Pawtucket, Providence, and Woonsocket). Much like in other urban centers, this disparity is attributed to the lack of capacity to address the needs of an increasingly shifting demographic. "The Latino-White achievement gaps in Rhode Island are among some of the worst in the country...in some cases Rhode Island ranks as low as 40th and 41st among states in Latino student performance" (Huguley, 2013).¹ I highlight these conditions as part of the ecosystem within which participating schools operate and, given NYCLA's and my own commitment to equity, the work of transformation, while a process, takes on "fierce urgency of now" (Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., 1963).

⁵ Lowest performing as defined by state accountability metrics. For more information please visit <http://infoworks.ride.ri.gov/reports/accountability/school-classifications-and-composite-index-score/2012>

In 2010, RI was one of 16 states awarded RttT funding. The \$75 million dollars it received were to be used over a 3-year period to implement the state’s strategic plan, which aims to address several areas, including data collection and management, educator quality, school improvement, etc. Of the four school improvement models outlined in the US Department of Education’s RttT application, Rhode Island focused on a transformation model,⁶ where the leverage for change is through curricular reform, professional development for staff, extended time interventions, and a variety of other strategies. RIDE created the Office of Transformation as a structural change to support statewide transformation (Mass Insight, 2007); however, with a staff of three to serve all of the transformation schools in the state, there was a significant capacity gap to develop and implement a variety of new programs and provide the necessary school-based support in the implementation process.

The Rhode Island Department of Education put out a request for proposals (“RFP”) and selected NYCLA to support its transformation strategy through the lever of school leadership. Defined by the Foundations Strategy Group’s (“FSG”) School Turnaround Field Guide as a *Supporting Partner*,⁷ NYCLA is focused primarily on human capital and professional development support (FSG Social Impact Advisors, 2010a). While RIDE articulated a strategy through its RttT application, NYCLA’s role was to develop a portfolio of services that would marry its own expertise, tools, and frameworks with the presenting needs in RI in order to create the most effective system

⁵ To view all four models of school improvement—Turnaround, Restart, School Closure, and Transformation—please visit <https://www2.ed.gov/news/pressreleases/2009/12/12032009a.html>

⁷ To view all categories of partnerships with external actors, please visit <http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/school-leadership/district-policy-and-practice/Documents/The-School-Turnaround-Field-Guide.pdf>

of supports for schools. My role in designing and delivering professional development was only one part of NYCLA's larger portfolio of work. Entering the strategic project, I explore three critical questions in this capstone:

- 1. What do school leadership teams need to effectively implement a transformation strategy?**
- 2. How can external organizations most effectively support site-based transformation?**
- 3. What might success look like for a system-level professional development strategy?**

To answer these questions, I highlight experiences and insights gained through the design and delivery of professional development for RI transformation leaders and their teams.

Positioning the Strategic Project

In its articulation of values and beliefs around site-based capacity-building, RIDE positions "*Prioritizing support for school leadership teams*," as 1 of 3 critical Elements⁸ to effective professional development.

RIDE believes that...developing all educators as leaders is a key to retaining and growing effective educators at all levels, including teachers. Therefore, our strategy to support teachers and principals prioritizes investments in developing school leadership teams, including teacher leaders. (RIDE RtT application, 2010)

While team learning has always been a part of NYCLA's curriculum, it has not been an explicit focus of its coaching and/or its professional development offerings.⁹ In

⁸Three elements: 1. Provide educators with the tools they need to be effective and the training to use these tools to greatest effects; 2. Prioritize support for school leaders (and their teams); 3. Provide high-quality induction for novice teachers.

⁹ Personal communication via phone with Michelle Jarney, Senior Director of Leadership Support Programs, NYCLA, August 1, 2013.

response to RIDE's RFP, NYCLA designed a portfolio of support and services that aimed to provide an integrated approach to the development and learning of school leadership teams alongside school leaders. NYCLA session designs have always addressed team effectiveness and provided a multitude of resources to support the work of teams; however, through the various cycles of design, implementation, feedback, and reflection of this strategic project, the work of the team has emerged as the focal point of the professional development sessions.

Strategic Project Findings

This Capstone focuses on the analysis of the ATL Professional Development series as the central strategic project. It is important to note that the project timeline extends through the end of May, and the results presented in this Capstone are not designed to demonstrate definitive outcomes but to provide an analysis of results, lessons learned, and potential impact to date. These findings reflect an analysis of the data collected through my own experience in leading the project, session evaluation forms, low-inference data collection at sessions, interviews with school-based coaches, and use of quarterly monitoring data of Focus and Priority schools. The analysis will focus on four major findings:

1. Transformation schools need support in developing strong leadership teams to effectively implement school reform plans.

In a context where organizational cultures of schools and districts can seem immutable, leading change through the work of the team is critical to a leader's success. If the health of the organization is reflected in the health of the leadership team (Curtis & City, 2010), then it is critical to address the team's capacity as a primary focus. There is a significant

skill set that a new leader requires in order to shift organizational culture, practices, and behavior with a staff that preceded him/her. Generating lateral ownership of the vision and of the shifts in behavior and mindset that accompany that vision can result in learning across *status and knowledge boundaries* (Edmondson, 2012). Furthermore, in districts where school leaders can be transferred between schools to meet district needs, the focus on the capacity building of school leadership teams proves critical to sustainability of change efforts.

2. *Professional development for transformation schools should provide a space for participants to reconcile the need to respond to state mandates and address emerging school needs.*

The value of professional development has been most evident when it has been able to frame the transformation process as one that acknowledges the importance of understanding and utilizing traditional accountability frameworks (improvement on New England Common Assessment Program “NECAP” and other assessments in RI) *and* push past it to focus on strategies to address the emerging challenges of implementation at the school. In the strategic project this has meant supporting a shift for some teams to the *learning zone* (Edmondson, 2012). This involves framing the school reform plan implementation process as being in service to school improvement, rather than a compliance exercise that can generate a great deal of urgency but be disconnected from the actual work of the school. Being in the learning zone allows teams to effectively address the tensions between state mandates and locally driven needs.

3. *By leveraging its positioning as an expert outside the system with its relationships within and knowledge of the system, an external organization can play strategic roles in implementing state-level strategies while responding to context-specific needs.*

From impacting school-level practices to building relationships across stakeholders,

external organizations can engage in the work in ways that state-level leaders may not have the capacity or political authority to do. Given the political context in RI, NYCLA's role as an outside organization was important leverage in schools and some districts; at the same time, its relationship with RIDE served as an inhibiting factor in others. An external organization can develop flexible professional development goals from a triangulation of data from state, district, and school-based priorities in order to ensure coherence and relevancy while facilitating implementation of the state's strategy. Depending on the "authorizing agent's" capacity for oversight and support, the external organizations can also position itself to operate independently of local partnerships. The Implications section of this capstone explores this further.

4. Success of a statewide professional development strategy (or any support strategy for turnaround schools) can be measured through short- and long-term outcomes connected to its original purpose.

A professional development strategy designed to support school reform plan implementation must continuously assess emerging needs and predict implementation challenges. As such, its overall impact is determined neither by session experience nor by student outcomes but by a school's ability to effectively implement its plan. Given that each school's plan is different, and implementation is an ongoing process, interim assessment measures help determine ongoing effectiveness. Short-term measures can include attendance at sessions, use of tools and strategies, and observable changes in leader/team communication strategies and behaviors. Additionally, utilizing an external measure, such as RI's quarterly monitoring process, provides an opportunity to assess the growth of the team's capacity for implementation.

III. Review of Knowledge for Action

Undoubtedly the heart of this performance shift will need to happen in individual schools and classrooms through the relationships among students and teachers. “If you can’t see it in the [instructional] core, it’s not there” (City, Elmore, Fiarman, & Teitel, 2009, p. 27). It is also true that facilitating the shift in classrooms requires skilled leadership. In a turnaround context, that leadership is even more critical and the skills more nuanced. “It is the combination of highly effective teaching with highly capable school leadership that will change outcomes for children in our schools – not one or the other but both” (Rainwater Leadership Alliance, 2010, p. 8). As Lead Designer and Coach with NYCLA, I was responsible for designing and supporting transformation leaders and teams in the complex work of School Reform Plan (SRP)¹⁰ implementation.

This Review of Knowledge for Action highlights the three bodies of work that have framed my leadership in the Residency and decision-making in the strategic project. Although the strategic project is focused on supporting school-based change, this RKA will draw from multiple sectors in an effort to understand the behaviors, processes, and structures that best support the transformation of organizational culture and performance. The bodies of work include:

- the role of team learning and development in organizational change;
- the role of external organizations in the school turnaround space; and
- an exploration of system turnaround strategy evaluation.

¹⁰ Identified schools are required to write a School Reform Plan (SRP) outlining goals and an action plan for the 2013-2014 school year.

The Role of Team Learning and Development in Organizational Change

The competencies of a successful turnaround leader are not dissimilar to those of a strong leader in a high-performing school. However, the urgency of improving a school in a turnaround setting points to a need for a leader who can be versatile and lead both an outcome-driven and culture-dependent transformation process; all while building a strong team to be able to carry out the work. Hassel and Hassel (2009) assert that “successful turnaround leaders typically do not replace all or even most staff at the start, but they often replace some key leaders who help organize and drive change” (Ibid).

Similarly, Murphy’s (2008) research suggests it is equally important to develop an effective leadership team to carry out implementation. If the goal is sustainability, then leaders must engage other stakeholders in not only “buying in” but in driving change. “You have to get other people to do them...otherwise the change will be transitional and superficial” (Bibeault, 1998 p. 194). Developing a transformation strategy without carefully considering the capacity, skills, and knowledge of those who will drive implementation, and how to align those individuals, places the plan in peril. “Strategy will never be implemented nor vision realized without collaboration and teamwork. Strategy doesn’t just happen. People working in teams make it happen” (Curtis & City, 2012, p. 38).

While focused on turnaround situations where there is a completely new team, Foundation Strategy Group “FSG” Social Impact Advisors (2010), points to the need for a “planning year” for any turnaround team. One can infer that along with necessary action planning, there is significant alignment work that must happen among team members. Ultimately, that coherence has a direct impact in how the plan is implemented,

and ultimately, the type of environment students learn in. In 2004, the Wallace Foundation funded research on how leadership influences student learning; Fullan (2009) articulates three effective leadership moves resulting from the review of this research:

1. *Setting directions* (shared vision and group goals, high performance expectations)
2. *Developing people* (individual support, intellectual/emotional stimulation, modeling)
3. *Redesigning the organization* (collaborative cultures and structures, building productive relationships with parents and the community)

The work of *setting direction*, *developing people*, and *redesigning an organization* is a tall order for any leader, and more so for a leader charged with immediate improvements in performance. Therefore, carving out intentional spaces for type of this work and providing the support to do it is not optional; it is part of how the system (district or state) sets conditions for success.

While transformation efforts can often be driven by plans intended to serve as roadmaps, these aren't always clear and/or available; and ultimately, implementation is driven by context and people-specific needs, which can be unpredictable and challenging. A school leader's ability to effectively navigate that uncertainty is paramount, making the work of setting direction, developing people, and redesigning the organization even more critical. "[T]o excel in a complex and uncertain business environment [like a turnaround and transformation school], people need to both work *and* learn together" (Edmondson, 2012, p. 1). In defining what it means for a team to "both work *and* learn together" (Ibid), Heifetz's (2004) properties of adaptive challenges are particularly poignant. Specifically, the skills required to move an organization from its current reality to an

aspirational state are not simple or innate. The adaptive work of implementation is challenging, and the *doing of the plan* to move towards this aspirational state requires an equal emphasis on the way in which the team is also *learning* while implementing its plan.

To explore what is necessary to foster this type of learning and working together to move through adaptive challenges, we look to the adult learning literature. Integrating the literature around teaming with adult learning principles begins to create a frame for designing team learning experiences. Drago-Severson's (2008) four pillars: *teaming*, *providing leadership roles*, *collegial inquiry*, and *mentoring*, provide an important frame in the design of learning experience for teams in turnaround who may potentially be in the *anxiety zone*, as described by Edmondson (2012). The *anxiety zone* can be driven by a sense of urgency and potentially helplessness; given the context of school transformation and the prospect of school closure, moving teams from an *anxiety* to a *learning zone* is critical. Key to the effective implementation of these four pillars is the notion that learning and growth are developmental and effective learning environments embody this. The idea of "practice" is important to this developmental approach. It is through the space of practice that adults can make meaning of their experiences and embody new ways of being (Kegan, 1994; Drago-Severson, 2011).

The importance of meaning making is even more critical in addressing nuanced challenges that may become more complex over time. Murphy (2008) emphasizes the need to evaluate and reevaluate the context for the type of leadership needed, stating, "more than one change in leadership may be required in school turnarounds" (Murphy, 2008, p. 91). While Murphy's work does seem to point to a focus on the "right" type of

leader, I interpret this “context-specific leadership” as part of my developmental leadership frame, as leaders may need to learn to *lead differently* depending on the challenges they face. Logically, leadership teams may also need to function and lead differently depending on emerging needs and/or the nature of the change.

The Role of External Organizations in School Turnaround

Well-placed pressure from external partners, combined with internal energy, can be the stimulus for tackling something that might not otherwise be addressed, and district leaders can use this to stir the pot in purposeful directions. (Fullan, 2005, p. 73)

As a graduate of NYCLA’s 3rd class of Aspiring Principal Program (“APP”), I benefitted from NYCLA’s training, which focused largely on personal leadership. As someone who completed a school leadership program at a local university prior to entering the APP program, I needed to build muscles around self-reflection, managing resistance, and building staff capacity. I offer this as an insight to the lens through which I entered this work. Admittedly, while this capstone offers a critical lens on NYCLA’s work in RI through my strategic project, I also have a strong belief in the work of the organization.

That belief, however, is most definitely not universal. NYCLA’s level of access, autonomy, and private funding during Chancellor Klein’s tenure was (and still is) heavily criticized. Not unlike other non-traditional/alterative principal preparation programs, there was an additional layer of scrutiny for NYCLA graduates based on a belief that they were “too inexperienced to be school leaders.” In some cases, these concerns were warranted, with some APP graduates failing to recognize the need to earn legitimacy as school leaders. However, an independent evaluation conducted by the Institute for

Education and Social Policy at New York University (2009) data shows that in its first ten years, NYCLA graduates have made gains in student outcomes at their schools. And while the question of experience is still hotly contested, 11 years later with a different Chancellor in NYC, NYCLA's reputation for rigorous preparation and intensive early career support is still strong.

FSG Social Impact Advisors' *School Turnaround: A Brief Overview of the Landscape and Key Issues* (Kutash, Nico, Gorin, Tallant, & Rahmatullah, 2010b) outlines the roles of other external organizations actively involved in different facets of school turnaround. While this is by no means an exhaustive list of actors, it articulates the key areas being addressed by RttT funding and the focus of school improvement efforts on a national level.

Partners Supporting School Turnaround	
Type of Partner	Example Organizations
Comprehensive School Redesign Organizations that help schools implement robust turnaround strategies including diagnosing issues, building teacher/principal capacity, and designing instructional approaches	<i>The Institute for Cambridge Education, Partners in School Innovation, Student Achievement</i>
Human Capital and Professional Development Organizations and programs working to increase the supply of quality educators in turnaround schools through recruiting, training, and supporting turnaround principals and teachers	<i>Louisiana School Turnaround Specialist Program, New Leaders for New Schools, The New Teacher Project, New York City Leadership Academy, UVA School Turnaround Specialist Program</i>
District and School Resource Management Organizations that help districts and schools institute financial and operational policies and practices to support turnaround	<i>Alvarez and Marsal, Education Resource Strategies</i>
Integrated Services Organizations that work with school staff to integrate social and behavioral support directly into the learning environment	<i>Turnaround USA, Turnaround for Children</i>
Parent and Community Organizing and Engagement Coalitions aimed at mobilizing parents and the community to urge districts and states to create needed conditions	<i>America's Promise, Parent Revolution</i>

Figure 2. Partners supporting school turnaround.
FSG Social Impact Advisor's Report: *School Turnaround: A Brief Overview of the Landscape and Key Issues*, p.8

While my strategic project focused on Human Capital and Professional Development, NYCLA's work spans at least 3 of the 5 types of partnerships listed above: Comprehensive School Redesign, Human Capital and Professional Development, and District and School Resource Management.

Another human capital organization that has had significant impact on school leadership development across the country is New Leaders¹¹. Founded by a group of social entrepreneurs, New Leaders has trained almost 800 leaders across the country. Initially founded as an organization to prepare school leaders for new schools, New Leaders is NYCLA's strongest competitor in the turnaround leadership space. With permanent locations in 12 urban areas, including New York City, New Leaders has had a markedly different trajectory in its first decade, with a strong focus on the organization's direct and continued impact in cities across the country. What distinguishes the organizations is their approach to the work; NYCLA supports districts through time-bound, capacity building of local stakeholders to develop programs, and with a "slow release" model; New Leaders generally takes a direct-service approach, often bringing in external programmatic capacity to build local leadership. Ultimately, depending on the local resources and organizational culture and capacity, each approach can potentially meet a different set of needs.

The research on turnaround work outlines several leverage points on which states and districts have focused. Fairchild and DeMary (2011) point to structural approaches, charter schools, human capital investments, and some hybrid approaches. Structural approaches include creating "turnaround zones" (MERI, 2007) through state or district

¹¹ Formerly New Leaders for New Schools (NLNS). For more information, please visit <http://www.newleaders.org/about/>

takeovers; these are based on the idea that “zones” enable successful turnarounds (p. 25). Similar examples include the Louisiana Recovery School District (RSD), where, through legislative action, the state of Louisiana was able to take control of schools deemed to be failing with the expectation that schools would be eventually returned to local control. Similar strategies have occurred in Michigan, where the Educational Achievement Authority (EAA) took control of the state’s 15 lowest performing schools, as well as in Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Tennessee.

While structural approaches may be the leverage point for change in some contexts, there are also conditions and bodies of work in support of those structures (Murphy, 2008). “When structural changes work, they do so because something important is happening inside the structures (for example, high personalization, the forging of a community of dedicated people sharing important values)... Structures can be of real assistance in helping schools recover when all the other tasks are done correctly” (from Lesson #7, Murphy, 2010). The strategic project represents an example of a structure whose details have largely been left to NYCLA, as a human capital development organization.

Beyond the organizations operating on a national scale, there are many local organizations involved in similar work. In Rhode Island, several community-based organizations, universities, and nonprofits, including unions and youth-led groups, have been a part of the push for school improvement across the state. These include Youth In Action (YIA),¹² Rhode Island Association of School Principals (RIASP),¹³ Providence

¹² Retrieved from http://www.whatkidscando.org/resources/spec_youthorganizing.html on February 24, 2014.

¹³ Retrieved from <http://www.riasp.org/> on February 24, 2014.

Residency Network (PRN),¹⁴ and Center for Leadership and Equity in Education (CLEE).¹⁵ I also am including districts as part of this network of local organizations. This is particularly important as we consider the development of the strategic project in RI. While it is true that system-wide strategies and interventions require significant capacity of time, resources, and expertise that may be absent locally, there is often also a history among organizations and between the state and local groups that plays a role in who is authorized to do the type of work outlined in this capstone. This presents an important implication explored in later sections.

As a result of this influx of external expertise, it is important to do more than consider context in turnaround settings; it is critical to engage in it to the extent that it supports the turnaround work. While it is necessary to manage the political context external to the schools, the ultimate responsibility is to support schools in the challenge of aligning school level needs and outcomes to the expectations from the system-level leadership. This type of support and attention to local conditions is an important precondition for successful implementation (Fairchild & DeMary, 2011). Additionally, there are implications for the system when an external organization (both external to the school system and geographically external) is charged with making sense of that local context in relation to the system's strategy. It raises important questions about what local partnerships should look like, who or what brings them together, and how they should be structured for mutual accountability.

“Changing whole systems means changing the entire context within which people work...[and] if context is everything, we must directly focus on how it can be changed for

¹⁴ Retrieved from http://leadershipandequity.org/?page_id=17 on February 24, 2014.

¹⁵ Ibid.

the better” (Fullan, 2005, p. 16). The strategic project’s focus is on professional development as a part of a larger turnaround strategy. How might this strategy play a part in shifting context at all levels? What are the limitations of an external organization in school turnaround? These are important questions to consider in understanding the role of an external organization leading site-based improvement throughout a system.

Defining Success for a System-level Turnaround Strategy

What “turnaround” looks like can vary and often depends upon political mandates, resources available (human and otherwise), and site-based capacity.¹⁶ Mass Insight Education and Research Institute frames school turnaround as “a dramatic and comprehensive intervention in a low-performing school that produces significant gains in student achievement within two academic years” (Calkins, Guenther, Belfiore, & Lash, 2009). While as a research-practitioner I have reservations about defining school turnarounds in this way because of its overly narrow focus on standardized testing outcomes, it is a definition that is both widely accepted in terms of the finite timeline given to schools to implement their improvement plans and is considered evidence of success by states or districts evaluating school improvement. As such, RI’s overarching definition of turnaround success is no different.

Although controversial in its competitive approach to reform, RttT¹⁷ funding has propelled many states that may have otherwise not had the resources to launch innovative programs and structures and to design comprehensive systems for school improvement

¹⁶ In this capstone I will not directly explore the multitude of external conditions that best support a systemic turnaround strategy but will include these conditions as relevant to the implementation of the strategic project.

¹⁷ Initiated in 2009, RttT grants are US Department of Education-funded competitive grants totaling \$4 billion to states to incent nationwide school improvement. For more information, please visit <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop/index.html>.

(Fairchild & DeMary, 2011). This has been true for states such as RI, which in its application articulated major shifts in its approach to leadership development, teacher evaluation structures, and instructional expectations. With plans that are highly ambitious and highly visible, questions remain about the capacity for successful implementation given a context of local control, political challenges, and the financial commitment to sustaining changes well beyond the life of RttT funding.

More specifically, perceived failures of RttT as an investment are connected to turnaround strategies, which are seen as insufficient in their ability to change the learning context. “Quite simply, turnarounds are not a scalable strategy for turning around America’s troubled urban school systems” (Smarick, 2010). Transformations are considered to be particularly ineffective.

Some observers believe the models that require the fewest changes in staff – especially the transformation model, which may be the most widely implemented – are the least effective in turning schools around.” (FSG Social Impact Advisors, 2010a, p. 5)

However, with thousands of schools nationwide identified as underperforming, and the underlying implications of creating “blank slates,” school turnaround, and specifically school transformation strategies, must look to capitalize on the strengths that exist in the system and aggressively address the gaps causing low performance. In other words, the turnaround challenge requires a marriage between the “incrementalists” and the “clean slate club”—those who believe the road to success is slow and steady and those who believe it is through shutting schools down and reopening them (Hassel & Hassel, 2009). As a testament to this, approximately 74% of first-round grantees chose

transformation as their turnaround strategy, including RI¹⁸ (U.S. Department of Education, 2011).

Given RI's choice to focus on transformation, what might success look like? Much of the literature points to a "dual commitment to long and short-term wins" (Bibeault, 1982; Fullan, 2005) to demonstrate forward movement and to motivate. The need to balance the sense of urgency with the *process* of transformation (Murphy, 2008) is a large part of what makes school improvement work so challenging. FSG's *School Turnaround Field Guide* (2010a) also points to a leader's responsibility to "signal change early and build momentum by delivering and communicating 'quick wins'" (p. 6). While urgency is not necessarily equivalent to speed, leaders work with a strict timeline for performance, necessitating fairly immediate actions and results. This complicates the need to establish "psychological safety" (Edmonson, 2012), which sets conditions for disagreement, questioning, and true collaboration.

Though we have discussed turnarounds as context-specific challenges, Kotter (2007) asserts that there is a process to successful turnaround strategy. Kotter's "Eight Steps to Transforming Your Organization" (See Artifact 3) establish a sequence that signals the viability of a transformation strategy. Skipping any step, as Kotter frames it, will result in poor strategy execution. This is particularly poignant when we consider the investment of resources and time placed into transformation.

While the focus in this RKA on context-specific considerations may point to a tension with Kotter's work, I interpret his commitment to the transformation process as a signal to the importance of transformation leaders taking on the entirety of a school

¹⁸ There were 3 restart model schools in Providence, RI.

culture and remaining committed to that shift through the organization's tendencies to return to its default culture. Fullan (2005) reinforces this commitment to culture change in his framework for sustainability, which places "changing the context at all levels" as one of its critical components. "Changing whole systems means changing the entire context within which people work" (p. 16).

Finally, if we turn to the body of work proposed in the contract between NYCLA and RIDE as indicators of success (See Figure 1), there are several initiatives that aim to affect the context at multiple levels: principal preparation and ongoing support in the form of coaching and professional development. This set of initiatives also underscores the commitment to evaluation, improvement, and sustainability through local capacity building.

Theory of Action

The three bodies of work explored in the previous section set the stage for the type of support leadership teams need in a school transformation context, who might be best positioned to provide that support, and how that support is evaluated for both value and effectiveness. With the intentional coupling of the leader and leadership team's development, ensuring that partner organizations can deliver on a statewide strategy in a context-specific manner while building internal organizational capacity in the process, and demonstrating both short- and long-term success at the system level, critical factors emerge in implementing a strategy with the school as the unit of change. Supported by the literature and my own experience as a teacher and school leader, the theory of action driving this strategic project is as follows:

If a statewide professional development strategy

- Builds on existing capacity at the school level
- Is coordinated with other school-based supports that concurrently build school leadership capacity (i.e., coaching)
- Is in alignment with state mandates and processes

And

- focuses on and leverages school leadership teams' learning and development alongside the implementation process

Then

- system-wide professional development can be an effective strategy to support School Reform Plan implementation.

IV. Description, Results, and Analysis of the Strategic Project

RIDE's Monitoring Process for Transformation Schools

The state's lowest-performing schools are identified as Focus or Priority. There are a total of 29 schools across the state identified as Focus or Priority; each completed a School Reform Plan¹⁹ and was required to participate in a quarterly monitoring process. The process included a facilitated meeting, where representatives from RIDE's Office of Transformation provided technical and strategic support to schools; this can include identifying data that demonstrates progress across indicators identified in the School Reform Plan, addressing gaps in implementation, and perhaps most importantly, preparation for the monitoring meetings, which include RIDE, the local district, and the school. The meetings are evaluative in nature in that they determine a school's progress towards its stated goals for the year.

Monitoring for School Transformation: Quarterly Cycle



Figure 3. Adapted from RI Department of Education “Monitoring for School Transformation: Quarterly Cycle”. This visual represents RIDE’s process for monitoring transformation schools’ plan implementation.

¹⁹ School Reforms Plans (SRPs) are also referred to as School Improvement Plans (SIPs) in different districts.

The process outlined above provided opportunities for schools to shift from being participants in the process to driving it. A distinguishing feature of the RI quarterly monitoring process for Focus and Priority schools included the school's ability to identify which data best represents their improvement process. As articulated by Sarah Anderson, Transformation Specialist in RIDE's Office of Transformation, "each school has the opportunity to tell their story of transformation in the way that makes most sense to them." (February 14, 2014) There were several standardized data points that schools reported on: teacher absenteeism, student attendance, chronic absenteeism, and suspension rates. However, schools were able to highlight what was most reflective of their transformation process, particularly in relation to interim assessment data and other data, including environmental data.

RIDE acknowledged that this is a different approach than from what schools were accustomed to, and the quarterly monitoring process also served as a tool for the state "to push to learn how to do this and push those conversations to happen at the school level."²⁰ Ultimately, the state looked for evidence of each school leader's capacity to filter the various competing commitments and focus on what was most important for implementation and identify the relevant data, all the while building staff capacity to do the same at the classroom level. Elmore's Principle of Symmetry speaks to the implementation of a strategy across an organization in ways that mirrors the learning processes at all levels (Elmore, ch. 2 unpublished, 2009). It is here where we see the role of the team emerge and where there was great opportunity for schools to drive the process, as opposed to being "driven by it." This is also where questions surfaced about

²⁰ Ibid.

schools’ capacity to do that work; and while compelling and locally driven, the process made certain assumptions about capacity and ownership of the implementation plan. “The testing data is important *and* we need to look beyond NECAP scores. When we think about transforming schools, we are now asking ourselves whether people know *how* to do that transformation work. Essentially, how do you move a school?”²¹

In preparation for each meeting, each team prepared a “data dashboard” highlighting specific goals or interventions with attached evidence of progress in three areas: Implementation progress (adult behaviors), Impact progress (student behaviors), and the infrastructure that supported the changes (RIDE quarterly dashboard, 2013-2014). Progress was indicated on the dashboard with green, yellow, and red highlights besides each intervention (green for full implementation, yellow for in progress, and red for no progress).

Table 1. Dashboard example

Goal/Intervention	Implementation progress (adult behaviors)	Impact progress (student outcomes)	Infrastructure
Goal	Data demonstrating progress or reason for lack of progress	Data from interim assessments	Description of infrastructure
Goal 1: Increase teacher capacity in utilizing interim assessment data to conference with students	100% of teachers trained in using data system; first round of data successfully downloaded by all teachers; student conferences are 50% complete.	Only 50% of students have engaged in data conferences.	90% of students have participated in all 3 assessment cycles in math and literacy. Feedback on data system’s ease of use is positive.

²¹ Interview with Sarah Anderson, Transformation Specialist, RI Department of Education, February 14, 2014.

The quarterly monitoring meetings were also designed to include school leaders and members of the leadership team to ensure collaboration with stakeholders in the school. Finally, each meeting outlines specific next steps to be revisited; these include next steps for the school, support from the district, and support from the state in implementation.

The choice to use the transformation process as a leverage point also implicates the state in the dual role of supporting schools and ultimately holding them accountable to the outcomes of the process. Logically, RIDE has voiced concerns about how to do this well. This is where NYCLA's role as a support organization in leading the professional development strategy²² is key to the strategy. The PD series, initially set to begin during the 2012-2013 school year, was intended to be a part of NYCLA's portfolio of support for schools: the Transformative Leaders Program (TLP), Winter and Spring sessions for Principals (January and April), the Summer Institute for Principals and their leadership teams, and yearlong coaching for sitting principals. The PD sessions were a way to ensure continued support to principals and their teams as they got into the complexity of implementing²³ their school improvement plans. While standards for success were never made explicit, there was an underlying assumption that NYCLA would ensure coherence between the PD sessions and the other school-based support it provided.

The project itself focused on the design and delivery of the professional development sessions. There was also a set of goals linked to NYCLA's ability to build

²² It is important to note that NYCLA's portfolio of work involved some initiatives, where as an external organization, NYCLA did have significant responsibility to engage in both high levels of support and high levels of accountability, i.e the Turnaround Leaders Program. However, the PD was limited to support.

²³ "The complexity of implementation" is a phrase often used by our Project Director, Andrea LaRocca, to describe the work in RI.

the necessary capacity to ensure sustainability beyond RttT. In initial conversations with Pam Ferner, Executive Vice President of Nationwide Initiatives, there was a focus on developing relationships with stakeholders beyond the state, including local districts and local professional organizations in RI in order to gather data about pre-existing professional development offerings and identify a potential “home” for this work. Through these conversations I would be able to develop a scope and sequence that would complement the work already being done across the state and perhaps fill areas of recognized need. The hope was also that these connections would strengthen and in some cases begin to build NYCLA’s relationships with these local actors.

Data Collection to Inform Initial PD Design

The data collection process served as a vehicle to not only inform the PD sessions but also to build relationships with key stakeholders and, as a new member to the NYCLA, to develop relationships with the National team to better understand the team’s approach and past work in RI. The process started in early June with the Advisory Group, a group of stakeholders NYCLA convened to serve as on-the-ground thought partners. The Advisory Group consisted of leadership from the Providence Residency Network (“PRN”), the Center for Leadership and Equity in Education (“CLEE”), the RI Association of School Principals (“RIASP”), district leadership from Warwick and Chariho, and early career principals from across the state. The group met once a month and was initially designed to be a critical partner in ensuring sustainability in the work of the Academy of Transformative Leadership (“ATL”).

My goal in external data collection was to survey the type of PD already offered and determine how to complement it, uncover what type of PD was needed but not being

offered, and identify patterns of leadership needs across the state. Data sources included interviews with RIDE staff, district staff, local organizations, a synthesis of state- and district-led initiatives, NYCLA coach focus group data from the first year of coaching, and low-inference observations of Summer Institute participants.

During the first week of the ATL Summer Institute (June 24th-28th), data were collected about what schools found challenging. During that week, I, along with other NYCLA staff and coaches, observed 7 school teams face an incredibly daunting school reform plan/school improvement plan, and naturally, the teams placed a high premium on time to complete action plans. The design included opportunities to explore values as a team, discuss the importance of addressing adaptive challenges along with the more technical ones, and generally, lots of opportunities for team building. However, the value of working “on the plan” trumped these other activities. Throughout the Summer Institute, 3 teams requested permission to deviate from the day’s agenda in order to work on “planning.” In all cases we allowed for that focused time to ensure that the sessions remained relevant for participants. At the same time, as a research-practitioner, it raised the question about what conversations the teams were possibly avoiding by focusing on action. “Adaptive work generates disequilibrium and avoidance” (Heifetz, 2004). It was also data that I would consider in designing the PD sessions.

By July, there was enough data to inform an initial proposal for RIDE for feedback.²⁴ This was also an effort to ensure alignment in messaging with RIDE’s Office of Transformation. I presented the communication strategy to then-Director of the Office of Transformation, Tonda Dunbar, and outlined a draft of design principles, potential

²⁴ I was also 9 months pregnant, with a due date of August 10th, and needed to ensure that there was a design, calendar, and communications plan in place well before that.

learning outcomes, as well as a session calendar. In that presentation, it was important to also assert the conditions that would be necessary for successful implementation of the PD:

- Access to PD sessions (time, location, etc.)
- Consistent and timely communication about dates, topics, and other logistics
- Alignment with external professional development sessions (district and other orgs)
- Diversity of participants

Some conditions were technical: identifying where the PD would take place, meeting times that were off limits, and ensuring timely communication about the sessions to schools. Other conditions were about what RIDE could actively do to support the value these sessions could provide. Although I was new to the RI transformation work, my NYCLA colleagues were clear about needing to “go through the proper channels” in reaching out to districts. A cold-calling strategy would not work. I needed direct access to district leadership and, at that point, RIDE was my only entry point. Finally, it was important to ensure that there was widespread access to the sessions, specifically, ensuring outreach to a diverse body of participants. Feedback from RIDE’s Office of Transformation was largely around continuing to engage as many stakeholders as possible to avoid the PD coming across as a “promoting the state’s agenda.” Through that presentation, I was able to connect with leaders at RIDE who designed statewide PD for principals in teacher evaluation and common core implementation.

The interviews with RIDE were particularly powerful in that they framed a strong contrast with what was being assessed at more local levels. In fact, some of the data from RIDE mirrored much of what members of the statewide Advisory Board shared; both

groups had a statewide vantage point. Their feedback focused on supporting principals to take ownership over large-scale initiatives, *even if they did not agree with them*. As an example, they highlighted the rollout of the teacher evaluation program. The interviewees indicated that a greater level of ownership over the initiatives would improve how principals spent their time, how they were talking about and framing change to get people on board (Edmondson, 2012), and how effective they were in “changing mindsets.” Additionally, there were concerns about how school leaders would track progress of their plans and make that progress transparent.

At that point, two major themes emerged. The first was about what type of PD was available to school leaders and their teams. Much of the PD provided through RIDE or local districts was technical in nature (how to use the teacher evaluation databases, how to structure data teams to look at student growth, etc.), was mandated, and occurred during the school day. In addition, much of it was “sit and get,” without immediate or direct application to school-based challenges. (The only PD that appeared to push the boundaries was the Professional Learning Communities (“PLC”) training through the Providence Residency Network.)

This theme was of particular importance because it highlighted a potential *capacity* gap in PD offerings, spanning both content and style. The second theme gets into assessments of what skills, knowledge, or behavior were important in an era of major change in the state. Principals needed support in communicating alignment with state and/or district initiatives. There were two ways this was expressed: principals frame change through compliance—“we have to do this because the state/district said so”—or

through a belief that “this too shall pass.” This second sentiment was particularly evident with the teacher evaluation system.

While there were clear patterns across all interviews (working with resistant staff, using data to measure progress, improving instruction, etc.), school leader and district perspectives provided somewhat different lenses. The two district leaders I spoke with also emphasized the importance of school leaders receiving support in how to engage in difficult conversations with staff, particularly in addressing low expectations of students in the context of teacher evaluations. While school leaders also reflected a need for training in difficult conversations, they also expressed concern about how to frame change when much of what they were asking staff to do was not only brand new but also extremely difficult. Heifetz’s adaptive change model points to the “gap between aspiration and reality, demanding a response outside our current repertoire” (Heifetz, 2004). When asked to explain, school leaders were particularly concerned with how to manage anxiety in a transformation environment; the stakes were high, and they wondered how staff could trust and learn in an environment like that. In NYCLA’s RI Coach Focus Groups, school leaders raised the challenge of asking staff to do much more than they had ever done before with the same amount of resources or, in some cases, fewer. This is a theme that emerged again in later PD sessions.

Equally important was what I *didn’t* hear. Although at the time, I didn’t know the extent to which team effectiveness would shift the focus of the sessions, much of the conversation around supporting the team involved implementing the plan and tracking progress. Only 1 team out of the 7 made specific requests for continued work on team effectiveness, specifically around how the team was working together and

communicating. Additionally, it was not clear how each district would support school reform plan implementation, and whether our approach would support the districts'. There was evidence that there would be instructional and data coaches available from either the district or state, but it was not evident what the ongoing support would look like.

Finally, an important part of the data gathering process was maintaining clarity on how these professional development sessions would sustain the learning and the “thru line” from NYCLA’s Summer Institute, where school teams developed action plans for implementation of their School Reform Plans. This thru line was not always clear, given the competing commitments principals faced, particularly as we considered the difference in expectations from the state and the local district. Ensuring consistency in topic/focus with their other PD experiences would create an easy entry point for schools in terms of language, structure, content, and process. I also engaged other members of the NYCLA team and the RI-based coaches to make sense of what was most important to address, recognizing that some of the data were shared with specific school leaders in mind.

Using the final feedback from the Summer Institute along with the gaps identified in interviews during the summer, three major content themes emerged, primarily in relation to the role of the school principal:

- refining leadership voice and stance, specifically as it pertains to consistent and effective communication of vision,
- development and use of structures for staff capacity-building, including accountability and support for teams and staff, and
- addressing schools’ capacity to use data to determine progress (with student data and with school-wide plan implementation).

I then coupled the collected data with the leadership competencies for which RI principals were held accountable. In an effort to establish clear standards for turnaround leadership in RI, NYCLA cross-walked its own research-based leadership competencies in the Leadership Performance Planning Worksheet (LPPW) and RI’s statewide School Leadership Standards to create *The RI Turnaround Leaders’ Super Standards*. These standards reflected a narrow set of competencies that were specific to transformation leaders and informed much of the content design of the PD sessions.

Through integrating the data collected from stakeholders, leadership competencies, and the research on external support, turnaround success, and designing learning for turnaround leaders and teams, I crafted and vetted design principles to guide the development of the ATL Professional Development.

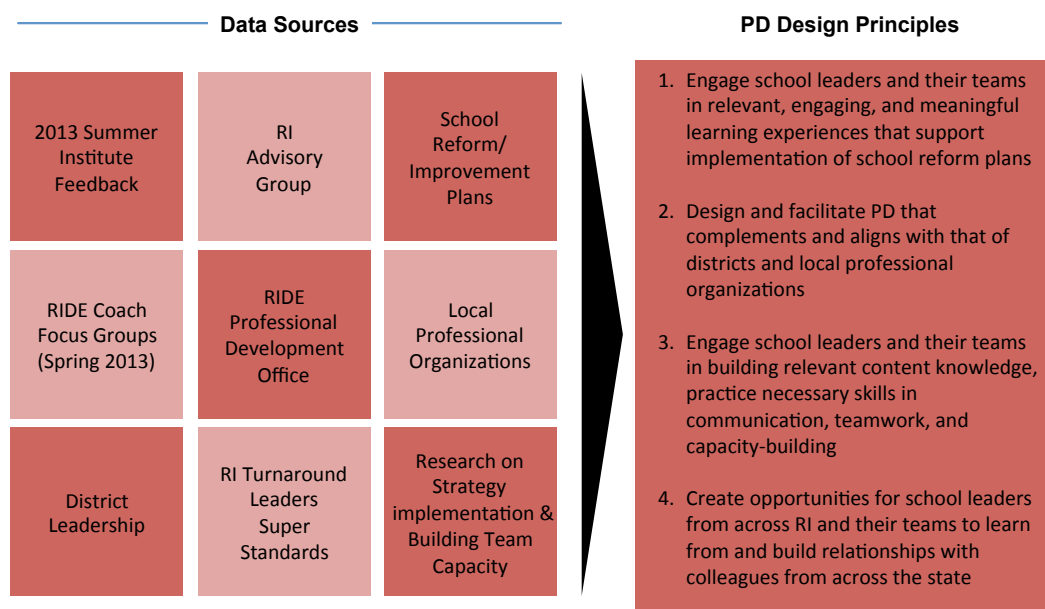


Figure 4. Data gathering resulting in professional development design principles

Outreach and Engagement

The nature of my outreach and engagement has evolved since the project started. Initially, the goal was to outreach as broadly as possible; and with 29 schools identified as having either a Priority or Focus status and an additional 65 identified as Warning schools, there was no shortage of possible participants. In fact, the ATL Professional Development Series was originally intended to serve up to 99 schools (the number of identified as Warning, Focus, and Priority) for a total 48 hours of professional development over the course of the 2013-2014 school year.

In September, due to shifts in staffing at RIDE, the scope of the strategic project changed dramatically. The ATL Professional Development Series would receive direct support from RIDE to serve only NYCLA-affiliated schools. Initially, the state was serving as the outreach vehicle for the PD sessions. We could not reach out directly to schools and, given our relationship with the state, they committed to advertising and making the direct connections with districts. Essentially, the PD sessions were intended to be a RIDE-led initiative, much like ATL's Turnaround Leaders Program. With the staffing changes, the state no longer had the capacity to be a partner in outreach; and there were also emerging concerns from districts that this would create additional time demands on their principals.

In early September, RIDE considered eliminating the PD sessions from the contract as part of NYCLA's portfolio of work. The National Initiatives leadership pushed back and negotiated with the state, pointing to the foundational work already done, and proposed that the PD sessions could perhaps focus on NYCLA-affiliated schools. As a result, the number of schools went from 99 to the 12 schools that had pre-

existing relationships with NYCLA through the Aspiring Principal Program or Spring 2013 Institute. Although I could have focused on continuing outreach to individual districts in September and October to get more schools to participate, I decided to focus on ensuring quality support to the 12 schools.

An important part of the outreach was influenced by the fact that the sessions were completely voluntary. Additionally, participants could enter or exit the sessions at any point. My first step was to create a calendar for the sessions that did not conflict with district or state PD and other events (e.g., school board meetings, open school night/afternoon, vacations, etc.). Each of the initial 12 schools received NYCLA coaching, which created an entry point for engaging school leaders and their teams. After the first session, while outreach continued to go out to the 12 schools, I ensured consistent personal follow-up with the 8 schools that attended the first session. This included sending out session agendas one week in advance with a request for RSVPs, copying each school's coach in all communications, sending each principal a follow-up email after sessions to thank them for their participation and engagement, and, where appropriate, providing resources that aligned with needs expressed at the session. Given that the sessions were both voluntary for the 8 schools and also remained open to any other schools that wanted to attend, every session could have potentially had a different audience.

Participating Schools' Profiles

The 8 schools described in this project portray the diversity of schools in RI fairly accurately. Additionally, it is evident that schools in Priority status (the highest need according to the classification system) are concentrated in the Urban Core. This also

reflects a mix of schools, from one that is classified as “Commended” to “Priority.” Although nearly all schools were in transformation, 2 were not. Below is an overview of schools’ profiles.

Table 2. Profiles of ATL PD participating schools

<i>School identifier</i>	<i>Grade</i>	<i>Principal Tenure at school</i>	<i>Number of Team Members (incl. principal)</i>	<i>Accountability Classification & Years in Transformation</i>
School A	K-5	5 th year	6	Warning School
School B	K-5	2 nd year	6	Priority School (2 nd year)
School C	K-5	1 st year	6	Priority School (2 nd year)
School D	6-8	2 nd year (1.5)	4	Priority School (2 nd year)
School E	6-8	1 st year	3	Warning School
School F	K-12	2 nd year	4	Priority School (5+ under old system)
School G	9-12	2 nd year	5	Priority School (2 nd year; several phases of transformation over last 10 years)
School H	9-12	1 st year	2	Commended School

Maintaining Relevance and Connection

Given the diversity of the participants across grade levels and types of schools, I worked to establish strong connections from one session to the next. Sessions were held monthly, starting in October 2013, with 4 sessions dedicated to the school leadership team and 3 sessions exclusively for school leaders. Each session was held from 3:30-6:30 pm. While the design of the April session shifted based on feedback from the March session, I shared this overview of the scope and sequence with the group,

including how their feedback impacted remaining sessions at the February 12th session. I highlighted the shift in focus of the sessions, which I outline further in this section.

Connecting the PD Series

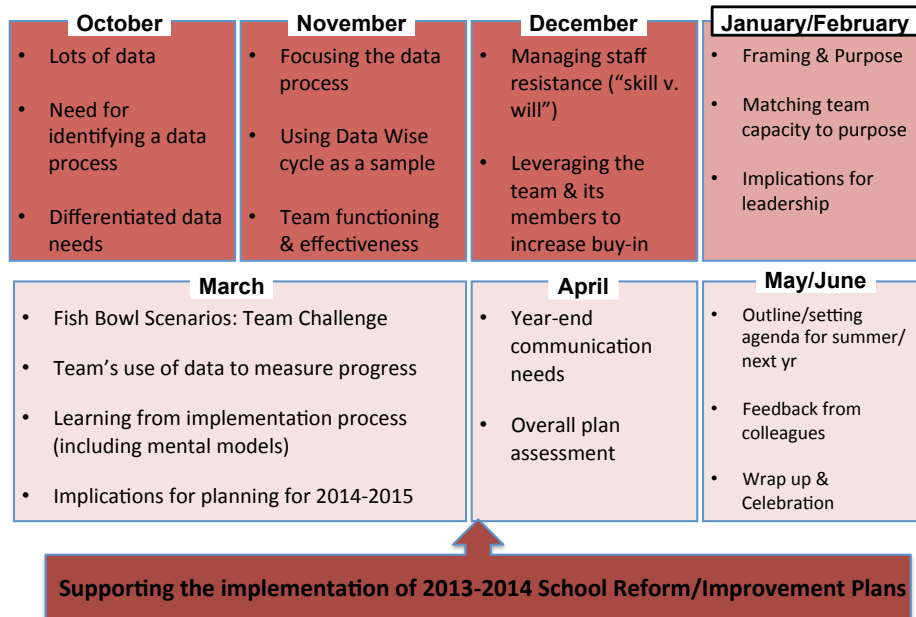


Figure 5. High-level scope and sequence showing connections between sessions

To ensure consistency between sessions, I included the following structures, which emerged out of the adult learning, and PD design principles discussed previously:

- *Purpose*: Review of agenda and connection to yearlong professional development goals; connection to previous session to build background and setting expectations for future sessions
- *Transparency in design process*: Sharing data used to inform design, including previous session feedback, its application, and use of coach observations
- *"Rules of engagement"*: Making facilitation moves and expectations transparent throughout the session, including explicit norming at each session
- *Revisiting commitments from previous sessions*: Every session ends with a team discussion about next steps, takeaways, etc. This is then shared out with the room.

When teams make commitments or indicate next steps, we bring these commitments back in subsequent sessions to surface how the team achieved or didn't achieve the goal that was set.

- *Learning from colleagues across the state:* Part of session design included mixed groups by school and role to create opportunities for sharing practices.

The role of the RI-based coaches became a major factor in ensuring relevance and connection between sessions. From the outset I was transparent with participants about sharing low-inference data from the meetings with the coaches and using what the coaches observed at the schools to inform session designs. Initially, I was not sure if it would be necessary to have the coaches at the sessions. After the November session it was clear that their participation would not only be useful in table facilitation, but it created a powerful connection for teams between what they were doing day to day at the schools and what they could focus on at the sessions. Over the course of the year, we became a team, and the ownership of the sessions extended beyond my role as designer and lead facilitator. In fact, in January I reached out to my Program Manager to request more formal support. That request was critical because it allowed me to partner with one of the coaches to both co-design and co-facilitate the sessions. I gained a thought partner in the work, and the sessions have benefited from her experience as a former RI principal and NYCLA coach.

Impact of Feedback and Data Collection on Session Design

The most notable shift in the initial scope and sequence of the sessions has been an increased focus on team functioning and effectiveness. Initially, the sessions were designed to center on the team's capacity to develop and sustain data processes that

would inform the implementation of their School Reform Plans. At the November 20th session I introduced the Data Wise improvement process (Boudett, City, & Murnane, 2006). The intent was not to engage in an in-depth training of these tools but to use them as a type of diagnostic of where schools were.

While a valuable process, the questions, discussions, feedback, and challenges that arose at the November 20th and subsequent sessions were consistently around the team's challenges in implementing their School Reform Plan strategies when they came up against the school's existing culture. At that session, we also asked teams to "paint a picture" (Bridges, 2009) of June 2014, using an activity from *Strategy in Action*, where teams had to take one strategy and describe what implementation of that strategy would look like in June. We were surprised by the difficulty all teams had in getting into the specifics of this. It mirrored what we observed in the Summer Institute, where we saw teams jump into action planning without a very clear picture of where they wanted to go. Additionally, at the November session, I introduced a "Team Functioning Checklist" (Curtis & City, 2011), which allowed us to observe how teams self-assessed. While many teams were able to narrow their focus on 2 to 3 areas of team functioning, nearly all of the teams assessed that they were doing most of what was described in the checklist. In consultation with the coaches (including my own assessment as a coach) following that session, two patterns emerged:

- Several teams were not having regular meetings; in fact, the monthly PD was the *only* time that some teams met in a structured way. It is important to note that the teams made up largely of teacher leaders (as opposed to administrators) did meet regularly.
- The teams were focused on the school reform plan/school implementation plan and in nearly all cases were facing major resistance to implementation.

With this new data, the design of the sessions shifted to reflect a more explicit focus on team purpose, functioning, and learning. Additionally, the majority of participants are teacher leaders new to the role this year; and ensuring alignment, clarity in purpose and messaging, and strategies for building trust and engaging with resistant colleagues became the most important outcomes for teams. The underlying purpose of the sessions is still to support plan implementation, but the leverage has shifted from the team's capacity to effectively use data to the strength and cohesion of the team.

As discussed above, the role of the coaches has emerged as a particularly important one because of the data they are able to bring to the session design as well as the data they are able to collect at the sessions. An important part of ensuring alignment in our support is the feedback loop between coaching (also referred to as mentoring by Drago-Severson, 2011) and the PD sessions. Prior to each session, I meet with the coaches to discuss the design, explain the role of table facilitators, and discuss important points or questions that should be raised throughout the session. We began to design sessions to ensure that the team has space to “practice” being a team and developing processes for working together.

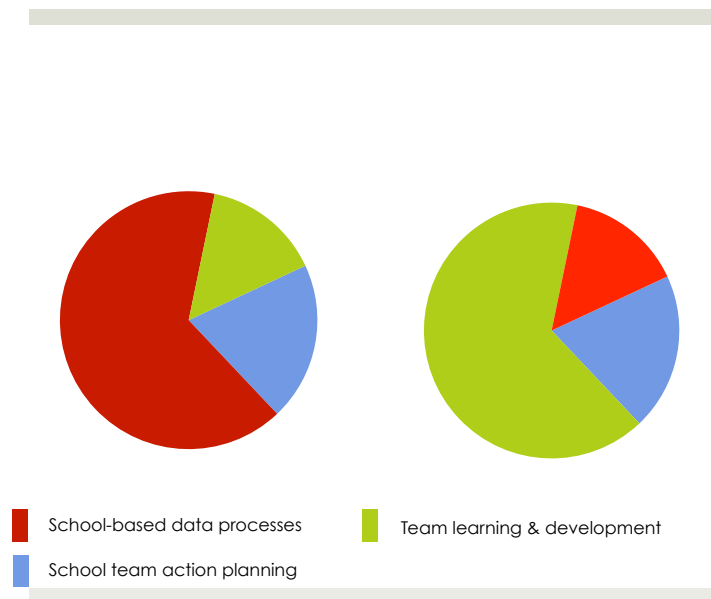


Figure 6. Shift in time allocation of content from a focus on school-based data process to a focus on team learning and development

Although we had enough data in November to warrant shifting the content of the December 2013 session, I thought it was important to bring some closure to the formal focus on data. I used the “Mason Elementary School Case” from *Data Wise in Action* (Boudett & Steele, 2007) as a transition piece. Although my original intent was to use it to have teams explore how to get focused in the midst of multiple initiatives in order to collect meaningful data, that became secondary in the group discussion. Teams were able to highlight certain practices, behaviors, and mindsets that they wanted to implement at their own schools. Two of the most common were “teacher ownership over student growth” and “effective teacher teams.” From this, we were then able to take the conversation to the implications of these goals for the leadership team itself. The key question then surfaced quite organically: “What needs to be true about our own team in order for this to be true at our school?” This question opened the door to take the sessions to a different yet more meaningful place for the sustainability of the work:

prioritizing supporting the development of the team in order to support plan implementation.

Below is a timeline showing the progress of the strategic project from June 2013-March 2014, reflecting the timeline of the results shared and subsequent analysis.

Time Period	Actions Taken	Implications
June-August 2013	- Data Collection to inform design: Interviews with Advisory Group members, RIDE staff, reviewed evaluation data from coaching and Summer Institute - Design & facilitation of Summer Institute - Mid-July: Presented PD Plan to RIDE with a focus on supporting implementation of School Reform Plans	- Received approval for PD plan from the Office of Transformation - Summer Institute facilitated relationship-building for me and across schools
September – October 2013	- Change in staffing in the Office of Transformational Leadership - Disseminated professional development scope & sequence to coaches and 12 school leaders - Delivered 1st session for Principals	- RIDE lack of capacity to support marketing or implementation of professional development; NYCLA negotiated delivering to schools with pre-existing relationships (total of 12) - Received feedback from coaches on content - Received confirmations of attendance from 8 of 12 schools; 8 principals attended first session
November-January 2014	- Delivered 2 team sessions; 8 school teams attended in November, 7 in December - Changed location to one of our participating schools - Held planning meetings with coaches to prepare for PD session; debriefed every session with coaches - Requested more support from NYCLA in design and delivery	- Largely positive feedback from the group; content shift to focus mostly on team functioning - Location change shifted the energy of the sessions - Coaches played an important role in table facilitation; new strand of work identified: building capacity of coaches to facilitate - One of the RI-based coaches joined me in co-designing and co-facilitating sessions
February-March 2014	- Rescheduled & cancelled January session due to snow - Invited Interim Acting Principal of school where leader passed away suddenly - More targeted outreach for March session	- Potential loss of momentum for some schools; 4 of 8 teams attended February session - Feedback & session observation demonstrated evidence of safety and strong community 7 out of 8 teams attended March 2014 session

Figure 7. ATL PD Design and Implementation timeline

Results

To effectively demonstrate the results of the ATL Professional Development series to date, I collected data from multiple sources. It was through this triangulation that I was able to make inferences about the potential impact of the sessions and their role in supporting implementation of school reform plans in the strategic project's analysis.

As previously stated, the design principles for the sessions included:

1. Engage school leaders and their teams in relevant, engaging, and meaningful learning experiences that support implementation of school reform plans.
2. Design and facilitate PD that complements and aligns with that of districts and local professional organizations.
3. Engage school leaders and their teams in building relevant content knowledge and practice necessary skills in communication, teamwork, and capacity building.
4. Create opportunities for school leaders from across RI and their teams to learn from and build relationships with colleagues from across the state.

To assess the effective execution of these design principles and their impact, I will use session attendance, session feedback, coach observations of behavioral and/or communication shifts of the leader and the team, and potential impact on schools' quarterly monitoring reporting cycle with RIDE.

Attendance

As articulated in the timeline, a major shift occurred in August 2013, when the number of schools we intended to serve was significantly reduced. Out of a total of 12 schools that had pre-existing relationships with NYCLA, 8 had consistent attendance at the sessions. During the summer 2013 meetings, with NYCLA's support I advocated for teacher compensation for attending the after school sessions. I anticipated that it would be very difficult to get school teams to attend a *voluntary* monthly session. At that time, the response from RIDE was not definitive, and by the time the sessions started in October, I told participants that the sessions were voluntary. At the first session in October 2013, all 8 schools committed to attending the sessions voluntarily. The table below shows each school's attendance.

Table 3. ATL PD Attendance by school

<i>School Name</i>	<i>Grade Level</i>	<i>Principal Tenure at School</i>	<i>Number of Sessions Attended to Date (3/2014)</i>	<i>Number of Team Members (incl. Principal)</i>	<i>Accountability Classification & Years in Turnaround</i>
School A	K-5	5 th year	5 out of 5	6	Warning School
School B*	K-5	2 nd year	4 out of 5	6	Priority School (2 nd year)
School C*	K-5	1 st year	5 out of 5	6	Priority School (2 nd year)
School D*	6-8	2 nd year (1.5)	5 out of 5	4	Priority School (2 nd year)
School E	6-8	1 st year	3 out of 5	3	Warning School
School F	K-12	2 nd year	5 out of 5	4	Priority (5+ under old system)
School G*	9-12	2 nd year	4 out of 5	5	Priority (2 nd year; several phases of transformation over last 10 years)
School H	9-12	1 st year	3 out of 5	2	Commended School

*Schools participating in quarterly monitoring meetings with RIDE.

Interestingly, the district with the most publicly tenuous relationship with the state also had the most schools in ATL PD sessions. Schools from that district also had a pre-existing relationship with NYCLA through participation at the 2013 Summer Institute or the 2013 Spring Institute. One of these school leaders enthusiastically shared at the first session, “I will attend anything that NYCLA leads.”

Participant Feedback

Using NYCLA’s PD evaluation tools to assess the efficacy and relevance of each session, data were collected from both school leaders and members of their team at the conclusion of each session. Using a scale from 1-4 (1=Not at all, 2=Somewhat,

3=Moderately, 4=Significantly), session participants were asked to provide feedback on different components of the session:

1. Overall relevancy and applicability of session to school-based practice
2. Facilitation of the session
3. Session activities

Additionally, participants were asked to provide feedback through open-ended questions requiring a narrative response.

Broadly, evaluation data from October 2013 to February 2014 show that 100% of participants found the sessions to be relevant to their needs and effectively facilitated, with a rating of either a 3 or 4. With more specific, content-based questions, the feedback varied but was typically never lower than 2 (somewhat useful). Session activities that involved the teams in action planning consistently received feedback indicating high levels of satisfaction.

In the February session, I decided to integrate different questions into the evaluation to collect some midpoint data. Unfortunately, this is also the session that occurred the evening that a snow day was called in districts across the state, so there was significantly lower attendance, with only 4 of the 8 schools present and several teams missing team members. Figure 8 highlights feedback from February 2014 session attendees.

PD Midpoint Assessment (included as part of the session evaluation)	
The focus of these PD sessions is to support the work of your team in implementing your school improvement plan. To what extent have these sessions done that? 1 2 3 4 ☐ ☐ 1 9	
(1=Not at all, 2=Somewhat, 3=Moderately, 4=Significantly)	
What has been most useful? • Sharing and hearing from other teams • Transparency of discussions • Use of protocols • Team time; time for team reflection • Reflection on team purpose and roles • Meeting with the team • Collaborating with other teams	
What would have made these sessions more useful? As always, more team time.	
All evaluations consistently reference the team functioning and structured team time as the most beneficial and most impactful parts of the sessions.	

Figure 8. Summary of responses from midyear PD evaluation

In stark contrast to previous data, March 2014 data demonstrates a lower level of satisfaction from several participants; this was reflected in feedback about lack of differentiation in specific activities. Of 31 participants in the March 2014 session, 26 completed evaluation forms and between 2 and 5 participants rated different parts of the session a 2 (somewhat useful). Additionally, coaches shared that in follow-up conversations with at least 2 schools, team members shared that some of the activities did not meet teams where they were.

Coaches' Assessment of Sessions' Impact

As previously stated, the school-based coaches were a critical part of engaging participants and establishing connections between what the teams were working on in the school and how we designed the PD sessions. The interview questions were designed not to make direct links between the PD sessions and the teams' work but to identify possible themes around team behaviors. In an interview of 4 coaches (including data from my own experience as a coach), I focused on 4 main areas outlined in Table 4.

Table 4. Summary of coach interviews about impact of PD sessions

<i>Impact of sessions on plan implementation</i>	• Realization that plan on paper was not enough; the need for a vision statement to guide plan implementation • Opportunity to get focused (get out of the weeds of multiple initiatives) ◦ Helped figure out what data were actually relevant. • For the schools not in transformation, it has been difficult to see impact.
<i>Observable changes in team functioning</i>	• The way the school leader communicates with team; explaining what change looks like – the team can now do that too • Team can identify own strengths as a team; gained an understanding of what a team actually is. • In one case, the team changed completely. Creating a vision and getting focused forced the team to reevaluate the type of team necessary to implement the plan. • For some teams, utilizing meeting structures (norms, agendas, goals, roles, etc.)
<i>Integration of coaching and PD sessions</i>	• Session on team purpose and implications for the team was most powerful; it gave me a jumping off point as a coach. • Observing the team at the sessions gave me a vehicle to work with the team on the impact of their team behaviors on other teams at the school. • Taking the conversations directly back – how the team frames change, sets purpose, understanding of each person's role • Some of it has been difficult to translate because of the team's interpretation of where it is developmentally.
<i>Likelihood of sustaining changes in team practice</i>	• For some, they have a mandate to meet with the plans for transformation, and the tools help them carry that out. I would hope that they see they have better questions and new understandings of themselves and are able to move these practices to other teams in the school. • Impact beyond June – the only one that wasn't as relevant was the data session because they were already too steeped in data. The move to the awareness of and focus on the team will last.

External Informal Feedback

I also received feedback through informal communication channels. Leadership from PRN/CLEE (members of advisory group) shared that they were hearing very positive feedback about the sessions from teacher leaders with whom they were working. Specifically, they made reference to “language of commitment in action planning.” Additionally, one district superintendent shared appreciation for the work we were doing

with two of the district's schools, particularly around building the capacity of the team to lead change.

RIDE's Emerging Assessment of Session Impact

This final source of data begins to disclose the emerging value of the sessions to RIDE. Although RIDE did not conduct any formal assessment of the sessions, I shared session agendas and attendance with the Office of Transformation simply for record-keeping purposes. As previously stated, we advocated for appropriate compensation for school teams who attended the sessions but were not clear on whether that would happen. In January 2014, RIDE's Office of Transformation formally requested attendance lists of participating schools in order to process appropriate compensation to each school. While it is unclear why RIDE made the decision to compensate schools for their teams' attendance, it served as a data point to analyze further.

The second data point from RIDE reflects feedback shared at a planning meeting between RIDE and NYCLA leadership. The team of facilitators leading the quarterly monitoring progress meetings shared with the Office of Transformation that they noted a "marked difference between the teams attending the PD sessions and those that did not." This difference was demonstrated in the team "being on the same page, real clarity about what they were trying to do and why they were doing it." Although it did not necessarily translate into successful implementation in all cases, there was a noticeable difference in the teams' cohesion.

The third data point came from the quarterly monitoring progress meetings, where Focus and Priority schools present their progress to a representative from RIDE's Office of Transformation and the Transformation Officer of the district. Of the 8 schools that

attended the sessions, 4 schools were classified as Focus and Priority and participated in the quarterly monitoring process. In preparation for each meeting, each team prepared a “data dashboard” highlighting specific goals or interventions with attached evidence of progress in three areas: Implementation progress (adult behaviors), Impact progress (student behaviors), and the infrastructure that supported the changes (RIDE quarterly dashboard). Progress was indicated on the dashboard with green, yellow, and red highlights besides each intervention (green for full implementation, yellow for in progress, and red for no progress).

Each of the 4 schools focused on interventions that were specific to their plans. In the first cycle of meetings (September/October), all schools indicated areas where progress was not being made and/or implementation had not yet started. In the last quarterly cycle (February/March 2014), all schools reflected interventions being in progress or in full implementation (yellow and green).

Finally, each meeting outlined specific next steps to be revisited in the next cycle. These include next steps for the school, support from the district, and support from the state in implementation. The written feedback and articulated next steps highlighted in Table 5 point to some of the differences between each school’s progress.

Table 5. Summary of key feedback to schools participating in quarterly monitoring meetings.

<i>School</i>	<i>Level</i>	<i>Number of Sessions Attended to Date (3/2014)</i>	<i>Feedback from (February/March) Quarterly Monitoring Meetings</i>
B	K-5 (large school)	4 out of 5	• Refining intervention structures to maximize efficiency • Collecting perception data from staff re: interventions • Expanded use of data by staff and leadership team
C	K-5 (small school)	5 out of 5	Focused on sustainability and planning for next year
D	6-8 (large school)	5 out of 5	Notable shift in feedback from Fall to Winter • From a focus on addressing resistance and action planning to targeted feedback on instructional interventions and data collection
G	9-12 (large school)	4 out of 5	• Building value around collaboration • Distributing leadership more broadly • Ensuring staff understanding and purpose of certain interventions

The feedback varied between schools, and it is evident that some teams are in full implementation and working on the nuances of data collection and planning for next year, while others are still managing issues of staff understanding and buy-in around some of the interventions.

Where the Project Met and Did Not Meet Its Intended Goals (through March 2014)

To outline where the results indicate success, I will focus on application and impact of the PD design principles.

1. Engage school leaders and their teams in relevant, engaging, and meaningful learning experiences that support implementation of school reform plans.

Leading indicators that sessions met this design principle:

- Largely positive end-of-session feedback, particularly regarding team action planning and team effectiveness work

- Consistent attendance for 6 out of 8 schools; every team attended at least 3 out of 5 sessions through March 2014.
- Coach observations indicate that for most schools, work from the PD sessions impacted behaviors back in the building, including leaders' communication of vision and team norms and practices.
- Early feedback from RIDE's Office of Transformation suggests that the sessions supported the development of a cohesive team with a shared purpose.
- Session feedback was applied to following session and shared with participants.

Leading indicators that sessions did not meet this design principle:

- Data from RIDE's quarterly monitoring meetings indicates that some teams have not been successful at translating alignment in vision and purpose of leadership team to staff. There is little evidence of impact on implementation, particularly with School G.
- Feedback from the March 12th session indicates a lack of differentiation for teams that may be more developed.
- Drop off in attendance of two teams.

2. Design and facilitate PD that complements and aligns with that of districts and local professional organizations.

Leading indicators that sessions met this design principle:

- Content of sessions included addressing school leaders' communication of vision and action planning for generating staff buy-in.
- PD design allowed for experiential learning experiences, involving the team in direct application of team functioning and data collection concepts.
- Feedback from one district expressed satisfaction for the PD, particularly in supporting team capacity building.

Leading indicators that sessions did not meet this design principle:

- Data were not collected from all districts represented by participating schools.

- Absence of ongoing alignment with local professional organizations
- Up to this point, data from PD sessions has not been shared with any district.

3. Engage school leaders and their teams in building relevant content knowledge and practicing necessary skills in communication, teamwork, and capacity-building.

Leading indicators that sessions met this design principle:

- Coach observations indicated that teams were able to translate session experience into school-based practices. This included team meeting norming, use of protocols, and agendas.
- RIDE feedback indicates that teams participating in quarterly monitoring sessions and attending the PD sessions demonstrated a marked difference in clarity of team purpose and vision.

Leading indicators that sessions did not meet this design principle:

- Drop off in attendance of two teams indicates that this type of deep learning may not have been happening for those teams.
- Coach observations indicate that teams not in transformation did not demonstrate a change in practice.

4. Create opportunities for school leaders from across RI and their teams to learn from and build relationships with colleagues from across the state.

Leading indicators that sessions met this design principle:

- Teams openly shared practices, challenges, and questions with each other. Feedback from participants also expressed interest in doing that more often.
- Mixed groupings of schools and roles received positive feedback.

Leading indicators that sessions did not meet this design principle:

- Activities were focused on sharing practice; there were not sufficient opportunities for collective problem solving.

The design principles provide a useful framework for organizing result data from the PD sessions; additionally, gathering data from multiple sources was important in understanding the sessions' value and impact on different stakeholders. It is with this notion of value that I looked towards Mark Moore's strategic triangle (1995) to analyze the results of the strategic project.

Strategic Project Analysis

The question of success in this strategic project has been a difficult one to answer. While there were several leading indicators of success from the data collected and in measuring against design principles, there were also several data points that indicate that the sessions' impact fell short of my intended goals. The ATL Professional Development series is one of a myriad of professional development opportunities in Rhode Island. As an initiative out of RIDE's Office of Transformation, it had the potential to be viewed as simply another PD offering from the state. Proving its value and assessing its impact in relation to different stakeholders in the RI education sector (state, district, professional organizations, and schools) was a critical focus of this work.

Mark Moore's *strategic triangle* (Moore, 1995) provides a lens for analysis of the sessions' value creation; this is particularly poignant as we consider the broader implications of the strategic project results for other systems seeking ways to best support schools in transformation.



Figure 8. The strategic triangle. From Moore, M. and Khagram, S. (2004).

To understand the use of the strategic triangle, it is important to note that it brings together three domains: 1) a shared sense of the value that is being produced, 2) ensuring legitimacy and support from those in the authorizing environment, and 3) the capacity necessary to operationalize (Moore & Khagram, 2004). Sustaining all three domains concurrently is critical to effective strategy implementation. “The strategic problem for public managers thus came to be: imagine and articulate a vision of public value that can command legitimacy and support, and is operationally doable in the domain for which you have responsibility” (Moore & Khagram, 2004, p. 9). My role as Lead Designer and Facilitator for the ATL PD sessions gave me a unique opportunity to engage in and lead a process where I had to understand value through the lenses of multiple stakeholders, gain enough legitimacy to get a consistent group of participants at the sessions, and consider the implications for not only operationalizing the sessions but building the capacity of local actors beyond the NYCLA team.

In an analysis of the project’s *value proposition*, the design process, session evaluations, and quarterly monitoring results offer insights into the extent to which the

PD program generated value for different stakeholders. This level of analysis explores the strategy's ability to address the state's mandate for transformation and ensure that sessions continue to be relevant and bring value to the schools by meeting each school's short- and long-term needs. To assess the *operational capacity* necessary to execute and sustain the project, I've included an analysis of session design and delivery and engagement and training of RI-based coaches. Third is an analysis of my capacity as Lead Designer and Coach, and that of NYCLA as an organization, to *engage the necessary stakeholders* to ensure support for the sessions during the 2013-2014 school year but also, potentially, beyond the duration of the RttT contract.

In the analysis that follows, I engage with Moore's *strategic triangle* at multiple levels (school, district, state) and over time. This multidimensional application of the framework effectively captures the iterative nature of the strategic project as well as the importance of understanding the dimensions (public value, legitimacy and support, and operational capacity) as dynamic, rather than a set of static conditions for implementation.

Value Creation

As previously articulated, the initial design was driven largely by the needs articulated by various stakeholders: for RIDE, it was to support schools in implementation of their school reform plans; for the schools, it was to help build the team capacity for implementation and ways of assessing progress; for districts and some professional organizations, it was to build capacity of school leaders; and for the RI-based coaches, it was to support the work of in-school coaching. Ultimately, the emerging need of the schools and the coaches' observations informed the design most.

Below is an analysis of value creation for each of the stakeholders that engaged in the design, delivery, and evaluation of the sessions.

For schools: Attendance at the ATL Professional Development sessions is the first clear indicator of the sessions' value. Given that sessions were voluntary, the consistency in attendance speaks to the relevancy, or the "creation of value," of the session design over the course of the year. The initial data collected from the Summer Institute, RIDE, district officials, and the NYCLA Advisory Board pointed to a need for PD that created a space for teams to engage with new content and also practice doing that work *together*. Additionally, to sustain the relevancy or value of the sessions I applied feedback from participants around content and facilitation (types of activities), as well as consulting with coaches between sessions to discover any important themes coming up at the schools. In effect, the PD sessions strived to embody Drago-Severson's (2008) four pillars of adult learning: teaming, providing leadership roles, collegial inquiry, and mentoring (in this case, coaching). While each team's experience of these adult learning principles varied, the PD sessions were designed to consistently integrate these four pillars.

During the first session in October, with school leaders only, I engaged them in an informal assessment of their leadership and leadership teams' needs. This opened up an opportunity for some collective value creation and ownership over the sessions. At the beginning of each subsequent session we shared the goals of the session and what data shaped those goals. Most schools remained engaged because of the level of responsiveness and level of transparency around design as well as sessions that resulted in actionable next steps, tools for use back in school and with other teams, and opportunities for the team to practice how to work together. For many, value creation

was immediate; schools could leave each session with a new strategy, tool, or framework to use with teams in the school, as well as a concrete next step in implementation. Schools could also receive follow-up, site-based support in implementation from their coaches.

It was also clear to schools that without alignment in how the team was working towards the goals and, in most cases, how they were *talking* about the work, engaging the rest of the school in the work of implementation would be extremely challenging if not impossible. “In the absence of a functional senior leadership team, there may be isolated pockets of teaming and collaboration, but there won’t be a functioning *system* of collaboration and teamwork” (Curtis & City, 2012, p. 39). Beyond allowing us as coaches to observe the teams, the sessions also created an opportunity for school leaders to assess their own teams. For some leaders, the necessity of changing the makeup of the teams became clear through the interactions at the sessions. It became apparent that “not everyone is cut out to thrive in conditions of ambiguity and adversity” (McComb, 2014). While this was not an intended goal of the sessions, it allowed for, as one leader put it, “making some courageous decisions.” For some teams, using the team functioning checklists and engaging in certain protocols granted the school leaders and members of the team “permission” to address areas of concern.

My intent was to engage in another round of collective planning with school leaders in the January session; however, the session was cancelled due to snow. That session could have created an important intervention point for the two schools whose attendance had dropped off. For these two schools, I assumed value creation based on my knowledge of the flexibility of the tools and protocols we were using. However,

neither school was in transformation and, as previously shared, the sessions were designed specifically to serve transformation schools. While the content was applicable to any school in any improvement process, I didn't communicate that value to those schools in an intentional way, whether within or outside of the formal sessions. This points to the need to ensure continuous value creation for stakeholders through various methods of communication, more effective leveraging of the coaches, and by broadening the language I used in framing the sessions.

In the case of these two schools, they may have also benefitted from differentiated facilitation during the sessions. These two schools were also the only two schools with teams of assistant principals; the other 6 teams were made up of largely teacher leaders. This distinction in team composition was not something I had given consideration to, but through this analysis, signals a need to explore the difference in learning needs of a team of administrations vs. teacher leaders.

For RIDE: The notion of communicating value in different ways to different stakeholders was also apparent when presenting the PD design to RIDE's Office of Transformation. Its foremost priority was to support the schools in implementing their school reform plans, which represented their investment as a client seeking value. RIDE was also working to ensure that the transformation process they designed was successfully executed and served as a way for school teams to lead change, not just serve as a compliance exercise. In this way, RIDE was receiving value as a client, but would also come to leverage the value produced for the schools.

Additionally, there was the question of sustainability; and though defined broadly, I understood it as locating a "home" for the sessions. While the implementation of school

improvement plans remained a top priority and underpinned the sessions, once we physically got people to the sessions, it was important that we maintained the value proposition to RIDE *and* integrated what was valuable to the schools.

As Lead Designer and Facilitator, I felt a constant tension between seemingly opposed value propositions: what was of value to RIDE and what was of value to the schools. Although RIDE and the schools shared a common purpose in implementing the plan, shifting adult behaviors to impact student outcomes (demonstrable gains on the NECAP, boosts in attendance and graduation rates) and the immediate needs of the school often trumped the long-term vision of full plan implementation. This dissonance is important because school leaders need support in being able to engage in both short- and long-term strategic thinking and understand the implications of both. My resolution for this was through the design, by building in opportunities for teams to look at the bigger picture (i.e., Vision for June 2014) and also end each session with a commitment to a next step that would be completed by our next session (approximately one month later). Additionally, the teams consistently explored implications for their own leadership, behaviors, and practices when discussing action plans. It was this combination of processes that impacted RIDE's assessment of the 4 teams' apparent cohesion in purpose at the quarterly monitoring meetings and perhaps even influenced its decision to shift resources to compensate participating schools for attending the PD sessions.

Finally, while the 4 teams' progress from one quarterly monitoring meeting to the next is not solely attributable to the sessions, our design engaged the teams in a constant process of not only looking at long-term goals but also planning for short-term outcomes and responding to emerging needs. Moving towards improvement with an eye to

sustainability is “the ultimate adaptive challenge” (Fullan, 2005, p. 14); leadership must move quickly to create a plan with immediate “wins” and long-term results, often with immediate wins being the priority and only broad expectations and assumptions about how long-term changes might be sustained.

While it is yet unclear what programmatic sustainability looks like for this type of PD, it is the *type* of support that has created value. Leading in this way is not innate, and it calls for a deliberate and purposeful look at how to cultivate team leadership. At one particular session we focused on task-driven versus purpose-driven teams, which resonated for many leaders. There was a realization that leading change was mostly about leading *people*.

The team professional development is one of the aspects of school support that RIDE considers to be key to sustainability beyond transformation. “Developing the capacity of the team is a sustainable structure because it ensures shared ownership and ensures that the work continues beyond the tenure of the school leader” (Sarah Anderson, RIDE Office of Transformation, Interview on February 14, 2014). This brings up the question of how support is defined once schools approach accountability deadlines for proposed outcomes. With several of our participating schools in the 2nd year of their 3 years of transformation, I am left with the question of how success of plan implementation will be measured. Will it be enough to demonstrate evidence of changes in adult behavior if student outcomes are not sufficiently met? This question of accountability is one I will explore further in the Implications section of the capstone.

The question of sustaining value creation for all stakeholders is one that requires careful consideration moving forward. With teams in different developmental spaces, the

type of support they need has become far more individualized. This was true even this year for some schools. Many teams are moving into the “muck” of implementation, facing a variety of challenges, including the need for targeted instructional support, developing assessment literacy, becoming data-driven, and providing differentiated professional development for their staff. While the work of the team *on the team* continues, they are moving into a different learning space, and responding to these needs will be a critical plan of any implementation support moving forward.

Building and Sustaining Capacity

To analyze the project’s results in relation to capacity I will focus on the following elements: RIDE’s capacity to support the PD sessions; the capacity of the coaches and their experience and relationships with school teams; and finally, my own capacity (former teacher and school leader, current graduate student with access to Harvard Graduate School of Education’s (“HGSE”) resources, member of the NYCLA team with access to their body of work and resources, and the benefit of being a learner in the Residency year).

RIDE’s capacity: RIDE’s role in the development of this strategic project was reflected their role as an entry point to the work and providing the initial authority to connect the sessions to the School Reform Plans; it has not included capacity to support outreach, design, delivery, or evaluation of the sessions. While RIDE’s direct support could have created more direct relationships with specific districts and subsequently attracted more participants to the sessions, it remains an unknown whether this could have happened. NYCLA’s work in the first year of the RttT contract garnered respect from many educators in RI, providing the organization with some level of freedom but

more importantly, trust. NYCLA's credibility in RI granted me the flexibility to operate "under the radar"; I was able to maintain full autonomy over the content and facilitation of the sessions and explore what support leaders and teams needed in implementation. This ability to "operate under the radar" is a benefit of engaging an external organization in implementing a system strategy through site-specific support.

Finally, having a group of 12 instead of a group of 99 schools created a very different dynamic. All of the schools shared a connection to the style, language, and coaching of NYCLA. I worked with many of them closely during the 2013 Summer Institute. This access to school-level data about their behaviors, practices, strengths, and challenges certainly allowed for a level of transparency and depth that may not have been possible with a different set and/or larger number of schools.

Coach capacity: An unanticipated but important factor in the strategic project was the evolving capacity of the 4 NYCLA-trained coaches.²⁵ As former principals and superintendents, the coaches had extensive experience and relationships in Rhode Island. In June and July 2013, I interviewed 4 of the coaches (including myself) and learned about what they saw as the needs across leadership teams from their first year of coaching; I also tapped into their knowledge of the edu-political landscape in RI. I learned about which districts had been particularly challenging to work with and inquired about ways in which they had managed these relationships as coaches. The RI coach training that started the previous year led by Michelle Jarney, Senior Director of Leadership Support Programs, and Sonia Bu, Master Coach, not only did a tremendous

²⁵ There was a fifth coach who was involved via phone.

job of building the coaches' capacity to coach and facilitate but also created a space for the 5 of us to learn together and gain cohesion.

Initially, I asked coaches for their feedback on drafts of the design. I also invited them to attend the sessions that included the teams; we thought it would be a great opportunity to observe the teams in a different space. By the third session however, I knew that the coaches' role was more than as observers; two critical areas of capacity quickly surfaced: the need for strong table facilitation during activities and the collection of low-inference observations from team activities at the sessions. Although the sessions included structured activities, often involving protocols with built-in time limits, there were times when teams needed support to keep the conversation focused on *the team learning* and to avoid getting into action planning until it was time to do so. Edmondson (2012) points to the importance of this balance, suggesting that "to excel in a complex and uncertain business environment [like a turnaround situation], people need to both work *and* learn together" (p. 1). For some teams the discipline of focusing on the team learning was a challenge, and it helped to have their coach frame the team learning as critical to their action planning and even bring forth evidence from their observations at the school. Getting this type of data from the coaches also served as a reminder of the need for transparency about each activity's purpose and connection to implementation. It supported the session's focus on building capacity beyond the school leader, with an explicit focus on the leadership teams.

My capacity: Finally, my own capacity, experience, and network of resources gave me credibility with my team at NYCLA, RIDE, the coaches, and the participating schools. My ability to share anecdotes of experiences in teaching and in school

leadership and connect to the challenges leaders and their teams were facing was really important in creating a safe space for learning. Although I couldn't directly connect with their experience of transforming a low-performing school in RI, having previously taught in low-performing schools in Providence and in NYC, and leading a school with both new and veteran staff, I understood the magnitude of the challenges in changing adult behaviors.

As a member of NYCLA's NI team and current HGSE student, I had access to tools and resources to support the design and facilitation of the sessions. Along with a significant research base around professional development, adult learning, and supporting school improvement, the experience of designing and facilitating alongside the team during Summer Institute provided a quick ramp up into the organization's work in RI. This included the history of NYCLA's relationships in RI, the changes to the work since the contract started, and expectations of my work. Whether in-person, via webex, or phone, I consulted with members of the team in designing sessions that tapped into what NYCLA had already developed and also ensured alignment with the organization's design process. The support from the NYCLA team was consistent and grounded in a deep understanding of the needs of the schools.

The question of my capacity to work without the physical presence of a team is one I will explore further in the Implications section, but it also impacted session delivery. Despite having multiple table facilitators present at the November session, the design was not as effective as it could have been. While the variety of activities allowed for important data collection that informed future sessions, many teams felt rushed from one activity to the next. That experience pushed me to make more explicit requests for

support, narrow the focus of the sessions to focus on teaming, and recognize that my capacity to be an effective facilitator depended on being able to collaborate more effectively with the coaches. In that moment, I had to redefine *who* I considered to be my team. When I started collaborating formally with one of the coaches to co-design and co-facilitate the sessions, the increase in capacity was quite evident for me in both the design process and in session facilitation. It also created an important opportunity to build local capacity to create this type of adult learning space. In considering the possibility of serving 99 schools, building local capacity in design and facilitation emerges as a critical strategy and one I will explore further in the Implications of the strategic project.

Identifying and Engaging Sources of Legitimacy and Support

The identification of the sources of legitimacy and support was one of the most important parts of the design process; it was also the area of my strategic project that I assessed to be least successful in relation to its initial goals. In early June, my strategy was to get to know as many educators in the state, district, school, and local organizations as possible. As a leader who believes in the power of relationships to lead change, I was confident that once I engaged with different stakeholders, I would gain their support and access to schools and local resources.

Local PD providers: I quickly learned that NYCLA was a direct competitor to many of the current school leadership programs. This was true even though my research demonstrated that NYCLA was providing a markedly different service in both its Aspiring Principal Program design and the PD I was planning. In fact, the existing programs either did not have the capacity to provide those services or had a different expertise. I learned that several of our participating schools had relationships with or

were already participating in those other programs, and there were concerns that organizations would “lose” those schools.

It quickly became important to be far more explicit about how what NYCLA was doing was, in fact, *different* from what other organizations were providing. While Murphy’s (2008) emphasizes that turnarounds require the “right type” of leader, I proposed that with the proper support, leaders *and their teams* could learn to lead differently. Having had the experience of designing for the Summer Institute and working with the NI team early on, I was able to develop some language to articulate what was different. Additionally, some of the positive feedback from teams during the Summer Institute highlighted what made it different. Ultimately, it was the focus on providing principals and their teams with experiences that allowed them to speak differently, behave differently, and ultimately, think differently that defined the distinction. (See Artifact 1 for Marketing Tool Describing What Makes ATL PD Different) Essentially, the NYCLA sessions could provide a space to *practice* different ways of leading and learning. The work of engaging the authorizing environment made the value of the sessions far more evident.

Districts: Districts across the state had different relationships with RIDE; some worked in partnership with the state while others saw the state as infringing on local control. I spent the months of June and July reaching out to several local districts and received a response from 1 district; in October I made a conscious choice to focus on the stakeholders who were responsive and stopped direct outreach to other districts. That choice was driven mainly by my assessment that most of the schools had granted me legitimacy and support and that support was enough to produce high quality PD. Upon

analysis, although I made no assumptions about districts' capacity to support transformation schools, my offer of state-initiated PD support could have been communicated differently. Perhaps leveraging NYCLA's position as an external organization and legitimacy with the schools we were already coaching could have provided a different entry point.

My analysis of the impact of my decision to not pursue certain districts focuses less on having more schools attend the sessions and more on the possible lost opportunity to share what I learned in the PD sessions and impact how districts can support transformation schools. The representation of NYCLA's engagement strategy (See Figure 9 below) indicates where I also did not sufficiently engage the authorizing environment, specifically the local organizations and the districts. It is important to note that unions are not included among the stakeholders, which I will discuss in more detail below.

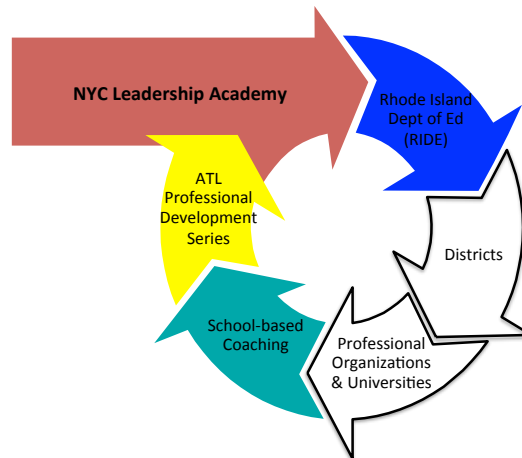


Figure 9. Observation of NYCLA's engagement strategy in Rhode Island during Residency.

RIDE: Gaining RIDE's support was important for the legitimacy of the sessions. This happened in two ways: I shared the plan with leaders at RIDE and requested their feedback and input; and I framed the sessions as a support for school reform plan implementation. While this signaled alignment with RIDE's priorities and I had their support to carry out the sessions, there were limits to the benefits of the legitimacy we gained through RIDE. Fortunately I was able to gain some legitimacy and support through NYCLA's reputation in RI through its previous work with schools.

Unions: Although a key part of the authorizing environment, I did not engage with leadership at the teachers' unions. While there was no longer an administrator's union in any district in RI, the teachers' unions were particularly strong and often represented areas where transformation principals faltered in leading change. Given the large number of teacher leaders who participated in the sessions, engaging unions could have provided a vehicle for at least sharing awareness of the types of PD from which teacher leaders could benefit. My engagement with the unions was limited to those teacher leaders who were also chapter chairs or delegates. While this represented some engagement, it was not sufficient to make claims about gaining union support.

Personal authority and legitimacy: The question of personal authority is one I will explore further in the Implications section of this capstone, but it offers important insights into when I chose to self-authorize, what experiences I chose to highlight, and when I chose to allow my ongoing work in RI to demonstrate my legitimacy. Undoubtedly, those choices were made based on with whom I engaged.

At NYCLA, I was granted a high level of legitimacy because of my experience as an Aspiring Principal in the program in NYC and my success as a school leader.

However, I was extremely cautious about that legitimacy for several reasons. I was coming to the organization as a resident with a lot to learn about how to support schools through a state-level strategy and an external organization that was geographically distant from the schools it was serving. Also, I was joining a well-established team that had spent the past year building relationships and laying the groundwork in RI and had faced significant challenges in doing so. In many ways, I saw myself as a resident with a lot to prove and extremely high standards to meet because of NYCLA's reputation and my own experience as a school leader who benefitted from their support.

The work to build relationships with RI-based coaches to gain their support for the sessions was developmental and did not always feel fruitful. Because they had a year of training with NYCLA and were familiar with its work, I brought that organizational legitimacy with me. However, it was clear to me from our first meeting that this group would need to see evidence of my capacity to coach and to lead the PD sessions. This is a particularly poignant example of where the three areas of the strategic triangle are mutually dependent: to gain legitimacy with the coaches I needed to demonstrate my capacity and add value to their work. It was also a group that wanted to be engaged through their experience and knowledge of the RI context. It was not until our February coaching meeting that I felt that I had become "one of them." This was true with the schools as well. I gained legitimacy through my facilitation and team coaching in the Summer Institute, but delivering on that throughout the school year in the sessions had yet to be seen.

Finally, the area of legitimacy I drew on least to gain support was my connection to HGSE as a doctoral candidate. As someone new to RI, I was concerned about the

different interpretations of being viewed as a graduate student, including a lack of experience or less commitment to the work. However, it became important in my relationship with RIDE once I learned that the Office of Transformation used *Strategy in Action* (Curtis & City, 2011) in designing its transformation strategy and school-based support as articulated in the RttT application process. Sharing that connection gave me greater access to the thinking behind the transformation strategy, and I was also able to leverage that access in the strategic project and in writing this capstone.

Application of the strategic triangle at multiple levels of a school system and over time allowed me to:

- engage in continuous analysis of how a PD strategy's value creation can be both developmental and stakeholder-specific;
- experience the importance of concurrently building current and future-focused capacity where needs are constantly changing; and
- recognize the ways that legitimacy and support can be leveraged to engage with different actors in the authorizing environment based on value created for each.

V. Implications for Site, Sector, and Self

Implications for Site

As I propose implications for future work, I consider NYCLA's evolution into an organization that not only prepares leaders for NYC schools but has become part of the national landscape in leadership preparation and development. Currently, the organization describes itself as being at a crossroads, working to establish its identity and brand as an organization. NYCLA is focused on building its internal capacity, aligning its national and local work, ensuring its financial sustainability, articulating its theory of change, and defining its stance as a leader in the sector. As it considers the complex question of impact, this strategic project, while small in scope, highlights important considerations for NYCLA.

1. Develop an ongoing assessment tool for turnaround leadership teams aligned to the Leadership Performance Planning Worksheet (LPPW).

In its Aspiring Principal Program, NYCLA uses the LPPW as a diagnostic and formative assessment tool in its leadership preparation and ongoing coaching. It also prepares school leaders to diagnose in order to effectively create action plans when entering turnaround contexts. "Too often, team functioning is viewed as peripheral to improving instructional quality and learning for all students" (Curtis & City, 2011). Given the importance of the team's cohesion and overall functioning in relation to plan implementation, a diagnostic and formative tool is necessary to assess team functioning/effectiveness as well as the leadership team's capacity in relation to the team's purpose (or its implementation plan). This can be done using a combination of already existing tools for team assessment and NYCLA's current competency

framework, the LPPW, so that the team's competencies are aligned to those of the school leader. This assessment tool creates an opportunity to align NYCLA resources to specific schools and coaches with certain skill sets, and it can highlight areas for coaching and early interventions, design professional development similar to that in RI, and provide the school leader with data to consider as he/she sets direction, develops people, and redesigns the organization (Fullan, 2009). Given NYCLA's current push to articulate an organizational theory of change, the team assessment tool may provide an opportunity to test the connection between the health of the team and the success of implementation.

2. Leverage the coaching to provide differentiated support for schools and use PD as leverage for coaching.

My role as a coach and as designer and facilitator of the PD sessions offered me a unique perspective in that I was completely grounded in the context of the schools' work. When the other coaches shared data, I shared a frame for what it looked like; the standards used in coaching were reflected in the sessions and helped sustain a common language, and the data from coaching and the sessions informed each other, creating important connections for coaches and participants. There was tremendous benefit for us as coaches to learn and problem-solve together in our trainings and contribute to the design and facilitation of the sessions. The strategic project demonstrated that leveraging the coaching to directly inform the content and process of the professional development sessions generated more value and relevancy for participants. For some coaches, the sessions "jump started" conversations that may not have emerged as quickly or as clearly in the coaching relationship, and also provided them with tools to use in following up with the teams they coached.

In many ways, the sessions also provided embedded professional development for the coaches; the tools, protocols, and design were all accessible to be further modified for individual schools. Admittedly, I did question the notion of confidentiality in the coaching relationships, given the success of using data from coaching to inform professional development. While the data sharing was made transparent to leaders at each session, I am left with the question of the implications of complete confidentiality when trying to inform a strategy designed to support schools' emerging needs; it seems that we might be able to differentiate data to inform support from other types of data. In Implication #4 below, I explore the ways in which NYCLA can more effectively partner with states and districts. Not addressed fully in this capstone are the ways in which coaching can inform and/or support the relationship between districts and schools.

3. Explore the distinctions and capacity necessary to support different types of teams.

Through the analysis of the teams' participation there was a clear distinction in engagement, as measured by attendance, between the teams of teacher leaders and the teams of assistant principals. While further exploration would be necessary to understand the reasons for the difference in attendance to the sessions, this data also signals a need to bring attention to the team composition in assessing the team's learning needs. Given NYCLA's increased focus on team coaching, identifying and effectively supporting teams' needs is an important consideration for future work.

4. Leveraging expertise, resources, and emergent relationships to shift the context.

In many ways, through my strategic project, NYCLA was able to implement the professional development strategy in RI without engaging the districts as partners; in fact,

one might argue that NYCLA carried out the professional development strategy through RIDE's Office of Transformation fairly independently. Operating within a context with few systemic partnerships between the state and districts, it is not surprising that the PD sessions happened largely without district involvement. While good work still got done, the absence of formal partnerships has made the question of sustainability difficult to answer. If NYCLA's goal is to effect system-level change, the work of engaging across levels of the system must happen alongside program delivery. The implementation of the professional development sessions did not demonstrate "the commitment to changing context at all levels," as Fullan (2005) states in his sustainability framework. As an organization, our biggest strength has been in the impact we have at the school-level, through coaching, or through PD such as the Summer Institute.

Because partnering with districts was not absolutely necessary to carry out the professional development, much of that leverage with school leaders and their teams remains untapped. With old relationships strengthened and new ones developed in schools across various districts, the RttT no-cost extension in RI creates an opportunity to use other vehicles to reach and engage with district leadership in ways that will translate into effective support for schools. More specifically, I wonder if the quarterly monitoring meetings for transformation schools provide a structure for NYCLA to engage with RIDE and the districts to align resources and support and create a stronger relationship between coaching and professional development and plan implementation.

Implications for Sector

My strategic project results and analysis point to several key implications for the sector as it continues to grapple with the challenge of turnaround and effectively supporting schools in that process.

1. *Targeting resources for continuous support of school leadership teams is critical to all schools.*

Along with leadership development, the strategy of focusing on the team has been demonstrated to have value in the team's ability to implement a plan. Taking on team learning directly not only makes a statement about expectations from school leadership, it makes organizational learning more than just theoretical lip service. It grounds the work of school improvement in a collective beyond the school leader. "It is deeply ironic that a skill students need to ensure their future opportunities is one that the adults responsible for their education often do not possess and have not had the opportunity to learn" (Curtis & City, 2012, p. 38). While this strategic project focused mostly on transformation schools, the findings are applicable to all schools and their leadership teams. While RIDE has indicated that teams are critical to sustainability and that team cohesion has been apparent with several of our participating transformation schools, I wonder what might be necessary to expand this type of support beyond both transformation schools and RttT funding. The existence of School Improvement Teams at all schools is a possible entry point for the focus on teaming. My experience with the ATL PD sessions highlights the power of teacher teams to not just impact school-wide strategy, but to be key capacity builders in their buildings.

2. *Embodying "transformation as an era, not an event" (McComb, 2014).*

An organization in transformation is guided by clear parameters around time and implementation; at the same time, transformation is more than a 3-year plan. William McComb, CEO of Liz Claiborne from 2006-2013, points to being in turnaround for his 7 years as the company's leader. RIDE recognizes this in its focus on adult behaviors as reflected in the school reform plans and in its articulation of transformation as a process. However, there is dissonance between that approach and the 3-year timeline transformation, no matter the magnitude of the challenge.

Concurrently, there is also a set of skills and aptitudes required for transformational leadership; most are reflected in the RI Turnaround Leaders Super Standards and are developmental. As one small but prominent example, schools need support from state and district levels in “focusing and helping concentrate on the essentials” (Murphy, 2008, p. 172). Similarly, schools need support in understanding what a high leverage strategy looks like and how to identify that within their plan. The current School Reform Plan (SRP) process expects that school leaders will be able to accurately “filter” and focus on the highest leverage strategies while holding them accountable to full implementation. At the end of this strategic project, I am left with the question of how a system-level leader can both create a sense of urgency given the real impact on the lives of students and develop an understanding of the developmental nature of transformation work. It seems that the process outlined by RIDE helps to create that sense of urgency and the focus on adult behaviors recognizes the developmental nature of transformation. However, for a system of schools to do this effectively requires more nuanced support. Leveraging the expertise of external organizations such as NYCLA, who can make meaning of the state's strategy and can build capacity at the local level

(district, union, or professional organizations) to implement, is part of setting the conditions for success.

RIDE's recognition of the developmental process must also be coupled with a similar understanding at the district level. Although the monitoring process is designed by and facilitated by the state, ultimately, the districts hold school leaders accountable for outcomes through the evaluation process. Without a clear sense of what accountability looks like at both the district and state level, this seemingly developmental process can lose its intended purpose.

3. Alignment between state and district strategy is a critical component to systemic transformation.

With a state-driven process such as the School Reform Plans and time-bound funding like RttT, state-driven change is both insufficient and unsustainable. With locally controlled budgets, professional development, and school-based support, it is critical that districts and state agencies develop a relationship to support schools. While RIDE has recognized the value of these partnerships, the political challenges around authority are strong.

FSG Social Impact Advisors (2010) highlights the importance of relationships between districts and states: "close partnerships and alignment need to be transformed into partnerships based on mutual goals and shared accountability." Even in the most ideal context, alignment between the state's and districts' expectations of how to support and hold schools accountable is critical, let alone supporting the transformation of almost 1/3 of the schools in the state. While the formal structures for developing this alignment do not always exist, the transformation process creates opportunities to begin this conversation. For example, in RI, the quarterly monitoring progress meetings, which

include a representative from the state and the district, are an important opportunity to come together in service of school transformation. Aligning around school strengths, needs, resources, and support would couple the current environment of high accountability with that of high support. Elmore's (2009) principle of reciprocity is one that is particularly apt in the role states and districts can play: "for every unit of performance I demand of you, I have a responsibility to provide you with a unit of capacity to produce that performance" (p. 15).

As an example, states and districts can combine resources to support specific interventions or, more importantly, play an advocacy role (i.e., last in, first out policies). Is it possible that state and district leadership will see its relationship as that of a team in support of schools? Could there be effective mirroring of the teaming process at all levels, where transformation strategies are enacted in relation to schools and the systems they are a part of?

In addition to support, as I articulated in the previous implication, one of the most important questions is around how schools will be held accountable. What will it look like at the end of the three years? Some of the initial data I collected signaled a belief that RIDE would not follow through on the conditions of transformation (i.e., "this too shall pass"). Will RI close the schools that do not meet the school reform plan outcomes? This is an important area on which states and districts across the country can align, both to ensure appropriate support, including resources, and defining what accountability looks like when schools do not meet standards. It gives the transformation process some teeth, particularly where there might be resistance getting in the way of change.

Implications for Self

The capstone process created opportunities to pause in the work of the strategic project and reflect on my emerging strengths and persistent challenges. In thinking about how this strategic project surfaces different aspects of my leadership, the question of system-level thinking is perhaps the most salient. The decision to come to the Ed.L.D. program represented a commitment to embodying system-level leadership no matter the role I am in. I left the confines of a school building in order to apply what I learned as a teacher and school leader and grapple with how to impact students and communities beyond my own. Fullan's notion of the "commitment to changing all levels of context" (Fullan, 2009) resonates profoundly with me; yet how to do that well and consistently continues to elude me. The Residency and strategic project have served to concretize the complexity of doing that. This experience has also raised several implications for my future leadership, particularly as I prepare to officially join the NYCLA team.

Defining Value Creation in a New Space

In a recent conversation with my mentor, I shared the realization that the transition from school leader to graduate student/system level leader-in-training was far more challenging than I ever imagined. In fact, I resisted the transition when I entered the program because being a school leader was such an important part of my identity. As I consider Mark Moore's strategic triangle (Moore, 1995), much of my resistance was grounded in not having a clear picture of what value creation looks like at the system level. I worked so hard to gain legitimacy and support from internal and external stakeholders as a school leader, that it was difficult to imagine how I would do that from a position outside of a school and across a system. This seemed particularly challenging

as I considered impact in communities I might never even see. Second, I knew the capacity necessary to lead a school and, admittedly, building the capacity of others to lead was one of the most difficult parts of my role and also the most important. Finally, every day I could find evidence of the value created through my leadership and I could articulate the impact I was having on adult and student learning.

The experience of the Residency and the strategic project created a space for me to experiment with defining value creation in this new, unbounded space of system leadership. I have been able to expand my interpretation of Moore's strategic triangle to reflect two realities. First, in a system, value creation occurs simultaneously at different levels. While this was also true at the school level, in a system I may not have direct access or control over the three dimensions of the strategic triangle at each level, but I can build the capacity of others to do so. Second, I can establish processes for ensuring alignment in that value creation. This also requires redefining my own leadership.

Defining Leadership in a New Way

My role as a school leader was well-defined; I was clear on the expectations of my role, where we were going, and why I was there. I found stepping into system-level leadership, particularly with an organization that functions largely in an insider/outsider role, to be very difficult. "Leadership" was not clearly defined, or rather, it was self-defined. In writing this capstone, I continuously asked myself, "What did I *actually* do?" My mental model of success was as a principal where the connection to student achievement, while sometimes challenging, was a lot clearer. Therefore, the first step in defining leadership at this level involves reflecting upon implications I have posited for

both site and sector. The strategic project emphasized the importance of being able to articulate “quick wins” or leading indicators of my own success.

As designer and facilitator of voluntary PD sessions, and someone new to the RI education scene, I actually had very little authority in the formal sense. However, as I indicated in my analysis, I had enormous flexibility to create what was most relevant for schools; that was the only authority I had. I quickly learned that authority for me would have to come through demonstrating trust, legitimacy, and, as my mentor often states, “integrity.” Thinking about authority in this way is actually quite heartening, as I am a leader who gives great import to leading from a space of example and ensuring that work gets done because it’s the work that should be done, not out of a sense of compliance.

Finally, in connection to the implication around value creation at the system level, it is important to also be able to transfer the knowledge and skills I honed as a school principal to a system level leadership role. While the magnitude of the task and the challenges are at a different scale, the set of skills around building coalitions, ensuring relevancy for stakeholders, and connecting learning to shifts in behavior were all critical to my success as a principal. It is an area I will continue to explore as I seek to understand what consistent application of these skills looks like in a much broader role with a scope of work that is far less clear, but whose potential for impact is far greater.

New Understanding of System-Level Change

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the Residency experience and strategic project challenged my belief about the possibility of system-level change. It is important to preface this analysis by stating that my experience as a teacher was in two

extraordinarily large and often overcrowded schools, which has been an important part of why I am a strong proponent of small learning communities. It is the reason why I founded a small high school for students who are most marginalized by the current system. Fundamentally, my mental models about school systems is that they are large and impersonal and are often left unable to meet school-specific needs in service of the larger whole.

The Residency experience with NYCLA and, specifically, the strategic project reinforced a relatively simple concept in theory: system-level leadership is responsible for setting the conditions and processes for change to happen effectively. System leaders identify the strengths of the system as well as its gaps in order to effectively seek capacity to fill those gaps. While change will ultimately be determined by an improvement in the daily experiences of students, the system's role is to provide the tools and opportunities for adults to make that happen. Through my strategic project, I was able to engage in a constant "dance" between the system-level view of the schools we served and the plan to meet their needs. While this was not always simple, and I am left with a myriad of questions about how to balance stakeholder engagement with the urgency of improvement, I was able to see the connection between the state's strategy and what was happening in schools. Creating spaces and opportunities to bridge the divide between system and school is a powerful place to lead from and impact change.

VI. Conclusion

The role of turnaround leaders in organizational change is undeniable. Mark Moore's (1995) strategic triangle, Fullan's (2009) sustainability framework, and Kotter's (2007) "Eight Steps to Transforming Your Organization" all require powerful and committed leadership to create a process in which the organization can engage. What this capstone proposes, through the results and analysis of my strategic project, is that leadership teams are equally important in organizational change. "Successful turnaround leaders are not 'lone rangers' – they develop and rely on leadership teams, distribute responsibilities among staff, and partner with the district and community" (FSG Social Impact Advisors, 2010b).

The proposition that good leaders need strong teams is not a new one; however, what I am proposing is that while we must continue to focus on leadership as an important leverage point, we need to place a comparable investment into the leadership teams that support these leaders. This is particularly true when you are combining the "incrementalist" and "clean slate" (Hassel & Hassel, 2009) approaches to school transformation. None of the schools involved in the PD sessions started with a new staff; with the exception of a few new hires, all of the leaders walked into schools with existing staff. For some schools, it was the first time they had a formal leadership team.

All of the teams needed the opportunity to get to the work of transforming their schools, and a space to acknowledge and work through the challenges of being teams leading transformation. RIDE recognized the importance of leveraging teams in the transformation process and was able to see evidence of this with the small group of schools. As it enters the no-cost extension of the work with transformation schools, how

will it expand what it has learned about team development to other schools in transformation? Could the strategy of supporting and developing the leadership team extend beyond schools in transformation? If the health of a team indicates the health of an organization, how might this benefit high-performing schools?

While the focus of the strategic project was transformation schools, the results raise an important question about how states, districts, and system-level organizations like NYCLA approach the work of team development in their own organizations. Elmore's (2009) Principle #2 highlights the symmetrical process of improvement strategy:

If the terms and conditions of learning across the system are basically symmetrical, then implementing a strategy means that you are essentially doing that same thing, expecting the same processes of learning, monitoring the same elements of the strategy across the whole system. You don't have to have different practices for different parts of the system. The system improves by doing the same things in different venues, and as people do these things repeatedly...they get better and better at doing it. (p. 13)

While the findings of the strategic project would require further experimentation (larger numbers of schools, a combination transformation and high-performing schools), if the relationship between successful plan implementation and the health of a leadership team is a linear one, could investment in leadership team development have an impact on strategy implementation at all levels?

I am brought back to the three questions guiding the development of the strategic project. The questions offered a process to work through; and in many ways, the questions *were* the project. While my intent is not to frame "responses" to the questions, looking at them holistically highlights both the possibilities and complexity of supporting

the transformation process with the school as the unit of change and operating as an external stakeholder through a state-level strategy. Again, the guiding questions were:

- 1. What do school leadership teams need to effectively implement a transformation strategy?**
- 2. How can external organizations most effectively support site-based transformation?**
- 3. What might success look like for a system-level professional development strategy?**

Although the results of my strategic project do not indicate direct impact on implementation across all schools, or a connection with improved student performance, the notion of success is perhaps the most important finding of this capstone. In the midst of data pointing to transformation as a “failure,” I am heartened by my experience in Rhode Island and the reality that school transformation is a relatively new strategy, requiring far more research and support (Hassel & Hassel, 2009). I have spent the last 10 months working alongside both new and veteran leaders, teams of assistant principals, and teacher leaders whose years of experience ranged from 2 to 25. Among those were union representatives, classroom teachers of all grade levels, principals, and many with deep mistrust of “the system”; there were teachers from districts where the trauma of mass firings was still very much alive, and those who wondered if in 2 years their schools would be closed and they out of a job. Even with that, school teams came back, month after month, to voluntarily engage in the work of learning and working as a team. It stands as powerful evidence against the belief that veteran educators are incapable of or unwilling to change. That said, there continues to be a need for powerful leadership to make the tough decisions when necessary – at all levels. Continuous application of Mark Moore’s strategic triangle (1995) across different parts of the system and over time will

determine whether the leadership and the strategy are creating value or whether a new or more nuanced strategy is necessary.

It is in this value creation space where organizations like NYCLA become important resources for states and large districts: to support evaluating and redefining strategy. Beyond being a service-provider, organizations like NYCLA offer both on-the-ground engagement and system-level expertise through their work across the country. Developing these partnerships early on creates a space to co-design or unpack a strategy to ensure that it is creating the necessary and intended value, to organize resources to ensure current and sustainable capacity building, and to consider how to maximize stakeholder involvement and ownership so that improvements are sustained.

The experience I have gained through my Residency with NYCLA and the transformation work in RI has been a powerful example of what is possible when we create and facilitate opportunities to both lead and learn - both the opportunities and challenges. There is no more rigorous, purposeful, and impactful strategy than the explicit attention to the capacity of humans to work together in leading significant change. I ended each PD session with the quote I opened this capstone with, from Heifetz & Linsky's work around adaptive change:

Because when leadership counts, when you lead people through difficult change, you challenge what people hold dear—their daily habits, tools, loyalties and ways of thinking—with nothing more to offer perhaps than a possibility. (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002, p. 2)

I have ended this Residency with a belief that transformation is not only possible, but we have a moral obligation as educational leaders to set the conditions for it to happen at all levels. For many years I have framed transformation as something to do in service of

another, more important outcome. This past year has taught me that while transformation is about student learning, about adult learning, about system learning, it is also about something much bigger. As our society grapples with a multitude of global and local challenges around our collective health, our natural environment, and social, political and economic rights and liberties, transformation means much more than the outcomes of our school system – it is about transforming human interactions, our ability to see each other as assets, and exist in a far more connected way. We have to do more than believe that transformation is possible, we have to act as if it were the only option.

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IX: Artifacts

Artifact 1: Marketing Tool Describing ATL Professional Development

<i>What makes ATL professional development different from other PD offerings?</i>

Perhaps what makes ATL's PD most distinctive is its steadfast belief in and commitment to individual school leaders and their team's leadership development as the most powerful lever for school improvement. We believe that those in the schools are uniquely positioned to determine needs and assess whether or not their school is reaching its goals. We also know that schools need support in doing so. In using the school action/improvement plan as a starting point, we are committed to:

- working from where each school is and where it plans to be by June 2014;
- learning how other schools are addressing similar challenges through small- and large-group design (the answers are in the room);
- practicing relevant leadership skills (i.e., communicating vision, facilitation, use of data, etc.);
- supporting school leaders and their teams in the challenging work of shifting adult behaviors that will most impact student success; and
- continuously bringing the leader and respective team back to its vision for teaching and learning.

Artifact 2: ATL PD Guiding Questions Document

1. ***Ongoing implementation of 2013-2014 Plans (School Reform Plans or other)***

- Leadership voice and stance; consistent and effective communication of vision

Guiding Questions:

- How am I/are we talking about the changes that need to happen this year?
- Is it clear to everyone on staff where we want to be by June 2014?
- Do they know their roles in communicating that vision?

- Structures of support and accountability for teams and individual teachers

Guiding Questions:

- Given where we want to be by June 2014, what do the teachers need?
- How are we using teacher evaluations to both support their growth and hold them to our expectations?
- How are we ensuring that learning is happening and instruction is improving?

- Using data to assess plan implementation and effectiveness

Guiding Questions:

- What am I and my team looking at to determine where we are in our plan?
- What are we doing with the feedback we may have received at our quarterly monitoring meeting?

2. ***Capacity-building of school leadership teams***

- Examining structures and conditions to determine capacity needed for the effective implementation of school improvement plans

Guiding Questions:

- Do the members of my leadership team understand their roles and responsibilities within the plan? Do they have the capacity to carry those out?
- Are we using our resources (people, time, and money) appropriately to support our goals?

- Continuous assessment of team functioning and effectiveness

Guiding Questions:

- How well is my team working together? Are we consistent in our structure?
- How are we communicating, sharing responsibilities and expertise, and holding each other accountable?

- Extending capacity beyond the leadership team

Guiding Questions:

- Is staff beyond the leadership team empowered to lead parts of the improvement plan?
- What are we doing to build towards continued improvement in 2014-2015?

Artifact 3: Kotter's Eight Steps to Transforming Your Organization



(Kotter, 2007)