

The Simultaneous Implementation of Two School Improvement Models  
in a Rural Southwest Virginia School System

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to describe the process of simultaneous implementation of the Indistar model of school improvement and the University of Virginia School Turnaround model of school improvement and how those models influenced school improvement practices in a rural Southwest Virginia school system. Best practices from each of the school improvement models were identified and adopted, which led to the establishment of a hybrid model of school improvement. The study documents how and why the practices were adopted and used in the hybrid model.

The paper includes a literature review which examines the evolution of school improvement in the U.S. The description of the historical development of school reform sets the context for in-depth reviews of five current research studies. The studies selected for review, as well as the research study, focus on the role of the central office in school improvement. A synthesis of the studies' findings provided evidence that further research was needed.

Data sources for the study include an individual interview of the superintendent, focus group interviews of central office administration and school leadership teams, archival records, and documents. The focus group interviews were conducted to describe the process of implementation of the two school improvement models and to identify school improvement practices that were adopted by the division.

This study identifies the practices that were adopted and implemented throughout the rural Southwest Virginia school system. Best practices that are used in the hybrid model of school improvement are Professional Learning Communities, acceleration teams, 90-day school improvement plans, and a tiered remediation program. Barriers to implementation of school improvement were time, the initial lack of support in the Indistar model, involvement, and the understanding of data and data analysis. The themes of professional development, external and internal supports, and sustainability of school improvement are discussed in Chapter 5. Recommendations for practice and future research are presented.

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## Dedication

I have been able to take this journey because of the determination and goal my parents impressed upon me at an early age. To my wife, Amy, thank you for allowing me to follow my dream. I have tried to keep this from impacting our family time, but I know that it has on more than one occasion. Thank you for your support and encouragement to help me finish.

To my boys, Tanner and Spencer, I am so thankful to be a part of your life. I am beyond proud of you and hope you have your goals set high. You can accomplish anything you set your mind to. You live life once, make it count.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

Research has been conducted within public education on many different topics. Leadership, school culture, data analysis, students in poverty, teaching strategies and many other variables have been examined to determine their possible impacts on student achievement (Ladd, 2012; Lujan, 2010; Marzano, 1992; Maxwell & Thomas, 1991; Spillane, 2004). The political and financial implications of the effectiveness of school improvement and school turnaround efforts have intrigued researchers who hope to determine if these efforts are viable and sustainable.

Ridgeview County Public Schools, a pseudonym for the district, had two elementary schools participating in two different school improvement models during the 2011-2013 school years. The schools participated in the University of Virginia School Turnaround Program beginning in the fall of 2011 through the summer of 2013. The University of Virginia program is a school improvement model developed by the Curry School of Education and the Darden School of Business to help schools achieve rapid improvement in student achievement. While the implementation of the University of Virginia School Turnaround Program was occurring, the two schools were also participating in the Indistar Program. Participation in the Indistar Program is mandatory for Virginia schools that have not met federal adequate yearly progress goals and/or have not met state accreditation. The program provides support for those schools. The Indistar Program was developed “in 2007 for use by the Virginia Department of Education” (<http://www.indistar.org/evidence/>, para. 1) by the Center on Innovation and Improvement (CII), a partnership among the Academic Development Institute, Temple University Institute for School and Society, the Center for School Improvement and Policy Studies at Boise State University, and Little Plant Learning (<http://www.centerii.org/aboutus/brochure/NewCIIBrochure0111.pdf>).

The research in this study describes the simultaneous implementation of the University of Virginia School Turnaround Program and the Indistar Program in the two schools. Through the implementation of these two programs, certain practices were identified and adopted by Ridgeview County Public Schools to help in its quest for improved student achievement. Therefore, the study also seeks to describe how participation in those models influenced the school system’s school improvement practices.

Research reviewed for the study examined the school district as a key unit of change (Marsh, Strunk, & Bush, 2012), school districts' role in change (Rorrer, Skrla & Scheurich, 2008), trust and its impact on school improvement (Chhuon, Gilkey, Gonzalez, Daly, & Crispeels, 2008), the districtwide use of data (Wayman, Cho, Jimerson, & Spikes, 2012), and sustainability of school improvement (Lambert 2007). Implementation of the two school improvement models was a collaborative effort between the two schools and the Ridgeview County district office. As Rorrer et al. (2008) stated, "School reform, school improvement, and school effectiveness over the past two decades often has overlooked, ignored and even dismissed the potential of districts as substantial contributors to systematic reform" (p. 308). The study examines research that describes the district's role in school improvement. Another important catalyst for change is trust. When implementing two improvement models simultaneously, trust is likely to be a major component of the process. A paradigm of trust had to be established among the university partnership, district office staff, school administration, teachers, parents and community. A study conducted by Chhuon et al. (2013) provided evidence of the nexus between the trust of central office staff and achieving and sustaining school district reform. (p. 228)

Wayman et al. (2012) examined districtwide effects on data use in the classroom. Attitudes toward data influence the use of data. Reluctance to use data can be widespread throughout the school system. Wayman et al. (2012) concluded that barriers to data use can be eliminated through effective district policies to improve structures and support for using data. Both the University of Virginia Turnaround and the Indistar programs required extensive data analysis and interpretation.

Sustainability is the elusive component to school improvement. Once a school has attained success, the ability to sustain the success can be very difficult. Toward that end, the University of Virginia and the Indistar school improvement models were chosen for implementation because they focused on sustainable leadership. As Lambert (2007) stated, "Sustainable schools are those with high leadership capacity, defined as broad-based, skillful participation in the work of leadership" (p. 312). The two school improvement models provided different types of professional development for the school leaders. While the professional development varied, school leadership is recognized as a critical component to achieving sustainability.

## **Definition of Key Terms**

The definitions of key terms used in the study are listed here for reference and information.

*Hybrid model of school improvement* – The hybrid model of school improvement will refer to the practices that emerged from the implementation of the Indistar Program and the University of Virginia School Turnaround Program in Ridgeview County Schools.

*Indistar Program* – Indistar is defined as “a web-based system implemented by a state education agency, district, or charter school organization for use with district and/or school improvement teams to inform, coach, sustain, track, and report improvement activities” (Academic Development Institute, 2009). The program was designated by the Virginia Department of Education for use in schools that do not meet Annual Measureable Objectives (AMOs). Participation in the Indistar Program is mandatory for Virginia schools that have not met federal adequate yearly progress goals and/or have not met state accreditation.

*School improvement model* – is defined as “a systematic and sustained effort aimed at making changes that accomplish educational goals more effectively and enhance student outcomes, as well as continuing to strengthen the school’s capacity to make and sustain further improvements” (Woods & Brighthouse, 2013, p. xi).

*School turnaround* - the definition of school turnaround is “a dramatic and comprehensive intervention in a low-performing school that produces significant gains in student achievement within two academic years” (Calkins et al., 2007, p. 1). As used in this paper, the term school turnaround refers to a particular form of school improvement.

*Student data* – student data are derived from “curriculum-based measurements aligned with the state standards to track student progress” (Bambrick-Santoyo, 2010, p. XVI). For this study, these data include assessment data from the Standards of Learning tests and district created benchmark tests.

*University of Virginia School Turnaround Program* – The University of Virginia School Turnaround Program provides “guidance in selecting and developing school leaders with a high

potential for success, using a rigorous, competency-based process. The program also helps provide districts and other entities with the skills necessary to build a pipeline of high impact turnaround leaders” (<http://www.darden.virginia.edu/web/Darden-Curry-PLE/UVA-School-Turnaround/Components/>, para. 2). The program was developed jointly by the Darden School of Business and the Curry School of Education.

### **Statement of the Problem**

School improvement and school turnaround are terms heard throughout the country as potential solutions for schools whose student performances on standardized tests are found to be inadequate to meet state and federal standards. “In a time when student outcomes matter more than ever, many states, districts, and reformers are considering whether and how turnarounds of chronically failing schools can achieve superior results” (Steiner & Hassel, 2011, p. 1). The Ridgeview County Public Schools are facing challenges similar to those other school districts across the nation are experiencing: ever-increasing expectations of student performance and schools unable to make the gains necessary to avoid sanctions. In an effort to improve student performance in Ridgeview County Schools, two school improvement programs were implemented. The study describes the implementation of the two models and how they influenced school improvement practices within the district. An examination of the implementation of these initiatives may provide insight into instructional best practices.

Ridgeview County Schools had two elementary schools that were forced to participate in the Indistar Program for school improvement by the Virginia Department of Education due to continued poor performance on the Standards of Learning tests. While the Indistar Program was being implemented, the University of Virginia contacted the superintendent of schools and offered to provide services to the two schools through the University of Virginia School Turnaround Program. Through the implementation of the two programs a hybrid school improvement model developed. It incorporated the best practices of the Indistar Program and the University of Virginia School Turnaround Program.

## **Significance of the Study**

The research study has both practical and scholarly significance for public education. A child's education is critically important to the child becoming a productive member of society. School improvement initiatives provide schools with practices to help improve student performance. "Dramatically changing the course of low-performing schools is a national imperative. Whether considered on moral or economic terms, as a nation we cannot afford to have students attend schools that do not prepare them to succeed" (Rhim, 2012, p. 1).

The study describes the implementation of two school improvement models. Both of the school improvement models provide evidence of best practice. The study highlights successful strategies from the two school improvement models. While the simultaneous implementation of the two models may not be replicable, the strategies and practices that were found to be beneficial in Ridgeview County may be transferable to other settings and valuable to policymakers and educators as potential best practices for school improvement.

The study adds to the existing research on school improvement by describing the process of school improvement through simultaneous implementation of two school improvement models. Research on effective strategies to improve student achievement is immense and the results are diverse. However, "Researchers have openly lamented the lack of *reliable* information pointing to or explaining successful improvement efforts, describing them as sparse or scarce" (Smarick, 2010, p. 22). "Students assigned by geography to low-performing schools simply have no time to lose while adults tinker with incremental change efforts" (Rhim, 2012, p. 1).

## **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study is to describe the process of simultaneous implementation of two school improvement models and how those models influenced school improvement practices in a rural Southwest Virginia school system. Throughout the implementation, best practices were identified and adopted from both of the school improvement models. The best practices taken from the programs and combined with existing local practices evolved into the hybrid school improvement model the system currently uses. The study documents the specific practices that were adopted for use in the hybrid model as well as how and why they were adopted.

## **Research Questions**

The research questions that framed the study are listed here.

1. How were the two school improvement models implemented?
  - a. Who was involved in the decision to implement each of the school improvement models?
  - b. What factors aided in the implementation of the two school improvement models?
  - c. What barriers to the implementation of the two school improvement models were encountered?
2. Which best practices were adopted from each school improvement model that resulted in the Ridgeview County hybrid model of school improvement? Why?
3. Which practices of the two school improvement models were not adopted in the Ridgeview County hybrid model of school improvement? Why?
4. What other practices are utilized in the Ridgeview County hybrid model of school improvement? From what source were they adopted and why?

## **Delimitations**

Delimitations are used “to narrow the scope of a study” (Creswell, 2003, p. 148). The study examines the implementation of two school improvement models in a rural Southwest Virginia school system. The setting of the study is Ridgeview County Public Schools, specifically Richfield Primary School and Monroe Elementary School (pseudonyms for the schools). The two schools were the only ones in the district to implement both the Indistar Program and the University of Virginia School Turnaround Program. Consequently, the study was delimited to those two schools.

The study was conducted following the completion of the University of Virginia’s School Turnaround Program, which is a two-year program, in the summer of 2013. Participation in the Indistar Program began in the fall of 2010 and was ongoing at the time of this research. The two programs were implemented simultaneously from fall 2011 until summer 2013. Research was conducted during the 2013-2014 academic year.

## **Organization of the Study**

Chapter 1 included an introduction, definition of key terms, statement of the problem, significance of the study, purpose of the study, research questions and delimitations. Chapter 2 is the literature review. Literature relating to historical development of school improvement is presented and selected studies relating to school improvement through the lens of the district office are examined in depth. Chapter 3 includes the research design and methodology of the study. Chapter 4 provides the findings of the study. Chapter 5 includes a discussion of the findings, conclusions, recommendations for further research, and the epilogue.

## Chapter 2

### The Literature Review

#### Review of the Relevant Literature

This literature review examines the historical development of the school reform, school improvement, and school turnaround initiatives and their impact on public education. The researcher initially identified literature associated with educational reform and subsequently narrowed the focus of the review to selected studies of specific reform efforts including school improvement and school turnaround efforts. The review begins with a historical examination of national education initiatives in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century and continues through current legislation. Following the historical context, five selected studies of school improvement are reviewed in depth. The review closes with a discussion about the need for school turnaround and an introduction to the two models of school improvement chosen for implementation in one school district.

#### Search Process

A comprehensive review of the literature written about school improvement and school turnaround was conducted using a variety of resources. Online databases provided an extensive amount of material for consideration. A comprehensive search was conducted primarily using the electronic discovery tool Summon. Summon searches through relevant books, databases, journals, and dissertations as one robust database (H. Moorefield-Lang, personal communication, June 25, 2013). The search was conducted during the spring of 2013. Using Summon, articles were selected that were peer-reviewed, were from scholarly publications, and had the publication date of January 1995 or later.

Search terms were selected by relevance and importance to the historical perspective of school reform. School turnaround was also selected as a specific type of school reform for review because the University of Virginia model is a school turnaround program. A search using the key words *A Nation at Risk* yielded 27,409 results. Additional searches using the key words *Goals 2000* and *No Child Left Behind* gave 9,342 and 6,959 hits respectively. A search of the term *School Turnaround* produced 444 results. The term *School Improvement Program* provided the most research with 74,687 results.

The Virginia Tech Interlibrary Loan program provided many of the articles cited throughout this review. Careful consideration was given to each resource prior to it being included. Research supportive school improvement efforts and research critical of school improvement initiatives were reviewed. Resources were selected based on their capacity to yield insight to the overarching topic of school reform.

### **The Historical Context of U.S. School Reform**

Hampel, Johnson, Plank, Ravitch, Tyack, and Cuban (1996) stated that the history of school reform has continuously fascinated historians of education in the United States, but that the study of the subject has acquired a new urgency in the last quarter of a century as national political discussions have given an increasingly important place to educational policy. Presidents in recent history have initiated commissions to recommend improvements to public education. Presidential commissions in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century include *The Truman Report* (1947), President Eisenhower's *Committee on Education Beyond High School* (1956), President Kennedy's *Task Force on Education* (1960), and President Johnson's *Gardner Commission* (1964). For the purposes of this dissertation, the historical review of the literature on public education reform will begin in 1983 with the publication of *A Nation At Risk* and continue through current legislation.

### **A Nation at Risk**

President Ronald Reagan's National Commission on Excellence in Education was "created by the Secretary of Education T.H. Bell" (*A Nation At Risk*, 1983, p. 1). "Bell characterized the climate of the country in 1981 as one of malaise, in general, and of discontent with education" (Hunt & Staton 1996, p. 272). Bell "sought members who would command respect and be beyond reproach. He gave the Commission total autonomy to do its work and pledged the full resources of the Department of Education in support of the Commission" (Hunt & Staton 1996, p. 273). The Commission's purpose was to address "the widespread public perception that something is seriously remiss in our educational system" (*A Nation At Risk*, 1983, p. 7). The Commission's concern about public education was evident. "The educational dimensions of the risk before us have been amply documented in testimony received by the

Commission” (*A Nation At Risk*, 1983, p. 11). As the following quote illustrates, the perceived decay of public education was being likened to an act of war.

If an unfriendly power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war. As it stands, we have allowed this to happen to ourselves. We have even squandered the gains in achievement made in the wake of the Sputnik challenge. Moreover, we have dismantled essential support systems which helped make those gains possible. We have, in effect, been committing an act of unthinking, unilateral educational disarmament. (*A Nation At Risk*, 1983, p. 9)

As Hunt and Staton (1996) stated, Bell wanted to rally the American people around education and believed that “educators also needed to be shaken out of their complacency” (p. 272). Many indicators of risk were included within the report. Standardized test scores, comprehension skills, graduation rates, adult literacy, and College Board examination scores were among some examples of the risk indicators examined by the commission.

Analysts examining these indicators of student performance and the demands for new skills have made some chilling observations. Educational researcher Paul Hurd concluded at the end of a thorough national survey of student achievement that within the context of the modern scientific revolution, we are raising a new generation of Americans that is scientifically and technologically illiterate. (*A Nation At Risk*, 1983, p. 12)

The findings presented by the Commission were troubling. The Commission made the disturbing conclusion that “For the first time in the history of our country, the educational skills of one generation will not surpass, will not equal, will not even approach, those of their parents” (*A Nation At Risk*, 1983, p. 12). Hunt and Staton (1996) stated that the publication of *A Nation at Risk* catapulted the issue of educational reform into the public sphere. The need for educational reform became a national issue.

*A Nation at Risk* led to reform efforts in almost every state.

Fourteen months after the release of *A Nation at Risk*, the Education Commission of the States issued a report on new state legislation and policy aimed at education renewal. Action in the States [the report issued by the Commission] identified forty-four states that had raised graduation requirements; thirty states that had developed new regulations governing learning outcomes, curriculum content, and frameworks; forty-five states that

had strengthened teacher certification and evaluation requirements; and twenty-seven states that had implemented initiatives to provide more instructional time. More than 250 task forces were helping forty-six states develop comprehensive state action plans to improve educational outcomes of students. (Schwartz & Robinson, 2000, p. 175)

While the efforts yielded a movement aimed at school reform, a consistent educational outcomes system to measure student academic gains was still not available. The expectations set forth by states and districts provided no uniformity. The criticisms leveled at American public education through *A Nation at Risk* began to be addressed through a major initiative called Goals 2000.

### **Goals 2000**

Educational reform continued to evolve as time progressed. As Thompson (2001) stated “Too few children in many of our public schools are receiving the quality of education needed for successful life and work in a rapidly changing world” (p. 360). The history of Goals 2000 began in Charlottesville, Virginia, “at the 1989 National Education Summit with the creation of the first-ever national education goals” (Schwartz & Robinson, 2000, p. 175). Schwartz and Robinson (2000) stated,

While President George Bush convened the Charlottesville summit, the impetus for the creation of national goals came from the National Governors’ Association. Bush’s invitation to the National Governors’ Association to join him in an educational summit in late 1989 provided the occasion for the governors to advance the idea of national education goals (Schwartz & Robinson, 2002, p. 176).

Two years after the Charlottesville summit “President Bill Clinton introduced his own program to help the country move forward to meet the ambitious goals set in Charlottesville” (Schwartz & Robinson, 2000, p. 178).

The Goals 2000: Educate America Act, the centerpiece of the Clinton administration’s education reform program, provides a fascinating case study of the challenges facing an activist administration in trying to craft federal legislation that can provide national direction and leadership in a highly decentralized system. (Schwartz & Robinson, 2000, p. 174)

Prior to Goals 2000, the public education system in the United States did not have any uniform curricular expectations. “Virtually every state in the union has developed, or is in the

process of developing, new academic standards that specify what students are expected to know and be able to do in core academic subjects at key grade levels” (Schwartz & Robinson, 2000, p. 173).

Goals 2000 included these goals, all of which were to be accomplished by the year 2000.

1. All children in America will start school ready to learn.
  2. The high school graduation rate will increase to at least 90 percent.
  3. All students will leave grades 4, 8, and 12 having demonstrated competency over challenging subject matter including English, mathematics, science, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, the arts, history, and geography, and every school in America will ensure that all students learn to use their minds well, so they may be prepared for responsible citizenship, further learning, and productive employment in our nation’s modern economy.
  4. United States students will be first in the world in mathematics and science achievement.
  5. Every adult American will be literate and will possess the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in a global economy and exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.
  6. Every school in the United States will be free of drugs, violence, and the unauthorized presence of firearms and alcohol and will offer a disciplined environment conducive to learning.
  7. The nation’s teaching force will have access to programs for the continued improvement of their professional skills and the opportunity to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to instruct and prepare all American students for the next century.
  8. Every school will promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional, and academic growth of children.
- (Paris, 1994, p. 24)

“The Standards and Accountability Movement was solidified with the signing of Goals 2000: Educate America Act (P.L. 103-227) on March 31, 1994” (Paris, 1994). “Building off of the burgeoning standards movement, the most fundamental components of Goals 2000 provided grants to states to develop their own standards and assessment systems” (Superfine, 2005).

Therefore, there was a financial incentive for states to apply to participate in the standard setting process associated with Goals 2000.

Many debates influenced the direction of public education reform and the implementation of educational standards. “Clinton’s proposals were significantly influenced by the 1992 report of the National Council on Education Standards and Testing (NCEST)” (Schwartz & Robinson, 2000, p. 178). The proposals were heavily debated and focused on two issues. “The first was the question of whether there should be standards for schools and school systems as well as for the students, and, if so, where they should be set” (Schwartz & Robinson, 2000, p. 179).

The second contentious issue stemmed from the council’s attempt to reconcile its recommendation to create voluntary national standards with its recommendation for a voluntary system of assessments that would respect the ability of individual states to design or select their own tests, all of which would somehow be linked to national standards. (Schwartz & Robinson, 2000, p. 179)

As Paris (2004) stated “Goals 2000 establishes a framework in which to identify world-class academic standards, to measure student progress, and to provide the support that students may need to meet the standards.” Goals 2000 began the standards movement.

Goals 2000 supports state efforts to develop clear and rigorous standards for what every child should know and be able to do and supports comprehensive state- and district-wide planning and implementation of school improvement efforts focused on improving student achievement to those standards. (Goals 2000: Reforming Education to Improve Student Achievement, 1998, page i)

“Together, standards, assessments, flexibility, and accountability were thought to be key components that could spur systemic reform in the American education system” (Superfine, 2005). While striving for common standards, Goals 2000 required states to work toward accountability through an established assessment program developed by each state based on the standards. Up until the implementation of Goals 2000 individual states had operated their public schools with very little federal input. The idea of accountability and flexibility working together seems contradictory. “Holding states and localities accountable for actions taken with federal funds would indicate an increase in federal control over educational decisions, while allowing states and localities more flexibility with federal funds would indicate a decrease in federal control” (Superfine, 2005). Superfine (2005) stated that the original version of Goals 2000 also

increased state accountability by requiring states to develop opportunity-to-learn (OTL) standards and creating the National Education Standards and Improvement Council (NESIC).

The idea of common standards was not welcomed by everyone but financial incentives were tied to their development and implementation. Nonetheless, the outcry against federal control was beginning to grow. “Conservative groups like the Christian Coalition and Women for America were raising local opposition across the country in response to federal control” (Superfine, 2005). Schwartz and Robinson (2000) also attested that Goals 2000 would bring the federal government deeply into public schools, burden them with new regulations, and bully them about what to teach. “In 1999, Congress refused to reauthorize Goals 2000, and in 2002, the No Child Left Behind Act dealt the final blow to Goals 2000” (Superfine, 2005).

While Goals 2000 lost its funding in 2002, the No Child Left Behind Act continued to make educational reform a priority. Goals 2000 initiated the standards movement but the controversy surrounding commonalities of standards led to its demise. No Child Left Behind solidified the connection of standards to accountability.

### **No Child Left Behind**

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), which is a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), was a federal initiative to promote public school reform. In order to understand the legislation, the reason for its inception and evolution should be examined. “In 1964, President Lyndon Johnson developed a new commission on education referred to as the Gardner Commission. This initiative was chaired by John W. Gardner, president of the Carnegie Commission, who later became President Johnson’s secretary of health, education, and welfare” (Thomas & Brady, 2005, p. 52).

The purpose of the commission was primarily to determine a method to provide federal financial support to states in order to help educate economically disadvantaged students. “The commission proposed the idea of linking education aid to President Johnson’s War on Poverty policy programs” (Thomas & Brady, 2005, p. 52). “On April 11, 1965, President Johnson adopted this approach and the ESEA was passed, with Title I representing the largest financial component of the legislation” (Thomas & Brady, 2005, p. 52). While the original intent of ESEA was to help states fund the education of students who were considered economically disadvantaged, the reauthorization, entitled the No Child Left Behind Act, profoundly changed

public education and the accountability system in which it operated. Both iterations of the law were intent on providing additional instructional support for students who are considered at risk. As reflected in its name, the No Child Left Behind Act broadened the law's focus to include all children. The No Child Left Behind Act was signed into law by President George W. Bush on January 8, 2002.

“By making accountability the centerpiece of the education agenda, President Bush strongly reinforced what was already a central theme of state policies aimed at improving education” (Linn, Baker, & Betebenner, 2002, p. 3). “Similar to ESEA, NCLB is grounded in the practice of standards-based education reform” (Thomas & Brady, 2005, p. 55). In fact, the federal initiative for standards development began with *Goals 2000*. “*Goals 2000*'s main purpose was to encourage systematic reform by providing grants to states for the development of standards, assessments, and accountability systems” (Superfine, 2005). The requirements of NCLB added importance to the standardized tests and impact to the results of student performance on the tests.

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 substantially increases the testing requirements for states and sets demanding accountability standards for schools, districts, and states with measureable adequate yearly progress (AYP) objectives for all students and subgroups of students defined by socioeconomic background, race-ethnicity, English language proficiency, and disability. (Linn, Baker & Betebenner, 2002, p. 3)

Establishing expectations for states to meet AYP targets based on the state standards posed a problem. “Although many states have established performance standards for their tests, the standards were set unaware that they would be used to determine AYP objectives or that substantial sanctions would be associated with failure to meet AYP targets” (Linn, Baker, & Betebenner, 2002, p. 4). State policy makers and educators initially did not know the objectives would be evaluated for student mastery and AYP would be determined by student performance. In order to understand better the sanctions, a closer look at what was expected is necessary. The following information compiled by Linn, Baker, and Betebenner (2005) outlines what was required in order to meet AYP.

NCLB specifies that states must develop AYP objectives consistent with the following requirements in the law:

1. States must develop AYP statewide measureable objectives for improved achievement by all students and for specific groups: economically disadvantaged students, students from major racial and ethnic groups, students with disabilities, and students with limited English proficiency.
2. The objectives must be set with the goal of having all students at the proficient level or above within 12 years (i.e., by the end of the 2013-2014 school year).
3. AYP must be based primarily on state assessments, but must also include one additional academic indicator.
4. The AYP objectives must be assessed at the school level. Schools that have failed to meet their AYP objectives for two consecutive years will be identified for improvement.
5. School AYP results must be reported separately for each group of students identified above so that it can be determined whether each student group met the AYP objective.
6. At least 95% of each group must participate in state assessments.
7. States may aggregate up to 3 years of data in making AYP determinations. (Linn, et al., 2002, p. 4)

The goals set forth in NCLB were ambitious. Many believe the expectations were unrealistic. The requirement for all students to pass standardized tests by 2014 created a great deal of concern.

The result of this judgmental standard setting process frequently has been to set the proficient level so high that it may be unrealistic to expect all students to reach that level by 2014. The problem with the implementation of NCLB continued to grow. States had to enforce these new federally imposed mandates, but they lacked the capacity to put the reforms into action as required by law (Thomas & Brady, 2005, p. 58).

An additional issue regarding quality of the evaluation instrument became evident. Researchers found that underperforming states could use lower stakes assessments to avoid having high numbers of schools labeled as in need of improvement, thus defeating the purpose of providing high-quality education for all students and closing the achievement gap (Thomas & Brady, 2005, p. 58).

As time progressed toward the deadline for 100% of all students to pass the standardized tests, a significant change took place. “In March, the U.S. Department of Education (2010) released *A Blueprint for Reform: The Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act*” (Morrell, 2010, p. 146). The report indicated continued national concern about the public education system. “The United States has slipped in the world rankings to 11 out of 32 developed nations in college completion rates for individuals ages 25-34” (Morrell, 2010, p. 146). This concern resonated in one of the items identified on the blueprint focusing on college and career ready students. The goal of the educational reform blueprint is to lead the world in college completion rates by 2020.

“The Blueprint identifies five areas of focus: college and career ready students, great teachers and leaders in every school, equity and opportunity for all students, raise the bar and reward excellence, and promote innovation and continuous improvement” (Morrell, 2010, p. 146). While there is a nexus between NCLB and the reauthorization of ESEA, there are certainly differences. The governmental sanctions are hefty for schools that do not meet the benchmarks established by ESEA.

### **Selected Research Relating to District Level Involvement in School Improvement**

While the review of the literature thus far has focused on the historical development of school reform, the next section examines school reform in a specific context. School improvement efforts are primarily based on individual school initiatives or programs being implemented at a particular site. The studies selected for examination provide an in-depth focus on reform through the lens of a district-level approach and the involvement of the central office in school improvement. The search for the research studies selected was purposeful. The research articles selected are all reports of studies that involved the district office in school improvement efforts.

#### **The district as a key unit of change (Marsh, Strunk, & Bush, 2012).**

According to Marsh, Strunk, and Bush (2012), research on the implementation and effects on student achievement of both turnaround and portfolio districts remain limited. Marsh et al. stated that more than 20 major cities are currently implementing the portfolio management model as an innovative approach to help low-performing districts improve. Portfolio reforms

treat the district as a key unit of change. Districts are encouraged to establish a diverse set of service providers to operate schools, and the district then selects the higher performing providers based on student achievement. Providers are utilized to partner with the district through individual schools to increase student achievement. The providers who can support the school and gain the most academic success are maintained while the providers who do not achieve success are terminated (Marsh et al. 2012).

A case study was conducted using a mixed-methods approach with a focus on the implementation of both reform efforts, turnaround and portfolio district, in the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) using a mixed methods approach. The improvement initiative was derived from the Public School Choice Initiative (PSCI) which combined both reform efforts and treated the schools and the district as units of change. As Marsh et al. (2012) stated, “PSCI allowed teams of internal and external stakeholders to compete to turn around the district’s lowest performing focus schools” (p. 499).

Marsh et al. (2012) stated their research questions as: How were the key mechanisms of change outlined in the district’s vision of PSCI enacted? What were the early successes and challenges? What can be learned from these early lessons to inform future turnaround and portfolio management efforts?

Implementation of the reform effort was governed by administrators at the district level. According to Marsh et al. (2012), schools participating in the PSCI were identified by LAUSD administrators based on two criteria. The schools had to be in their third or a subsequent year of Program Improvement (PI) as a result of not having reached state achievement goals and they had to have a high quality, detailed school plan. The school plans incorporated topics such as curriculum and instruction, school organization, professional development and school operations. Once selected, the schools had the autonomy to choose from the governance models established within the division. The governance models included: *Traditional, Expanded School Based Management Model, Network Partnership, Pilot, Dependent or Affiliated Charter, and Independent Charter.*

The data collection used by Marsh et al. (2012) was guided by a conceptual framework grounded in the research on school turnaround and portfolio districts as well as the district’s implicit “theory of change.” The theory of change highlighted six key levers that were evident throughout documents collected and interviews. The six levers are identified as (a) rigorous

screening of school plans, (b) competition for selection among a diverse set of applicant teams believed to motivate applicants to enhance the quality of the plan and increase innovation, (c) autonomy to respond to local contexts and needs, (d) oversight and accountability, (e) capacity building, and (f) increased pressure and contribution from parents and community. These mechanisms were expected to yield a diverse set of high quality learning environments (Marsh et al., 2012).

The research conducted by Marsh et al. (2012) was focused on the second cohort of schools in 2010-2011. The reason this cohort was selected was practical. The funding of the project and the start date enabled the data to be reviewed as the interviews and observations could be conducted simultaneously.

Marsh et al. (2012) administered web-based surveys to one representative from all PSCI second cohort teams. The teams included a mix of teachers, non-profit or charter school administrators, principals, school staff, and local district administrators. They received a response rate of 80% with 36 teams completing the survey. The survey asked about the plan writing process, content of the plans, and perceptions of PSCI. The descriptive analysis of the survey data was conducted, and the responses from different types of teams were compared. Only statistically significant differences were discussed. Due to the small sample size, the significance threshold of  $p < 0.10$  was used.

Marsh et al. (2012) conducted interviews with LAUSD central office administrators, and district partners. The case study leader's interview notes and documents were analyzed by individual schools and then compared across schools. The researcher observed 28 district meetings regarding school reform and collected relevant documents, such as meeting agendas, PowerPoint presentations, and print and online communication. The data were triangulated from multiple sources, comparing interview data to documents and surveys whenever feasible.

The limitations of their study declared by Marsh et al. (2012) were defined as follows. The scope of the initiative was quite large, and the resources for the study were limited. The data collected were from a short period of time and the data needed from the actual implementation of the plans and the effects were not collected. The last limitation indicated the reliability of the research was survey-based, therefore the respondents' perceptions of understanding may have skewed the results. In-depth interviews were used to corroborate the survey results.

Marsh et al. (2012) concluded that the first two years of PSCI had many challenges and some successes. On the one hand, PSCI leaders attracted diverse stakeholder participation within teams and the plan development process provided an array of supports from multiple organizations and ensured transparency at each stage of the process. On the other hand, leaders encountered difficulty establishing understanding and buy-in from the community and parents, attracting sufficient numbers of applicants for all schools, maintaining neutrality and the perception of fairness, and ensuring that competition did not interfere with other levers of change.

The results of the preliminary research indicated that regardless of whether implementing a portfolio model or managing a school turnaround, districts need time to develop new policies, processes, and practices. The misunderstandings and confusion Marsh et al. (2012) uncovered suggest more planning time may have improved the consistency of central office messages about the reform initiative.

**The role of the school district in school improvement (Rorrer, Skrla, & Scheurich, 2008).**

Researchers of school reform and school improvement have overlooked the potential of districts as substantial contributors to systemic reform, according to Rorrer, Skrla, and Scheurich (2008). In fact, a constant theme among many scholars has been the argument that responsibility for reform efforts should be at the school level. However, the research conducted by Rorrer et al. included the collection of empirical or conceptual research on school district roles reported since 1984 in a narrative synthesis of previous findings. The researchers utilized the traditional conceptualization of districts as operationalized by scholars to date. The term district as used by Rorrer et al. may refer to the superintendent, school board, and/or midlevel administration as well as to the district as an organizational unit (Rorrer et al., 2008).

Rorrer et al. (2008) indicated three overarching questions guided their inquiry: (a) What roles have districts served in reform? (b) What role could districts serve to improve achievement and advance equity systemically?, and (c) What would be the nature of district-level change necessary to systemically improve achievement and advance equity? (p. 308). Rorrer et al. used the qualitative method of narrative synthesis to conduct the review of the district's role in systematic reform. Rorrer et al. explained the purpose of a narrative synthesis was to allow the

researcher to cast a wider net. Rorrer et al. used the guidelines identified by Mays (2005) for a narrative synthesis. Mays (2005, p. 4) outlined six stages for a narrative synthesis. The iterative stages include (a) identifying the broad focus of the review and searching for and mapping available evidence, (b) specifying the review question, (c) selecting studies to include in the review, (d) extracting data and appraising study quality, (e) conducting the synthesis, and (f) reporting and disseminating the results of the review. The reason given for this method of review was due to the research being sporadic, varied in focus, and heterogeneous in methods. The findings from each study were linked and presented as a narrative.

Rorrer et al. (2008) made three assumptions. First, was their belief that the key to understanding the roles districts serve in improving student achievement and advancing equity lies in deliberately setting aside longings for a precise “one best solution.” Districts must abandon random, isolated efforts to systematic reform and instead attend to what can be learned from the complexity and adaptability of districts as well as the interdependence of the roles they enact. Second, districts have an indispensable role in educational reform. Third, the proposed theory of districts as institutional actors in systematic reform is predicated on the idea that change at a system level is nonlinear and complex and that their roles and efforts must be variably coupled.

Rorrer et al. (2008) collected research using three electronic databases (EBSCO Host, Education Full Text, and JSTOR). The ancestry approach, which identifies articles and related literature from the reference list of studies selected for inclusion in the synthesis to identify additional relevant studies or reports that may have been missed in the initial search, was used. A total of 81 peer-reviewed articles were used in the final narrative synthesis of research on the district’s role in school reform. In order to ensure the quality of reviews used in the narrative synthesis, Rorrer et al. relied upon research that used qualitative, quantitative, and survey methods. Sixty-two empirical based articles, 12 conceptual articles, three syntheses of previous research, and four other types of scholarship were used in the study.

Four essential roles of districts in reform emerged from the analysis of research conducted by Rorrer et al (2008). The four roles include: (a) providing instructional leadership, (b) reorienting the organization, (c) establishing policy and coherence, and (d) maintaining an equity focus. A thematic analysis of the research allowed Rorrer et al. to develop the four essential roles.

Rorrer et al. (2008) identified instructional leadership as an integral component in school reform. However, it was noted that an agreed-upon definition of instructional leadership does not exist. While an agreed-upon definition is not available, two characteristics of instructional leadership evolved from the research. Generating the will for reform and building the capacity for reform help districts bridge organizational development and policy implementation. As Rorrer et al. explained, generating will and building capacity are key to sustaining reform, particularly when resources for reform implementation diminish.

Rorrer et al. (2008) identified reorienting the organization as the second role of districts in reform. In order to accomplish reorientation, refining and aligning organizational structures and processes as well as changing the district culture are required. These organizational elements define how shifts in structures and processes to support systemic reform must be aligned with refined beliefs, expectations, and norms.

Rorrer et al. (2008) stated that many district actions refining and aligning the organizational structure have to do with structural and organizational changes made to align the district operations with goals for improvement. They also stated that the organizational structure changes include district leadership exerting more control over and involvement in decision making and reform implementation, increasing attention and resources to the curriculum and instruction, hiring or replacing persons to support the mission, and monitoring the technical core. Changing the district culture involves the shifting of the norms, expectations, and values.

Establishing policy coherence is the third essential role of the district. Rorrer et al. (2008) defined coherence as not being simply achieved through implementation of a federal, state, or local policy. Instead, policy coherence is achieved by district leadership examining policies and developing ownership by making them district-specific. The district-specific policies represent a combination of external policy and internal goals and strategies. The key components to establishing policy coherence are mediating federal, state and local policy as well as aligning resources.

The fourth essential role emerged from the research synthesis was maintaining an equity focus. Rorrer et al. (2008) indicated most researchers have been interested in some element of improved instruction or outcomes. Only recently has maintaining an equity focus become prominent as an explicit value in reform implementation or research focus. The research synthesis indicated transparency as a vital role of the district to ensure success. Inequity in

policies, practices, structures, and school and student outcomes in the district were unveiled and made transparent by the school administration and the district administration. Rorrer et al. cited as an example of the use of evaluation and research a comparison of the performance of students receiving free and reduced price lunch to the performance of their peers not participating in the program. The analysis was conducted, posted publicly, referenced, and served as a basis for decision making at the district and school level.

Rorrer et al. (2008) suggested additional research is needed to explore the complexity, interrelatedness, and nonlinearity of the district's roles and the ways that together these roles position the district as an institutional actor in reform. They also suggested expanding future research on districts utilizing longitudinal and comparative case studies to explore the variable coupling between and among the four essential roles of districts.

Rorrer et al. (2008) stated that a limitation of the research is that very little is known about how the external environment influences the district that is enacting the four roles interdependently. Further research is warranted to uncover the possible relationships between external factors and the four roles. It is also evident that varied methodologies should be utilized in future research.

### **Trust and its impact on school improvement (Chhuon, Gilkey, Gonzalez, Daly, & Chrispeels, 2008).**

A study conducted by Chhuon, Gilkey, Gonzalez, Daly, and Chrispeels (2008) focused on the process through which one district engaged in the development of trust between central office and school site leaders, stimulated by participation in a district-university partnership. The operational definition of trust is defined by Chhuon et al. (2008) as one's willingness to participate in a relationship that involves being vulnerable to another person (p. 227). Scholars have identified the critical role of the central office in district reform but have not specifically attended to the construct of trust as a resource to support this reform. Chhuon et al. indicated their investigation bridges the study of district reform and research on trust as an essential element to district improvement.

Chhuon et al. (2008) identified their research method as an exploratory case study designed to examine the development of trust between the central office and school sites in a

California school district (District Y<sup>1</sup>). As Chhuon et al. explained, a case study approach is most appropriate when the phenomenon of interest has ill-defined boundaries and real-life complexities that require multiple data sources. The sources of data included surveys, interviews, observations, and documents collected during a four-year period from central office and site leaders. The study provided significance to the field of educational reform by illustrating that building trust between central office administration and school staff can be an essential step in an underperforming district and can serve as a resource in achieving and sustaining district reform.

Chhuon et al. (2008) explored the construct of trust as a whole as well as the individual subconstructs of trust. The eight subconstructs of trust were identified as (a) risk, (b) communication, (c) benevolence, (d) reliability, (e) competence, (f) integrity, (g) openness, and (h) respect. The researchers also stated that without high-trust relationships, it is unlikely that central office, school staff, and other school district shareholders can create a compelling vision of reform that others wish to share.

The study began in the summer of 2003 when District Y formed a four-year partnership with a university in hopes of closing the achievement gap and to meet the requirements of NCLB. The dynamics of the district were changing rapidly. The district was comprised of 12 elementary schools, four middle schools, an alternative school, and a community day school. The district had experienced a 20% increase in new residents in the prior 12 years, bringing the population to 130,000. According to Chhuon et al. (2008) growth had produced considerable challenges for the district, moving it from a small “family-like” district of 5,000 students of similar background to an urban-like district. At the time of the study, the district had grown to 16,000 students. District Y was labeled a Program Improvement District because five subgroups failed to make adequate yearly progress as defined by NCLB.

Chhuon et al. (2008) attested that the university provided the District Y central office and shareholder team with coaching, facilitation, professional development, and research for four years. The partnership was carried out in four overlapping phases. Phase 1, conducted in 2003-2004, included work with an ethnically diverse district shareholder team and the university partner. The team was comprised of the superintendent, school board, central office administrators, school administrators, classified and certified unions, teachers, parents, and

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<sup>1</sup> Pseudonym for district

community representatives. The university partners conducted the first round of interviews to establish baseline information about the team. Phase 2, conducted in 2003-2005, increased shareholder capacity through a series of institutes and workshops. It included a three-day Fall Institute focused on gaining insights from underlying values blocking reform efforts. Phase 3, conducted in 2004-2005, involved the university partner providing daylong seminars to six of the 16 school leadership teams. Phase 4, conducted in 2005-2007, included sustained and various trust-building efforts by having all school leadership teams participate in the seminars, organizing a strengths-based leadership team summit in November 2005, and implementing a districtwide strategic planning process in 2006-2007.

The data collected by Chhuon et al. (2008) were gathered during a three-year period from primary and secondary sources. Over the course of the partnership between District Y and the university, the university researchers carried out three series of semistructured, individual interviews with members of the district shareholder team as well as with principals. The first round of interviews was conducted prior to the implementation of the university partnership. According to Chhuon et al. trust was not mentioned during the initial interview or the second round of interviews. The third round of individual interviews was to explore participants' perceptions of the actions taken by the central office to build trust. The principals were explicitly asked about the trust-building activities of the central office.

According to Chhuon et al. (2008), researchers observed and videotaped the district shareholder meetings and administrative retreats. They also collected a variety of documents to triangulate the interview and survey data. Chhuon et al. identified the data analysis as an ongoing, recursive process.

Chhuon et al. (2008) used a constant comparative analysis strategy to reexamine the first set of interviews conducted in the fall of 2003 to see if there were any specific mentions of trust or if its facets were present. The additional interviews were analyzed again using a constant comparative analysis method by grouping answers to common questions and analyzing the different perspectives on central issues that involved trust. Member checking was used to further ensure the trustworthiness of the interpretation.

One of the key factors in establishing trust identified by Chhuon et al. (2008) was social exchange and interaction. Unfortunately, Chhuon et al. acknowledged that the structural design of most school districts does not facilitate the opportunities for repeated social exchange and

interactions. Principals operate and lead their schools in relative isolation from each other and from the central office. Chhuon et al. also stated that trust alone may not be a sufficient response for systems to the pressures of *No Child Left Behind* and the threat it poses for leaders of underperforming schools, however it is an essential part of educational systems as well as a resource for school improvement.

The findings indicated four catalytic developments that seemed to bring trust forward to a level that led to action. The developments included: (a) population growth and shifting demographics, (b) attendance at the university-district partnership Fall Institute, (c) Summer Learning Lab 2004 and a growing sense that trust may be critical to the district's improvement process, (d) and raising the trust issue with all administrators. Chhuon et al. (2008) determined these four critical developments served as catalysts that brought trust forth as an issue for examination. Through the analysis of data, Chhuon et al. identified three major trust-building activities: (a) the content of management activities, (b) central office visits to school sites, and (c) implementation of district-wide summits (p. 268).

According to Chhuon et al. (2008) several key implications for theory and practice can be drawn from their case study. An external partner can serve as a catalyst to support a district in discussing the "undiscussables." Although trust in general is important, the facets of trust may provide more explicit guidance in the district reform process. Trust can be developed and fostered by a central office as a way to support district reform. Longitudinal studies would determine whether sustained efforts to build trust yield gains in achievement for students.

The limitations of the study identified by Chhuon et al. (2008) include that the findings are not generalizable to other settings due to the fact the study took place in one district. Chhuon et al. also mentioned that selective bias is a possibility because a single case study is not easily open to cross-checking. Chhuon et al. made an attempt to limit the potential of selective bias by bringing together a team from inside the district and a team from outside the district to collaboratively debate the findings and come to an agreement on the interpretation of them.

### **The districtwide use of data (Wayman, Cho, Jimerson, & Spikes, 2012).**

The use of data is becoming commonplace in the public education realm. Wayman, Cho, Jimerson, and Spikes (2012) stated that during the last 10 years, the field of education has witnessed a substantial increase in studies that examine how educators may use student data to

help improve their practice. The study conducted by Wayman et al. examined the use of data in three school districts. The study explored the effects of educator attitude toward data, principal leadership, and computer data systems have on how data are used to affect classroom practice.

Wayman et al. (2012) provided a review of the literature pertaining to four distinct areas. First, the educators' use of data identified that the use of data varies by role, but has focused primarily on how teachers and principals use data. Exemplary settings have shown principals use both student and building level data to make policy decisions and support faculty. Second, educators in rich data-using contexts often report that they have positive attitudes toward data when supported by a culture of data use. Third, principal leadership research shows that successful school-based data initiatives are almost always marked by principals who are employing practices such as setting clear expectations for data use, involving entire faculties, and making time for collaboration. Fourth, the use of computer data systems, when implemented effectively, has been shown to facilitate many facets of educator data use.

The study conducted by Wayman et al. (2012) was drawn from a larger three-year project designed to help three school districts improve their use of data by employing a systematic focus called "the Data-Informed District." The data were collected in three districts in Texas during the 2009-2010 school year. Wayman et al. stated that the districts, represented by pseudonyms, volunteered for this study to improve their districts' data use. The study included the Boyer School District<sup>1</sup>, which was composed of 8,000 students with less than 5% who were economically disadvantaged. The Gibson School District<sup>2</sup> had a student population of 25,000 students, 50% of whom were economically disadvantaged. The third district was Musial<sup>3</sup> with approximately 45,000 students and an economically disadvantaged percentage of 33%.

The research design Wayman et al. (2012) used was mixed methods. Phone and in-person interviews were conducted with individuals, site visits were made to schools to conduct educator focus groups, and a confidential online survey was made available to all educators in each study district. The information gathered focused on ways data were used and accessed, specific data systems employed, and goals for future data use. All of the interviews were recorded and transcribed for analysis. The qualitative data were collected by administering the Survey of Educator Data Use (Wayman et al., 2012). The survey was a 67-item instrument

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<sup>1</sup> Pseudonym for district

<sup>2</sup> Pseudonym for district

<sup>3</sup> Pseudonym for district

assessing attitudes toward data, support for data use, instructional practices, technology, and specific ways in which data were used by the respondent. Educators in all three districts had access to the survey. Wayman et al. reported the response rate as 50% in Boyer, 62% in Gibson, and 41% in Musial. The comparison categories were educational role and district experience. The educational roles were divided into campus administrators, central office staff, instructional support staff, and teachers. The experience was determined by 5 years or less, 6-11 years, 11-20 years, and 20 years or more.

The analysis of data used by Wayman et al. (2012) drew upon prior research on educational data use and a list of potential analytic themes was generated. The themes were updated and refined during research team meetings. The process resulted in a conceptually coherent set of themes that was used for coding interviews and focus groups. The quantitative analysis included a ranked list of the frequency data use for each of the questions. For the survey scales, ANOVAs were used to compare mean responses by role.

Wayman et al. (2012) concluded that central office educators in the study tended to use data to monitor district and campus progress, to provide feedback to personnel, and to support broad-scale campus efforts. Gibson and Musial central office educators provided information for particular goals while Boyer conducted item analysis for teachers and helped inform departments about strengths and weaknesses in their academic area. According to Wayman et al. instructional support specialists used data consistently across the districts. Campus administrators were found to often focus their data use on struggling students. In fact, they ranked their use of data for identifying the needs of struggling students and for developing recommendations for intervention as the top two most frequent uses of data. The teachers were determined to use data in a variety of ways. They used data to help struggling students, to group and regroup for instruction, to reteach particular concepts and skills, and to adjust instruction. According to Wayman et al. the survey and interview data revealed that participants were generally positive about data use and its potential. Principals across the district also seemed to hold the benefits of data use in high regard. However, the qualitative analysis showed that faculty struggles with data use were often connected to the leadership of their principals.

The results regarding the use of a computer data system were different across each division (Wayman et al. 2012). Boyer had an electronic grade book used to handle grades and other student data; however no data warehouse was present. Gibson employed a Student

Information System (SIS) for assessment data; however it was not user friendly. Their data warehouse was used only to organize district and state level tests. Musial provided a SIS for assessment data. Musial also had a data warehouse but site license restrictions prevented teachers from using it.

Some principals in this study, according to Wayman et al. (2012), were shown to be employing multiple leadership strategies to facilitate faculty data use. In those schools, attitudes were good and data supported educational practice. Unfortunately, only a few principals were facilitating the data use. In schools that were not facilitating the data use, educators reported negative attitudes, and had difficulty using data to improve practice.

In conclusion, Wayman et al. (2012) declared most of the educators in the study wanted data to be used to support classroom practice. They also found that the influences on data use were numerous and complex and many influences could be made positive by effective policy. It is also likely that district policies grounded in compliance will not be effective, but policies that react to and support the ways that educators work will be effective.

### **Sustainability of school improvement (Lambert, 2007).**

Lambert (2007) examined sustainability as a condition for lasting school improvement. The research identified characteristics of high leadership capacity schools. Lambert stated that sustainability is a function of leadership, a particular kind of leadership. The leadership assumptions identified by Lambert (2007) as crucial for sustainability include:

- a. Leadership is not a trait theory; leadership and the leader are not the same.
- b. Leadership is about learning that leads to constructive change. Learning has direction toward a shared purpose.
- c. Everyone has the potential and right to work as a leader. Leading is skilled and complicated work that every member of the school community can learn.
- d. Leading is a shared endeavor, the foundation for the democratization of schools.
- e. Leadership requires the redistribution of power and authority. Shared learning, purpose, action and responsibility demand the realignment of power and authority.
- f. How leadership is defined will determine how people participate. If only those in formal roles are called leaders, others will not perceive themselves as leaders. (p. 312)

Lambert (2007) studied 15 high leadership capacity schools based on the following characteristics,

- Principal and teachers as well as a significant number of parents and students are becoming skillful leaders.
- Shared vision produces program coherence.
- Inquiry-based information is used.
- Roles and actions reflect broad involvement, collaboration & collective responsibility.
- Reflective practice leads to innovation.
- Student achievement is high or improving steadily. (Lambert, 2007, p. 312)

The schools were located in the United States and Canada. They varied in size, grade level distribution, diversity, and socioeconomic status. While Lambert examined 15 schools deemed as having high leadership capacity, the same schools previously had been determined to be lower leadership capacity schools. Lambert (2007) described lower leadership capacity schools as being Archetype 1: low participation and low skillfulness, Archetype 2: higher participation and low skillfulness, or Archetype 3: high skillfulness and low participation. The schools selected for the study had shown improvement in student performance data. Lambert identified student achievement as multiple sources of evidence for development and performance – test scores, portfolios, exhibits, self-knowledge, and social maturity. The study sought to unravel the questions: How did they get there? How did they become ‘High Leadership Capacity Schools’?

Lambert (2007) indicated fundamental components of school improvement. While the researcher identified the three archetypes of low leadership capacity schools, the evolving phases toward lasting school improvement were discussed at length. Time for the improvement to occur is a necessity, however it is what consistently occurs during that time that brings about change. The consistent evolution of school improvement was identified by Lambert in three phases: the instructive phase, the transitional phase, and the high capacity leadership phase. Principal characteristics are different at each of the phases.

In the instructive phase, the principal and other formal leaders insisted on giving results, convening conversations, solving problems, challenging assumptions, confronting incompetence, focusing work, establishing structures and processes that engage others, and articulating beliefs that may find their way into the fabric of thinking of the school. They understood where they

were going in building capacity and felt that they needed to “jump start” the process in order to move out of the low performing leadership capacity school status.

The transitional phase, according to Lambert (2007), may be the most challenging for the principal. It is a time of epiphanies and turning points for both principals and teachers. Lambert described the transitional phase as being supported by a continuance of a holding environment, and an easing out, or letting go, of that condition as teachers gained ascendancy in initiation and responsibility. Teachers were given additional roles and responsibilities as they are ready. The transition phase gave way to the high leadership capacity phase when reintegration and self-organization became more nearly achieved.

Lambert (2007) described the high leadership capacity phase as displaying many of the qualities and skills that helped principals succeed in the two previous phases. The principal evidenced a lower profile than ever before and relinquished and shared critical roles and responsibilities. Teachers as well as principals initiated new actions and posed critical questions. Lambert identified teachers and principals as being more alike than different. In fact, she stated that when principals lead for the time when they will no longer be the principal, teachers can enter a state of self-organization. Within a state of self-organization, staff can outlast, endure, and perhaps energize a marginal principal and often sustain school improvement.

Lambert (2007) stated that sustainability continues to be the most confounding problem in human organizations. The complexity of student learning and bureaucratic limitations place education even more at risk. The risk factors are identified as episodic and random improvements subject to rapid diminution with personnel changes.

The research articles discussed in depth highlight educational reform through the lens of the central office level. While the studies focused on specific reform strategies, a more rapid quest for achievement in failing schools may be necessary or desirable. School improvement initiatives provide schools the possibility to make substantial academic gains in a short period of time.

### **The Need for School Improvement**

“The schools always have had plenty of critics, but widespread reform has succeeded only when there has been a general crisis of confidence” (Kaestle 1990, p. 33). In an article entitled *The Polls-Trends, Governance and Reform of Public Education in the United States*,

Hochschild and Scott (1998) stated, “Americans have been surveyed to a fare-thee-well with regard to their views of elementary and secondary public education” (p. 79). “Roughly four in 10 Americans had a great deal of confidence in public education during the 1970s” (Hochschild & Scott, 1998, p. 80). “By the mid-1990s, fewer than one-quarter of Americans expressed great confidence in public schooling” (Hochschild & Scott, 1998, p. 80).

Educational reform includes a staggering body of research, ranging from the impact of classroom size on educational gains to school attendance and the significance of absenteeism in relation to standardized test performance. Although the amount of research is vast, it is difficult to pinpoint why certain schools continue to struggle with student achievement. Effective schools, however, exhibit common characteristics.

The task of Effective Schools researchers “was to identify existing effective schools – schools that were successful in educating all students regardless of their socioeconomic status or family background” (Lezotte, 2001, p. 1). Once the schools were identified, the researchers began to determine common characteristics among the effective schools. “These attributes eventually became known as the Correlates of Effective Schools” (Lezotte, 2001, p. 2). The correlates have been refined to include: “instructional leadership, clear and focused mission, safe and orderly environment, climate of high expectations, frequent monitoring of student progress, positive home-school relations, and opportunity to learn and student time on task” (Lezotte, 2001, p. 3). Two additional components identified by Lezotte (2001) include “school improvement resulting in increased student achievement could only be sustained with strong district support (p.3) and “we have never yet found an effective school that did not have a strong instructional leader as the principal” (p. 4).

Although we can determine the characteristics an effective school has, the trek to become effective is not always clear. “Education leaders seem to believe that, outside of the world of schools, persistent failures are easily fixed. Far from it” (Smarick, 2010, p. 25). In fact, “The limited success of turnarounds is a common theme in other fields” (Smarick, 2010, p. 25). While instructional leaders are taught what an effective school looks like, it is difficult to put all of the necessary components into place to ensure success.

School turnaround has a fundamentally different approach than other school improvement initiatives. “School turnaround focuses on the most consistently underperforming schools and involves dramatic, transformative change” (Calkins. A., Geunther, W., Belfiore, G.,

& Lash, D, 2007, p. 10). “For as long as there have been struggling schools in America’s cities, there have been efforts to turn them around” (Smarick 2010, p. 21). While “the school turnaround movement now occupies center stage in US education reform” (Stuit & Stringfield, 2012, p. 4), understanding why, when, and where the concept of school turnaround originated is important.

The concept of organizational turnaround originated from private business. “Turnaround specialists were called upon to assume leadership of failing businesses and make the tough decisions necessary to restore them to profitability” (Duke 2012). “In fact, Northeastern University even had established a program to offer credentials to turnaround specialists in the private sector” (Duke, 2012, p. 11). While the research on turnarounds in the business sector is clear, that research provides very little evidence to help determine the long-term effects of school turnaround efforts.

The term turnaround appeared initially in the realm of education during the 1990s. Turnaround for Children, Inc. was created in New York City to address the psychological needs of young people. “Harold Levy, Chancellor of the New York City school system, asked Pamela Cantor, the president of Turnaround for Children, to work with children in crisis in New York City schools” (Duke, 2012, p. 10). The initial work completed by Cantor and Turnaround for Children, Inc. led to the inception of school turnaround strategies. The launching of School Turnaround, a consulting company to help schools achieve rapid growth in student educational performance, was spearheaded by Gillian Williams. “Williams had been serving as principal of P.S. 63 in the South Bronx and had achieved dramatic gains in student achievement over a relatively brief period of time” (Duke, 2012, p. 10). The Rensselaerville Institute in upstate New York worked with Williams to establish a program to “help principals turn around low-performing schools” (Duke, 2012, p. 10).

Research on school turnaround comes primarily from two distinct strands: case studies of successful turnaround schools and organizational turnaround lessons imported from outside of the education sector (Hansen, 2012). While the case studies of successful programs are exciting and provide hope for failing schools, as Brownstein (n.d.) stated, “turnaround schools may be rare, but they do happen-the scarcity of success stories is reason enough for journalists to approach the plans put forth by their neighborhood schools with a high degree of skepticism” (p. 4)

School turnaround efforts have captured the attention of school, government, and industry leaders. As Hochbein (2012) stated, borrowed from the vocabulary and methods of the corporate sector, school turnaround has become a commonly proposed solution to improving chronically low-performing schools. The changes are typically gigantic and the impact can be great. Relevant research on school turnaround efforts includes the use of data in decision making, goal establishment, stakeholder involvement, and professional learning community development (Cwikla, 2003; Marzano, 1992; Stewart, 2012; Strom, Strom, & Beckert, 2011). The seemingly impossible task of raising student achievement looms, ever present, demanding attention. While research indicates themes within school turnaround, Smarick (2010) warned, “Once persistently low performing, the majority of schools will remain low performing despite being acted upon in innumerable ways” (p. 21).

While the research is current and ongoing, there is little evidence of intent to study sustained change after the implementation of school turnaround efforts. While immediate gains are quite appealing to districts that are lacking in educational achievement, consideration must be given to the sustainability of results. “Few authors have examined the sustainability and longitudinal impact of schools that experienced significant gains in student achievement” (Hochbein, 2012, p. 93). Instructional gains as determined by performance on standardized tests may in fact occur, but there have been minimal efforts to examine change over a period of time. Systemic change is the goal of school turnaround efforts and longitudinal analysis of standardized scores will determine if the changes have been sustained. We cannot assume schools whose students are not achieving success have the knowledge or capacity to rectify their situation with state-imposed sanctions.

Using data to inform decision making is a vital component of school turnaround. As Rhim (2012) indicated in the action steps related to turnaround leaders, they must “collect data related to turnaround indicators” (p. 6). Data must also be used to make the determination of sustainability. In the study *Relegation and Reversion: Longitudinal Analysis of School Turnaround and Decline*, Hochbein (2012) stated “Results of the study indicated that three years after a school experienced turnaround, on average, academic performance declined from peak performance, but did not revert to prior low levels of performance” (p. 92).

Sustainability of school turnaround efforts is a vital topic to examine. Federal, state, and local funds are infused into failing schools and school districts. If the efforts are successful, and

it is known from case studies that the margin for success is small, how long will the reform last? One important factor to consider is the target goal for meeting Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) is not fixed. It has increased over time in incremental stages. For instance, a school in Virginia can be deemed successful in meeting the AYP goal of 85% one year but can be deemed a failing school as a result of the AYP bar moving higher the next. Is the amount of money, time, and effort available enough to culturally reform a school for sustained success? Duke (2012) stated, failure to focus on the performance of particular student subgroups, failure to distribute and target resources adequately, failure to accord schools greater decision-making authority and flexibility, and failure to increase instructional time for struggling students are all implied causes of low achievement (p. 11).

As successful strategies are implemented in a failing school, the continuation and evolution of the educational program can continue and ideally academic gains would sustain. However, this is often not the case as evidenced through research (Brownstein, n.d.; Gewertz, 2009; Smarick, 2010).

An extensive amount of federal aid has been earmarked for school improvement. As Gewertz (2009) stated, “the federal government is dangling a lot of money for school turnaround work” (p. 3). The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act included \$3.5 billion for the Title I school improvement grant program. The U.S. Secretary of Education had made the call to “turn around the nation’s 5,000 worst performing schools” (Gewertz, 2009, p. 4). With the funding available and the national push to turn around failing public schools, school turnaround programs started to develop. “Late in 2005 the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation awarded the Mass Insight Education and Research Institute a grant to create a framework for states and school systems seeking a systematic approach to rapid school improvement” (Duke, 2012, p. 12). In 2006, Chicago’s Academy for Urban School Leadership (AUSL) took over management of its first turnaround school (Duke, 2012, p. 12). The model AUSL developed was eventually called the reconstitution model. It included hiring a new faculty, many of whom had been trained at an AUSL academy (Duke, 2012, p. 12).

The availability of an enormous amount of federal funding plus state and local resources created considerable interest in school turnarounds on the part of external partners. In addition to relatively small organizations such as the University of Virginia’s School Turnaround Specialist Program (STSP) and Mass Insight, large commercial outfits

including Pearson and Houghton Mifflin created units devoted to turning around low-performing schools. So many external partners surfaced in the wake of ARRA, in fact, that some states developed approved lists of vendors to protect school districts from hucksterism. (Duke, 2012, p. 14)

Different programs have been developed for the purpose of school improvement. Within the state of Virginia, the school improvement model selected by the Virginia Department of Education's Office of School Improvement is the Indistar Program (<http://www.indistar.org/evidence/>, para. 1). The second school improvement program selected for examination in this study is the University of Virginia School Turnaround Specialist Program. Both were implemented in two elementary schools in Ridgeview County. The Virginia Department of Education's Office of School Improvement allowed the simultaneous implementation of both school improvement models in only two Virginia districts.

## **The University of Virginia School Turnaround Specialist Program**

### **History.**

“When Mark Warner became governor of Virginia in 2002, he brought with him a background in business entrepreneurship” (Duke, 2012, p. 11). Warner pursued the transformation of the turnaround idea from the business sector to public education by “pressing the Virginia Department of Education to issue a request for proposals to create a program to develop school turnaround specialists” (Duke, 2012, p. 11). The University of Virginia's Curry School of Education and Darden Graduate School of Business Administration submitted a response to a request for proposal to create a program to aid in school turnaround. The UVA proposal was selected as the winning program and “in 2004 launched the Virginia School Turnaround Specialist Program (VSTSP)” (Duke, 2012, p. 11).

According to the VSTSP (2013), the program was expanded in 2006, based on promising results in Virginia, demand from other districts, and a \$3 million grant from Microsoft's Partners in Learning Program. The schools and districts served have included urban, suburban, and rural districts across 17 states (<http://www.darden.virginia.edu/web/Darden-Curry-PLP/UVA-School-Turnaround/History/>).

### **Program goals.**

In an article published by Public Impact in association with the University of Virginia, authors Steiner and Hassel (2011) stated that the factors affecting turnaround are “the characteristics and actions of the turnaround leader, and the support for dramatic change that the leader and staff receive from the district, state, and/or other governing authority” (p. 1). They add the following statistic, “although leadership accounts for 25 percent of school effects in most schools, in a turnaround the leader is paramount (p. 1).

“Three of the four options available under the federal School Improvement Grant program require districts to replace top leadership in persistently low-achieving schools. A large number of state accountability systems also require new leadership in failing schools” (Kowal & Hassel, 2011, p. 2). Kowal and Hassel (2011) stated that “cross-industry research indicates that as many as 70 percent of successful turnarounds begin with a change in top leadership” (p. 2). One of the key components of the VSTSP is “high-impact leaders” (<http://www.darden.virginia.edu/web/Darden-Curry-PLE/UVA-School-Turnaround/History/>, para. 2). The VSTSP provides “guidance in selecting and developing school leaders with a high potential for success, using a rigorous, competency based process. The program also helps provide districts and other entities with the skills necessary to build a pipeline of high impact turnaround leaders” (<http://www.darden.virginia.edu/web/Darden-Curry-PLE/UVA-School-Turnaround/Components/>, para. 2).

The VSTSP program also “builds capacity of leaders in the fundamentals of what successful turnaround requires” (<http://www.darden.virginia.edu/web/Darden-Curry-PLE/UVA-School-Turnaround/Components/>, para. 4).

The program “ensures the district capacity to support and sustain effective school turnaround is in place.” The program also works with districts to “identify a key district leader, or district shepherd, who attends all leadership development sessions and ensures the conditions necessary for turnaround success are established” (<http://www.darden.virginia.edu/web/Darden-Curry-PLE/UVA-School-Turnaround/Components/>, para. 3).

“Through coursework, case studies, interactive discussions, workshops and implementation of action plans, the VSTSP is delivered at UVA’s Darden School of Business and in participating school districts over the course of two years”

[\(http://www.darden.virginia.edu/web/Darden-Curry-PLE/UVA-School-Turnaround/Curriculum/\)](http://www.darden.virginia.edu/web/Darden-Curry-PLE/UVA-School-Turnaround/Curriculum/). The VSTSP focuses on practices that will initiate change and build capacity. The VSTSP curriculum for school, district, and specified teachers include:

- Understanding the school turnaround context and the fundamentals of successful turnarounds,
- Developing and communicating a vision that includes the need for urgent change,
- Establishing a culture of high expectations,
- Building effective coalitions and implementing shared decision-making,
- Using data to drive decisions and to monitor/measure the need for mid-course corrections,
- Identifying innovation opportunities and develop strategic plans, and
- Teaching state/district/school administrators to think like leaders, not simply managers. (<http://www.darden.virginia.edu/web/Darden-Curry-PLE/UVA-School-Turnaround/Curriculum/>, para. 3)

While the curriculum, as stated above, is defined, the VSTSP acknowledges there is no one particular method to turn around schools. “The VSTSP works with educational leaders to identify key issues and develop strategies based on their own school/district’s context” (<http://www.darden.virginia.edu/web/Darden-Curry-PLE/UVA-School-Turnaround/Program/>, para. 5). “Through 2011, 138 schools have completed the University of Virginia School Turnaround Specialist Program across 10 states (Florida, Illinois, Louisiana, Missouri, North Dakota, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, Texas, and Virginia)” (<http://www.darden.virginia.edu/web/Darden-Curry-PLE/UVA-School-Turnaround/Results/> para. 3). According to research conducted by the University of Virginia’s School Turnaround Program, “The average school completing our two-year program saw more than a 40% rise in average proficiency” (Robinson & Buntrock 2011, p. 4).

## **Indistar Program**

### **History.**

Indistar is defined as “a web-based system implemented by a state education agency, district, or charter school organization for use with district and/or school improvement teams to inform, coach, sustain, track, and report improvement activities” (Academic Development Institute, 2009, p. 1). The Indistar program was developed by the Center on Innovation and Improvement (CII) “in 2007 for use by the Virginia Department of Education and has since been adopted by an additional twenty-three states” (<http://www.indistar.org/evidence/>, para. 5).

### **Program goals.**

The overarching goal of CII is to “support regional centers in their work with states to provide districts, schools, and families with the opportunities, information, and skills to make wise decisions on behalf of students”

(<http://www.centerii.org/aboutus/brochure/NewCIIBrochure32009.pdf>, p. 2). The initiatives established by CII include the following:

- School and District Improvement,
- Restructuring and Turnarounds,
- Statewide Systems of Supports,
- Families and Schools,
- Extended Learning (SES, Tutoring), and
- Charter Schools

(<http://www.centerii.org/aboutus/brochure/NewCIIBrochure32009.pdf>, p. 2 )

In efforts to help districts and schools, the “goals are typically constructed around a core function, such as Leadership, Curriculum, Professional Development, or Instruction. They are often broad statements that advance a mission. Specific, detailed actions, are then necessary to attain a goal” (<http://www.indistar.org/advance>, para. 1).

The program institutes indicators for success that are described as “specific, plain language guideposts, aligned with research. In fact, the indicators are so specific that they can be easily assessed, clearly aligned with people responsible, set to timelines, coached, and tracked for high-quality implementation” (<http://www.indistar.org/advance>, para. 1). The validity of

Indistar is addressed within a publication produced by the Academic Development Institute (2009), owner of Indistar. “CII has spent the time researching and identifying the behaviors and practices that result in improved teaching and learning so that the district and school can spend its time implementing them” (Academic Development Institute, 2009, p. 3).

The Indistar Program provides a customizable list of practices and indicators. States, divisions, or schools have the ability to populate the list as deemed appropriate. The indicators of effective practice are specific, plain language guide posts, aligned with research, easily assessed, clearly aligned with people responsible, set to timelines, and tracked for high-quality implementation. Overall goals are broken into four distinct areas along with effective practices and indicators.

- District Improvement: 4 effective practices, 38 indicators
- School (Continuous Improvement for schools making adequate progress): 17 effective practices, 168 indicators
- School (Rapid Improvement for schools needing a steep improvement trajectory): 14 effective practices, 82 indicators
- Rapid Improvement Leader (principal): 4 effective practices, 14 indicators (Academic Development Institute, 2009, p. 7)

“Virginia employed the system first at the district level, in 30 districts in conditional accreditation status or with schools in restructuring or conditional accreditation status. Virginia has now expanded to more than 300 schools” (<http://www.indistar.org/evidence/>, para. 1). Positive trends have been indicated throughout the country. In fact, Dr Kathleen Smith, Virginia Director of School Improvement noted, “We were thrilled! At the end of the first year, 20 of the 30 schools participating in Indistar and identified as chronically low-performing made the benchmark pass rate to meet full accreditation status” (<http://www.centerii.org/aboutus/brochure/NewCIIBrochure32009.pdf>, p. 2)

### **A Comparison of the Salient Features of the University of Virginia School Turnaround Program and the Indistar Program**

“A failing school does not have the luxury of years to implement incremental reforms. Instead, leaders at the school should make clear commitments to dramatic changes from the status quo and signal the magnitude and urgency of those changes” (Herman, R., Dawson, P.,

Dee, T., Green, J., Maynard, R., Redding, S., & Darwin, M., 2008, p. 10). Both the University of Virginia School Turnaround Program and the Indistar Program strive for improved student performance. However, the means by which improved performance is obtained is different for each program.

The University of Virginia School Turnaround Program promotes change through leadership at the central office level, the principal level, and the teacher level. “One of the most challenging barriers in education today is identifying school leaders who can successfully lead turnarounds of persistently low-achieving public schools” (Kowal & Hassell, 2011, p. 1). The Indistar Program works with the teachers to implement a program to build educational capacity with the students they serve. “Indistar will guide improvement – whether district, school, or both – through a continuous cycle of assessment, planning, implementation, and progress tracking. Focus will be clear, responsibilities assigned, efforts synchronized” (Academic Development Institute, 2009, p. 1)

Both programs require extensive professional development for the administration and teacher leadership teams. The University of Virginia School Turnaround Program requires the central office leadership team and the school based administrative team to spend seven days attending professional development workshops at the Darden School of Business. The professional development is provided by the Darden School of Business and the Curry School of Education professors. The focus is on leadership development. Each semester, throughout the two-year implementation phase, a team from Ridgeview County attended additional professional development at the University of Virginia. The University of Virginia School Turnaround Program assigned a staff member to serve as a liaison with Ridgeview County throughout the program to assist and encourage the implementation.

The Indistar Program relies heavily on professional development through webinars. The central office leadership team, school based administrative team and teacher leadership teams are provided professional development. The professional development continues throughout the implementation of the Indistar Program. A liaison, Dr. Jim Sellers, who is on this researchers examining committee, was assigned through the Virginia Department of Education School Improvement Office to assist in the implementation of the program.

Both programs are data-driven, goal oriented, focused on successes and geared to break organizational norms. Throughout the implementation of the programs change is an expectation.

Periodic “check-ups” were conducted through the University of Virginia School Turnaround Program and the Virginia Department of Education Office of School Improvement.

## **Synthesis and Conclusion**

Several factors have led to the development of school turnaround programs including increased accountability, legislative initiatives, grant opportunities, and the overall desire for increased student achievement. While researchers have examined many different aspects of school reform and school improvement, limited research focuses specifically on school turnaround efforts.

In the fall of 2011, Ridgeview County Schools partnered with the University of Virginia’s School Turnaround Program due to continued poor academic performance in two elementary schools. Richfield Primary, a pre-kindergarten through second grade school, and Monroe Elementary, a third through fifth grade school, had not achieved the federal and state expectations on standardized tests for four consecutive years. The schools worked with the University of Virginia and also implemented the Indistar school improvement model. Only Ridgeview County and one additional district within Virginia have had the experience of working with both improvement models simultaneously.

School districts in Virginia are referred to as school divisions. The two school divisions that participated in both models simultaneously are very different. Ridgeview County is a rural division located in Southwest Virginia while the other division is in Northern Virginia. Ridgeview has fewer resources and is much smaller than the Northern Virginia division. However, the two divisions participated in the same University of Virginia School Turnaround Program cohort.

While some studies have examined school turnaround programs, there is no research on the simultaneous implementation of the University of Virginia’s School Turnaround Program and the Indistar Program (Duke, 2012; Hanson, 2012; Kowal & Hassell, 2011). Therefore, the purpose of the study is to describe the process of simultaneous implementation of two school improvement models and how those models influenced school improvement practices in a rural Southwest Virginia school system. The research questions include:

1. How were the two school improvement models implemented?

- a. Who was involved in the decision to implement each of the school improvement models?
  - b. What factors aided in the implementation of the two school improvement models?
  - c. What barriers to the implementation of the two school improvement models were encountered?
2. Which best practices were adopted from each school improvement model that resulted in the Ridgeview County hybrid model of school improvement? Why?
  3. Which practices of the two school improvement models were not adopted in the Ridgeview County hybrid model of school improvement? Why?
  4. What other practices are utilized in the Ridgeview County hybrid model of school improvement? From what source were they adopted and why?

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methodology**

#### **Introduction**

Richfield Primary School and Monroe Elementary School, schools in the Ridgeview County school system, fell under federal sanctions because of continued failure to meet AYP. While a school improvement process was in use in Ridgeview County Schools, the data used to determine areas of weakness were not broken down to determine specific instructional deficits. The existing school improvement process focused on overall school performance as opposed to seeking in-depth information to implement instructional change. The Ridgeview County school improvement model is in continual development. The hybrid school improvement model now in use is derived from the division's own experiences with school improvement in the past as well as its involvement with the Indistar Program and the University of Virginia School Turnaround Program.

The evolution of the Ridgeview County hybrid school improvement model will become evident through the description of the simultaneous implementation process. The hybrid model incorporates identified best practices from both of the programs. In addition to the description of implementation, themes within four domains of information emerged from the interviews conducted with the central office staff, school administration, and the school leadership teams. While the results of the study are not generalizable, the practices that were found to be beneficial in Ridgeview County may be valuable to other educators and policymakers as examples of best practice.

#### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study was to describe the process of simultaneous implementation of two school improvement models and how those models influenced school improvement practices in a rural Southwest Virginia school system.

#### **Research Question**

The research questions that framed the study are:

1. How were the two school improvement models implemented?

- a. Who was involved in the decision to implement each of the school improvement models?
  - b. What factors aided in the implementation of the two school improvement models?
  - c. What barriers to the implementation of the two school improvement models were encountered?
2. Which best practices were adopted from each school improvement model that resulted in the Ridgeview County hybrid model of school improvement? Why?
  3. Which practices of the two school improvement models were not adopted in the Ridgeview County hybrid model of school improvement? Why?
  4. What other practices are utilized in the Ridgeview County hybrid model of school improvement? From what source were they adopted and why?

### **Design of the Study**

The goal for the investigation was to describe and understand the implementation process and the resulting hybrid school improvement model based on the lived experiences of school leaders who led the process. Therefore, the research design selected for the study was qualitative. A qualitative approach was selected because the study is “based on the philosophical orientation called phenomenology, which focuses on people’s experience from their perspective” (Roberts, 2010, p. 143). McMillan and Wergin (2010) stated, “In qualitative research, the emphasis is on conducting studies in natural settings using mostly verbal descriptions, resulting in stories and case studies rather than statistical reports” (p. 4).

The specific research methodology used was a case study. As Yin, 1994, explains “case studies are the preferred strategy when ‘how’ or ‘why’ questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context” (p. 1). Additionally, “if you needed to know ‘how’ or ‘why’ the program had worked (or not), you would lean toward either a case study or a field experiment” (Yin, 1994, p. 7). As the study’s purpose and research questions paralleled those conditions, a case study was the appropriate research design for the study.

## **Setting for the Study**

Ridgeview County is in rural Southwest Virginia. The district has seven elementary schools, three middle schools, three high schools, and a career and technical school. The district serves approximately 4,560 students. Two schools within Ridgeview County, Richfield Primary School and Monroe Elementary School, were the sites for the study. Richfield Primary School and Monroe Elementary School are both pseudonyms.

Richfield Primary School served approximately 485 students in Grades Pre-kindergarten through 2 during the 2011-2013 academic years. Richfield Primary School has an economically disadvantaged rate of 61% of the student population receiving free or reduced price meals. The student population is predominately White with 9% of the students coming from minority groups that include African Americans, Asians, Hispanics, Pacific Islanders, American Indians, or Alaska Natives. Students with disabilities make up 17% of the student population. The administrative staff includes one principal, a shared assistant principal and a shared school improvement coach. Both the assistant principal and the school improvement coach are shared with Monroe Elementary School. The instructional staff includes 24 classroom teachers, two special education inclusion teachers, one resource teacher, four Title I teachers, three special education self-contained teachers, and 14 instructional aides. Richfield Primary School is the only feeder school for Monroe Elementary School.

Monroe Elementary School served approximately 400 students in Grades 3 through 5 during the same time period. Monroe Elementary School has an economically disadvantaged rate of 58% of the student population receiving free or reduced price meals. Student ethnicity is comparable to that of Richfield Primary School. The population is predominately White with 11% of the students coming from minority groups that include African Americans, Asians, Hispanics, Pacific Islanders, American Indians or Alaska Natives. Students with disabilities make up 15% of the student population. The administrative staff includes one principal, a shared assistant principal and a shared school improvement coach. Both the assistant principal and the school improvement coach are shared with Richfield Primary School. The instructional staff includes 19 classroom teachers, three special education inclusion teachers, four Title I teachers, one intervention teacher, two special education self-contained special education teachers, and eight instructional aides.

For federal and state accountability purposes, student performance is measured beginning in third grade. Therefore, Richfield Primary School’s state accreditation and federal attainment of AYP is based on the performance of students who attend Monroe Elementary School. The results of the Standards of Learning tests in reading and mathematics at Grade 3 determine attainment of accreditation and attainment of AYP.

Monroe Elementary and Richfield Primary both fell under sanctions for not attaining federal AYP. Participation in the Indistar Program is a requirement for schools in Virginia that do not meet federal AYP. The University of Virginia School Turnaround Program was selected by Ridgeview County as an additional resource to assist both schools in improving student achievement. The SOL pass rates for 2010-2011 are presented in Table 1.

Table 1  
*SOL Pass Percentages for Monroe Elementary School and Richfield Primary School*

Administration Date	Subject	Overall Pass Rate	AYP Required
Spring 2011			
Subject	English	75.44	86
Subject	Math	77.15	85
Spring 2012			
Subject	English	77.68	91
Subject	Math	59.92	90

**Approval for the Study**

The researcher completed Training in Human Subjects Protection in the fall of 2011 in conjunction with the course *EDRE Qualitative Research Methods in Education I*, which was taken as a course in his program of study at Virginia Tech. The training was successfully completed on September 5, 2011 (see Appendix A for the IRB certificate).

Prior to conducting the study, the researcher completed an Institutional Review Board (IRB) Research Protocol and submitted it for approval to the Virginia Tech Institutional Review

Board. Institutional Review Board approval for the study was obtained on May 28, 2014 (see Appendix B). The timeline for completion of the interview process is in the Researcher's Log, Appendix C. The IRB suggested securing the participants' verbal consent for participation in the study. The IRB indicated that verbal consent rather than written consent would increase the confidentiality for the participants. The change was made in the procedures of the interview process.

Subsequent to IRB approval, the researcher contacted the superintendent of Ridgeview County Schools, provided an overview of the study, and asked permission to implement the study (see Appendix D). The study was viewed positively and verbal permission was gained from the superintendent of schools. Written permission from the superintendent was given on May 30, 2014 (see Appendix E). A letter was sent thanking him for his permission and assistance (see Appendix F). The researcher also contacted Mr. William Robinson, professor in the University of Virginia School Turnaround Program and notified him of the planned study by phone, requested his cooperation, and inquired about his willingness to provide documents and archival records created during Ridgeview County's implementation period. Finally, the researcher contacted Dr. Kathleen Smith, Title I Coordinator for the Virginia Department of Education and notified her of the planned study by phone, requested her cooperation, and inquired about her willingness to provide documents and archival records created during Ridgeview County's implementation period. Both Mr. Robinson and Dr. Smith verbally agreed during the month of March, 2014, to cooperate and provide information for the study as needed. Appendices G and H provide evidence of their willingness to cooperate.

### **Participant Selection**

Participants in the study were selected as a purposeful sample. "Purposeful sampling is done to select individuals, sites, or documents that will be most informative" (McMillan & Wergin, 2010, p. 90). Every participant served in a leadership capacity during the implementation of the two school improvement models. The superintendent, District Leadership Team, school administrators, and School Leadership Teams were selected for participation because of their direct involvement in the University of Virginia School Turnaround Program and the Indistar Program. The District Leadership Team consisted of three individuals: the assistant superintendent, Title I director and the special education director. The school

administration consisted of four individuals: the principal of both schools, the shared assistant principal, and the school improvement coach serving both buildings. The school leadership team consisted of five teachers in each building serving as collaborators with the principal to make school-level decisions regarding school improvement activities. Each group was interviewed independently from each other. All 18 individuals who agreed to participate in the study were provided information about the study (see Appendix I).

### **Informed Consent**

The ethical principles underlying informed consent are that

1. participants are as fully informed as possible about the study's purpose and audience,
2. they understand what their agreement to participate entails,
3. they give that consent willingly, and
4. they understand that they may withdraw from the study at any time without prejudice.

(Rossman and Rallis, 2003, p.75)

Those who agreed to participate in the study received a confirmation and thank you letter (see Appendix J). A brief description of the study and an explanation of informed consent were given to participants (see Appendix K) and verbal consent was gained. Informed consent also protects the identity and privacy of the participants. The risk to them as a participant, the absence of compensation, the ability to withdraw from the study at any time, the method of recording the interview, and how data would be disposed once the study concluded were conveyed in the informed consent.

### **Data Sources**

Data were collected from three sources typically used in case studies: participant interviews, documents, and archival records. Interviews were chosen to secure a rich and robust data set. "Interviewing takes you into participants' worlds, at least as far as they can (or choose to) verbally relate what is in their minds (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 180). Documents and archival records were chosen to triangulate and augment the data that emerged from the interviews.

## **Interviews**

Interview data were collected by interviewing: (a) the superintendent; (b) the District Leadership Team consisting of the assistant superintendent, who is also the researcher, the special education director, and the Title I director; (c) the Richfield Primary School and Monroe Elementary School leadership teams consisting of the principals, assistant principal and school improvement coach; (d) the teacher leadership team from Richfield Primary School; and (e) the teacher leadership team from Monroe Elementary School.

An individual interview was conducted with the superintendent. Focus group interviews were conducted with the other participants and served as the primary data source for the study. Focus group interviews allow the researcher to ask key respondents questions to obtain the facts of a matter and for their opinions about events (Yin, 1994, p. 84). They may also be used to ask participants to propose their own insights, which can be used as the basis for further inquiry (Yin, 1994, p. 84).

The focus group interviews were guided by a specific set of questions. “The interviews may still remain open-ended and assume a conversational manner, but you are more likely to be following a certain set of questions derived from the case study protocol” (Yin, 1994, p. 85). Through interviewing the district office staff, the school administration and the teacher leadership team, an understanding of the implementation process was gleaned from the lived experiences of each individual group. The interviews gave “people’s knowledge, opinions, perceptions, and feelings as well as detailed descriptions of people’s actions, behaviors, activities, and interpersonal interactions” (Roberts, 2010, p. 143).

## **Development of the Interview Questions**

The base set of interview questions used in the study is located in Appendix L. Questions specific to each focus group and to the superintendent were developed in addition to the base set of interview questions. The questions were based on the participant’s level of responsibility for the implementation of the two school improvement models. The specific interview questions used in the interview sessions are found in Appendix M. The interview questions data were cross-referenced against three domains of information: (a) experience, what the participants thought, felt, and did during the implementation of the models; (b) knowledge, what the participants determined as the positive and negative impacts of the implementation as well as

their views of what others thought about the programs throughout the division; and (c) involvement, their role in the implementation. The domains of information were developed by examining the purpose, research questions, and the interview questions. Follow up questions were developed to probe further responses to the questions if needed (see Appendix L).

### **Content Validity Check**

A content validity check of the interview questions was performed to provide the researcher with confirmation that the interview questions were related to the domain(s) of information associated with the research question and were clear to the interviewee. Content validity “has to do with the format of the instrument. This includes such things as the clarity of printing, size of type, adequacy of work space, appropriateness of language, clarity of directions, and so on” (Fraenkel, Waller, & Hyun, 2015, p. 152).

Two Ridgeview County school principals not involved in the study were selected as participants in the content validity check. Both agreed to participate and were informed of the purpose of the task, risks, and benefits of participation in the task, the confidentiality component, and their ability to withdraw from participation at any point during the process. This information was conveyed through a cover letter attached to the validity instrument (see Appendix N). The researcher met with the two principals to complete the content validity check on May 29, 2014.

The principals were asked to assign each question to the appropriate domain(s) of information as a check of the researcher’s assignment of the questions into domains. The definitions of the three domains of information for the content validity check are found in Appendix O. The content validity check participants were also asked to rate the clarity of each question using a scale of 1 to 3. The rating scale was: 1, the question is unclear – remove the question, 2, rewording is suggested, please provide rewording suggestions, and 3, the question is clear (see Appendix P for the complete rating scale).

The principals received the directions for completing the Question Content Validity Instrument (see Appendix P) and the Question Content Validity Instrument (see Appendix Q). They also received the Definitions of Domains, Appendix O, and the Cover Letter for Content Validity Check Participants, Appendix N. The documents were left with them on May 29, 2014, and a return date of June 2, 2014, was requested. The researcher picked up the content validity check forms from both participating school administrators on June 2, 2014.

The principals confirmed the researcher's assignment of the interview questions by independently assigning them to the same domains of information as the researcher did. Clarity of the questions was also found to be satisfactory with a score of three for each question. The administrators did not suggest rewording of any questions. A notation was made by both administrators that interview Questions 6 and 8 were redundant. Therefore, the interview question protocol was modified to remove Question 8.

### **Field Test of the Interview Protocol**

Field testing of the interview protocol took place during June 2014 after IRB approval for the study was granted, the content validity instrument check had been completed, and all necessary revisions had been completed. The researcher serves as the Assistant Superintendent of Ridgeview County Schools. Due to the relationship between the researcher and the interview participants, neither the field test interviews, nor the interviews with the study participants were conducted by the researcher. Dr. Kyle Rhodes served in the capacity of research assistant. He is currently the Director of Testing for Ridgeview County Schools. Dr. Rhodes obtained his doctorate through Virginia Tech and has conducted focus group interviews for several studies. The researcher trained Dr. Rhodes on May 28. The purpose of the study, the methodology, the history of the Indistar Program and the University of Virginia School Turnaround Program were discussed in detail. Also discussed were the research questions, the interview questions, informed consent, and the procedures to follow when conducting the interviews.

Dr. Rhodes worked with the district office and the building level administrations to establish dates and times for the field test interviews. His methods of contact with the participants to coordinate the interviews were primarily by personal contact and phone calls. The date for each interview is listed in the Researcher's Log, Appendix C.

Teachers were selected from Monroe Elementary School to participate in the Teacher Leadership Focus Group Field Test. The teachers selected were classroom teachers and a reading specialist who did not serve on the school leadership team. They were asked to participate by the research assistant. A date of June 3, 2014, was selected as the interview date. The interview was conducted at Monroe Elementary School by the research assistant. A description of the study and verbal consent form was given to the field test participants by the

research assistant (see Appendix S). Verbal informed consent was gained after the participants read the description of the study and the verbal consent form.

The interview was conducted and was recorded. The recorded interview was given to the researcher to send to Synergy Transcription Services for transcription. The data file was submitted on June 3, 2014. A discussion by the researcher with Dr. Rhodes was held at the completion of the field test to determine if any changes were needed in the interview process. The length of time for the interview, the questions, the probes, and the order of the questions were appropriate in Dr. Rhodes's judgment.

Two central office staff members who were not directly involved with the implementation of the Indistar Program and the UVA Program were asked to participate in the Central Office Focus Group Field Test. The interview was conducted by the research assistant on June 16, 2014, at the Ridgeview County Central Office. A description of the study and verbal consent form was given to the field test participants by the research assistant (see Appendix S). Verbal informed consent was gained after the participants read the description of the study and the verbal consent form. The recorded interview was given to the researcher to send to Synergy Transcription Services for transcription. The data file was submitted on June 16, 2014. A discussion by the researcher with Dr. Rhodes was held at the completion of the field test to determine if any changes were needed in the interview process. The length of time for the interview, the questions, the probes, and the order of the questions were appropriate in Dr. Rhodes's judgment.

Dr. Rhodes used the Interview Question List (see Appendix R) as the guide for both field test interviews. After the completion of the field test interviews, the researcher reviewed the interview process with Dr. Rhodes to determine if any changes needed to be made to the interview question format or content. The determination was made that no changes to the process were needed. Information gained from the field test provided the researcher with an estimate of the amount of time the interviews would take. The experience of collecting the information on a recording device and determining if the strategy used to analyze, code, and interpret the data was appropriate was beneficial as well.

The transcripts were received electronically by email from Synergy Transcription Services to the researcher. The transcriptions were read by the researcher. Each response was coded by the alignment to the domains of experience, knowledge, and involvement. Each

statement/answer given by each participant was labeled as 1 – experience, 2 – knowledge, or 3 – involvement. As the analysis of the responses concluded, the need for an additional domain became apparent because several of the responses did not align with the three initial domains of information.

### **Interview Procedures**

Once the interview protocol was validated and field tested, the interviews were conducted. The Study Participants Informational Letter (see Appendix I) was given to the purposeful selection of 18 participants. the superintendent, the assistant superintendent, the Title I director, the special education director, the principals of Richfield Primary School and Monroe Elementary School, the assistant principal, the school improvement coach, four members of the Richfield Primary School Teacher Leadership Team, and five members of the Monroe Elementary School Teacher Leadership Team. One member of the Richfield Primary School Leadership Team was absent and did not participate in the study.

The participants who agreed to be included in this study were given the Study Participants Confirmation and Thank You Letter (see Appendix J). The letter confirmed the date and time of the interview. The Monroe Elementary School Teacher Leadership focus group interview was conducted on June 9, 2014. The Richfield Primary School Teacher Leadership focus group interview was conducted on June 10, 2014. The School Administrative Leadership Team focus group interview was conducted on June 19, 2014. The Superintendent interview was conducted on June 24, 2014.

The interviews followed the same procedures as were employed in the field test interviews and were completed by Dr. Rhodes. The superintendent and central office interviews were conducted at the Ridgeview County School Board Office. The school administrative leadership team interview was conducted at Monroe Elementary School. The teacher leadership interviews were conducted at their respective schools. Each interview session was approximately 30 minutes long.

### **Member Checks**

Member checking helps researchers make sure they “have not distorted the spirit of what the participant said” (Seidman, 2013, p. 100). Each of the interview participants was emailed a

copy of their interview transcriptions on July 2, 2014, by the research assistant. The email was composed by the researcher and was sent by the research assistant to avoid any identification of the participants (see Appendix T). The researcher was also a participant in the District Leadership Team focus group interview, therefore the identities of those participants are known by the researcher. Participants were asked to submit any changes to Dr. Rhodes by July 9, 2014. No changes were requested by the participants.

### **Teacher Leadership Focus Groups**

Teacher leadership focus group interviews were conducted at Richfield Primary School and Monroe Elementary School. The research assistant worked with each building principal to determine which teachers served on the Teacher Leadership Team and would be invited to participate in the study. Once the list was obtained from each principal, the dates of June 9 and June 10, 2014, were selected for the focus group interviews. Five teacher leaders from each school were selected to participate in the study, one teacher from Richfield Primary School was absent and did not participate. Each focus group interview was conducted in the school library and lasted approximately 30 minutes.

As in the field test, each interview was recorded and the electronic file was submitted to Synergy Transcription Services by the researcher for transcription. The transcripts were transmitted electronically by email to the researcher. The transcriptions were read carefully and analyzed line by line for segments of information (Creswell & Clark, [http://community.csusm.edu/pluginfile.php/21112/mod\\_resource/content/1/CresswellJWAndPlanoClarkVLPrinciples\\_of\\_QualitativeResearchDesigningQualitativeStudyPPT.pdf](http://community.csusm.edu/pluginfile.php/21112/mod_resource/content/1/CresswellJWAndPlanoClarkVLPrinciples_of_QualitativeResearchDesigningQualitativeStudyPPT.pdf), slide 34, n.d.). Each segment of information was coded by its alignment to the domains of information of experience, knowledge, and involvement. Again, several responses did not align with the existing domains of information.

### **School Administrative Leadership Team Focus Group Interview and District Leadership Focus Group Interview**

The date and time for each of the focus group interviews were established by the research assistant. Dr. Rhodes worked with the participants to accommodate schedules to ensure maximum availability for participation. The School Administrative Leadership Team focus

group interview included the building principal from Richfield Primary School, the building principal from Monroe Elementary School, the assistant principal who served both schools, and the school improvement coach who also served both schools. The School Administrative Leadership Team focus group interview was conducted at Richfield Primary School on June 19, 2014. The School Administrative Leadership Team focus group interview lasted approximately 30 minutes.

The District Leadership focus group interview included the Title I director, the special education director, and the assistant superintendent, who is also the researcher. The focus group interview was conducted at the Ridgeview County school board office on June 20, 2014. The District Leadership Team focus group interview lasted approximately 35 minutes.

Both of the focus group interviews were recorded and the electronic files were submitted to Synergy Transcription Services to be transcribed. Once the transcriptions were received by the researcher, the transcripts were examined carefully to determine segments of information, given by the participants (Creswell & Clark, [http://community.csusm.edu/pluginfile.php/21112/mod\\_resource/content/1/CresswellJWAndPlanoClarkVLPrinciples\\_of\\_QualitativeResearchDesigningQualitativeStudyPPT.pdf](http://community.csusm.edu/pluginfile.php/21112/mod_resource/content/1/CresswellJWAndPlanoClarkVLPrinciples_of_QualitativeResearchDesigningQualitativeStudyPPT.pdf), slide 34, n.d.). Each segment of information was then coded to the corresponding domain of information.

### **Superintendent Interview**

The research assistant worked with the Ridgeview County Superintendent to establish a date for the interview. June 24, 2014, was selected as the date for the interview. The interview was conducted by the research assistant in the superintendent's office and lasted approximately 20 minutes. Once the interview was complete, the electronic recording was submitted to Synergy Transcription Services to be transcribed. Once the transcript was received, the researcher read and analyzed it carefully. Each response was examined to identify segments of information obtained from the superintendent. (Creswell & Clark, [http://community.csusm.edu/pluginfile.php/21112/mod\\_resource/content/1/CresswellJWAndPlanoClarkVLPrinciples\\_of\\_QualitativeResearchDesigningQualitativeStudyPPT.pdf](http://community.csusm.edu/pluginfile.php/21112/mod_resource/content/1/CresswellJWAndPlanoClarkVLPrinciples_of_QualitativeResearchDesigningQualitativeStudyPPT.pdf), slide 34, n.d.). Each segment of information was coded to the corresponding domain of information.

## **Identification and Security of Interview Data**

Data sources are identified in the study by codes. The codes indicate the role of the participant being interviewed, the date of the interview, and the page number of the transcription. Data from the superintendent interview are coded as SUPT. Data from the District Leadership Team interview are coded as DLT. Data from the School Administrative Leadership Team interview are coded as SALT. Data from the two school teacher leadership teams are coded as TLRP, Teacher Leadership Richfield Primary School or TLME, Teacher Leadership Monroe Elementary School respectively.

The only interview data identifiable to a specific participant are from the interview conducted with the superintendent. School administrative teams are not identified separately. School teacher leadership teams are only identifiable by their school assignment.

The researcher did not listen to any of the interview recordings. Transcription of the interviews was compiled by Synergy Transcription. Transcriptions were maintained by the researcher and kept in a locked file. The data gathered were stored in the researcher's computer and was password protected. Access to the computer was limited to the researcher. Recordings will be erased and transcriptions will be destroyed after the researcher's final examination.

## **Documents and Archival Records**

In order to understand fully the phenomenon of the implementation of the two school improvement models and to provide triangulation of data, multiple sources of data were considered. "Evidence for case studies may come from six sources: documents, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant-observations, and physical artifacts" (Yin, 1994, p. 4). For this case study documents and archival records were collected and examined.

Documents served three purposes as described by Yin (1994):

(a) documents are helpful in verifying the correct spelling and titles or names of organizations that might have been mentioned in an interview, (b) documents can provide other specific details to corroborate information from other sources and (c) inferences can be made from documents. (p. 81)

Documents are "letters, memoranda, and other communiqués, agendas, announcements and minutes of meetings, and other written reports of events" (Yin, 1994, p. 81). Archival records were also used as a data source for the case study. According to the Encyclopedia of Case Study

Research, “Archival records are an invaluable tool of data gathering for case study research that is focused on the past and its impact on the present” (2010). Additionally “archives mostly consist of personal and/or public written documents, maps, and official and private letters” (2010). The following items were reviewed as documents: District Leadership Team agendas and minutes, school board minutes, professional development plans and agendas from school leadership meetings. The following items were reviewed as archival records: documentation of correspondence with representatives from the University of Virginia and the Virginia Department of Education and school improvement plan procedures which provided insight into the implementation process.

### **Data Coding and Analysis**

There were three sources of data for the study: interview transcriptions, documents, and archival records. Data from each were reviewed and analyzed thoroughly. An inductive approach to the data analysis was employed (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). Interview transcripts were read carefully line by line for recurring words, phrases, and topics (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). The recurring words, phrases, and topics were then treated as segments of information (Creswell & Clark, [http://community.csusm.edu/pluginfile.php/21112/mod\\_resource/content/1/CressrellJWAndPlanClarkVLPrinciples\\_of\\_QualitativeResearchDesigningQualitativeStudyPPT.pdf](http://community.csusm.edu/pluginfile.php/21112/mod_resource/content/1/CressrellJWAndPlanClarkVLPrinciples_of_QualitativeResearchDesigningQualitativeStudyPPT.pdf), slide 34, n.d.) Data from documents and archival records were also reviewed thoroughly for recurring words, phrases, and topics, which were treated as segments of information as well.

In order to provide credibility to the data gathered, triangulation was used. “One of the most common techniques used to enhance credibility of instrumentation is triangulation” (McMillan & Wergin, 2010, p. 91). “Triangulation refers to the process of using multiple investigators, multiple sources of data, or multiple methods to confirm the emerging findings” (Merriam, 1998). The intent was to find and verify common themes through the analysis of data. Documents, archival records, and interview transcripts were triangulated with one another to add credibility to the research.

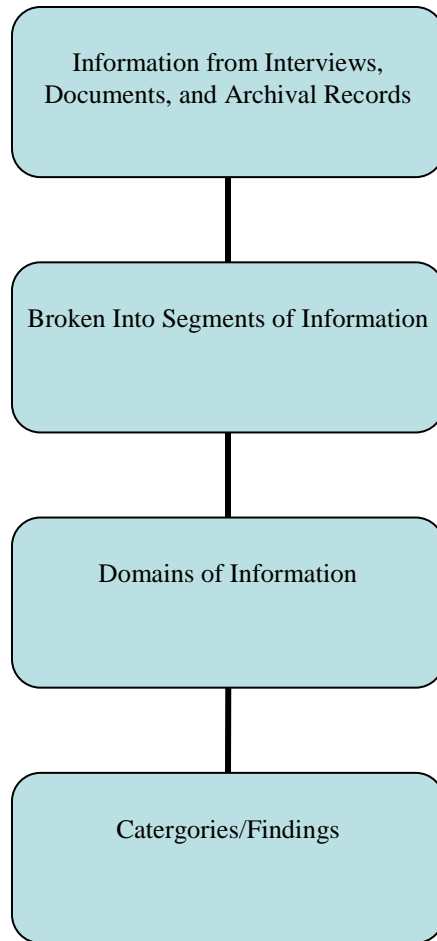
“Coding entails thinking through what you take as evidence of a category or theme (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 285). Domains of information were used for the initial sorting of the segments of information. “Broad domains, each encompassing many related traits, are

located near the top of the hierarchy, and very specific patterns of behavior and experience are located near the bottom” (DeYoung, Quilty, & Peterson, 2007, p. 880). The initial domains of information and their definitions are listed in Appendix U. During the process of coding the interview responses into the domains of information of experience, knowledge, and involvement, the realization was made that many responses did not fit into any of the three initial domains of information. Through the initial coding of responses, many of the responses were identified with participant understanding of each of the programs and their implementation. Therefore, an additional domain of Understanding was added.

An additional area of commonality existed between the definition of experience and knowledge. So a further revision was made to the experience domain that clarified the domain was from a personal perspective, whereas the knowledge domain was for the school and district level and not the personal level. This additional change helped code the data more precisely. An additional change was clarifying the definition of Involvement. Involvement is defined as the participants’ role in the implementation process, in relation to their job title or contribution to a specific committee. The changes made to the definitions of domains of information can be found in Appendix V.

Segments of information from the interview transcriptions, documents, and archival records were sorted into the revised four domains of information. In instances where there was overlap the segments were placed into multiple domains. Once the segments were sorted into the domains, they were examined and color coded into categories within the domains. The categories were key components, strategies, facilitating factors, barriers, best practices from the models, and other practices. Each category was identified by a different color. The categories and their individual elements became the findings that are presented in Chapter 4.

The flowchart in Figure 1 shows the progression of raw data into segments of information, domains of information, categories, and findings.



*Figure 1.* Data flow chart.

### **Informational Flow Chart Through the Findings**

Once the initial phase of coding by domains of information was completed, the data were coded again and placed onto a display chart corresponding to the appropriate domain/s. Prior to the second coding, the researcher examined the data again to determine if additional domains of information were needed or if changes to the existing domains were necessary.

“Data analysis consists of examining, categorizing, tabulating, or otherwise recombining the evidence to address the initial propositions of a study (Yin, 1994, p. 102).

Analyzing and interpreting qualitative data is the process of deep immersion in the interview transcripts, field notes, and other materials you have collected; systematically organizing these materials into salient themes and patterns; bringing meaning so the

themes tell a coherent story; and writing it all up so that the others can read what you have learned (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 270).

Through the review and analysis of the data collected and used in this study, the implementation of the two school improvement models was chronicled. The data are interpreted, themes are identified, and conclusions are offered in Chapter 5.

## **Limitations**

Limitations are used to identify potential weaknesses of a study (Creswell, 2003, p. 148). There are four limitations to the study. First, the possibility of researcher bias affecting the study must be acknowledged due to the fact that the researcher served on the District Leadership Team as the assistant superintendent of Ridgeview County Schools, as the shepherd for the University of Virginia School Turnaround Program, and as the division contact for Dr. Jim Sellers, the Virginia Department of Education liaison for the Indistar Program. Researcher bias “reflects ways in which people make meaning of the world and thus it must simply be acknowledged, allowing room for others to make meaning differently” (McMillan & Wergin, 2010, p. 91). As a researcher “We are clear about our theoretical and methodological orientation; we consider past experiences that might influence our views. In short, we try to be aware of and vigilant about the baggage we carry into the inquiry” (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 51). “Qualitative researchers are careful to check their feelings for bias or prejudice. If they encounter a study about which they feel so strongly that they cannot avoid passing judgement, they often consider and clarify their motivations” (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 53).

Several strategies were used to offset the potential of researcher bias. Bracketing was the strategy employed. Bracketing requires the researcher to “be as clear and open as they can about the perspectives they bring to the inquiry, including how their own experience might color what they see and how they interpret” (McMillan & Wergin, 2010, p. 91). The researcher’s journal assisted with sharing of the research experience and the researcher’s reflections of the process.

Triangulation of data was another strategy used to counteract potential researcher bias. The researcher examined multiple sources of information, including interview transcriptions, documents, and archival records. The segments of information were reviewed for similarities and inconsistencies.

In addition, a critical friend was utilized throughout the implementation of the study to help reduce the possibility of researcher bias. Dr. Rhodes served as a critical friend throughout the study. “A critical friend, as the name suggests, is a trusted person who asks provocative questions, provides data to be examined through another lens, and offers critique of a person’s work as a friend” (Costa & Kallick, p. 50, 1993). Another attribute of a critical friend is that they “take the time to fully understand the context of the work presented and the outcomes that the person or group is working toward” (Costa & Kallick, p. 50, 1993). Due to Dr. Rhodes’ in-depth involvement in the study, his serving as the critical friend was logical. Dr. Rhodes worked directly with the study. He also served as the research assistant and conducted both the field tests interviews and the actual participant interviews. Meetings were held after each interview session to discuss the interview process. The results of the interviews and document analysis were also discussed with Dr. Rhodes.

Second, because the Virginia Department of Education forced Richfield Primary School and Monroe Elementary School to participate in the Indistar model of school improvement, there is the possibility that participant attitudes might have been affected. Participants may have elected not to participate in the study due to their negative views of the forced implementation of the Indistar Program. Individuals who did participate may have held a negative perception of Indistar because of its forced implementation, which might have influenced their responses.

Third, Dr. Jim Sellers served as the liaison from the Virginia Department of Education for the Indistar Program. He also served as a member of the researcher’s examining committee. Therefore a potential for bias existed as a result of that relationship. However, Dr. Sellers did not serve as the examining committee chair and was only one member of the four-person examining committee that directed the researcher’s work. Dr. Sellers himself raised the potential of bias at the outset of the study and all committee members approved his participation.

Fourth, no claim of generalizability of this study should be assumed due to the unique setting of the study and the number of schools examined. Practitioners and policymakers may determine for themselves if the educational best practices identified in the study have the potential for transferability to their particular settings.

## **Chapter Summary**

Chapter 3 lays out the methodology employed in the study. The research design was qualitative in order to describe and understand the implementation of the two school improvement models through the lived experiences of the school leaders who led the process. The specific research methodology used was a case study.

The setting of the study was described as two elementary schools and the central office of a rural Southwest Virginia school division. The data sources for this study were identified as interviews, documents, and archival records.

Participants in the study were identified as 18 school leaders at the division's central office and in the two schools. Participant selection procedures and procedures to obtain the informed consent of the participants were explained. Interview procedures were discussed in detail including the use of focus group and individual interviews, the development of interview questions, a content validity check, field tests, and the use of member checks. Documents and archival records were defined and distinguished from one another.

Data review, coding, and analysis were discussed in depth. A figure illustrating the flow of the data was presented. Limitations were identified, and explanations of how the researcher addressed them were offered.

## Chapter 4

### Results

#### Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of the study was to describe the process of simultaneous implementation of two school improvement models and how those models influenced school improvement practices in a rural Southwest Virginia school system. The study examined the implementation of the Indistar Program and the implementation of the University of Virginia's School Turnaround Program.

The following research questions guided the study:

1. How were the two school improvement models implemented?
  - a. Who was involved in the decision to implement each of the school improvement models?
  - b. What factors aided in the implementation of the two school improvement models?
  - c. What barriers to the implementation of the two school improvement models were encountered?
2. Which best practices were adopted from each school improvement model that resulted in the Ridgeview County hybrid model of school improvement? Why?
3. Which practices of the two school improvement models were not adopted in the Ridgeview County hybrid model of school improvement? Why?
4. What other practices are utilized in the Ridgeview County hybrid model of school improvement? From what source were they adopted and why?

The collection of data occurred between May 2014 and July 2014. The data were collected from an individual interview with the superintendent, focus group interviews with the teacher leadership teams from both Richfield Primary School and Monroe Elementary School, a focus group interview with the School Administrative Leadership Team, a focus group interview with the District Leadership Team, and an examination of documents and archival records relating to the implementation of the Indistar Program and the implementation of the University of Virginia School Turnaround Program. This chapter presents the findings of the study. The findings include data from the individual and focus group interviews as well as information from the document analysis.

## **Findings**

This section reports the findings from the data gleaned from the individual interview, focus group interviews, document analysis, and archival records review. The findings are organized by research question and are presented in a narrative description of responses to each research question.

### **Question 1. How were the two school improvement models implemented?**

Monroe Primary School and Richfield Elementary School participated in the Indistar Program due to their continued inability to make Federal AYP through the Virginia Assessment Program. The Virginia Department of Education required schools that did not make AYP to participate in the Indistar Program, which is a school improvement model used by the Virginia Department of Education. Ridgeview County Schools began their work with Indistar during the summer of 2010 with the Indistar Summer Institute in Williamsburg. The professional development was provided by the VDOE. Principals from both schools, the Title I director, and a teacher representative from each school attended the workshop. Two additional workshops for Indistar were held in January 2011 and March 2011.

The relationship with the University of Virginia Turnaround Program began in January 2011. The Ridgeview County superintendent was contacted by UVA to request the school division's participation. Members from the UVA Turnaround Program came to Ridgeview County Schools to present their program. The superintendent, assistant superintendent, Title I director, and the principals from Monroe Primary School and Richfield Elementary School participated in the meeting with UVA. During the February 2011 Ridgeview County School Board meeting, approval was obtained for Monroe Primary School and Richfield Elementary School to participate in the UVA Turnaround Program.

Monroe Primary School and Richfield Elementary School were participating simultaneously in the Indistar Program and the UVA Program. Interview data and Ridgeview County School Board minutes show the VDOE allowed flexibility with the Indistar Program by only requiring the schools to have a school improvement plan and allowing the district the option of not having to submit a division school improvement plan to VDOE for approval. The flexibility was granted due to the division's participation in the UVA Program. The UVA Program's emphasis is on developing school leaders in order to help facilitate change within the

instructional environment. Therefore, the UVA focus was on leadership in school improvement, while the Indistar Program was more focused on the instructional component of school improvement. As documented by the participant interviews the programs actually complemented each other by focusing on different aspects of school improvement.

VDOE assigned Dr. Sellers to work with Ridgeview County Schools to help in the implementation of the Indistar Program. His work began in December 2011. Twelve meetings were held with Dr. Sellers and the administration from Monroe Primary School and Richfield Elementary School monthly through March 2013 (see Table 6). While Ridgeview County participated six months prior to agreeing to participate in the UVA Program, interview transcripts indicate very little was done with the Indistar Program prior to December 2011 other than some training activity with selected staff.

UVA provided institutes held on the campus of UVA Darden Business School throughout the implementation. They were held five times over the course of two years (see Table 3). The initial meeting was held July 18-24, 2011. The superintendent, assistant superintendent, Title I director, and principals from Monroe Primary School and Richfield Elementary School attended the meeting. The group from Ridgeview County Schools attending the meetings grew over the two year implementation period. Teacher leaders were invited to attend the third, fourth, and fifth visits.

Throughout the implementation of both programs, specific professional development was provided. The Indistar Program provided specific professional development by the program liaison, Dr. Sellers. According to minutes from the District Leadership Team meetings, the monthly team meetings focused on the identification of cusp kids, best instructional practices, the development of a tiered remediation program, specific support for struggling teachers, and data analysis. The UVA Program provided specific professional development on the impact of a high capacity leader, the development of a 90-day school improvement plan, data analysis, acceleration teams/plans, and professional learning communities. The majority of the professional development was provided on-site at UVA, but some professional development was held at the school level in order to impact more of the school staff. Dr. Michael Kite, a member of the UVA Program and a data specialist, provided professional development on data analysis on September 28-29, 2011. Dr. Trish Howard provided professional development on PLCs and data analysis March 18-20, 2013.

The Ridgeview County central office staff, Monroe Primary School administration and teacher leaders, and Richfield Elementary School administration and teacher leaders worked very closely with the implementation of the two school improvement models. While the teacher leaders were more directly involved in the training through UVA, the school administration held weekly leadership meetings with teacher leaders to ensure everyone was aware of and participating in the efforts being made by Dr. Sellers and the administrative leadership team. Cohesiveness and the conveying of information between the administration and staff was a vital component to the success of both programs.

Throughout the implementation, the central office staff worked closely with both programs. As the implementation progresses, key components were identified as being integral to helping a school increase student achievement. These key components became a part of the Ridgeview County hybrid model of school improvement. The key components are discussed in the sections that follow.

Implementation milestones. Tables 2 and 3 document significant events, or milestones, in the implementation of the Indistar Program and the implementation of the University of Virginia School Turnaround Program respectively.

Table 2

*Indistar Program Implementation Milestones*

Date	Event
July 19-22, 2010	Virginia Model for School Improvement – Summer Institute/Williamsburg – attended by Richfield Primary School principal, Monroe Elementary School principal, Title I director, and a teacher representative from each school
October 10-11, 2010	Teacher Leader Training – Session Two/Williamsburg– attended by Richfield Primary School principal, Monroe Elementary School principal, Title I director, and a teacher representative from each school
January 20-21, 2011	Teacher Leader Training – Session Three/Williamsburg– attended by Richfield Primary School principal, Monroe Elementary School principal, Title I director, and a teacher representative from each school
March 30-31, 2011	Teacher Leader Training – Session Four/Williamsburg– attended by Richfield Primary School principal, Monroe Elementary School principal, Title I director, and a teacher representative from each school
December 19, 2011	Division meetings were held to review individual student data and discuss plans for remediation in Ridgeview County Schools. Participants included the superintendent (when his schedule allowed), the assistant superintendent, Title I director, principals of Richfield Primary School and Monroe Elementary School, and the Virginia Department of Education liaison Dr. Jim Sellers.
February 6, 2012	
February 20, 2012	
September 3, 2012	
October 24, 2012	
October 31, 2012	
November 12, 2012	
November 26, 2012	
December 17, 2012	
February 4, 2013	
February 25, 2013	VDOE webinar
March 12, 2012	Webinar on vouchers and impact on schools
July 18, 2012	VDOE webinar
September 17-18, 2012	Meeting in Richmond, VA regarding focus schools
December 6, 2012	Webinar to discuss implementation of tiered remediation program
January 10, 2013	Webinar to discuss focus schools
May 8, 2013	Professional development in Roanoke, VA regarding assessing for 21st Century.

Table 3

*University of Virginia School Turnaround Program Implementation Milestones*

Date	Event
January 4, 2011	Visit to Ridgeview County Schools to determine interest
February 14, 2011	Ridgeview School Board approved participation in the Turnaround Program
April 7, 2011	William Robinson and LeAnn Buntrock, program coordinators for the UVA program visited division to solidify participation
July 18-24, 2011	Leadership team – including superintendent, Title I director, assistant superintendent, and principals from Richfield Primary School and Monroe Elementary School attend initial training on campus of UVA
September 28-29, 2011	Michael Kite, a member of the UVA program and data specialist, visited Richfield Primary School and Monroe Elementary School to provide professional development on data analysis  (Requested PD from Richfield Primary School and Monroe Elementary School)
January 19-24, 2012	Leadership team – including superintendent, Title I director, assistant superintendent, and principals from Richfield Primary School and Monroe Elementary School attend second training on campus of UVA
February 23-24, 2012	William Robinson, UVA program coordinator, visited Richfield Primary School and Monroe Elementary School
March 28, 2012	William Robinson, UVA program coordinator, visited Richfield Primary School and Monroe Elementary School
April 10, 2012	William Robinson, UVA program coordinator, visited Richfield Primary School and Monroe Elementary School
June 25-28, 2012	Leadership team – including superintendent, Title I director, assistant superintendent, and principals from Richfield Primary School and Monroe Elementary School attend third training on campus of UVA. A teacher leader from Richfield Primary School and Monroe Elementary School was also included in this training
October 8, 2012	William Robinson, UVA program coordinator, visited Richfield Primary School and Monroe Elementary School
January 6-8, 2013	Winter visit to UVA. The leadership team as well as a small teacher leadership team attended the fourth training on the campus of UVA.
March 18-20, 2013	Trish Howard, a visiting school principal recommended by UVA, visited Richfield Primary School and Monroe Elementary School to provide professional development with the use of data and the development of professional learning communities.  (Requested PD from Richfield Primary School and Monroe Elementary School)
June 12-14, 2013	Final visit to UVA campus. The team included the leadership team as well as the teacher leadership team from Richfield Primary School and Monroe Elementary School

## Key Components of the UVA and Indistar School Improvement Programs

**Target groups.** The University of Virginia School Turnaround Program promotes change through leadership at the central office level, the principal level, and the teacher level. “One of the most challenging barriers in education today is identifying school leaders who can successfully lead turnarounds of persistently low-achieving public schools” (Kowal & Hassell, 2011, p. 1). The Indistar Program works with the teachers to implement a program to build educational capacity with the students they serve. “Indistar will guide improvement – whether district, school, or both – through a continuous cycle of assessment, planning, implementation, and progress tracking. Focus will be clear, responsibilities assigned, efforts synchronized” (Academic Development Institute, 2009, p. 1).

While the emphasis of the Indistar Program is on instruction and the teacher impact on student achievement, the UVA Program focuses more on the leadership aspect of school improvement. While the two programs focus on different aspects of school improvement, the dynamics of the simultaneous improvement had a greater impact than each program working in isolation.

**Professional development.** Both the Indistar Program and the University of Virginia School Turnaround Program provided initial training for the school administration and district office staff. The Initial training for Indistar occurred July 18-22, 2010, in Williamsburg, Virginia (VDOE, 2010). The UVA Program initial training occurred July 18-24, 2011 on the campus of the University of Virginia (School Turnaround Specialist Program Cohort 8 Turnaround Specialist Session July 18-24, 2011). Both programs provided a level of support through the initial professional development. The initial Indistar training was attended by the building level principals of Richfield Primary School and Monroe Elementary School, as well as a teacher representative for each school, and the Title I director (VDOE, 2010). The initial training for the UVA Program, was attended by the superintendent, the assistant superintendent, the Title I director, and the building principals of Richfield Primary School and Monroe Elementary School (Carter, personal communication, June 15, 2011). “We went up to UVA for the initial training. The initial training was a week-long, very intense format with professors in the Darden Business School at UVA” (SALT, p. 2). A School Administrative Leadership Team member also stated “It [UVA] was an interesting perspective of a combination of the business world and education professors” (SALT, p. 2).

The way that they [UVA] did it was a tiered system. There was a central office leadership team with school building principals and then the next time or within a couple of times of going, the group grew. It just kind of grew exponentially where we ended up having a large group attend the UVA program. (DLT, p. 2).

A member of the School Administrative Leadership Team described the initial training for the Indistar Program in this statement.

Four years ago in the summer I went to a DOE week-long workshop professional development on school improvement and one of the days was devoted to how to implement our plan on Indistar. We learned the basics there and then the rest, we learned through webinars throughout the year and trial and error on our part. (SALT, p. 1)

According to email correspondence professional development was provided to Richfield Primary School and Monroe Elementary School in areas the schools felt needed attention (Robinson, personal communication, December 1, 2011, February 26, 2012, October 12, 2012, and May 3, 2013). The areas were identified for professional development by the goals listed on the 90-day plan.

According to email correspondence, professional development was provided to Richfield Primary School and Monroe Elementary School in areas the school leadership team felt needed attention (Robinson, personal communication, December 1, 2011, February 26, 2012, October 12, 2012, and May, 3, 2013). The emails showed that UVA provided additional data analysis training, team building training, professional learning community training, and training to support special education instruction at both schools during the implementation period.

***External support.*** Interviews and document analysis provided information on the increased level of program support during the second and third year of the Indistar Program. “The Virginia Department of Education provided a liaison to work directly with us to help with the Indistar Program. The additional help was priceless in meeting state compliance and also in the identification of struggling children” (SALT, p. 1). Also, a District Leadership Team member stated “The liaison provided by the Virginia Department of Education helped a lot with understanding what was being asked of our schools and division” (DLT, p. 1). Agendas from division meetings and emails from Dr. Jim Sellers to the Ridgeview County Assistant Superintendent identify 12 dates Dr. Sellers met with the District Leadership Team (Agendas dated December 19, 2011, February 6, 2012, February 20, 2012, October 31, 2012, November

12, 2012, November 26, 2012, December 17, 2012, and February 25, 2012; Sellers, personal communications, August 25, 2012, September 26, 2012, January 17, 2013, and March 15, 2013). The District Leadership Team included the superintendent, when his schedule allowed, the assistant superintendent, the Title I director, and the principals of Richfield Primary School and Monroe Elementary School (District Leadership Team minutes dated February 6, 2012, February 20, 2012, February 25, 2012, October 31, 2012, November 12, 2012, November 26, 2012, December 17, 2012, August 25, 2012, September 26, 2012, January 17, 2013, and March 15, 2013).

Similarly, the UVA Program provided ongoing support. According to the assistant superintendent's calendar, site visits were made by Mr. Robinson to provide feedback about program implementation to both Richfield Primary School and Monroe Elementary School on August 25, 2011, February 23-24, 2012, and October 8, 2012. The UVA Program provided additional professional development as the program continued throughout the two-year implementation period. A review of the assistant superintendent's calendar indicated that teams attended programs at UVA on January 19-24, 2012, June 25-28, 2012, January 6-8, 2013, and June 12-14, 2013.

***Critical school improvement strategies.*** Document analysis and review of the segments of information from the interviews provided evidence of the implementation of three critical school improvement strategies common to the Indistar and UVA programs. The implementation of 90-day school improvement plans, Acceleration Plans, and a tiered remediation program were referenced in the interview transcripts, documents, and archival records. All three of the strategies were identified by the researcher as best practices that were adopted by Ridgeview County in its hybrid school improvement model.

***90-Day school improvement plans.*** According to the Training Manual for the initial UVA training, schools and districts were required to compose a 90-day school improvement plan. The UVA Training Manual provided evidence that training was conducted for the superintendent, assistant superintendent, Title I director, and principals of Monroe Primary and Richfield Elementary schools on data analysis, team building, root cause analysis, and how to conduct team meetings (School Turnaround Specialist Program Cohort 8 Turnaround Specialist Session July 18-24, 2011). The researcher examined the UVA 90-day plan. The plan required a section of "quick wins" and the 90-day plan. The documentation provided the quick wins were

expected to be completed in the initial 30 days of implementation. The headings on the document for the quick wins include; Condition or Matter Requiring Early Action, Reason it Requires Attention, Specific Early Actions to be Taken, Timeline for Actions, Responsible Parties, and Evidence Condition or Matter has been Adequately Addressed. The 90-day plan headings include; School Performance Challenge/Top Priority, Long Term Performance Goal, Root Causes of Performance Challenge, Actions to Address Root Cause, Timeline, Responsible Parties, and Evidence of Progress. Each visit to UVA provided the UVA team an opportunity to work with Richfield Primary School, Monroe Elementary School, and district team members on identifying specific goals for their next 90-day plan. According to email correspondence from the assistant superintendent to William Robinson, each 90-day plan was reviewed and suggestions were given to improve the plan (Carter, personal communication, August 17, 2011, January 27, 2012, and February 23, 2013).

***Acceleration plans.*** Document analysis also demonstrated Acceleration Plans were a requirement of the UVA Program (Robinson, personal communication, October 12, 2012). Acceleration Plans were designed to guide the remediation of struggling students (Robinson, personal communication, October 12, 2012). According to the *Acceleration Plan Document*, student data as well as remedial practices are identified on a single page. The Acceleration Team weekly meeting minutes show the school administration, the classroom teacher, and a team of interventionists worked together to identify the instructional deficit and assign a member of the Acceleration Team to remediate the student. (Acceleration Team Meeting Minutes dated October 26, 2012, November 2, 2012, and November 9, 2012).

***Tiered remediation program.*** The Indistar Program initially provided support through webinars. The assistant superintendent's schedule provided numerous dates for webinars. According to documents within Indistar, indicators TA01, TA02, and TA03 were required for implementation. Indicator TA01 requires schools to identify students in need of intervention. Indicator TA02 requires schools to provide a tiered level of remediation support for students who were identified as needing intervention. Indicator TA03 requires the intervention to be examined on a regular schedule and allow students to move fluidly in and out of the remediation as they need help with targeted identified skills.

According to email correspondence between the assistant superintendent and Dr. Sellers, agenda minutes, and interviews, Dr. Sellers helped Richfield Primary School and Monroe

Elementary School implement TA01, TA02, and TA03 (Sellers, personal communication, July 8, 2013; Quarterly Audit Reports December 14, 2012, February 28, 2013, and April 30, 2013; Agenda from District Leadership Meeting dated December 17, 2012). Minutes of meetings on November 12 and November 26, 2012, show that Dr. Sellers led the initial identification of the “cusp kids” for targeted intervention. Indistar District Leadership meeting agendas from November 12, 2012 and November 26, 2012, as well as minutes from each meeting, provides a description of cusp kids and how to identify them. Cusp kids are students who are in danger of failing the Standards of Learning Tests. They typically have scored 375-415 on their previous Standards of Learning Tests or have scored at or slightly below the passing percentage required on locally developed benchmark tests. They are students who are on the “cusp” of success or failure, depending upon the intervention and instruction they receive.

From an instructional standpoint, a School Administrative Leadership Team member stated “I think both [the Indistar Program and the UVA Program] forced us to look at those struggling students who had gaps in their learning that weren’t on grade level and forced us to reflect on causes” (SALT, p. 2). A member of the District Leadership Team stated, “You had the impact of Indistar that looked at it [school improvement] more of instructional strategies and the UVA model that looked at it [school improvement] from a leadership perspective” (DLT, p. 3).

**a. Who was involved in the decision to implement each of the school improvement models?**

The decision to participate in the University of Virginia School Turnaround Program was described by a member of the District Leadership Team as “we were actually selected to be a part of the UVA Turnaround Program and some of that came from our involvement with the state and how they felt like we were open and responsive to change” (DLT, p. 4). The superintendent played a vital role in the decision to participate in the University of Virginia Program.

The original phone call came into my office from UVA. They got the grant from Senator Warner to implement their school turnaround in a rural school division in Virginia. Our name came up as a place that they thought would work well and be willing to participate and we agreed. (SUPT, p. 1)

A member of the District Leadership Team stated “We were recommended and then the folks from UVA came down and interviewed us, talked with us to see if we did fit their model and to see if we would be a good addition” (DLT, p. 4).

The Ridgeview County School Board elected to participate in the University of Virginia School Turnaround Program based on the superintendent’s recommendation. Minutes from the February 23, 2011 Ridgeview County School Board Meeting detailed the superintendent’s presentation to the Board requesting approval to participate in the University of Virginia School Turnaround Program.

Participation in the Indistar Program was a requirement. The School Administrative Leadership Team member stated “you just had to participate in Indistar, and that was not a choice” (SALT, p. 4). The UVA Turnaround on the other hand, there was someone who came to the school [board] office and shared the information and it was optional to participate” (SALT, p. 4). The decision was made by the School Administrative Leadership Team, after discussing the program and gaining consensus from the school staff, the superintendent, and the Ridgeview County School Board to participate in the program.

**b. What factors aided in the implementation of the two school improvement models?**

There were several factors that aided in the implementation of the two school improvement models. The factors discussed in this section are (a) flexibility, (b) similarities, (c) professional development, (d) leadership, and (e) the use of a liaison for each program. Each factor will be discussed and sources identifying each factor will be identified.

**Flexibility.** The Indistar Program required updating as the implementation process progressed. The Virginia Department of Education allowed flexibility in the requirements of Indistar (Progress Monitoring Report for Focus Schools, 2012-2013). The superintendent discussed the flexibility allowed by the Virginia Department of Education and the similarities of the programs.

I mean the reporting requirements were different [between the Indistar Program and the UVA Program]. It would not have been a very pleasant experience if it hadn’t been for the flexibility that the DOE provided because we were in UVA...there are certain things that we need to participate in to satisfy. They [DOE] said you’re getting the same thing

over there at UVA, don't worry about part of it [the submission of a district improvement plan through Indistar]. It was a win-win for both organizations I think (SUPT, p. 1).

A District Leadership Team member reinforced the idea of flexibility allowed by the Virginia Department of Education. "We could be a part of each school's Indistar leadership team and support them rather than spending our energies trying to develop a plan from the division (DLT, p. 2).

The superintendent also stated "The Virginia Department of Education was willing to work with us and let us use the UVA program and create our own model if anything else" (SUPT, p. 1). He also stated "They're focused on the same thing. I mean everybody, the Virginia Department of Education as well as UVA, they are both designed to help schools be more successful with student achievement" (SUPT, p. 1). The superintendent discussed the flexibility with the Ridgeview County School Board on February 23, 2011. (Ridgeview County Schools School Board Minutes February 23, 2011). A review of the Department of Education Office of School Improvement, OSI, Quarterly Audit Report (December 14, 2012) states "Since Ridgeview County Public Schools uses the UVA Turnaround Model for School Improvement, the District is not required to use Indistar." While the DOE allowed flexibility for the division not to prepare and submit a division Indistar Plan for approval, the schools were still required to use the Indistar model for their individual school improvement plans. Additionally, the OSI Quarterly Audit Report supports the notion of the division flexibility. "While the two schools were required to assess the required Indistar indicators, the Division was not required to produce an Indistar-based plan for school improvement (December 14, 2012).

*Similarities.* The two programs appeared to complement one another. While the programs are different, there were similarities they shared. "I thought the basic outcome that they were looking for was the same" (TLME, p. 3). A participant stated "They were trying to reach the same goal by seeking improvement in our scores" (TLRP, p. 2). "Improvement is at the forefront of everyone's mind. Everyone is headed in the same direction" (TLRP, p. 4). As a member of the School Administrative Leadership Team said "a lot of teachers stepped up to the plate and really began to examine their teaching practices" (SALT, p. 5).

An additional similarity mentioned by the study participants and found in the document was that both programs provided the division a liaison with whom to work as a point of contact and resource. "We had seen it [data meetings in the UVA Program] modeled which is another

thing when you are dealing directly with people and you are seeing instruction and you are having instructors work with you” (DLT, p.3). An additional component discussed with the Indistar Program was the participation teachers had in the program. “I kind of felt like we were doing that model that teachers were not as empowered as we were with Indistar” (TLME, p. 3). Another teacher stated “I felt like we didn’t have quite as much input. I was on leadership when we did Indistar. So maybe that is why I felt like I had more input (TLME, p. 3).

A member of the District Leadership Team stated that “it [the school improvement process] was more of a leadership, team building, things of that matter; how to build a quality team within the leadership ranks and then within your instructional staff too (DLT, p. 3). The OSI Quarterly Audit Report states “the division team, including the two principals, has worked tirelessly in support of improved student achievement at these two schools (February 28, 2013).

**Professional development.** Professional development was an important component of each program. The Indistar Program provided a week-long professional development for school administration and a central office representative. The additional support came from webinars in the beginning of the implementation. Later in the process, Dr. Sellers met monthly with the principals of Richfield Primary School and Monroe Elementary School as well as the assistant superintendent and the Title I director. The UVA Program also provided an initial week of professional development at the onset of the program (School Turnaround Specialist Program Cohort 8 Turnaround Specialist Session July 18-24, 2011). Additional professional development support was continued throughout each program. A member of the District Leadership Team stated “My experience with it [UVA] was probably the best type of class or professional development or anything that I’ve attained in my educational career (DLT, p. 3). A teacher from Richfield Primary School said “It [UVA] really focuses on what you do to make a successful team (TLRP, p. 4).

A review of the 2011-2012 and 2012-2013 Richfield Primary School and Richfield Elementary School Professional Development Plans indicate specific professional development activities through the academic year. The Ridgeview County School Division Team Agenda for November 26, 2012, highlights professional development to support instructional growth, supervision of instruction, and data use. Reviews of the Richfield Primary School and Richfield Elementary School 90-day plans 2011-2012 and 2012-2013 indicate “The school will participate in ongoing professional development as specified by the School Improvement process to

improve teaming, curriculum alignment, and pre and post test analysis.” The complete lists of professional development are found in Tables 4 and 5.

Table 4

*Indistar Program Professional Development*

Date	Event
July 19-22, 2010	Virginia Model for School Improvement – Summer Institute/Williamsburg – attended by Richfield Primary School principal, Monroe Elementary School principal, Title I director, and a teacher representative from each school
October 10-11, 2010	Teacher Leader Training – Session Two/Williamsburg– attended by Richfield Primary School principal, Monroe Elementary School principal, Title I director, and a teacher representative from each school
January 20-21, 2011	Teacher Leader Training – Session Three/Williamsburg– attended by Richfield Primary School principal, Monroe Elementary School principal, Title I director, and a teacher representative from each school
March 30-31, 2011	Teacher Leader Training – Session Four/Williamsburg– attended by Richfield Primary School principal, Monroe Elementary School principal, Title I director, and a teacher representative from each school
December 19, 2011 February 6, 2012 February 20, 2012 September 3, 2012 October 24, 2012 October 31, 2012 November 12, 2012 November 26, 2012 December 17, 2012 February 4, 2013 February 25, 2013 March 20, 2013	District Leadership Team Meetings – Dr. Sellers led the meetings. Richfield Primary School and Monroe Elementary School principals, the superintendent, the assistant superintendent, and the Title I director attended the meetings. The focus was on the identification of cusp kids, the development of a tiered remediation program, and the identification of struggling teachers as well as ways to support those teachers.
December 6, 2012	Webinar to discuss implementation of tiered remediation program
May 8, 2013	Professional development in Roanoke, VA regarding assessing for 21st Century.

Table 5

*University of Virginia Professional Development*

Date	Event
July 18-24, 2011	Leadership team – including superintendent, Title I director, assistant superintendent, and principals from Richfield Primary School and Monroe Elementary School attend initial training on campus of UVA
September 28-29, 2011	Michael Kite, a member of the UVA program and data specialist, visited Richfield Primary School and Monroe Elementary School to provide professional development on data analysis  (Requested PD from Richfield Primary School and Monroe Elementary School)
January 19-24, 2012	Leadership team – including superintendent, Title I director, assistant superintendent, and principals from Richfield Primary School and Monroe Elementary School attend second training on campus of UVA
June 25-28, 2012	Leadership team – including superintendent, Title I director, assistant superintendent, and principals from Richfield Primary School and Monroe Elementary School attend third training on campus of UVA. A teacher leader from Richfield Primary School and Monroe Elementary School was also included in this training
January 6-8, 2013	Winter visit to UVA. The leadership team as well as a small teacher leadership team attended the fourth training on the campus of UVA.
March 18-20, 2013	Trish Howard, a visiting school principal recommended by UVA, visited Richfield Primary School and Monroe Elementary School to provide professional development with the use of data and the development of professional learning communities.  (Requested PD from Richfield Primary School and Monroe Elementary School)
June 12-14, 2013	Final visit to UVA campus. The team included the leadership team as well as the teacher leadership team from Richfield Primary School and Monroe Elementary School

**Leadership.** The School Administrative Leadership Team also noted that leadership was a factor that facilitated the implementation of the programs and overall school improvement.

“Our division leaders are not figureheads. They actually come into the schools and they work with us to disaggregate data and to assess instruction” (SALT, p. 8). The assistant superintendent and the Title I director attended all of the District Leadership Team meetings with the principals of Richfield Primary School and Monroe Elementary School (Agendas dated December 19, 2011, February 6, 2012, February 20, 2012, October 31, 2012, November 12, 2012, November 26, 2012, December 17, 2012, and February 25, 2012; Carter, personal communication, August 25, 2012, September 26, 2012, January 17, 2013, and March 15, 2013).

In addition to the District Leadership Team meetings with Dr. Sellers, the superintendent, the assistant superintendent, and the Title I director attended all of the trainings held at the University of Virginia for the Turnaround Program. A teacher from Richfield Primary School said “I felt like the first training was more of the logistics of the whole process and learning how to implement those processes and then when the principals went for this training, the week long, it was more intense (TLRP, p. 5). A member of the School Administrative Leadership Team stated “We always tried to work with our people to make it [school improvement] valuable and relevant to our situation” (SALT, p. 4).

According to the Department of Education Corrective Action Plan Supplemental Question Report,

The program [UVA] focuses on guiding the division in the selection and development of school leaders with competencies that indicate a high potential for success and engaging division and school leadership teams to create a supportive environment for successful and sustainable school turnaround (p. 1, November 14, 2011).

An additional indicator of leadership is determining what needs to happen to improve. As indicated in the minutes of the Division Team Meeting on November 26, 2012, “We then reminded ourselves why we were focus schools. We needed overall greater success with our economically disadvantaged and special education students in reading.

The UVA PLC Site Visit Report for Fall 2013 indicates “We appreciate the efforts district leaders have pursued to establish these strong conditions for improvement and the work of school leaders to leverage this data through data days, one-on-one meetings with teachers and initial steps towards more effective PLCs” (p. 1). The report goes on to say “We are glad to see the district leaders continuing to pursue many actions to establish conditions for further improvement” (p. 1).

*Program liaisons.* The availability of program liaisons from both programs was another factor that facilitated the implementation of the school improvement models. In particular, communication with the liaisons was identified by the participants as valuable to their understanding of school improvement and to their ongoing efforts to implement the programs. Mr. William Robinson served as the point of contact for the University of Virginia and Dr. Jim Sellers was the division liaison for the Indistar Program. As identified in Tables 6 and 7, Mr. Robinson's and Dr. Sellers's communications were at least twice per month. Mr. Robinson communicated through email and site visits to Ridgeview County. Mr. Robinson provided leadership, gave feedback on the schools' turnaround efforts through site visit reports (Fall 2012 and Spring 2013), offered feedback on the 90-day plan, and attended the sessions with the District Leadership Team while they were at UVA. Dr. Sellers also communicated through email. Dr. Sellers prepared and transmitted the Quarterly Reports to the division leaders. He scheduled and led the District Leadership Team meetings. District Leadership Team meeting minutes show the level of support provided by Dr. Sellers (December 19, 2011; February 6, 2012; February 20, 2012; September 3, 2012; October 24, 2012; October 31, 2012; November 12, 2012; November 26, 2012; December 17, 2012; February 4, 2013; February 25, 2013; March 20, 2013).

The two liaisons and their contributions were also valued. As stated by a member of the District Leadership Team, "That gave our administrators the support and the knowledge that they needed to go back into their schools to make changes and they could truly be instructional leaders and it [school improvement] starts there" (DLT, p. 2). Another member of the District Leadership Team stated "Another benefit to the UVA Program that I saw was there was a point of contact. There was a liaison between the University and us. You had some accountability to that person but he was there to offer support as well" (DLT, p. 4).

**c. What barriers to the implementation of the two school improvement models were encountered?**

There were four barriers identified through the interviews. Time was the barrier that was common to all data sources. The time required attending the trainings, webinars, and meetings required at the school and central office was recognized as a barrier to implementation. The second barrier was the initial lack of support in the Indistar Program, prior to the involvement of

Dr. Jim Sellers. The third barrier was involvement. Trying to bring the level of enthusiasm, excitement, and understanding back to the entire staff was a challenge. The final barrier was understanding data and data analysis.

**Time.** Time is identified multiple times throughout the Teacher Leadership transcripts. “I just think that time trying to rush to get things done and get it done efficiently but yet also correctly and not let it hamper your everyday life in the classroom is difficult” (TLME, p. 4). “Really just the time factor is a barrier. It was just the fact of teaching and then also having to do things” (TLME, p. 5).

Time was a barrier identified by the School Administrative Leadership Team as well. “Time management. It just takes a lot of time, and there are very specific timelines and deadlines for having things done” (SALT, p. 4). The District Leadership Team also reflected on time. “Time. I think anything in improvement is going to take time” (DLT, p. 3).

The superintendent’s response also focused on time. “Finding the time for any new model in school was difficult and that was one of the challenges for us to pull everyone because people had to leave school to attend the UVA Program” (SUPT, p. 2). He also stated “The labor end of it [Indistar] was more tedious than expected, at least initially (SUPT, p. 2).

**Initial lack of support.** The initial lack of support with the Indistar Program was mentioned by a member of the District Leadership Team. “Prior to the Department of Education providing a liaison to work with us, we were feeling our way through Indistar” (DLT, p. 3). Another member of the District Leadership Team stated “Our first year of Indistar was really quite a challenge. We didn’t feel like we got the direction that we needed to be able to implement it (DLT, p. 3). “Dr. Sellers helped to navigate the implementation of the Indistar Program” (SALT, p. 5). A member of the School Administrative Leadership Team stated “without the support of Dr. Sellers, it [Indistar] would have been very difficult” (SALT, p. 5). A member of the Teacher Leadership Team of Monroe Elementary School reflected on the implementation of the Indistar Program “Indistar was the first one we did. It was the one handed down from the state department” (TLME, p. 6). As indicated by interview transcripts at all levels, the initial lack of support for the Indistar Program was a barrier to its implementation.

**Involvement.** Another barrier mentioned by the District Leadership Team was involvement. “You send a group off and they come back and are very energized and trying to bring everybody on board with that same emotional involvement is difficult” (DLT, p. 3). “They

received the information from UVA first hand and bringing it back and trying to share it out with everyone was hard” (DLT, p. 3). Additionally, “How do you replicate a program where a group of 10 attend? How do you replicate that excitement and that enthusiasm to the entire staff?” (DLT, p. 3).

According to the information obtained through transcripts, replicating the level of enthusiasm and sharing the same knowledge that participants who had attended a professional development activity with other teachers was difficult. Staff members who were unable to attend a professional development activity were not as impacted by the professional development as staff members who actually attended the professional development. As a member of the District Leadership Team stated “Just trying to bring everybody in your school on board with what you’re trying to do is a barrier” (DLT, p. 5). The 2011-2012 and 2012-2013 Professional Development Plans for Richfield Primary School and Monroe Elementary School indicate “Opening Professional Development Activities with a joint staff meeting with RPS and MES staff” (p.1). The intent of the joint professional development was to replicate the excitement and enthusiasm gained during the summer sessions with UVA.

As stated by a member of the School Administrative Leadership Team, it is difficult to replicate a professional development activity within the smaller blocks of time available during grade level meetings, faculty meetings, workdays, and other on-site activities. “It is hard to pack what you’ve learned in an entire week or in a day into a two-hour block or sometimes you’re lucky to get a one-hour block” (SALT, p. 7).

***Understanding data and data analysis.*** Email correspondence between the assistant superintendent and William Robinson and the minutes of District Leadership meetings with Dr. Sellers, indicate a barrier of understanding what specifically the student data were revealing (Robinson, personal communication, December 1, 2011; Division Meeting Minutes February 6, 2012, February 20, 2012). Both the UVA Program and the Indistar Program provided extensive professional development on the understanding and use of data for Richfield Primary School and Monroe Elementary School (Robinson, personal communication, December 1, 2011, February 26, 2012, October 12, 12, May 5, 2013; Division Meeting Minutes December 19, 2011, February 20, 2012, October 31, 2012, November 12, 2012, November 26, 2012, and December 17, 2012). A member of the Teacher Leadership Team from Monroe Elementary School stated “Both programs were so data driven that it had made us all more conscientious of our data and how that

can truly reflect the growth over time of a child” (TLME, p. 7). A District Leadership Team member reinforced the thought, “I think we do a better job with that [data analysis] and I think that it is a derivative of both UVA and Indistar forcing us to look at the data and what data is actually applicable” (DLT, p. 6).

Understanding and interpreting data were also identified as prior weaknesses that improved throughout the implementation of the Indistar Program and the UVA Program. “I think we are more data-driven than we were. Teachers seem to share that more and it became more of a focus” (SALT, p. 8).

Findings from document analysis indicate that the schools and the district saw data analysis and interpretation as a barrier. A review of the Monroe Elementary School 90-day plan indicates “Pre-post test data will be analyzed by teachers weekly and acceleration groups will be reassigned every three weeks” (p. 1, Fall 2012). The 90-Day Plan Monitoring document states “Continues a focus on data-driven analysis leading to tailored instruction based on data” (Fall 2012, p. 1). The UVA PLC Site Visit Report prepared by Mr. Robinson for Fall 2011 noted that “professional development efforts on deep implementation of the data-driven instruction/analysis process is a goal” (p. 2). Additionally the report suggests “As a starting point, we recommend each school ask all core teachers to identify a set of students, using data, for focused interventions and monitoring” (UVA PLC Site Visit Report, Fall 2011, p. 2). Data analysis was also highlighted on each school’s 90-day School Improvement Plan and Mid-Year 90-Day School Improvement Review (2011-2012 and 2012-2013).

***Other barriers.*** In addition to the barriers for which there was substantial evidence, other individual comments about the challenges of the implementation of the models were found in the interview transcripts and documents. Two of the more salient comments are lifted up here. One teacher said that “each one [program] is making us jump through different hoops” (TLRP, p. 8). Another teacher stated “you feel like you’re being pulled like a piece of chewing gum. I think that it stretches across all the way from leadership, all the way through every classroom” (TLRP, p. 8). Clearly there was some frustration on the part of some teachers during the implementation of the two school improvement programs. At least for them, that frustration must have been a barrier of sorts.

**Question 2. Which best practices were adopted from each school improvement model that resulted in the Ridgeview County hybrid model of school improvement? Why?**

Both the Indistar Program and the University of Virginia Program provided best practices that were incorporated into the Ridgeview County model of school improvement. The best practices of (a) Professional Learning Communities (PLC), (b) acceleration teams, (c) 90-day school improvement plans, and (d) the use of a remediation program, were identified from interview data and document analysis.

*Professional learning communities.* Professional Learning Communities were identified as a best practice from both programs. Dr. Trish Howard provided professional development for Richfield Primary School and Monroe Elementary School on the implementation of a PLC. A member of the Richfield Primary Teacher Leadership stated, “We had great PLC meetings. They have been focused and data-driven since the programs” (TLRP, p. 5).

Evidence of PLCs was found throughout the document analysis. The UVA PLC Report Fall 2013 states “The report suggests next steps for schools relative to implementation of true Professional Learning Communities” (Fall 2013, p. 1). The suggestions highlighted in the report are “Provide sufficient time for grade level and/or content area teams to meet to support more in-depth discussion while using protocols” (p. 4). “The instructional coach and principal have collaborative meetings to discuss data and analyze student data” (p. 5). “Provide an expanded multi-disciplinary approach to learning in order to eliminate the fracturing of responsibilities in connection with student achievement” (p. 5). The Monroe Elementary School 2012-2013 Professional Development also indicated a type of PLC “Classroom teachers are meeting weekly with their intervention teachers to plan learning activities for the coming week and to discuss student progress” (p. 2). The Division Team Meeting on November 26, 2012 also indicated the use of a PLC “Teacher grade level and school-wide collaborations, team support, and sense of efficacy make a difference in students’ instructional success” (p. 3). According to interview data and document analysis, school improvement strategies are a collaborative effort among staff members. The nature of the effort creates varied PLCs throughout the school.

There were different types of Professional Learning Communities identified within the transcripts and data analysis. Within the leadership meetings, a PLC developed between the central office staff, and the school level administration. “Our principals and our division. We had a school leadership team at each school and a division leadership team and they worked

together” (SUPT, p. 3). The involvement of special education teachers with primary instructional staff was also recognized. “I think a positive tie to special education is the more involvement of special education teachers than just the academic planning” (DLT, p. 4). An additional comment made by a member of the School Administrative Leadership Team was “We all share each other’s data now and that we’d figure out these programs that we were all in this together and every kid is everybody’s kid” (DLT, p. 4).

Numerous other participants endorsed professional development generally. “Professional development was another good thing. It seemed we would do everything in our power to provide the professional development that was needed” (TLRP, p. 5). A member of the School Leadership Team stated “It encouraged us to work together” (TLME, p. 5) and “To look at it as a whole, we were doing a lot of the things required, but it made us focus in on more on how we were doing it” (TLME, p. 5). The programs “encouraged us look more closely at what the data tells us students need instead of looking at the whole group” (TLME, p. 6). The teachers also discussed data meetings as an example of effective professional development. “Our data days, we never had data days like we had after the implementation of the programs” (TLRP, p. 5).

“Instruction overall has improved due to our participation in both programs” (SALT, p. 5). Also “We are more data-driven. Teachers seemed to share that [data] more and it [data] became more of a focus. Then again I think to trust it [data] more and to be able to understand how to change their instruction based on data” (SALT, p. 6).

***Acceleration teams/plans.*** Acceleration is the efforts made by the schools to remediate a student. The attention was on the positive of acceleration as opposed to the negative term remediation. “I think we went from remediating students to acceleration because with remediating we just put a Band-Aid on, but we didn’t catch them up with their peers” and “Our focus is now on accelerating them until they make the gain they need to be on grade level” (SALT, p. 7). “Intervention is now based 100 percent on data” (TLME, p. 4). A School Administrative Leadership Team participant stated “Lots of practices have been implemented that are just now a part of what we do such as acceleration teams” (SALT, p. 7). “The biggest change is the use of our acceleration teams within the school. We have been able to replicate that throughout the division” (DLT, p. 5). Another focus mentioned was the involvement of specific staff members on the acceleration teams. “I think a positive tie to special education is the more involvement of special education teachers than just the academic planning. They

became a trusted and valued member of the instructional team. Everything was shared” (DLT, p. 5).

The acceleration teams had an impact on the special education process. “I think that with our special education referrals that we had better referrals from schools that are utilizing the acceleration teams and truly looking at their data” (DLT, p. 8). In addition to the referrals, “Special education teachers, Title I teachers, and interventionists looks at data every week and develop student acceleration plans” (SALT, p. 5). The special education teachers are an integral part of the acceleration team. A review of the Richfield Primary School Acceleration Plan document (2012) shows the collaboration required between the classroom teacher, the resource teacher, and the interventionist. The Monroe Elementary School 90-Day School Improvement Plan indicates the use of Acceleration Plans “Student Acceleration Plans will be developed for students who are identified as at-risk to coordinate instructional efforts” (Fall 2012, p. 3).

***90-day school improvement plans.*** Another best practice identified was the 90-day school improvement plan. “I guess one of our takeaways from participation in UVA is we [school administration and staff] now do 90-day plans and update them at the middle of the year” (SALT, p. 8). “Our schools now focus on semester goals as opposed to yearly ones” (SALT, p. 8). The District Leadership Team focused more on changes within the school improvement process. “The UVA 90-day school improvement plan was a huge change” (SALT, p. 8). A member of the School Administrative Leadership Team said

We now do 90-day plans and update them at the middle of the year with similar formats and student databases with specific timelines, specific people responsible for certain jobs and then line up the steps that you are going to use to get there. (SALT, p. 8).

The 90-day plan was the focus of the superintendent. “We had a school improvement process that did an annual school improvement plan and never revisited it. The building principal was responsible for building the plan. We now do a 90-day plan and at the semester adjust that 90-day plan” (SUPT, p. 3). He stated “We’ve seen significant improvements in these schools and they’ve rallied, the teachers have rallied behind the concepts and have really been positive” (SUPT, p. 2). He also stated that the programs have “created a laser-like focus on instructional issues” (SUPT, p. 2).

Feedback for the first proposed 90-day plan was provided by William Robinson to Ridgeview County Assistant Superintendent on August 13, 2011. A suggestion for continued

focus on data analysis was offered. A continual focus on bold efforts to change the culture, pursue more intentional presence in schools, implement interventions for the lowest performing students, data driven one-on-one meetings with each teacher, efforts to enhance structure of weekly collaboration, and efforts to increase teacher accountability were highlighted in the August 13, 2011 feedback and continued through each 90-day feedback through the program. A review of the 90-day plan document indicates actions to address the root cause of the challenge, timelines for the action to be complete, person responsible for completion, and the evidence of progress toward the goal. References to the 90-day plan were found in most of the documents (OSI Quarterly Audit Report December 14, 2012, February 28, 2013, and April 30, 2013; Richfield Primary School and Monroe Elementary School Professional Development Plans 2011-2012 and 2012-2013; Division Meeting Minutes; Corrective Action Plan Supplemental Question Report, November 14, 2011; UVA PLC Site Visit Report Fall 2012, Spring 2013, and Fall 2013). As stated by a member of the District Leadership Team “The 90-day plan became a part of the culture here” (DLT, p. 6, June 20, 2014).

**Remediation program.** Prior to the implementation of the Indistar indicators for the tiered remediation program, the intervention program used was not a skill-specific program. A very specific remediation program was required by the Indistar Program. “The three indicators in Indistar [TA01, TA02, and TA03] provided us a tiered intervention program at these two schools but we have replicated it throughout the division” (DLT, p. 5). Indicator TA01 requires schools to identify students in need of intervention. Indicator TA02 requires schools to provide a tiered level of remediation support for students who were identified as needing intervention. Indicator TA03 requires the intervention to be examined on a regular schedule and allows students to move fluidly in and out of the remediation as they need help with targeted identified skills. Indistar District Leadership meeting agendas from November 12, 2012, and November 26, 2012, as well as minutes from each meeting provided information on the identification of students for tiered remediation.

Document analysis provides evidence of the remediation program. According to the Richfield Primary School 90-day plan, “Students in need of strategic and intensive instruction will receive prescribed interventions during the school day. Student data will be analyzed to determine students who need strategic interventions and the effectiveness of the interventions” (Fall 2012, p. 2). The OSI Quarterly Audit states “While continuing to remediate struggling

learners, begin reviewing as a Division Team the benchmark data collected in support of cusp kid learning” (December 14, 2012, p. 4). The remediation was much more specific than it had been before.

**Question 3. Which practices of the two school improvement models were not adopted in the Ridgeview County hybrid model of school improvement? Why?**

The interview question used to answer this research question was “Were there any strategies or practices from the Indistar Program or the University of Virginia School Turnaround Program that were examined that were not implemented?” The intent of the research question was to identify any practices of the Indistar Program and the UVA Program that Ridgeview County had determined would not be used in its hybrid model of school improvement. Based on the responses received, the interview question may have led to misunderstanding by the participants about the practices that were implemented versus the practices that were adopted for ongoing use in the hybrid plan. An additional factor that may have influenced the responses is that the superintendent determined, with administrative collaboration, what practices would be implemented in the hybrid model of school improvement. Therefore, the teachers who responded that all components were implemented were most likely unaware of the practices that were not adopted for use. Two practices were identified by the District Leadership Team as not implemented from the models and as not adopted into the hybrid plan. The practices identified that were not implemented in any location and were not adopted for the hybrid plan were (a) the multiple indicators in the Indistar Program and (b) the removal of ineffective teachers recommended in the UVA Program.

**Multiple indicators.** A member of the Teacher Leadership Team stated “We collaborated on the indicators, chose the indicators [for implementation]” (TLME, p. 2). Therefore, an awareness of the additional indicators was evident and the selection process for the indicators shows many indicators were not selected. The Indistar Program has over 300 possible indicators (Academic Development Institute, 2009). The District Leadership Team also identified the selection of indicators in the Indistar Program.

The Indistar Program has just a wide array of different indicators you can use and we were so active in the three that were required, we were very selective in what we wanted

to implement. So there are several things [indicators] to Indistar that just didn't fit the mold for us" (DLT, p. 6).

Schools were allowed to determine what indicators fit their situation for implementation. Indicators TA01, TA02, and TA03 were required. Richfield Primary School and Monroe Elementary School could determine which additional indicators they wanted to implement based on their need.

***Removal of ineffective teachers.*** An additional practice that was not implemented was the removal of ineffective teachers. A member of the School Administrative Leadership Team stated

One of the major focuses of UVA was making sure that you have the right people in the right places. Moving people out of those positions, if they're not effective in a very small school division like we are in, that's almost impossible and that was tough. (SALT, p. 7)

The District Leadership Team also commented on the focus of the University of Virginia Program to remove ineffective teachers.

The UVA model, there was a heavy emphasis on removal of teachers that were poor performing. Our goal is to help teachers improve as opposed to just cutting loose what were struggling, so we had a bit of a philosophical difference there (DTL, p. 5).

Although the interview question may have led to misunderstanding, the participants' responses made it clear that there were two important practices that were not implemented or adopted. All of the multiple indicators associated with the Indistar Program were not implemented in Ridgeview County nor were they adopted in the Ridgeview County hybrid model of school improvement. Similarly, the removal of ineffective teachers recommended by the UVA Program was not implemented or adopted as a practice for use in the Ridgeview County hybrid model of school improvement.

**Question 4. What other practices are utilized in the Ridgeview County hybrid model of school improvement? From what source were they adopted and why?**

The responses to the interview questions in relation to this research question provided information on practices that existed in Ridgeview County prior to the implementation of the two school improvement models. The practices that are currently being used and were being used prior to the implementation of the Indistar Program and the UVA Program were identified as (a)

locally developed common assessments, (b) locally developed pacing guides, (c) Response-to-Intervention (RtI), and (d) a local school improvement plan.

***Locally developed common assessments and pacing guides.*** The locally developed common assessments that were put together by division staff were highlighted by both teacher groups. (TLME, p. 9; TLRP, p. 7). Another locally developed practice that was cited by the Teacher Leadership Teams was the development of pacing guides. (TLME, p. 9; TLRP, p. 7)

The School Administrative Leadership Team also focused on the “development of our countywide pacing guides in reading and math” (SALT, p. 8). Members of the School Administrative Leadership Team also discussed “unpacking the standards” and the “use of TRACbook and Interactive Achievement” (SALT, p. 8). Unpacking the standards refers to examining the Essential Skills and Essential Knowledge of each standard, provided by the Virginia Department of Education, and planning instruction that targets each skill and knowledge component specifically. TRACbook is an Internet-driven tool that tracks longitudinal data on each student (<http://www.interactiveachievement.com>). Interactive Achievement is the Internet-driven testing tool used by Ridgeview County to administer benchmarks throughout the division. A member of the Monroe Elementary School Teacher Leadership Team stated “Another thing I think that was good and not really part of the programs [Indistar and UVA] was our common assessments that we put together” (TLME, p. 9).

The District Leadership Team also indicated the use of locally developed common assessments and locally developed pacing guides (DLT, p. 6). An examination of locally developed common benchmark assessments show they were being used in reading and mathematics prior to the implementation of the Indistar Program and the UVA Program. An examination of the locally developed pacing guides illustrated they were used before the implementation of the Indistar Program and the UVA Program, but they became more detailed throughout the implementation of the programs (Ridgeview County Schools Reading and Math Pacing Guides, 2013-2014).

***Response to intervention.*** A member of the District Leadership Team also indicated the use of Response to Intervention (RtI) as an existing practice. “We were not totally using the RtI model but we were trained prior and all of that kind of came together with the strategies that we were learning (DLT, p. 6). The School Administrative Leadership Team also referenced the use of RtI “the examination of student data is familiar to us because of the inservices we have

participated in with RtI” (SALT, p. 7). A District Leadership Team member stated “I think one of the things that I would see come out of the RtI models is it ties to the data. We have a lot more assessments but we do get more targeted data” (DLT, p. 9). Specific student data was examined in the District Team Meetings and is reflected in the minutes of each of the meetings.

***School improvement plan.*** Prior to the 90-day plan, each Ridgeview County school developed a yearly school improvement plan. The superintendent said “We had a school improvement process that did an annual school improvement plan. Now we do the 90-day plan and it is much more data-driven” (SUPT, p. 3). A member of the District Leadership Team stated “At that point [end of the year] it was too late to make many instructional decisions that have benefit until the next academic year” (DLT, p. 5). The more frequent updates to the 90-day school improvement plan allowed for instructional changes that were needed to increase student achievement. “I think it [school improvement plan] has developed over the years. We found ways to make it more relevant and to incorporate what we are doing into the plan at the school levels” (DLT, p. 5).

Therefore, the process of a school improvement plan was retained, but the timeline and structure are now different. School improvement plans, according to examination of plans over the past five years, have been developed on a yearly basis (Ridgeview County School Improvement Plans 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, and 2013). The development of the 90-day plan as a requirement for all Ridgeview County Schools began in the fall of 2012 (Ridgeview County School Board Meeting October 8, 2012). “Every school, even if they’re not involved in either of those programs has a school improvement plan [90-day] and those are updated” (SALT, p. 8, June 19, 2014). A review of the 2010-2011 yearly school improvement plans in Ridgeview County indicates overall goals and strategies to meet those goals. A review of the 2011-2012 and 2012-2013 Richfield Primary School and Monroe Elementary School 90-day school improvement plans in Ridgeview County indicate the 90-day format discussed earlier.

## **Achievement Scores**

While there can be no claim of causality, in subsequent years the two schools did see positive changes in their achievement scores (Ridgeview County School Board Minutes, November 11, 2013). In Table 6, the scores reflect the attainment of AMO in both schools.

Table 6

*SOL Pass Percentages for Monroe Elementary School and Richfield Primary School*

Administration Date	Subject	Overall Pass Rate	AMO Required
Spring 2013			
Subject	English	71.87	66
Subject	Math	64.49	64

**The Ridgeview County Hybrid Model of School Improvement**

Based on findings from the document analysis and interview data, Ridgeview County Schools had an existing school improvement model prior to the implementation of the Indistar and UVA programs (Monroe Elementary School 2009 School Improvement Plan). The use of a yearly school improvement plan was also discussed by the District Leadership Team and the superintendent in their interviews. Even though the existing model was described as used infrequently and updated annually, there was an awareness of the need for a plan and for school improvement.

An additional school improvement component that existed prior to the implementation of the Indistar Program and the implementation of the UVA Program was the remediation program at the elementary level. While the remediation program existed, interview data suggested that the program evolved substantially with the implementation of the Indistar Program and the UVA Program. The locally developed remediation plan is another indication of the school division’s commitment to school improvement and to the success of its students.

The simultaneous implementation of the Indistar Program and the implementation of the UVA Program in the fall of 2011 through the summer of 2013 led to additional key components of the programs being used throughout Ridgeview County, thereby creating a hybrid model of school improvement incorporating what Ridgeview County viewed as the best practices taken from the UVA and Indistar school improvement models. The evolution of professional learning communities within each school and throughout the division aided in the school improvement

efforts because everyone was using the same terminology and working toward the same common goals. Acceleration teams and plans were developed for use within each elementary building. The acceleration team works closely with the instructional staff providing remediation to help keep the remediation focused on the skill deficit.

The adoption of the 90-day school improvement plan for Ridgeview County Schools helped the school division establish more specific goals to work toward and be accountable for within a shorter period of time. The development of a tiered intervention program started with Richfield Primary School and Monroe Elementary School but quickly spread through all of the Ridgeview County elementary schools. The middle and high schools now provide tiered remediation for students who are having academic difficulty. The components adopted from the Indistar and UVA programs provided Ridgeview County Schools with practices to help students achieve academic success.

## **Chapter Summary**

Chapter 4 began with a review of the purpose of the study and research questions. Detailed narrative findings were offered in response to each research question. Factors facilitating the implementation of the Indistar Program and the UVA Program, barriers in implementing both programs, and best practices from each program were identified in the findings. Facilitating factors include flexibility, similarities, professional development, leadership, and the use of a liaison for each program. Barriers included time, the initial lack of support in the Indistar Program, involvement, and understanding data and data analysis. Best practices from the implementation of the two school improvement models documented in the findings were the use of PLCs, acceleration teams/plans, the 90-day school improvement plan, and the use of a tiered remediation program. Achievement scores for Richfield Primary School and Monroe Elementary School were presented. An overview of the Ridgeview County hybrid school improvement model was presented.

## Chapter 5

### Discussion, Conclusions, Recommendations, and Epilogue

The purpose of the study was to describe the process of simultaneous implementation of two school improvement models and how those models influenced school improvement practices in a rural Southwest Virginia school system. The study examined the implementation of the Indistar Program and the implementation of the University of Virginia's School Turnaround Program.

The following research questions guided the study:

1. How were the two school improvement models implemented?
  - a. Who was involved in the decision to implement each of the school improvement models?
  - b. What factors aided in the implementation of the two school improvement models?
  - c. What barriers to the implementation of the two school improvement models were encountered?
2. Which best practices were adopted from each school improvement model that resulted in the Ridgeview County hybrid model of school improvement? Why?
3. Which practices of the two school improvement models were not adopted in the Ridgeview County hybrid model of school improvement? Why?
4. What other practices are utilized in the Ridgeview County hybrid model of school improvement? From what source were they adopted and why?

This chapter begins with a discussion and interpretation of the findings, followed by conclusions, recommendations for future practice, recommendations for further research, and an epilogue.

#### Discussion and Interpretation of the Findings

The discussions reported in this chapter are based on the findings reported in Chapter 4. When the findings were considered in the context of the research highlighted in the literature review in Chapter 2, the result was the emergence of four overall themes of school improvement based on the Ridgeview County experience. The data that support the findings were collected

from documents, archival records, and interviews conducted during the months of May 2014 through June 2014.

As described in Chapter 3, the documents, archival records, and interview transcripts were initially read carefully for recurring words, phrases, and topics, which were treated as segments of information that were sorted into domains of information. Once the segments were sorted into the domains, they were examined and color coded into categories within the domains. The categories were key components, strategies, facilitating factors, barriers, best practices from the models, and other practices. Each category was identified by a different color. The categories and their individual elements became the findings that are presented in Chapter 4.

The findings were then examined for relationships and saliency, and themes emerged (Creswell & Clark, [http://community.csusm.edu/pluginfile.php/21112/mod\\_resource/content/1?CressrellJWAndPlanoClarkVLPrinciples\\_of\\_QualityResearch DesigningQualitativeStudyPPT.pdf](http://community.csusm.edu/pluginfile.php/21112/mod_resource/content/1?CressrellJWAndPlanoClarkVLPrinciples_of_QualityResearch%20DesigningQualitativeStudyPPT.pdf), slide 34, n.d.). The overarching themes of school improvement in the Ridgeview County experience are (a) the need for professional development in school improvement, (b) the value of external and internal support for school improvement, (c) the importance of understanding data and data use in decision making, and (d) sustainability in school improvement. The progression of information through the discovery of themes is shown in Figure 2.

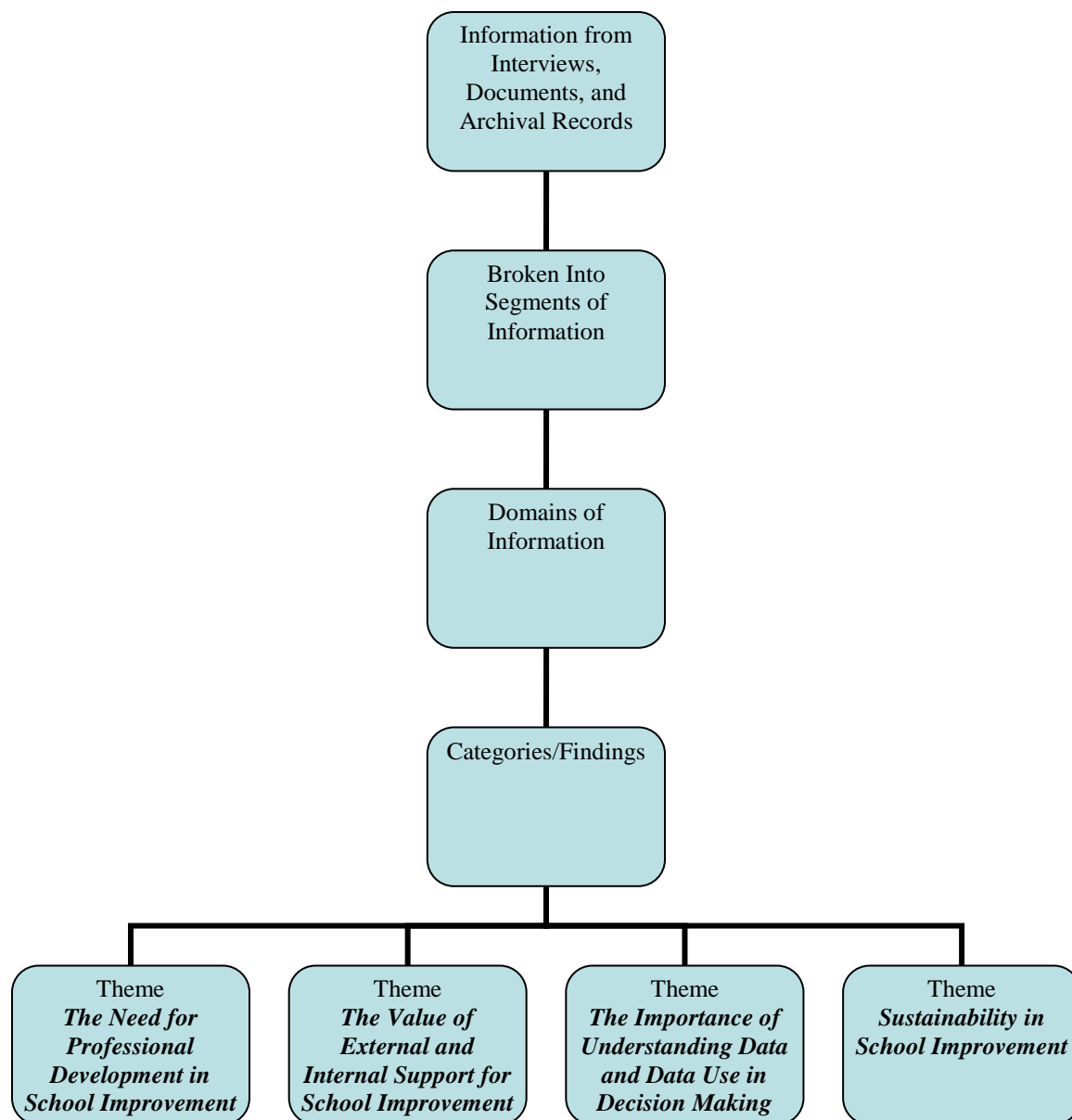


Figure 2. Information flow chart through themes.

Theme 1: The Need for Professional Development in School Improvement

Professional development efforts were highlighted within all of the studies examined in depth in the literature review (Chhuon et al. 2008; Lambert, 2007; Marsh et al. 2012; Rorrer et al. 2008; Wayman et al. 2012). The findings of this study indicate that multiple professional development opportunities were provided to the Ridgeview County District Leadership Team as well as the Richfield Primary School and Monroe Elementary School Administrative Leadership Teams.

Professional development was provided throughout the implementation of the Indistar Program and the UVA Program. The initial Indistar trainings were attended by the building level principals of Richfield Primary School and Monroe Elementary School, a teacher representative for each school, and the Title I director (VDOE, 2010). The initial training for the UVA Program, was attended by the superintendent, the assistant superintendent, the Title I director, and the building principals of Richfield Primary School and Monroe Elementary School. The first and second UVA trainings were a week-long professional development experience on the campus of UVA. The following UVA semester professional development trainings were three days.

According to document analysis, the professional development component was an ongoing component of both the Indistar Program and the UVA Program. The Indistar Program relied on the initial training and a webinar until Dr. Sellers started his work with Ridgeview County Schools. His monthly meetings provided leadership in navigating the Indistar Program. The PLC that developed from the District Leadership Meetings with Dr. Sellers included a dynamic relationship with the administration of Richfield Primary School, Monroe Elementary School, and the central office. The meetings provided opportunities to work together toward the goal of student achievement. The collegiality between the schools administration and the central office staff represented a relationship of equality. All opinions were heard and valued.

The UVA Program continued to invite the superintendent, assistant superintendent, Title I director, and the School Administrative Leadership Team to UVA each semester for intense professional development. If a specific need was identified prior to the semester meetings at UVA, the administration from Richfield Primary School and Monroe Elementary School would make a request for the professional development and specialists in the requested area of need would provide the specific professional development. Professional development was provided by the UVA staff in the areas of data analysis training, team building training, professional learning community training, and training to support special education instruction during the implementation period.

Similar to the findings of Chhuon, et al. (2008), Lambert (2007), Marsh et al. (2012), Rorrer et al. (2008), and Wayman et al. (2012), the analysis of data captured for this study affirmed that professional development was important to the implementation of the Indistar Program and the UVA Program in Ridgeview County Schools. Professional development was

seen to be so valuable a practice that it was incorporated in the Ridgeview County hybrid model of school improvement.

## Theme 2: The Value of External and Internal Support for School Improvement

External support is the support given by someone outside of the organization, whereas internal support is support from within the organization itself. Support for school improvement was highlighted by Chhuon et al. (2008) and Rorrer et al. (2008) in their research. Both external support and internal support were provided to the two Ridgeview County schools. External support was provided by the Indistar Program and the UVA Program liaisons and by resources they identified. Internal support was provided by the Ridgeview County central office administrative staff and superintendent.

As evidenced in the focus group interview, support with the Indistar Program was minimal at the beginning of the program but continued to increase when Dr. Sellers started his work with Ridgeview County Schools. Eventually his role became critically important to the implementation of the Indistar Program and to achieving school improvement across the board in the division. “The Virginia Department of Education provided a liaison to work directly with us to help with the Indistar Program. The additional help was priceless in meeting state compliance and also in the identification of struggling children” (SALT, p. 1).

Mr. William Robinson was the liaison with the UVA Program. As evidenced through email correspondence, he was the point of contact for Ridgeview County with the UVA Program. Mr. Robinson found professional development specialists in areas of need identified by the two schools. He also provided periodic feedback reports, reviewed the 90-day school improvement plans, and coordinated on-site visits.

Support from the district office was also a finding as evidenced by comments made in the School Administrative Leadership Team interview, the minutes of the District Leadership Team Meetings with Dr. Sellers, and the attendance of the district office staff in the meetings located at the University of Virginia. Rorrer et al. (2008) said districts have an indispensable role in educational reform. Similarly, Chhuon et al. (2008) concluded that the support of a district-university partnership helped to build trust between the school and central office staff. The UVA Program required the district office staff and the School Administrative Leadership Team to attend the semester trainings together.

Chhuon et al. (2008) acknowledged that the structural design of most school districts does not facilitate the opportunities for repeated social exchange and interactions between the school and central office. Principals operate and lead their schools in relative isolation from each other and from the central office. The implementation of the Indistar Program and the UVA Program was a united effort between the schools and the district office staff. Evidence provided by an examination of the District Leadership Team minutes shows that the School Administrative Leadership Team and the district office staff attended each District Leadership Team meeting.

Rorrer et al. (2008) stated that their research synthesis indicated transparency as a vital characteristic of the district to ensure success. Throughout the process of implementation, the Ridgeview County district office worked with the schools in every facet of the implementation process of both the Indistar Program and the UVA Program. The central office's collaborative approach resulted in a greater transparency. "We worked collaboratively with the schools" (DLT, p. 5).

Central office support was identified by Chhuon et al. (2008) and Rorrer et al. (2008), as well as analysis of interview data for this study, as being a key component for successful school improvement. The support provided by Indistar Program through Dr. Sellers and support provided by the UVA Program were identified as essential components to the programs success.

### Theme 3: The Importance of Understanding Data and Data Use in Decision Making

Professional development to train staff in the understanding and use of data was provided by the Indistar Program and the UVA Program on the use of student data. Wayman et al. (2012) stated that during the last 10 years, the field of education has witnessed a substantial increase in studies that examine how educators may use student data to help improve their practice. Richfield Primary School and Monroe Elementary School Administrative Leadership Teams attended data analysis trainings at the University of Virginia. Professional development was brought to each school to work with the administration and teacher leadership team. Data analysis was a vital component of the Indistar Program as well.

Wayman et al. (2012) illustrated that principal leadership research shows that successful school-based data initiatives are almost always marked by principals who are employing practices such as setting clear expectations for data use, involving entire faculties in data analysis, and making time for collaboration. The School Administrative Leadership Team of

Richfield Primary School and Monroe Elementary School involved teachers in the use of data and also provided time for the analysis of data. Acceleration Teams were developed to analyze each struggling student's data on a weekly basis. (Acceleration Team agenda April 12, 2013 and April 19, 2013; District Leadership Team Meeting minutes February 4, 2013). Wayman et al. also stated teachers were determined to use data in a variety of ways. They used data to help struggling students, to group and regroup for instruction, to reteach particular concepts and skills, and to adjust instruction. Again, the use of data described by Wayman et al. is the basis of the Acceleration Team concept.

#### Theme 4: Sustainability in School Improvement

Sustainability in school improvement is the desired outcome of school improvement models. Once the practices of a school improvement model are identified and adopted, continuation of student growth is sought. Lambert (2007) studied the consistent evolution of school improvement. Lambert identified three phases of leadership: the instructive phase, the transitional phase, and the high capacity leadership phase. In Lambert's high capacity phase, principals evidence a lower profile and relinquish or share leadership roles. Teachers initiate new actions and pose questions. According to Lambert the closer an organization can get to the high capacity leadership phase, the better the chance of sustainability.

Through the use of teacher leadership teams throughout the implementation of the Indistar Program and the UVA Program, the administration of Richfield Primary School and Monroe Elementary School are working toward the high capacity leadership phase described by Lambert (2008). Evidence of the high capacity leadership phase is found in the Acceleration Team minutes, in the 90-day school improvement plans, and in Teacher Leadership Team minutes. Throughout the document analysis, teachers provide leadership in the Acceleration Team meetings. According to the minutes of the Acceleration Team meetings, the administration is part of the team, but the data presentation and recommendation for remediation is presented by the teachers. The 90-day school improvement plans are submitted "by the faculty and staff" of each school. The 90-day plans are developed within each school and approved by each school faculty. Sustainability of the school improvement efforts by Richfield Primary School and Monroe Elementary School is evident in the adoption of practices identified in the Ridgeview County hybrid model of school improvement. The development and continuation of professional learning communities throughout the division, the implementation and adoption of

acceleration teams at the elementary level, the adoption of the 90-day plan division wide, and the implementation of a tiered remediation program within each school.

## **Conclusions**

Ridgeview County Schools had a number of school improvement practices in place prior to the implementation of the Indistar Program and the UVA Program. One of those practices was the development of a yearly school improvement plan. The plan was developed at the beginning of the year and not revisited until the plan had to be rewritten for the following year. Other practices utilized within Ridgeview County Schools were pacing guides and common benchmark assessments. Interactive Achievement was, and continues to be, used for the administration of the benchmark assessments. During the second year of the implementation of the Indistar Program and the UVA Program, TRACbook was introduced. TRACbook is the longitudinal data tracking system adopted by Ridgeview County Schools. Ridgeview County's existing school improvement practices most likely aided the implementation and the acceptance of both the Indistar Program and the UVA Program.

In addition, a number of factors of the programs themselves were found to have facilitated the implementation of the two school improvement models. One was the flexibility provided by the VDOE, UVA, the central office, and superintendent. A second was the similarities of the program. Both emphasized improved student achievement and the understanding and use of data. A third similarity between the programs was the extensive use of targeted professional development delivered by outside trainers and by internally developed PLCs. The fourth was the leadership provided by Ridgeview County administrators who were present and engaged in professional development, acceleration teams, leadership teams, and other activities. Similarly, the liaisons who offered external support often were catalysts for change.

During the implementation of the Indistar Program and the UVA Program several best practices were identified. These best practices were identified through document analysis and examination of the segments of information provided by the focus group interviews and the individual interview with the superintendent. PLCs, acceleration teams, 90-day school improvement plans, and remediation plans were all thought to be critical best practices.

Therefore, they were integrated into the Ridgeview County hybrid model of school improvement.

Different types of PLCs developed through the implementation of the programs. The relationships built within the District Leadership Team connected the central office with the school administration. Additional PLCs developed within each school. The administration worked with teachers to facilitate the implementation of the strategies from each program. The teachers worked within grade levels to identify instructional weaknesses and remediation possibilities. Another PLC developed between the classroom teachers and interventionists through the Acceleration Teams.

The use of Acceleration Teams and Acceleration Plans were first recommended through the UVA Program. Richfield Primary School and Monroe Elementary School utilized the idea of Acceleration Teams and Acceleration Plans. The remaining elementary schools adopted their use (Ridgeview County Elementary Schools Acceleration Team Documents, 2014).

Prior to implementing the UVA and Indistar programs, Ridgeview County Schools utilized a yearly school improvement plan. The UVA Program required a 90-day school improvement plan that focused on a smaller increment of time than that being used by Ridgeview County. An evaluation of the UVA 90-day plan provided a section of “quick wins” and the 90-day plan. The documentation provided the quick wins were expected to be completed in the initial 30 days of implementation. The 90-day school improvement plan was adopted by Ridgeview County Schools to be used with all schools (Ridgeview County School Board Meeting October 8, 2012).

The Indistar Program required the development of a tiered remediation system through indicators TA01, TA02, and TA03. The remediation system is a skill-specific remediation program to target specific areas of weakness. The remaining elementary schools in Ridgeview County have adopted the tiered remediation system and adjusted their master schedules to accommodate the remediation time (Ridgeview County Elementary Schools Master Schedules, 2014).

Four barriers were also identified during the implementation of the two school improvement models. Time was identified by all of the groups interviewed as being a barrier. The time required attending the trainings, webinars, and meetings required at the school and central office was recognized. The second barrier mentioned was the initial lack of support in

the Indistar Program, prior to the involvement of VDOE Liaison Dr. Jim Sellers. The third barrier was involvement. Trying to bring the level of enthusiasm, excitement, and understanding from off-site professional development back to the entire staff is difficult. The final barrier was the understanding of data and data analysis.

The importance of local autonomy and the effect of local culture on ownership of school improvement emerged as conclusions as well. The Ridgeview County administration determined that the multiple indicators offered through Indistar were simply overwhelming and chose to focus on the implementation of three overarching indicators rather than to try to implement them all. They also rejected the UVA Program's advice to remove or change staff in schools that did not achieve immediate school improvement. By choosing their own incremental approach, the school leaders in Ridgeview County made the hybrid plan truly their own.

### **Recommendations for Practice**

Based on the findings of the study, the researcher recommends six practices for consideration to achieve and sustain greater student success; (a) ongoing professional development including locally developed professional learning communities, (b) school improvement plans that are updated at least once during the school year, (c) a tiered approach to remediation, and (d) the development of acceleration plans to guide remediation (e) request a liaison to help in the implementation of Indistar, and (f) seek to find partnerships with higher education institutions.

Richfield Primary School and Monroe Elementary School were afforded the opportunity to participate in numerous professional development activities. The professional development activities were specific to the need of each school in their quest for higher student achievement. Professional development for professional learning communities was provided by UVA. Throughout the implementation of the Indistar Program and the implementation of the UVA Program, the development of PLCs emerged. A common language regarding school improvement developed and everyone was working toward the same goal of increased student achievement. Ridgeview County should consider working with all of its other schools to help identify professional development needs that would enable each school to have a better understanding of data, the use of Acceleration Teams, the use of Acceleration Plans, and the school improvement process.

Ridgeview County Schools had always asked schools to develop a yearly school improvement plan. With the adoption of the 90-day school improvement plan, schools were asked to review their student achievement goals twice a year. This allowed for the strategies to be evaluated at mid-year and adjustments made prior to the end of the year SOL testing. Prior to the change, school improvement plans were not evaluated until the end of the year. Based on the Ridgeview County experience, other divisions that use annual school improvement plans may wish to consider mid-year or periodic updates of their plans.

A tiered approach to remediation was required with the implementation of indicators TA01, TA02, and TA03 from the Indistar Program. The remediation program provided specific remediation to those students who needed it. It allowed flexibility to move students in and out of the remediation based on the skill deficit they may be experiencing. Acceleration plans helped guide the remediation for the struggling student. Acceleration teams, which included intervention teachers, would meet weekly to discuss the progress that students had made and adjust the lists of skills that will be taught in the upcoming week.

Schools in improvement working with the Virginia Department of Education may encounter difficulty implementing the Indistar Program without the help of a liaison. A recommendation would be to find a neighboring division that has had experience with the Indistar Program or request a liaison be appointed to help in the process. Without the help of someone experienced with Indistar, the implementation can be difficult.

The UVA partnership with Ridgeview County Schools leads to the recommendation that schools should seek out partnerships with higher education institutions. The higher education institutions may also seek to work with school divisions. Both the higher education institutions and the school division would receive benefit from the partnership. The school division would benefit from the latest research as well as professional development. The higher education institutions would benefit from having a location to conduct research as well as an opportunity to be a practitioner in the field.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

This study provided a description of the implementation of two school improvement models and the practices adopted in the Ridgeview County hybrid model of school improvement.

There are a number of questions that are recommended for research as a result of the study's completion.

Questions for possible future research include:

How would the development of Acceleration Teams at the high school/middle school level impact student achievement?

The idea of Acceleration Teams at the high school/middle school level is not commonly found in the literature. Therefore, their use at the secondary level appears not to have been explored extensively. High schools and middle schools have a number of organizational and cultural characteristics that distinguish them from elementary schools. Knowing whether acceleration teams have the potential to work at the secondary level would be valuable information for district administrators, school boards, and policy makers.

How has the Ridgeview County hybrid model of school improvement impacted student achievement across the division and over time?

While gains in student achievement in Ridgeview County were observed following the implementation of the Indistar Program and the UVA Program, continued research over time might provide evidence of whether the strategies and best practices implemented are sustainable means to maintain and/or improve student achievement. Toward that end, a longitudinal study of student achievement in the district and its individual schools could validate or refute the long-term efficacy of the Ridgeview County hybrid model of school improvement.

How does a partnership with a higher education institution impact student achievement in a local school/district?

The partnership between a higher education institution and a school/district can provide benefit to both entities. The higher education institution partner has a location to be a practitioner and to conduct research, while the school receives access to current research, to professional development, and other resources. The UVA Program was clearly an important external support for the Ridgeview County school system. Research studies of university-school partnerships could provide evidence of the impact on student achievement as higher education PK-12 partnerships develop and are implemented.

How does central office involvement influence student achievement?

As shown in the literature examined for this study, central office involvement appears to influence achievement positively in some settings. In this study, central office involvement was

found to be an important internal support for school improvement. A study examining the relationship between central office involvement and student achievement would be beneficial to districts across the nation. As a result of the study additional strategies might emerge to help central office administrative staff and schools in their quest for higher student achievement.

## **Epilogue**

As a researcher, participant in the study, participant in the implementation, and a practitioner, many beliefs were validated in this study. While the findings and themes outlined within Chapters 4 and 5 provide a tremendous amount of information about the implementation process and instructional strategies we found to be beneficial, there were areas that were not mentioned explicitly in the transcripts that I felt either need to be amplified for the reader or brought to the reader's attention.

The idea of Professional Learning Communities is a vast notion that needs further explanation. Both the Indistar Program and the UVA Program provided exceptional professional development and tremendous information. While both professional development and information are beneficial, and truly needed, the side effect became the relationships that developed within our schools and within our division. The relationships, while diverse and complex were a vital component to our success. The central office staff worked with the building level administration on a daily basis. The relationship was not defined by position, but by what each member could do to help achieve student success. The superintendent served as an equal member of the team. His voice was heard, but it carried the same value as a principal or a school improvement coach.

The building level administration worked with their teachers in the same manner that the superintendent worked with the administrators. Their style became a shared leadership approach. Every voice was heard and every voice was valued. The teachers worked collaboratively across grade levels, vertically, and between schools. The level of collaboration we experienced was outstanding. To say a PLC evolved within Richfield Primary School and Monroe Elementary School would be a gross understatement. The level of professionalism and collegiality shared amongst the entire team was tremendous.

An additional component is the weekly visits to the teachers who need the most support. The District Leadership Team determined additional support was needed for a select group of

teachers within Monroe Elementary School. The District Leadership Team divided the teachers and met with them on a weekly basis. The benefit resonated throughout the building and the division. The method of support was not threatening nor was it judgmental. The visits were calculated, structured, and purposeful. The intent was to offer whatever support was needed to help the students be successful. Teachers valued the concern and help that was given to them. Our district office is visible within our schools and strives to serve our teachers. The concentration on Monroe Elementary School helped our division realize how important focused support can be to a teacher who needs assistance.

This experience, while very intense, has been valuable to me, as an educator and instructional leader, and to everyone who played a role in the implementation.

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Appendix A  
IRB Certificate



## Appendix B

### IRB Approval



Office of Research Compliance  
Institutional Review Board  
North End Center, Suite 4120, Virginia Tech  
300 Turner Street NW  
Blacksburg, Virginia 24061  
540/231-4606 Fax 540/231-0959  
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website <http://www.irb.vt.edu>

#### MEMORANDUM

**DATE:** May 28, 2014  
**TO:** Wayne Tripp, Dennis Gale Carter Jr, Kyle Bevin Rhodes  
**FROM:** Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (FWA00000572, expires April 25, 2018)  
**PROTOCOL TITLE:** Current School Reform Efforts: The Simultaneous Implementation of Two School Improvement Models  
**IRB NUMBER:** 14-543

Effective May 28, 2014, the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chair, David M Moore, approved the New Application request for the above-mentioned research protocol.

This approval provides permission to begin the human subject activities outlined in the IRB-approved protocol and supporting documents.

Plans to deviate from the approved protocol and/or supporting documents must be submitted to the IRB as an amendment request and approved by the IRB prior to the implementation of any changes, regardless of how minor, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects. Report within 5 business days to the IRB any injuries or other unanticipated or adverse events involving risks or harms to human research subjects or others.

All investigators (listed above) are required to comply with the researcher requirements outlined at:

<http://www.irb.vt.edu/pages/responsibilities.htm>

(Please review responsibilities before the commencement of your research.)

#### PROTOCOL INFORMATION:

Approved As: **Expedited, under 45 CFR 46.110 category(ies) 5,6,7**  
Protocol Approval Date: **May 28, 2014**  
Protocol Expiration Date: **May 27, 2015**  
Continuing Review Due Date\*: **May 13, 2015**

\*Date a Continuing Review application is due to the IRB office if human subject activities covered under this protocol, including data analysis, are to continue beyond the Protocol Expiration Date.

#### FEDERALLY FUNDED RESEARCH REQUIREMENTS:

Per federal regulations, 45 CFR 46.103(f), the IRB is required to compare all federally funded grant proposals/work statements to the IRB protocol(s) which cover the human research activities included in the proposal / work statement before funds are released. Note that this requirement does not apply to Exempt and Interim IRB protocols, or grants for which VT is not the primary awardee.

The table on the following page indicates whether grant proposals are related to this IRB protocol, and which of the listed proposals, if any, have been compared to this IRB protocol, if required.

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## **Appendix C**

### **Researchers Log**

May 28, 2014 After an initial attempt to gain IRB approval and a revision, the IRB approval was obtained.

May 28, 2014 The researcher met with Dr. Rhodes to discuss the study and provide a list of questions he would use for the focus group interviews. A discussion was held regarding the implementation of the Indistar Program and the University of Virginia School Turnaround Program. Dr. Rhodes was also provided a list of the questions he would be asking the participants.

May 29, 2014 The validity check instrument was distributed to principals for review. An explanation of the instrument and what was required from the principals was discussed when the meeting occurred. Any questions the principals had were answered.

June 2, 2014 The researcher picked up the validity check instrument from the two principals.

June 3, 2014 Dr. Rhodes conducted the Teacher Leadership Focus Group Field Test Interview. The interview was held at Monroe Elementary School. After the interview, Dr. Rhodes met with the researcher to discuss the process and offered no suggestions to how the interview was conducted. He provided the researcher the recording device to send to Synergy Transcription Services for transcription.

June 7, 2014 The initial data analysis of Teacher Leadership Field Test was conducted. The realization was made by the researcher that segments of information overlapped between the domains of information and several segments of information did not fit into the existing domains of information.

June 9, 2014 The Teacher Leadership Focus Group Interview was conducted at Monroe Elementary School by Dr. Rhodes. Dr. Rhodes provided the researcher with the recording device after the interview and discussed the interview. The researcher uploaded the interview to Synergy Transcription Services for transcription.

June 10, 2014 Teacher Leadership Focus Group Interview was conducted at Richfield Primary School by Dr. Rhodes. Dr. Rhodes provided the researcher with the recording device after the interview. The researcher uploaded the interview to Synergy Transcription Services for transcription.

June 14, 2014 The initial data analysis of the Teacher Leadership Focus Groups was conducted. Again, the segments of information overlapped within the domains of information and an additional domain is needed.

June 16, 2014 The Central Office Leadership Focus Group Field Test Interview was conducted at the Ridgeview County School Board Office. Dr. Rhodes conducted the interview and met

with the researcher at the conclusion. No suggestions were recommended by Dr. Rhodes. The interview was uploaded to Synergy Transcription Services for transcription.

June 18, 2014 The initial data analysis of the Central Office Leadership Field Test provided segments of information that overlapped within the domains. There were segments of information that did not fit into any domain of information.

June 19, 2014 Dr. Rhodes conducted the School Administrative Leadership Team Focus Group Interview at Monroe Elementary School. The researcher uploaded the data to Synergy Transcription Services for transcription.

June 20, 2014 Dr. Rhodes conducted the Central Office Leadership Focus Group Interview at the Ridge County School Board Office. The researcher discussed the interview with Dr. Rhodes and asked about similarities with this interview and the interviews conducted previously. Dr. Rhodes commented on the similar themes from each group.

June 23, 2014 The initial data analysis of the School Administrative Leadership Team Focus Group and the Central Office Leadership Focus Group showed segments of information overlapping within different domains of information and also the need for an additional domain was recognized.

June 24, 2014 Dr. Rhodes conducted the Superintendent Interview in the Office of the Superintendent. Once the interview was complete Dr. Rhodes met with the researcher to discuss the reoccurring themes throughout the interview process. Dr. Rhodes gave the recording device to the researcher to upload to Synergy Transcription Services.

June 28, 2014 The initial data analysis of the Superintendent Interview illustrated the need for an additional domain of information.

July 2, 2014 Member checks were conducted. Dr. Rhodes sent email requesting any changes to the transcriptions by July 9, 2014. The responses from the interviewees did not request any changes to the transcriptions.

July 5, 2014 The data were analyzed for a second time with the addition of the *Understanding* domain of information. The additional domain of information helped place the segments of information into domain/s of meaning.

## **Appendix D**

### **Letter to Superintendent Requesting Permission to Conduct the Study**

Dear Superintendent,

As you know, I am a doctoral candidate in the Educational Leadership and Policy Studies program at Virginia Tech. I am working under the direction of Dr. Wayne Tripp. I have proposed a research study that will be my doctoral dissertation. This letter is to provide an overview of the study and request permission to conduct the research in Ridgeview County.

The purpose of the proposed study is to describe the process of simultaneous implementation of two school improvement models in two schools in a rural Southwest Virginia school system and how those models influenced the school system's school improvement processes. Throughout the implementation, practices evolved from each of the school improvement models, which led the school system to form a hybrid model of school improvement. The best practices or new practices of each of the programs evolved into a hybrid school improvement model the system currently uses. The proposed study will document how and why the specific practices were retained and used in the Ridgeview County hybrid plan of school improvement. I am requesting to interview you, title I director, special education director, Administrative Leadership Team of Richfield Primary School and Monroe Elementary School and Teacher Leadership Teams from Richfield Primary School and Monroe Elementary School. I am also requesting access to documentation involved in the implementation of the Indistar Program and the University of Virginia School Turnaround Program.

With your permission, I will gather information from division level staff, principals and teachers in the form of interviews and analyze the responses for commonalities, differences or patterns. Participants will be invited to participate in the interview. I will also gather and analyze documents and archival records maintained within the division regarding the implementation of the Indistar Program and the University of Virginia School Turnaround Program. Information collected in this study may be beneficial to other educators who are involved in school improvement.

Thank you for your consideration of the proposed study. I am available to answer any questions or address any concerns you have regarding the study.

Sincerely,

Dennis Carter  
Assistant Superintendent  
Doctoral Candidate

**Appendix E**  
**Approval for the Study**

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Dennis Carter,

You have my permission to conduct your study regarding the simultaneous implementation of the Indistar Program and the UVA Program within our division.

Thank you,

\_\_\_\_\_  
Superintendent's Signature

## **Appendix F**

### **Thank You Letter to Superintendent**

Dr. Superintendent,

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your willingness to allow me to conduct my study on the simultaneous implementation of two school improvement models in Ridgeview County. I will share the findings with you once they are complete. If I can answer any questions during this process, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Dennis Carter  
Assistant Superintendent  
Doctoral Candidate  
Virginia Tech

**Appendix G**  
**Email from William Robinson, University of Virginia**

March 25, 2014

Dennis –

Here is some additional information from our federal report, that you may find useful in your study:

***Information included identifiable information about schools and district***

## **Appendix H**

### **Email from Dr. Kathleen Smith, Virginia Department of Education**

September 26, 2014

I think this is an excellent study. I am more than happy to assist in anyway possible. I hope that you works goes well. My permission is granted.

**Kathleen Smith**  
**Director**

**Appendix I**  
**Study Participants Informational Letter**

Dear Central Office Staff/Principals and School Improvement Coach/Teacher Leadership Team Members,

As you know, I am a doctoral student in the Educational Leadership and Policy Studies program at Virginia Tech. I am working under the direction of Dr. Wayne Tripp. This letter is to inform you of the purpose of my study and to request your participation.

My dissertation study focuses on the simultaneous implementation of two school improvement models in Ridgeview County Schools. The Indistar Program and the University of Virginia School Turnaround Program were implemented during the same time frame at Monroe Primary School and Richfield Elementary School. The research will be a case study examining the process of implementation as well as the results, or best practices/new practices that were derived from the implementation. I am interested in your perspectives because of your involvement in the implementation.

You will be invited to participate in a focus group interview (central office, principal and school improvement coach, or teacher leadership team members for each school) to provide information from your aspect of the implementation. (Person to be named later) will coordinate the date and time of the interviews and conduct the interviews. Synergy Transcription Services will transcribe the interviews so your responses will be confidential. After the study is complete, the recording will be destroyed to maintain confidentiality. I will share the results of the study with you when it is complete if you wish.

If you have any questions regarding the study or any part of this process, please let me know.

Thank you,

Dennis Carter  
Assistant Superintendent  
Doctoral Candidate  
Virginia Tech

## **Appendix J**

### **Study Participants Confirmation and Thank You**

Dear Central Office Staff/Principals and School Improvement Coach/Teacher Leadership Team Members,

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this study. The interview will be held on \_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_. The interview will be held at \_\_\_\_\_(location). I am excited to speak with you about your experience with school improvement at your school. If you have any questions prior to our meeting, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Thank you,

Kyle Rhodes  
Research Assistant  
Virginia Tech

## Appendix K

### Description of Study and Informed Consent

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this study. The purpose of the proposed study is to describe the process of simultaneous implementation of two school improvement models in two schools in a rural Southwest Virginia school system and how those models influenced the school system's school improvement processes. Throughout the implementation, practices evolved from each of the school improvement models, which led the school system to form a hybrid model of school improvement. The best practices or new practices of each of the programs evolved into a hybrid school improvement model the system currently uses. The proposed study will document how and why the specific practices were retained and used in the hybrid plan. I will gather information from division level staff, principals and teachers in the form of interviews and analyze the responses for commonalities, differences or patterns.

During the interview today I will be using a recording device. No identifiable information will be used. A code will be used to identify the information to me, but no one will have access to that code for identification purposes. All of the information will be kept in a locked location. Once the interview is complete, a copy of the transcription will be given to you to check for accuracy. If you find corrections need to be made, please notify me as soon as possible. Once the final defense is complete, all of the recorded information will be deleted.

There will not be any compensation for this study. There is minimal risk to you as a participant in this study. There could be a minimal risk that you could be identified through your response, but that is a very minimal risk. The benefit of your participation in this study will allow me to have a better understanding of the school improvement initiatives your school has participated in over the past two years.

At any time you are free to withdraw from this study with no penalty to you. You are free not to answer any questions without penalty.

Do you have any questions? \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_No

Are you willing to become a participant in this study? \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_No

Thank you for participating in this study.

May I record our interview? \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_No

Do you have any questions before we begin? \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_No

---

Signature of the participant

## Appendix L

### Matrix of Research Question and Base Interview Questions for all Participants Cross-Referenced Against Domains of Information

Research question	Interview question	Domains of Information	Possible probes – only used if information is not derived from the interview question
1. How were the two school improvement models implemented?  a. Who was involved in the decision to implement each of the improvement models?  b. What factors aided in the implementation of the two school improvement models?  c. What barriers to the implementation of the two school improvement models were encountered?	1. Tell me about your experience with implementing the Indistar Program.	Experience  Knowledge	Probe for interview question 1;
	2. Tell me about your experience with implementing the University of Virginia School Turnaround Program.	Involvement	a. What was your involvement during the 1st year – the 2nd?
	3. How did the two programs complement each other?		Probe for interview question 2;
	4. How were the two programs conflicted?		a. What was the nature of your involvement?
	5. What barriers were encountered?		b. How did you learn about the two models?
2. Which best practices were adopted from each school improvement model that resulted in the Ridgeview County hybrid model of school improvement? Why?	6. Tell me about what you think the outcomes were to the simultaneous implementation of two school improvement models.	Experience  Knowledge	Probe for interview question 6;  a. What were the positive outcomes?
	7. What were the changes you observed at school during the implementation of the two school improvement models?		b. What were the negative outcomes?
3. Which practices of the two school improvement models were not adopted in the Ridgeview County hybrid model of school improvement? Why?	8. Were there any strategies or practices from the Indistar Program or the University of Virginia School Turnaround Program that were examined that were not implemented?	Experience  Knowledge  Involvement	
4. What other practices are utilized in the Ridgeview County hybrid model of school improvement? From what source were they adopted and why?	9. In addition to the practices adopted from the Indistar Program and the University of Virginia School Turnaround Program, what other components are involved in school improvement in Ridgeview County and where did they come from? Why are they still being used?	Experience	
		Knowledge	
	10. What did you learn about the school? The school division?		

**Appendix M**  
**Specific Interview Questions Based on the Participant’s Level of Responsibility of Implementation**

Level of Responsibility	Interview Questions	Domain
Superintendent	1. How was the decision made to participate in the Indistar Program? The UVA Program?	Experience Involvement
	2. What was your overall goal in implementing the Indistar Program and the UVA Program at the same time?	Experience
	3. Who was involved in determining what would be implemented throughout the division?	Experience
Central Office Leadership Team	1. What was your specific responsibility in the implementation of the Indistar Program and the UVA Program?	Experience Involvement
	2. How were the “best ideas” replicated throughout the division?	Knowledge
School Administrative Leadership Team	1. What were your thoughts when the final decision to implement the Indistar Program and the UVA Program was made?	Experience
	2. How did you approach the implementation with your faculty?	Experience Involvement
School Teacher Leadership Team	1. What were your thoughts to the implementation of the Indistar Program and the UVA Program?	Experience

**Appendix N**  
**Cover Letter for Content Validity Check Participants**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

Thank you for your willingness to participate in the validation of the instrument I will be using during my dissertation work. As you know, I am a doctoral candidate in the Educational Leadership and Policy Studies program at Virginia Tech. I am working under the direction of Dr. Wayne Tripp.

The topic of my dissertation focuses on the simultaneous implementation of two school improvement models in two rural elementary schools. Your participation and all communication can be completed through email correspondence.

Your participation in the validation of the instrument I will be using is completely voluntary. Your input will help me develop questions that will enable me to gain a better understanding of the implementation of the two school improvement models. If you choose not to participate in this study at any time, there will be no penalty to you. While I cannot identify every potential risk to you which may be possible during your participation, I do not anticipate any risks as a result of your work. Your responses will be completely confidential. I will not identify the names of the participants.

Attached to this email are the directions for completing the Question Content Validation Instrument. Please follow the directions and return the instrument to me as soon as you can. If you have any questions or would like to discuss any part of the instrument, please contact me.

Thank you,

Dennis Carter  
Assistant Superintendent  
Graduate Candidate  
Virginia Tech

**Appendix O**  
**Definitions of Domains**

Domain Number	Name of Domain	Definition of Domain
1	Experience	Defined as what the participants thought, felt and did throughout the implementation process of the two school improvement models.
2	Knowledge	Defined as what the participants determined as the positive and negative impacts of the implementation as well as their views of what others thought about the programs throughout the division.
3	Involvement	Defined as the participants' role in the implementation process of the two school improvement models.

## **Appendix P**

### **Directions for Completing the Interview Question Content Validity Instrument**

The purpose of the Interview Question Content Validity Instrument is to improve questions used in the interview protocol for central office staff, principals and teachers.

Directions: Attached to this document you will find the Definitions of Domains and The Question Content Validity Instrument. You will need to refer back to the definitions to complete the instrument. Please complete the following steps:

Select the domain/domains that you believe each question best represents. Again, you will need to refer back to the Definitions of Domains to help with this task. Once you have determined the domain/s that are best represented by the question, place the number of the domain/s in the column labeled "Domain."

Each item will also be rated for clarity by placing the number 1, 2 or 3 in the column labeled "Clarity." The numbers are identified by the following:

1. Question is unclear – remove the question
2. Rewording is suggested (please provide rewording suggestions in the column labeled "Rewording If Necessary")
3. Question is clear

**Appendix Q**  
**The Question Content Validity Instrument**

Base Questions	Domain	Clarity	Rewording If Necessary
1. Tell me about your experience with implementing Indistar Program.			
2. Tell me about your experience with implementing the University of Virginia School Turnaround Program.			
3. How did the two programs complement each other?			
4. How were the two programs conflicted?			
5. What barriers were encountered? Probe 1. What was your involvement during the 1st year – the 2nd? Probe 2. What was the nature of your involvement? Probe 3. How did you learn about the two models?			
6. Tell me about what you think the outcomes were to the simultaneous implementation of the two school improvement models. Probe 1. What were the positive outcomes? Probe 2. What were the negative outcomes?			

(table continued)

Base Questions	Domain	Clarity	Rewording If Necessary
7. What were the changes you observed at school during the implementation of the two school improvement models?			
8. Were there any strategies or practices from the Indistar Program or the University of Virginia School Turnaround Program that were examined that were not implemented?			
9. What were the changes you observed at school during the implementation of the two school improvement models?			
10. In addition to the practices adopted from the Indistar Program and the University of Virginia School Turnaround Program, what other components are involved in school improvement in Ridgeview County and where did they come from? Why are they still being used?			
11. What did you learn about the school? The school division?			

(table continued)

Specific Questions Based on Responsibility	Domain	Clarity	Rewording If Necessary
Superintendent – How was the decision made to participate in the Indistar Program? The UVA Program?			
Superintendent – Who was involved in determining what would be implemented throughout the division?			
Superintendent – What was your overall goal in implementing the Indistar Program and the UVA Program at the same time?			
Central Office Leadership – What was your specific responsibility in the implementation of the Indistar Program and the UVA Program?			
Central Office Leadership – How were the “best ideas” replicated throughout the division?			
School Administrative Leadership – What were your thoughts when the final decision to implement the Indistar Program and the UVA Program was made?			
School Administrative Leadership – How did you approach the implementation with your faculty?			
School Teacher Leadership – What were your thoughts to the implementation of the Indistar Program and the UVA Program?			

## Appendix R

### Interview Questions Asked by Dr. Rhodes

#### *Base Interview Questions for all Participants*

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#### Interview question

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1. Tell me about your experience with implementing the Indistar Program.

Probe: What was your involvement during the 1st year – the 2nd?

2. Tell me about your experience with implementing the University of Virginia School Turnaround Program.

Probe: What was the nature of your involvement?

Probe: How did you learn about the two models?

3. How did the two programs complement each other?

4. How were the two programs conflicted?

5. What barriers were encountered?

6. Tell me about what you think the outcomes were to the simultaneous implementation of two school improvement models.

Probe: What were the positive outcomes?

Probe: What were the negative outcomes?

7. What were the changes you observed at school during the implementation of the two school improvement models?

8. Were there any strategies or practices from the Indistar Program or the University of Virginia School Turnaround Program that were examined that were not implemented?

9. In addition to the practices adopted from the Indistar Program and the University of Virginia School Turnaround Program, what other components are involved in school improvement in Ridgeview County and where did they come from? Why are they still being used?

Probe: What did you learn about the school? The school division?

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*Specific Interview Questions based on Level of Responsibility*

Level of Responsibility	Interview Questions
Superintendent	<p>How was the decision made to participate in the Indistar Program? The UVA Program?</p> <p>What was your overall goal in implementing the Indistar Program and the UVA Program at the same time?</p> <p>Who was involved in determining what would be implemented throughout the division?</p>
Central Office Leadership Team	<p>What was your specific responsibility in the implementation of the Indistar Program and the UVA Program?</p> <p>How were the “best ideas” replicated throughout the division?</p>
School Administrative Leadership Team	<p>What were your thoughts when the final decision to implement the Indistar Program and the UVA Program was made?</p> <p>How did you approach the implementation with your faculty?</p>
School Teacher Leadership Team	<p>What were your thoughts to the implementation of the Indistar Program and the UVA Program?</p>

## **Appendix S**

### **Description of Study and Verbal Consent**

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this study. The purpose of the proposed study is to describe the process of simultaneous implementation of two school improvement models in two schools in a rural Southwest Virginia school system and how those models influenced the school system's school improvement processes. Throughout the implementation, practices evolved from each of the school improvement models, which led the school system to form a hybrid model of school improvement. The best practices or new practices of each of the programs evolved into a hybrid school improvement model the system currently uses. The proposed study will document how and why the specific practices were retained and used in the hybrid plan. I will gather information from division level staff, principals and teachers in the form of interviews and analyze the responses for commonalities, differences or patterns.

During the interview today I will be using a recording device. No identifiable information will be used. A code will be used to identify the information to me, but no one will have access to that code for identification purposes. All of the information will be kept in a locked location. Once the interview is complete, a copy of the transcription will be given to you to check for accuracy. If you find corrections need to be made, please notify me as soon as possible. Once the final defense is complete, all of the recorded information will be deleted.

There will not be any compensation for this study. There is minimal risk to you as a participant in this study. There could be a minimal risk that you could be identified through your response, but that is a very minimal risk. The benefit of your participation in this study will allow me to have a better understanding of the school improvement initiatives your school has participated in over the past two years.

At any time you are free to withdraw from this study with no penalty to you. You are free not to answer any questions without penalty.

Do you have any questions?

Are you willing to become a participant in this study?

Thank you for participating in this study.

May I record our interview?

Do you have any questions before we begin?

**Appendix T**  
**Email for Member Check**

Good Morning,

I would like to thank you for participating in my study. Without your cooperation and willingness to participate, this study could not be possible.

As part of the qualitative research process, ensuring valid information is vital. To do this I will be conducting a member check for each interview session. A member check is the opportunity for you to validate the information gathered in the interview process and make sure your thoughts were captured accurately. The interview session you participated in is attached to this email.

In order to maintain confidentiality to you as a participant, Dr. Rhodes is sending this email. He will also be collecting any inaccuracies within the transcript. He will print any changes you would like to make and present them to me. No personally identifiable information will be on the information he gives me. Please read through your sessions transcript and if there are any changes that need to be made, please email them to Dr. Rhodes by July 9th.

Again, I sincerely appreciate your willingness to participate in this study!

## Appendix U

### Definitions of the Domains of Information

Domain Number	Domain of Information	Definition of Domain
1	Experience	Defined as what the participants thought, felt and did throughout the implementation process of the two school improvement models.
2	Knowledge	Defined as what the participants determined as the positive and negative impacts of the implementation as well as their views of what others thought about the programs throughout the division.
3	Involvement	Defined as the participants' role in the implementation process of the two school improvement models.

## Appendix V

### Revised Definitions of Domains of Information

Domain Number	Domain of Information	Definition of Domain
1	Experience	Defined as what the participants thought, felt and did throughout the implementation process of the two school improvement models. (At the personal level)
2	Knowledge	Defined as what the participants determined as the positive and negative impacts of the implementation as well as their views of what others thought about the programs throughout the division. (At the school and district level)
3	Involvement	Defined as the participants' role in the implementation process of the two school improvement models. Involvement is specific to job title or contribution to a specific committee.
4	Understanding	Defined as the participants' understanding of the programs and the implementation process of the two school improvement models.