

A Third Way: The Politics of School District Takeover and Turnaround in Lawrence, Massachusetts

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Abstract

Superintendents say politics is the number one factor limiting their performance, yet research provides limited guidance in this area. State takeovers and district-wide turnaround efforts tend to be particularly politically heated. Lawrence provides a rare case of state takeover and district turnaround that resulted in academic improvements and generated limited controversy. I interviewed turnaround and stakeholder group leaders to analyze why reforms were not more contentious. Explanatory factors include: the (1) local context, (2) authorities granted to the state under its accountability law, and (3) turnaround leaders' approach. Specifically, leaders focused on relationship building, differentiated district-school relations, transcending polarizing politics, strategic staffing decisions, and generating early results while minimizing disruption. The findings have implications for state and district leaders seeking improvement.

Keywords: district turnaround, school improvement, state takeover, politics of education

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The Politics of School District Takeover and Turnaround

So often in education, we're pitted against each other. It's arts or academics. It's more time at school, or with families. It's empowering teachers, or it's teaching to the test. All these things are false choices. We just need to figure out how we empower more people to be successful. And the courage I saw... yesterday in Lawrence is absolutely inspiring. It makes you so hopeful about where we're going as a nation.

Arne Duncan, U.S. Secretary of Education, September 2014

Politics is the number one factor that superintendents say inhibits their job performance, according to a 2015 American Association of School Administrators survey (Education Week, 2015). State interventions in low-performing schools and district turnaround efforts tend to be especially contentious. State takeover of districts runs counter to our nation's deeply embedded tradition of local control over K-12 schools and of the resources devoted to running educational systems. District turnaround efforts can also be controversial, especially when they involve high levels of staff turnover or closures of schools that are tightly linked to community identity.

Several districts seeking dramatic improvement have implemented a "portfolio management model" (PMM) approach to district organization. With PMM, the central office oversees and holds accountable a supply of schools managed by a diverse set of operators such as CMOs, nonprofit groups, and the district itself (Hill, Campbell & Gross, 2012). Market-based approaches to educational improvement rely on the theory that families will drive positive change by expressing their priorities through choice and dissatisfaction through exit (Hirschman, 1970). Henig (2010) describes PMM as a quasi market-based "contracting regime" that assigns a public entity—the central office—as the primary consumer of school management organizations and service providers which compete for contracts with the district or state.

Given the primacy of public management within PMM systems, pluralistic politics likely play a large role, on top of families' expressed preferences, in determining which organizations receive and retain contracts. The effectiveness of PMM systems will therefore rely on

governmental capacity and could make “civic capacity”—the ability of a community to collectively set and pursue goals—imperative (Henig, Hula, Orr, & Pedescleaux, 1999; Stone et al., 2001). PMM implementation may introduce or empower new political actors, at the expense of others, as districts contract with outside organizations (Henig, 2010; Mehta & Teles, 2011). Interest groups likely influence policy and partnership choices (Moe, 2011). At the same time, PMM may avoid sharply ideological debates if it is viewed as a pragmatic blending of market-based approaches to reform with centralized public regulation (Henig and Bulkley, 2010).

Understanding the political dynamics of district turnaround could provide lessons for the implementation of future efforts and promoting the long-term sustainability of effective reforms. Single and cross-case studies of districts with records of improvement emphasize that effective navigation of politics appears to be a critical ingredient of success (Honig & Coburn, 2008; Johnson et al., 2015). Furthermore, any policy requires political support to sustain itself and fulfill its long-term objectives (Jochim, 2013; Stone, Henig, Jones & Pierannunzi, 2001). Unfortunately, the academic literature is short on both examples of successful district-wide turnaround and guidance for leaders on navigating the politics of state takeover and turnaround.

I begin to fill that hole by examining the political dynamics of the Lawrence Public Schools (LPS) turnaround—a rare example of state takeover and district-wide reform effort that resulted in substantial academic gains in its first two years of implementation and generated limited controversy. The Lawrence turnaround occurred in a particularly policy relevant context given the U.S. Department of Education (U.S. DOE) has held up Massachusetts’ accountability system as an exemplar (U.S. DOE, 2012). This system classifies schools and districts into five levels based on performance, requires low-performing schools and districts to implement rapid improvement plans, and allows the state to take over schools and districts at the very lowest

levels of achievement (U.S. DOE, 2012). Lawrence was the first district to be taken over since the state was given this authority. The State Commissioner of Education has since taken over two additional districts—Holyoke and Southbridge. Nationwide, the new Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) carves out a greater role for states in addressing academic underperformance. As a result, the need to examine state accountability systems has never been greater.

This paper provides lessons about the political viability of accountability-driven state takeover and the effective navigation of politics in the context of district-wide reform. Given the Lawrence turnaround generated substantially less controversy than more typical cases of takeover, I seek to understand why the Lawrence turnaround was not more contentious. I address the following research question: *What factors contributed to the ways that key stakeholders in Lawrence—the general public, parents, educators, union leaders, and district partners—responded to the state takeover and turnaround reforms?* I find three primary factors played a role: the (1) local political environment, (2) statewide accountability context, and (3) turnaround leaders' approach to implementation. Specifically, within a local context ripe for change and armed with broad new authorities, turnaround leaders' minimized opposition and increased support for their reforms through a focus on relationship building and empowerment, differentiated district-school relations, a "third way" approach to transcending polarizing politics, strategic staffing decisions, and generating early results while minimizing disruption.

Context

Lawrence, Massachusetts

Lawrence is a mid-sized industrial city about 30 miles north of Boston that is one of the most economically disadvantaged communities in Massachusetts. From 2009 to 2013, median household income was \$32,851 and the poverty rate was 29.2 percent. Roughly 11 percent of

residents over the age of 25 held at least a Bachelor's degree. The city is home to a large population of Latino residents, including many who came to Massachusetts from the Dominican Republic or Puerto Rico. The public school system enrolled approximately 13,000 students in 28 schools as of 2011. There were also a small number of charter schools in Lawrence that were not managed by the district. LPS is among the ten largest districts in Massachusetts, but its student population is still roughly a quarter the size of the largest district, the Boston Public Schools. Leading up to the takeover, about 90 percent of LPS students qualified for Free or Reduced Priced Lunch and roughly 80 percent were learning English as a second language. LPS students scored 0.70 standard deviations lower than the state average on both math and ELA standardized exams, and below the average predominately low-income Massachusetts district by 0.3 standard deviations in math and 0.2 standard deviations in ELA (Schueler, Goodman, Deming, 2016).

School Accountability in Massachusetts

Although Massachusetts' students lead the nation in their average performance on standardized exams, considerable achievement gaps based on race and social class remain. In an effort to address these issues in the midst of the competition for federal Race to the Top funding, the Massachusetts State Legislature passed the Achievement Gap Act (AGA) in 2010. This reform created a tiered system of accountability targeting the lowest performing schools and districts for intensive interventions, including state takeover at the very lowest levels of achievement. The AGA also provided the state with increased authorities in takeover districts.

Lawrence had a long history of low-performance, but the state considered the 2010-11 results to be especially grim. LPS was in the bottom five districts in the state based on the percentage of students considered proficient on the state's ELA and math exams. Three quarters of the schools in the districts experienced declines in achievement between 2009-10 and 2010-11

and only about half of all students were graduating within four years. Furthermore, the state now had new policy mechanisms at its disposal for attempting to address underperformance.

In the fall of 2011, the state deployed the takeover authority provided by the 2010 AGA. The Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (MA BESE) classified LPS as a Level 5 district, the lowest of the five possible ratings in its accountability system, and placed the district into state “receivership.” In January of 2012, the state appointed a Receiver who was a former Boston Public Schools teacher, principal and deputy superintendent. The AGA gave the Receiver all the authority of the previous Superintendent and School Committee, as well as broad discretion to alter district policies such as the collective bargaining agreement and to unilaterally extend the school day and year. Receivership was not accompanied by large amounts of additional funding from the state. Figure 1 illustrates that while per pupil spending in LPS did increase post-turnaround, spending was also increasing at a similar rate statewide.

Lawrence Public Schools Turnaround

The Receiver and State Commissioner of Education’s Turnaround Plan, released in spring 2012, had five major components. The first was an effort to raise expectations for students and staff through ambitious performance targets. The district also began a dropout recovery effort. The second component was increased school-level autonomy and accountability. The district handed over management of a small number of schools to outside operators, resulting in a version of the PMM of district governance without the typical choice-based school assignment element. Third was an effort to improve the quality of human capital, through staff replacement, staff development, and a new performance-based career ladder compensation system for teachers. The fourth feature was increased learning time, implemented through expanded school day, enrichment activities, tutoring, and special initiatives. One notable program was

“Acceleration Academies” in which select teachers provided struggling students with targeted instruction, in a single subject, delivered in small groups of roughly ten, over weeklong vacation breaks. The final component was an emphasis on using data to drive instructional improvement.

The first two full years of turnaround implementation led to substantial positive gains in math and modest improvements in ELA. There was no evidence of slippage on other non-test outcomes such as attendance, grade progression, district transfer, enrollment in school, and graduation among 12th graders, and improvement on grade progression among high school students (Schueler, Goodman & Deming, 2016). Furthermore, the Acceleration Academy programs appear to explain roughly half, but not all of the gains in math and all of the gains in ELA. Notably, the size of the effects is slightly larger than the effects of injecting the practices of high-performing charter schools into low-performing traditional public schools (Fryer, 2014).

Stakeholder Response to Lawrence Reforms

Although the Lawrence experience has not been entirely uncontroversial, the controversy has been minimal when compared to more typical district takeover and turnaround reforms in places like New Orleans (Buras, 2015; Jabar, 2015), Memphis (Glazer & Egan, 2016), Newark (Russakoff, 2015), and even in smaller Massachusetts cities such as Holyoke (Williams, 2015). In these communities, stakeholders have expressed considerable dissatisfaction in the form of public protests, school walkouts, and critical commentary in the press and other public venues. These types of reactions were relatively limited in post-receivership Lawrence.

One indicator of the overarching public narrative surrounding receivership is popular press coverage. I identified 259 news articles discussing LPS from fall 2007 to fall 2015 using LexisNexis, Google News Advanced Search, and the archives of publications such as *Commonwealth Magazine*, *Boston Magazine*, WGBH (Boston-based member station of NPR),

Boston Globe, *Eagle-Tribune*, and two regional publications geared toward a bilingual readers, *Rumbo News* and *El Mundo Boston*. I coded articles for major content-based themes and display the article count by publication year in Figure 2 and dominant themes over time in Figure 3.

The primary content of coverage shifted from a negative tone pre-receivership to a more positive tone post-receivership. For the first four years of coverage in the pre-receivership era, there was a single dominant theme related to allegations of wrongdoing against public officials, including campaign finance investigations of the Mayor, fraud and embezzlement indictments against an LPS Superintendent, and the firing of three consecutive pre-receivership Superintendents. (There were no allegations against the Interim Superintendent who served prior to the Receiver.) In 2011, new themes emerged related to low academic achievement and state takeover. In 2013, post-receivership, the coverage shifted to a narrative of academic improvement. In the most recent years, Lawrence was often described as a model for successful district turnaround. Overall, I found minimal mentions of community resistance to the reforms.¹

Other signs of limited controversy include expressions of support by elected officials and two secondary sources of survey data. Specifically, the then Mayor and Legislative Delegation expressed public support for the takeover. Additionally, the MassINC Polling Group surveyed 404 parents just after the turnaround plan's release, but prior to implementation of most reforms.² The majority of parents surveyed (68 percent) had heard about and approved of the turnaround plan while only five percent disapproved. Similarly, data from the March 2012 and January 2014 Teaching, Empowering, Leading and Learning Massachusetts survey of school-based educators

¹ Criticism related to union concerns over threats to collective bargaining, dismissals, performance pay, and ELT compensation. Individual teachers expressed due process complaints regarding their evaluations. Finally, some regional leaders argued that turnaround leaders did not go far enough in utilizing market-based reform approaches.

² Parent survey results are in Appendix Table A1. Educator survey results available at masstells.org or on request.

suggests no slippage and some post-turnaround improvements in educators' satisfaction with their working environments, at least among educators retained under receivership.³

The Lawrence Teachers Union (LTU), a local affiliate of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), had a more complicated response. The LTU was opposed to the concept of receivership and had serious concerns about the potential threat it posed to collective bargaining rights and local decision-making. Despite these concerns, union leaders described making an early conscious decision to collaborate with state and district leaders on turnaround efforts.

As the state considered whether to place LPS in receivership, the union expressed full agreement that LPS students were not being adequately served. However, union leaders viewed the AGA as a blunt instrument that misdiagnosed the cause of the district's problems, placing blame more heavily on teachers and collective bargaining than district leadership and other causes of low achievement. The union also criticized the concentration of power over an entire district with a single official, in this case, the State Commissioner of Education. Nevertheless, the union believed receivership could bring the district more focused leadership and resources.

Over time, the union began to view receivership as unavoidable, believing MA BESE had the votes to take over the district. In this context of perceived inevitability, the LTU President told the Commissioner he was committed to partnership and told the press he would "make lemonade out of a lemon." Union leaders made a deliberate decision to be at the table, citing Saul Rubenstein's research on the positive association between union-district collaboration and student outcomes. Without supporting takeover, the union decided it would be counterproductive to fight receivership and that collaboration was their best hope for having a voice.

Despite this commitment to collaboration, the early phase of implementation was marked by union-district tension. Union criticism of the turnaround was a dominant theme in the 2013

³ I provide full results and the texts of all items in Appendix Table A2.

press coverage. Union members initially had significant anxiety about job security, the possible conversion of schools to charter status, and how extended learning time (ELT) would affect work schedules and teacher retention. The Receiver's initial review of human capital quality was likely the most stressful aspect of the early turnaround phase for educators, as the Receiver and his team decided which principals, teachers, and central office staff to retain. It is hard to overstate how distressing this process must have been, especially for those who lost their jobs as a result.

The Receiver took a particularly aggressive approach to replacing principals. The district estimates that it actively replaced roughly half of all principals in the first two turnaround years (ERS, 2015). As I show in Panel B of Figure 4, LPS had a principal retention rate of 82 percent in 2012-13 and 72 percent in 2013-14. In an effort to improve teacher quality, district leaders identified teachers they considered low performing based on student data, attendance records, and principal reports. They then conducted a "Receiver's Review" in spring 2012, gathering information and observing these teachers in classrooms (Empower Schools, 2014). Ultimately, LPS estimates that ten percent of teachers were removed prior to turnaround year one. Between dismissals, resignations and retirements, LPS had a teacher retention rate of about 82 percent in 2012-13 and 74 percent in 2013-14, as displayed in the top half of Figure 4.⁴ While union leaders acknowledged that some LPS teachers should not have been teaching there, they believed the district went too far by firing teachers without due process who could have improved with support and damaging school culture by bringing in outside consultants to conduct evaluations.

The process of coming to an agreement on a new contract was also tumultuous from the union's perspective. The union filed two complaints with the MA Department of Labor Relations (DLR) for the district's failure to bargain and creation of a Teacher Leader Cabinet to advise on

⁴ For the purpose of this figure, MA DESE defines retention as remaining in the same position within the district. A staff member is considered retained if he or she transferred schools within the district.

district policy paid for via stipends rather than a union-negotiated rate. The union argued that the AGA allows the Receiver or Commissioner to set aside individual provisions of the contract if they are an impediment to student learning, but that the state began with the assumption that all provisions were problematic. The state and national AFT got involved. Eventually, the union and the district entered into conversations mediated by the DLR. The major points of disagreement centered on the performance-based compensation system and what union leaders viewed as unfairly low compensation for ELT. In the face of these concerns, the district moved forward with implementing its new compensation system before union members ratified the contract. The union did move the district toward outlining grievance and arbitration procedures and establishing school-level teacher leadership teams. In the spring of 2014, LPS teachers voted to ratify the contract by 57 to 43 percent (WBUR, 2014). The union viewed the agreement as titled toward management's policy objectives, but saw it as better than nothing.

In the midst of the tumult, one relative bright spot in union-district relations during the first year of turnaround implementation was ongoing planning conversations surrounding the Oliver Partnership School. In short, the district and the union came to an agreement that they would begin co-managing grades 1-5 at the old Oliver School starting in 2013-14. Planning began in early 2013. That spring, the Receiver and his team joined union leaders for a retreat and AFT conference where they worked out the school's model. Overall, communication and cooperation on the Oliver Partnership School continued in a positive direction.

Overall union-district relations improved after the contract was in place, but disagreements did not disappear entirely. Dominant press-based themes over 2014 and 2015 included union-district cooperation, and expressions of both union support for and criticism of the turnaround. Disagreements related to compensation for ELT duties, mid-career teacher

salaries, teacher retention among new hires (particularly young, Ivy League educated teachers from outside of Lawrence), due process for teachers non-renewed prior to attaining professional status, and compensation for paraprofessionals. Despite policy-based disagreements, union leaders argued that communication increased and interpersonal relations with district leaders had improved since prior to receivership and district leaders described the union as having opted for a supportive, rather than oppositional, approach. In 2014, AFT President Randi Weingarten highlighted Lawrence, alongside Finland, as an example of success driven by union-district collaboration (Education Week, 2014). Local and state union leaders saw this as an overstatement. Nevertheless, they did not hesitate to acknowledge the successes that have come with the turnaround in terms of MCAS scores and parent and educator confidence, but attributed improvements to policy changes, such as ELT, that they believe could have been implemented in a locally controlled district with more traditional collective bargaining rights.

In sum, the Lawrence turnaround was relatively well received by community members, parents, retained educators, and partner organizations. There was no evidence that these groups generated significant resistance. The union, on the other hand, expressed significant criticism, and district-union relations experienced ups and downs. However, there were signs of improvements in union-district relations in recent years and of ongoing cooperation despite policy-based disagreements. Both union and district leaders describe the union's overall response as fundamentally collaborative rather than oppositional. The relatively mild stakeholder response motivated me to explore why the reforms were not met with more controversy.

Methods

Data

I relied primarily on one-on-one interviews with leaders of the turnaround and stakeholder groups, supplementing interviews with a review of news articles and publically available documents (Merriam, 1998) such as website content, publicly available speeches, and minutes from MA BESE meetings. The incorporation of multiple types of data from a variety of sources helped me triangulate results to reduce systematic biases that could come from one particular mode of data or type of informant (Maxwell, 2005). For instance, interviews with leaders regarding their communication strategy might suffer from self-report bias while speeches allowed me to observe their behavior. Similarly, stakeholder group leaders sometimes had different perceptions about how leaders tried to gain their support than leaders themselves.

Interview Participants

I relied on purposeful sampling (Seidman, 2006) to gather a pool of participants representing turnaround leadership at the district and state levels, and who could speak to major stakeholder groups' perceptions of the receivership. I identified participants based on interactions with the district for an earlier study through which I learned about who played key roles and had institutional knowledge, as well as through public documents and news articles. I added to my list using snowball sampling. Once my analysis of press coverage and survey data suggested there had been minimal resistance to the turnaround, I asked interviewees and other contacts, to introduce me to other participants who had historically expressed criticism of the turnaround.

The resulting sample included twenty interviewees. Central office leaders included the Receiver and four other high-ranking district officials, including one who had worked in LPS for many years prior to receivership. I interviewed the former MA Secretary of Education who was in office during the transition to receivership, a MA DESE official who had been involved with labor contract conversations post-receivership, a former State Senator who represented Lawrence

during the receivership transition, and three representatives of organized labor including a high-ranking leader of the LTU and two officials from the MA AFT. I interviewed two principals, identified by the district, who had been administrators both before and after receivership. I also spoke with three teachers who were either non-renewed or otherwise left the district post-receivership. Finally, I spoke with the leaders of three non-profit partner organizations including enrichment providers and a local community group that had been conducting focus group-like gatherings with community members leading up to and through the receivership.

Interview Procedures

Interviews focused on public perceptions of reforms and the factors explaining public response. I used a semi-structured interview protocol (Merriam, 1998), beginning with open-ended questions to avoid steering the interview based on my hypotheses (Seidman, 2006). For turnaround leaders, I began by asking about broad changes in mood, among educators and members of the general public, over the course of the turnaround. Later in the protocol, I included more specific probes (Merriam, 1998) to get at the reactions of particular groups and district leaders' thought process about garnering support. With other stakeholders, I began by asking them to tell me the story of the takeover and attempted turnaround from their perspective, and then probed on specifics. I told subjects that I could not guarantee anonymity because of the unique context and because some of my respondents were identifiable public figures. Interviews lasted between 45 and 90 minutes and were audio recorded for transcription.

Data Analysis

I relied on content analysis to identify major themes emerging from my data (Merriam, 1998). I coded interview and speech transcripts using a list of codes that included examples of Maxwell's (2005) three types: (1) "organizational" codes which are broad topics anticipated

prior to interviews, such as a list of stakeholder groups or turnaround components, (2) “substantive” codes describing subjects’ perceptions without implying an abstract theory, such as adjectives describing communication between leaders and stakeholders, and (3) “theoretical” codes that imply an abstract framework, such as those related to ideology and pragmatism. I based codes on relevant literature and public documents, and some emerged from interview data.

Data analysis occurred simultaneously with data collection (Merriam, 1998). This was an iterative process in which I conducted and coded an interview, identified new codes and refined my protocol based on emergent themes. Coding throughout data collection helped me address threats to validity by developing tentative hypotheses and adapting my protocol to proactively seek out evidence running counter to my emerging theories (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and to ask respondents to react to my hypotheses. It also alerted me to an appropriate stopping point for recruitment once subjects no longer identified novel themes (Maxwell, 2005). At that point, I re-analyzed the interviews with my full set of codes, searching for discrepant data that could not be explained by my hypotheses or that might support alternative explanations (Maxwell, 2005).

Findings

Below I describe the factors that contributed to Lawrence stakeholders’ minimal opposition relative to other cases of state takeover and district turnaround. Although I cannot draw definitive causal conclusions, several distinct themes emerged from my analysis providing plausible explanatory factors. I find that three primary factors worked together to limit the negative response and increase support, including features of the: (1) local Lawrence context, (2) broader state accountability context, and (3) turnaround leaders’ approach to reform.

Lawrence Context

Several characteristics of the Lawrence context likely helped limit negative reactions to the turnaround. First, the district is medium-sized. Managing a set of roughly 30 schools allowed the Receiver and his deputies to set foot in all schools. One central office leader explained:

To do the school-by-school [reform] ...you need to have a small number of schools to be able to focus on... any intervention short of just hitting complete restart... you need to... see the whole school arrayed before you... to advise schools or strategically replace people, you have to know that school, pretty much like the back of your hand to be able to do it well.

In addition to the district's manageable starting size, throughout the post-receivership period, student enrollment was increasing. This prevented the central office from having to make unpopular budget cuts or close a large number of schools based on declining enrollments.

Lawrence's political context also helps explain the turnaround response. Prior to receivership, there was a widespread perception of dysfunction, instability, and even corruption among city and district officials. One leader of a partner organization argued that this created more receptivity to takeover than would have existed had LPS simply had low performance:

Corruption makes me feel much more comfortable with the state taking over... there's a big difference when you say, "I'm only doing this because we're going to do better with your schools than you were doing," versus "because people are stealing stuff" ... that condition really did change the rhetoric... there was a moral underpinning.

For many Lawrence community members, these perceptions contributed to a sense that there was a lack of local capacity to address student performance and a hope that state-level resources could help, as one now former high-ranking state education official argued:

There was a sense of urgency in this place because things had gone from bad to worse...this Mayor was tarnished with various accusations...when they arrested the Superintendent and the chaos that was prevailing in terms of the school system and the lengthy track record of failure there...there was a growing recommendation that...they needed help.

Typically, state takeovers are met with the concern that they compromise local, transparent, democracy. These concerns were present in Lawrence, but there was also limited confidence in local policymakers. At a Boston Foundation event, the Receiver remembered that

when he arrived in Lawrence, people told him, “watch the School Committee tapes from the past, it’s like Jerry Springer!” One leader of a community group argued that negative perceptions of the pre-receivership School Committee dampened concerns about usurping local power:

The one thing that there was a little bit more outcry or resistance about was the fact that the School Committee was not going to have a role anymore... I'm not sure that that was echoed by a lot of popular support... I don't think there were any parents on the School Committee... I don't know that the School Committee was before an incredibly effective vehicle for public oversight of the education system.

Therefore, although the community was not happy about receivership, many seemed to view state intervention as the lesser of two evils.

These dynamics contributed to unique situation in which local elected officials publicly supported receivership. The leader of one partner organization explained:

They were invited in. This was not actually a hostile takeover...a lot of these places, the biggest problem is if you have a local player who's opposed to you and fighting it. In fact, the Mayor invited it and then didn't dabble really...The delegation was very supportive.

One member of that legislative delegation talked about the intentionality with which he and others worked to gather local support that was demographically representative of the community:

[The Mayor] ...was from the north side of the city and that was where the vast majority of people that were sending their kids to the public schools [were]... to have Latinos on our side, that was huge... A white guy [referring to himself] couldn't have done this without having a team from Lawrence... we built an internal group. We had reps, we had parents, young moms, the Mayor, we had a lot of people in turn say, “We want this.”

Interviewees believed that elected officials’ early support for state involvement played a critical role in the broader community’s response to the reforms.

Beyond local elected officials, employee unions tend to play a large role in educational politics (Moe, 2011) and indeed several characteristics of the organized labor landscape in Lawrence contributed to the turnaround response. First, Massachusetts’ principals do not have the ability to collectively bargain, making it easier than it otherwise would have been for the

Receiver to replace half of all principals in the first two years of receivership. One district official argued that because a key part of the turnaround strategy was to “elevate” the principal’s role, “in other states that have unionized principal associations, you can’t do any of this.”

Relations between the teachers union and the district had been poor for a long time prior to receivership. One LTU leader recounted an early meeting with the previous Superintendent.

After making a comment to the press, the union leader was summoned to the central office:

[The Superintendent] just started yelling at me and saying that he produced a memo that said all communication had to go through the Superintendent and he put the memo in my face and said "Have you read this memo? Do you want me to get the old union president to read it to you?"... He ended up being jailed for embezzlement... for a long time the LTU, we were aware of the improprieties... by some of the School Committee members, City Council members... [the Superintendent] ended up – they had his office raided... he was removed... in the middle of all that the city of Lawrence was put into receivership... at a real low point.

Interestingly, the Receiver’s administration viewed the union as having been, in some ways, a force for good in a dysfunctional pre-receivership system. One district administrator explained:

For the last 20 years...the union was an incredibly positive force here in the midst of a lot of chaos, a lot of turmoil, a lot of people that were treated incredibly unfairly at the teacher and student level. Politics ran rampant...The union was actually protecting people from corruption...reformers never think this is a real thing but it literally was the union protecting people from cronyism, like “I want to fire you because you had a fight with my sister.”

The new team’s perception that the union had served to protect educators from corruption likely contributed to the district’s post-receivership willingness to collaborate with the union.

Finally, the lack of a strong union-parent alliance likely played a role in minimizing turnaround resistance. In many large urban districts, school systems have historically served as a major employer and often a venue for the social mobility of people of color. This dynamic can reinforce alliances between unions and parents, particularly in places where the teaching force is racially or ethnically similar to the families it serves (Henig, Hula, Orr, & Pedescleaux, 1999). In

contrast, the 80 percent white LPS staff is not representative of the roughly 90 percent Hispanic student population. I describe the racial and ethnic makeup of LPS staff over time in Figure 7.

One leader of a partner organization argued that these dynamics created a disconnect between the union and the broader community explaining, “it's not Latino teachers losing their jobs in Lawrence... there's not a 30, 40, 50-year history of [teaching] being a stepping stone to the middle class. And [the LTU President] is a White Irish guy.” One district official speculated that one reason the community outcry over job losses was relatively muted was because many of the teachers who were dismissed resided outside the district. One leader of a partner organization recounted the days leading up to receivership:

We also got calls from some folks pretty high in the union nationally sort of asking us if we would organize against receivership... the challenge with some unions today is that they have become disconnected from the communities they are embedded in and serve... we felt organizing to save the union was not something that was going to have resonance with parents and students here.

In sum, several characteristics of the local Lawrence context, such as the school district's size and growing enrollment, the union politics, and the racial/ethnic disconnect between the teaching force and student population, contributed to creating a context in which it was possible to implement receivership and turnaround without a dramatic backlash.

Expanded State Authorities

The accountability context in Massachusetts also contributed to the turnaround response within Lawrence. The AGA gave the state the authority to take over districts in the most extreme cases of underperformance. The state is then able to select and appoint a Receiver who has all the authority of the Superintendent and School Committee, as well as new authorities to change district-wide policy, such as suspending portions of the collective bargaining agreement and

unilaterally extending the school day and year. These AGA-provided authorities were, at least in the short run, useful in shielding turnaround leaders from some local political battles.

First, the new authorities seemed useful in allowing the state and district to recruit leaders with political capacity. Interviewees argued that it would have been difficult to recruit an effective receiver without offering authorities that he or she would perceive as necessary for making major improvements. One elected official advocated for state takeover, in part because, “to get the caliber of [the eventual Receiver], I knew that’s what we had to do.” Several interviewees characterized the Receiver as politically adept. One leader of a partner organization described his reaction to hearing the eventual Receiver was under consideration for the role:

That would be brilliant because not only is he a great guy, he's politically extremely savvy... he [was principal of]... one of the fastest growing schools, where the teachers were among the most pleased with it and the union was quite supportive... even though [the future Receiver] was skirting some rules, [his Superintendent] loved him... He had a personal set of skills to be... driving change at a high level, and at getting by, almost against what you'd expect in a way that people liked him for it, not disliked him for it.

One district leader, primarily with consulting experience, argued that the Receiver, “having lived in this world and understanding the political nuances in a much deeper way helped us to avoid a lot of the pitfalls that I think even incredibly well-intentioned thoughtful people would fall into.”

The authorities also seemed to aid the recruitment of other key staff members. At a November 2013 gathering of greater Boston area business leaders, the Receiver explained:

Receivership...put a spotlight on the Lawrence Public Schools. There's a lot of interest in the reforms...so we are getting hundreds more applicants in for teachers...people want to come work...in this unique set of circumstances. Self-motivated, self-starting people who are interested in being more than a principal, but really a CEO...people are interested in this idea that they can really put their own stamp on their building. (Riley, 2013)

The turnaround team believed that the AGA authorities allowed them to recruit staff members who helped improve the turnaround response because they were aligned with the new approach.

In addition, the authorities provided turnaround leaders crucial leverage. They allowed the district to bypass likely political battles over their preferred policy changes such as district-wide ELT. During union-district conversations over the teacher contract, the new authority that allowed the Receiver to ignore portions of the CBA helped the district get union support for a contract the union would not have otherwise accepted. One union leader explained:

At one point, the Receiver set a deadline... saying if we don't have a contract settled by this date, I'm imposing... we were powerless. So we pushed as hard as we could to get the best deal we could get and when the clock struck midnight we said okay, we'll sign the deal, also stating that we didn't like it and we didn't like the receivership, but we had to move forward... there was some lobbying done with the membership to tell them... if we didn't get this, we had... nothing in writing, no grievance procedure... Better to have this than nothing.

Furthermore, these new authorities allowed turnaround leaders to frame themselves as taking a measured approach by emphasizing that they did not use the full extent of their powers. The Receiver and Commissioner often argued that they exercised the authorities in a restrained and responsible way, pointing to the decisions not to ask all staff to reapply for their jobs and not to convert LPS schools into charters. At the Boston Foundation event, the Receiver said:

The reality is, I could make every teacher in Lawrence, if I so chose, reapply for their job... before I got there, there were calls to destroy the LPS system. People said "turn it all into charter schools," someone said, "this is their Katrina moment" which I thought was slightly disrespectful, but I got the point. But I wanted to take a more measured approach.

In contrast, union leaders argued that the state “overreached what the intent of the [AGA] law was.” When asked about the district’s framing around restraint, one union leader responded, “If I hear that one more time, I’m gonna scream... why would they come in and just fire everyone? That’s absurd. Mass firings don’t work.” The new authorities may have allowed turnaround leaders to appear measured to the general public, but union leaders did not accept this framing.

Beyond helping leaders describe their approach as measured, the AGA authorities helped district officials avoid some blame for unpopular decisions. One leader of a partner organization

argued that the Receiver's team sometimes responded to requests with, "I'd love to help you out with that, but [the State] won't let me." One union leader argued, "Most people in the district that know [the Receiver] on a personal level like the guy. They might very much dislike some of the policies, but they also know that [the Receiver] can't do anything without the approval of the Commissioner." In some cases, stakeholders said district leaders framed themselves as moderate relative to state leaders. One union leader said that district officials used the subtle threat of charter expansion to encourage cooperation, suggesting, "those people out there want to do nothing but charter schools and I'm sort of holding back the floodgates, so work with me and we'll make the system work and we won't have to kill you with charter schools." This is one example of how the state's primacy provided a degree of political cover for local leaders.

In sum, the new authorities provided by Massachusetts' accountability system contributed to minimizing resistance to the Lawrence turnaround. The autonomies helped the state recruit politically adept district leaders. The presence of talented leaders was not simply a fortunate accident, but at least in part, the result of state law. Furthermore, although state takeover itself was hardly popular, the authorities it provided helped to shield turnaround leaders from some potential local political conflicts in the short term.

Turnaround Leaders' Approach

Within the context described above, I find five features of the turnaround leaders' approach to implementation that seemed to limit resistance to their reforms. Their approach included an emphasis on relationship building and stakeholder empowerment, differentiated district-school relations, a "third way" approach to reconciling polarizing political perspectives, strategic staffing decisions, and producing early results while minimizing disruption.

Relationship Building and Stakeholder Empowerment. The first feature of turnaround leaders' approach was their emphasis on building relationships and empowering key players in Lawrence to feel a sense of ownership over the reforms. Stone et al. (2001) argue that when a policy subsystem, such as a school district, is ineffective or corrupt, it is not enough to simply disrupt that system. Sustained reform requires altering relationships between actors with a stake in the system to build civic capacity. Stone et al. (2001) describe civic capacity as, "various sectors of the community coming together in an effort to solve a major problem" (p. 4). Consistent with this concept, Lawrence leaders convened stakeholders, building relationships with and empowering them to be part of the effort. This was politically advantageous because, as one state level leader explained, "people support what they help create."

At the start, this approach was illustrated by the decision to begin with information gathering and needs assessment. The Receiver was appointed in January 2012 and spent a good part of the first five months visiting schools, and meeting parents, educators, potential partner organizations, union leaders, and elected officials. Leaders said this phase informed the creation of the June 2012 turnaround plan. This effort seemed to go beyond a symbolic listening tour because stakeholders feel heard when leaders implemented early changes that were responsive to community feedback. The central office team said they, "deliberately tried to weave in tangible changes that would resonate with people on the ground early on." The Receiver gave examples:

We had [a positive] vibe from the parents initially when they saw we were fixing the buildings... There are going to be bathroom doors on the stalls... toilet paper in the boys and girls room. Parents then began to see that we're also opening up all these opportunities for their kids... theatre performances and sports. The kids were probably happy... those were areas where we felt like we had a lot of support from parents and heard a lot from them.

This initial responsiveness helped to build confidence in the new leadership.

School administrators also argued that this period of information gathering, coupled with tangible changes, was important for securing principals' buy-in. One administrator explained:

[The Receiver] didn't make a whole bunch of changes that first half year... he was assessing on the ground, meeting with every single principal individually. He'd come right to the school... "Tell me what you think about this. Show me some classrooms... What do you need?"...the idea of someone asking... "What is going to help you to succeed?" that was a new idea I think for folks... That was very impressive... everybody just started to relax.

Another principal explained that these visits immediately demonstrated that the Receiver was different from previous leaders, arguing, "when you walk through a school you kind of get a good sense of...what's going on...the previous Superintendent came maybe once... [the Receiver] likes to be in the schools. You can tell he likes to talk to the students." However, listening to principals did not always mean capitulating. One explained, "we don't have to agree with everything but if you feel like you've been heard and respected and then at least you've had a voice in the change that's coming... that's been extraordinary."

Another component of relationship building with school-based staff was the approach to school-central office relations. The Receiver and his team were critical of top-down district authority, calling for a more decentralized system that empowered school leaders through greater autonomy. The stated goal was to shift the central office from a compliance- to a service-based organization, consistent with the approach of other improved districts (Supovitz, 2006; Honig, 2013; Johnson et al., 2015). The service orientation appealed to school-based staff. One principal explained, "[the Receiver] said 'we work for the schools, we serve the schools.' I'll never forget that. That was a big change. Before it had been, '[schools] report to central office.'" In practice, this meant cutting the central office budget by \$6.6 million in the first two years and pushing funds to the school level (ERS, 2015), a decision that again likely appealed to school staff. Describing his rationale at a 2013 event, the Receiver recalled his own experience as a principal:

As a principal, I spent a lifetime evading and ignoring the central office...I had to know how to get around some rules to focus on what matters...the teaching and learning...a lot of central offices... send dictates down to the principals... "this has to be filled in right away"... we try to...change the mindset...make their lives easier...and get the hell out of their way.

This rhetoric seemed to resonate with principals. One administrator said, “the big difference was that here was someone who very recently was in the principal's chair.”

The turnaround team also worked to build relationships with teachers. Principals said, “when you talk to [the Receiver], it’s not about the principals at all, it’s about... taking care of our teachers... He meets with teachers more than principals which I think is cool.” The Receiver’s himself echoed this sentiment, arguing, “Is there anything more important in a school system than the teachers?” Publicly, the Receiver often credited the hard work of teachers for the early turnaround results, “we were able to put some conditions in to make that happen but the teachers did this.” Union leaders suggested that this rhetoric resonated with teachers, “[the Receiver] has made several very strong statements about the faculty, stuff they like to hear.” In addition to the rhetoric, the district created new programs designed to provide excellent teachers with recognition and voice. Examples include the Teacher Leader Cabinet to advise central office leaders, Advanced and Master teacher roles within the new career ladder system, school-level Teacher Leadership Teams, and the Sontag Prize for outstanding educators. This positive orientation toward teachers likely helped sustain their energy to implement improvement efforts.

Furthermore, district leaders said their efforts to build relationships extended to organized labor. One central office leader described, “The amount of time that I’ve spent with [the LTU President] is quite significant... it’s been some of the most important hours that I’ve spent.” A state-level elected official explained:

Lawrence is a big labor community... there’s always the Annual Labor Day Breakfast. And the [former] Superintendent never showed up. [The Receiver] showed up... people were

blown away... [the LTU President] was tough, he's an old-school union guy. And [the Receiver] really went out of his way to work with him and make him feel a part of it.

Union leaders were clear that communication had improved post-receivership. One union leader explained, “we're having a lot of trouble over [at one particular school] right now. But I mean the one thing I like about [the Receiver] is we get on the phone. We're talking to each other.”

One notable example of the district's effort to engage the union was its decision to enter into discussions with union leaders regarding the new teacher contract even though it was not required. One central office leader explained the district's reasons for negotiating this way:

Number 1 there was this sense this was honestly just the right thing to do... [the Receiver] believes in a unionized district and, at the heart of it, it's because unions help teachers access protections for their jobs in cases where things haven't been good... Number 2, the teachers here had enlisted this group to be their voice... to just say we're not going to engage in that, I think would've really undermined the morale of the district in a needless way... Now we weren't willing to compromise on the things we really needed... but we really wanted to reach an agreement... thank goodness we had a really willing union president, and local and national AFT who saw that this could be a potential success story for everyone.

In the end, district leaders argued that the process of getting a new contract passed with union members helped solidify the district's view of the union as a longer-term partner.

One specific way in which these negotiations promoted increased partnership was that they resulted in the establishment of teacher leader teams that contribute to decision-making at each school. The incorporation of these teams into the district's model was a win for the union, making increased school-level autonomy more palatable. Additionally, union leaders saw the creation of teacher leader teams as emblematic of their broader influence on the turnaround:

The big thrust [of the turnaround] is school-based decision making... if it's just window dressing for... vesting all power in a school principal who is accountable to... the Receiver or Commissioner, that's a very top-down model... we've tried to...reframe it... to more of a bottom-up perspective... School autonomy is teachers having real voice and power... that's how you get sustainable, long-lasting reform that works, when you have the buy in from the people who are doing the job... A lot of these ideas we introduced to initial resistance from management have become part of the district's vocabulary now... teacher voice, teacher leadership teams... it's definitely part of the fabric of the district now.

The final example of turnaround leaders' emphasis on relationship building was their effort to convene and empower community members from outside of the school system. In their study of the politics of school reform in five big-city portfolio management districts, Hill and Jochim (2015) apply Schattschneider's (1960) framework to argue that leaders will have a political advantage when they attract bystanders into the political arena and convert them into active allies. Lawrence turnaround leaders did this by convening and enlisting community-based organizations such as local community development organizations, early childhood center, charter school operators, and enrichment providers, who had before had only a limited role in the schools. To expand learning time, the district relied in large part on existing non-profits to provide enrichment activities. In many cases, these arrangements greatly expanded enrichment providers' operations. An October 2015 *CommonWealth Magazine* article described:

The Boys and Girls Club's shiny state-of-the-art facility in Lawrence used to sit empty during the day until school got out. Now, six schools bus students to the club during school hours for the kids to enjoy swimming, karate, drumming, cooking, basketball, dance, computers, creative writing, and art. Kids from another set of schools go to the Lawrence YMCA, which also sends its instructors into the schools to provide enrichment on site. The Y used to serve only 140 Lawrence kids after school; now it works with thousands.

Leaders of non-profit partner organizations described this as a major departure from the pre-receivership culture. One argued, "the schools had been a very impenetrable place for a long time." Now these groups had an opportunity, "to serve kids whose parents might not get it together to bring them to you" and to extend their reach.

Early relationship building with these community-based leaders also improved public perceptions of the turnaround. One explained, "this was a two way street, we were asking things from [the Receiver] and he's saying I need your help in selling it." In the turnaround planning phase, this leader presented at a public forum about her organization's involvement in the ELT

efforts along with leaders of other community-based organizations. She described, “instead of [the Receiver] being the mouthpiece... we were the mouthpiece saying, ‘this is what we're excited about.’... it also put us on the line, too... you're saying you're a part of this.” As a result, the early engagement of these community-based groups likely contributed to public perceptions that the turnaround was not simply imposed from the outside. It also generated a large source of support for the Receiver and his team among organizations that were able to grow their programs through the district’s approach to ELT. This is one example of district leaders’ notable ability to identify win-win policy decisions that benefit students, the district, and the broader community.

Differentiated District-School Relations. The second feature of the turnaround that improved stakeholder response was its emphasis on differentiated, rather than uniform, school-district relationships. The contingency theory of leadership posits that there is not one best style of management. Instead, a leader’s ideal management style varies depending on the environment, including the characteristics of the organization being managed (Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967). Applying this theory to school systems, the degree of autonomy and support that a central office should provide to schools is dependent on environmental factors, including characteristics of individual schools. The ideal district-school relationship will likely vary from school to school.

Single and cross-case studies of improved districts (e.g., Supovitz, 2006) tend to conclude that what matters most is achieving policy coherence—in this case, the “alignment of standards, curricula, assessments, and ... formal policy texts” in schools and their central offices (Honig & Hatch, 2004, p. 16). This can be achieved in centralized or decentralized districts. Coherence does not require that practices are identical across schools, but rather that schools take actions aligned toward achieving coordinated objectives (Chrispeels, Burke, Johnson & Daly, 2008; Childress, Doyle, & Thomas, 2009; Johnson et al., 2015). Others emphasize that achieving

coherence is an ongoing process in which schools work with the central office to craft a fit between individual schools' approaches and external policy demands (Honig & Hatch, 2004). I find that Lawrence turnaround leaders allowed schools to operate in varied ways and tailored the district-school relationship to individual school contexts. This seemed to improve stakeholder response by providing flexibility and by tailoring policies to fit local preferences.

The first phase in which district leaders differentiated between schools was during the Receiver's initial needs assessment in the spring of 2012. The needs assessment was consistent with an asset-based approach to community development in that it involved an effort to identify community-based strengths that turnaround leaders could mobilize (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993). Turnaround leaders determined early on that there was within-district variation in terms of school, administrator, and teacher quality. The Receiver explained at a Boston Foundation event, "I took about the first five months to really look into the school system and I saw some good things. There were problems... but I also saw two high-performing schools... others that were about to break and go into high-performing status. I saw a lot of great teachers" (Riley, 2013). Rather than assuming that failure was the rule throughout the district, turnaround leaders identified pockets of pre-existing success to identify, retain and promote talented educators and administrators. This also allowed the Receiver's team to publicly celebrate the teachers and leaders at these high-performing schools, a move that these educators likely appreciated.

District leaders also aimed to increase school-level autonomy, consistent with the idea that the ideal method for running an effective school is contingent on local contextual factors best understood by school-level staff. School autonomy tended to improve school leaders' perceptions of the turnaround by giving them greater flexibility. However, principals initially also viewed autonomy with trepidation because it came with greater responsibility and

accountability. One principal remembered, “we were charged with redesigning our school and I didn’t know where to begin and I was incredibly nervous about that.” To smooth this transition, the central office narrowed the focus of principal planning in the first year to one major area: ELT. They brought in a partner organization the National Center for Time and Learning (NCTL) to help schools plan their ELT efforts. NCTL’s role was to help schools think about all possibilities for time use. The central office did mandate that schools add time, but allowed school staff to decide when to add it and how to use it. Principals suggested that this arrangement helped them think of possibilities beyond what they had done before and guided them through a planning process that made school-level autonomy more fruitful going forward.

Honig (2012) identifies effective central office practices for supporting principal development and finds that these practices are often consistent with theories of teaching and learning typically reserved for classroom teachers, such as differentiation and modeling. She argues for a shift toward conceptualizing central office staff as “teachers of principals’ instructional leadership” (p. 735). In their effort to transition Lawrence principals to a new system of greater autonomy, district leaders used several familiar instructional practices. They used what Honig calls “brokering” to connect principals to external sources of support. District leaders used instructional scaffolding by narrowing the focus of school-level planning to ELT in the first year so principals could adapt to their newfound autonomy. They used “modeling” by exposing principals to a range of ELT models, but resisted selecting models for principals. Ultimately, district leaders and principals argued that allowing schools to self-select their approach improved school-level buy-in for ELT and NCTL helped them feel supported.

Although the Receiver’s team increased school autonomy, rather than increasing it uniformly across the district, they implemented a system of differentiated autonomy. The district

provided schools with different levels of autonomy and a tailored set of central office supports based the district's assessment of each school's performance and capacity. Schools that were highest performing prior to the turnaround received the highest levels of autonomy to continue operating as they saw fit. Schools in the middle, based on prior performance, were provided with the less autonomy and more intensive central office supports. For the lowest performing schools, the district began handing over management to independent operators that were then given substantial operational autonomy. Had the district opted for a uniform system of autonomy, some schools might have felt that the default arrangement was poorly matched to their school context.

“Third Way” Framing and Policy Approach. Another notable feature of LPS leaders' approach that likely improved the turnaround reception was the use of “third way” framing and policy decisions. Bobbio (1997) describes the third way as a political position that attempts not only to reconcile right-wing and left-wing political perspectives, but also to “transcend the politics of left and right” (p. 8). In the education arena, political opponents often do not fall neatly into traditional categories of left and right and educational leaders have used the phrase “third way” to refer more broadly to efforts to avoid false dichotomies and to reconcile polarizing political disagreements. In public statements, the Receiver often characterized the education community as in the midst of a bipolar ideological battle between proponents of market-based reforms and proponents of more centralized systems of public schooling. The Lawrence turnaround, he argued, subscribed to a “third way” or “radical center” approach borrowing the best ideas from both camps and rising above ugly ideological battles:

We've taken shots from both sides of this war... we think there's another way of doing business... there are good ideas on both sides... This problem is far too big for a civil war. It's silly to watch some of these folks rage on either side... we've made a decision that we're going to tune out that stuff. So, sometimes I take shots from extremists in the traditional union camp. Sometimes I take shots from the extremists in the “charter schools are the only

way” camp. We don't need a camp... this third way is what we're about... I've seen many types of good schools and parents just don't care. They just want a good school for their kid.

This framing likely improved the reception of the Receiver’s approach. It is hard to imagine opposing “good schools” or favoring charged political arguments. Instead, supporters described the Receiver as a moderate, capable of crossing ideological lines. The former State Secretary of Education argued that the Receiver “was a boundary crosser... who had good relationships with the charter entrepreneurial innovation community and a long proven track record as a district administrator.” The Receiver remembered, “I was a principal of...an AFT union school...quietly I was friends with [charter network leaders]. We always had to kind of talk in secret and have beers because there was such animosity between the worlds” (Riley, 2013). Third way framing is an example of turnaround leaders’ ability to apply the kind of integrative thinking Martin (2007) argues is an essential attribute of successful leadership. Integrative thinking is characterized by an ability to avoid false dichotomies, resolve tensions and synthesize seemingly contradictory policy options into new solutions that are preferable to the original choices.

Beyond rhetoric, the third way was reflected in several of the turnaround team’s policy choices. First, by bringing in a small set of charter school operators to manage low-performing schools, the team implemented a version of a portfolio management approach to district governance. PPM incorporates both market and public management oriented approaches to educational improvement. In a PMM system, families usually have access to public school choice and their preferences inform the district’s decision-making regarding its portfolio of schools. However, PMM places the central office—typically a public, democratically governed entity—as the primary arbiter of school quality (Henig and Bulkley, 2010).

The LPS system diverged from the typical PMM in that LPS retained neighborhood- rather than choice-based school assignment. Despite this difference, the LPS model still

incorporates market and non-market elements. The district contracted with outside organizations that, in theory, compete to run schools. These groups include charter management groups born out of market-based approaches to education reform. The district provides these groups with autonomies more familiar to CEOs than public school administrators. Central office managers then track these groups' progress and renew contracts based on performance. This governance system lends itself to a third way approach by blending market and non-market based reform.

The district's selection of a diverse set of school operators further illustrates its third way approach. The large majority of LPS schools were kept under district management; however, the district handed over operations of four of the lowest performing schools. As I outline in Figure 6, these partners included charter operators based in Lawrence, Chelsea, and Boston, an early childhood center operator, a duo of Boston-based educators, and the local teachers union. Partnering with charter operators and the union reinforced the Receiver's message that he was willing to work with groups on both sides of several major education policy debates.

The district's partnership with the teachers union to co-manage the Oliver Partnership School seemed particularly valuable in terms of improving overall union-district relations. Union leaders argued that this collaboration built trust and increased union influence district wide:

We went to... an AFT conference in New York City and [the Receiver] did go to that, and his team... that's when a lot of the model for the Oliver Partnership was hashed out... that helped build a little bit of trust that we could kind of move forward in other areas. Plus, a lot of the vocabulary of the Oliver Partnership School has seeped into the vocabulary of the district at large. So I think it's been a net plus... we've tried to say this is the way to go if you're trying to move a school forward. It can be bottom-up and teacher led.

District leaders echoed this sentiment and further argued that collaboration on the school has given the district some advantages when negotiating with the union over other district policies. One district official said that union leaders were more likely to agree to school-based working

conditions (versus district-wide policies) when district leaders argued that district-wide policies would limit the union's flexibility over how to run things at the Oliver Partnership School.

Some observers went a step further, arguing the partnership was a win-win proposition for the district regardless of the outcome, "if the school's good, everybody loves it. If the school's bad, it's 'the union had a chance.'" District leaders pushed back against this idea, forcefully asserting, "we want them very much to succeed." The LTU President did worry about the risk of being blamed for failure, but described the school as a key priority and part of his legacy:

I always think of the 100th anniversary of the Strike of 1912. I led the parade... we ended in the middle of the Common... it was like a metaphor for me, where is the union going?... And then it hit me... I looked across the Common and I saw... our partnership school and I go "That's where we're going" ... I really have to do all that I can to make that work.

The third way approach was also on display at other schools undergoing turnaround. Although the district partnered with charter operators to manage low-performing schools, these did not technically become charter schools. They relied on neighborhood- rather than choice-based student assignment policies and all had a unionized teaching force. The Receiver said this approach stemmed, not from an effort to compromise, but from his own deeply held beliefs. At the Boston Foundation event, he explained, "We have asked charter operators... to have their teachers be AFT teachers. I believe in some kind of teacher representation." In our interview, he further explained, "If I had any concerns about charter schools, frankly, I'm worried that they weren't servicing the same kinds of kids... I always stayed in public schools because I felt it should be one unified system." One leader of a partner organization argued that the Receiver's orientation toward charter schools was politically useful, "because most of the people who he needed to woo hate the charters. So [the Receiver's] very smart about kind of presenting this as a lot less bad than it could be in many ways. At least it isn't those charters and stuff, right?"

The Receiver and his team often used the language of a “level playing field” between charter- and district-managed schools to describe the idea that all schools had to play by a certain set of foundational rules. Although this created challenges for charter operators that were used to greater flexibility, one district official argued that it also provided charters with an opportunity:

Charters have gotten unfairly maligned, or in some cases perhaps fairly maligned, because they've been on an unequal playing field in terms of the kids they can accept, how much money they're getting, the facilities... if you had a chance here to level that, wow, wouldn't that change the debate? ... When the charters have to do the real work inside the district, the people from outside can't yell at the charters for not taking the same kids anymore.

Union leaders also suggested that this arrangement was more palatable than it would have been for the Receiver to bring charter schools of choice into the LPS system:

In Lawrence, they're not really charters. They're like EMO-run schools... there's openness for the union to working with organizations like that. They need to be neighborhood schools. They can't use lotteries. The teachers must be unionized... if they're run well in a democratic way... if the teachers there feel that they have a voice, and if management is honoring the union contract and they're not violating people's rights, we're open to working with those places.... a lot of the union opposition to traditional charter schools is more along the lines of... choice, which means they cherry pick the top students...

The final example of a turnaround policy effort that reflected the third way approach was the dual emphasis on lifting academic expectations and boosting students' social and emotional skills through expanded enrichment offerings. The 2012 turnaround plan established ambitious performance targets, such as the goal to close the gap with the rest of the state in ELA and math proficiency and graduation in five to seven years (MA DESE, 2012). However, the Receiver and his team sent clear early signals that they were not focused on boosting academics alone.

At a public event, the Receiver explained that his emphasis on enrichment offerings was part of a broader strategy to close an “opportunity gap” between urban and suburban districts. He described this goal in both moral and pragmatic terms, arguing that all kids deserve these

opportunities and that they build the non-tested skills necessary for long-term success. The Receiver concluded with the following anecdote about one of his former students in Boston:

Michael was profoundly dyslexic. He is very unlikely to pass the English portion of the MCAS test... But Michael was cast as Jesus in our production of Godspell...and carried that play...not only was his performance exquisite...but when his friends, his co-actors messed up a line, he covered for them...we had a critic from New York who said to me...if that kid keeps this up...he's gonna be on Broadway. So Michael may not do advanced on the MCAS, but Michael has a rare talent... Don't tell me this kid is not going to do well in life.

The Receiver's team began implementing this vision early on. One leader of a partner organization explained that the Receiver, "got that [intramural sports] league going... That was one of the first things that happened... It is just a totally different message... than an academic-only, "I'm here to browbeat you people. Look at these terrible test scores." Expanded enrichment resonated with educators, parents, and students. One principal said:

Parents are supportive because we never had enrichment. We [now] have intramurals, our students go to the Y, they learn how to swim, we have karate, a dance teacher, a soccer person...we put on [a musical] this year... it was phenomenal, something that we as a school had always dreamed about... I was just blown away. Parents were like, "This was great."

The turnaround leaders' dual emphasis on academics and enrichment offerings was another example of their integrative thinking about how to approach district improvement.

In sum, turnaround leaders' third way framing and policy efforts, such as keeping most schools under district management, partnering with diverse operators, inviting the union to co-manage a school, asking charter operators to run unionized schools with neighborhood assignment, and promoting a balance of academics and enrichment, helped to avoid polarizing political battles and increased stakeholder receptivity to the reforms.

Strategic Staffing Decisions. One of the primary reasons for the politicization of education policy is that public school systems serve as major employers in urban areas (Henig, 1999) and unions representing employees in the education sector tend to be well organized (Moe,

2011). Education spending makes up nearly half of local budgets (US GAO, 2014) and salaries and benefits make up a large share of these expenditures. Therefore, educational reform often involves major, sometimes painful, implications for people's livelihoods. Indeed, the most contentious LPS reforms related to job security, salaries, and working conditions. However, turnaround leaders also made staffing decisions that reduced controversy.

First, the Receiver's team retained, enlisted and promoted staff members whose own attitudes and beliefs were aligned with turnaround leaders' approach to reform. District leaders report cutting roughly one-third of the central office staff. One leader who had been working in the district for many years prior to receivership remarked that the Receiver, "has a team that is all working aligned in the same direction. He was very quick to get people off the team who weren't aligned in that direction. The central office doesn't look anything like it looked three years ago." As a result, the staff members who remained were less likely to oppose the coming changes.

The Receiver decided early on that several schools could benefit from new leadership. The district prioritized hiring and retaining leaders with skills and beliefs aligned with the new emphasis on school-level autonomy and accountability. One district leader argued:

It's not even to say that principals in the past were a problem but the model...was top-down... the principal was there to follow orders... And now, we're not giving you orders. We can give you recommendations or suggestions. But... it is now on you to develop that plan... people who may have been successful in the past may not be successful in this new model."

As another central office leader explained, some of the principals who were retained represented, "rogue agents who had managed to get everything done well" in the midst of the pre-receivership chaos, "by basically not following top-down orders." One was a Lawrence native and first-generation college graduate who remembered, as a principal, living through eight superintendents with varied agendas in a three-year period, "through all of that we stayed with

the work that we were doing” focused on ELT and “progressive” methods. When the Receiver arrived this veteran educator said, “I felt like someone was finally talking my language.”

Teachers were also retained based on their fit with the district’s new approach. In some cases, teachers decided to leave when the fit was poor. Principals of schools taken over by outside operators had the flexibility to rehire staff to align with their philosophy. Many teachers at these schools were displaced, but some found roles at other LPS schools. ELT also required educators to rethink their fit with the school and/or district. One principal said that she explained to her teachers, “if this isn’t what you signed up for then I wish you well. You have to go where you believe in the mission and vision, the day and the time and the hours work for you.”

Turnaround leaders also placed an emphasis on hiring a balance of insiders and outsiders. Retaining key staff members who had a history in Lawrence helped build support for turnaround efforts. One central office leader who was new to the district explained that there were people who had been working in the district pre-receivership who “embraced what we’re trying to do.” She went on to say, “they’ve been the ambassadors with their own friends, family, and the community and so this effort is not just about those of us from outside coming in and evangelizing.” Retaining veteran staff also allowed new leaders to tap into institutional knowledge that helped them avoid potential political missteps. Another district-level leader said:

Other reform models, they said, “Well, what is there must be terrible. So we need to bring all these new people in.” And what can happen is the people there, many of them I’m sure are very good and hardworking and can tell you, “here are the different landmines to avoid.” Like, “Oh yeah, we did that and that didn’t go so well.” ...we’ve had some really great, great talent here that has helped.

Beyond retaining insiders, the Receiver’s decision to retain the majority of LPS teachers improved stakeholder receptivity. The Receiver framed this decision as an example of his restraint and a theory of action that likely resonated with educators. At a fall 2013 event, he said:

We kept 85-90% of the teachers...because I felt like we had some great people, we had some good people, and...some people we could develop and get better. I can work with those kind of people...you can't blame the teachers for things that sometimes are out of their control.

Another district leader said the turnaround team placed an emphasis on teacher retention:

The last thing that we wanted was for mass exodus to happen. And instead, "How do we keep all the good, great, working hard to improve teachers in the district?" And understanding that we care about them... If we did do a major school intervention... we try to be really thoughtful... "Okay, so if we are displacing these 12 teachers, let's really make sure we find them jobs," and not say, "Well, look, I'm sorry. You are out of luck."

Despite the district's framing, union leaders felt the team went too far, but agreed that had a greater fraction of teachers been replaced, the negative response would have been more extreme.

Despite concerns about the new compensation model, the district improved the system's palatability by emphasizing that it increased pay across the board. The Receiver explained:

For me, the most important part of the union contract is just with the compensation piece and trying to pay people like professionals... making sure that teachers felt valued and giving them opportunities to move up... Giving people a raise for the first time in many years is certainly a way to help overcome obstacles, having the membership feel respected.

LPS estimates that under the new system, 100 percent of teachers saw a pay increase and 92 percent saw a bump beyond the increase they would have received under the old system (LPS, 2013). The average LPS teacher received a \$3,000 raise for the 2014 school year (ERS, 2015) and the district raised base salaries for both new and experienced principals (ERS, 2015).⁵ The increases for retained educators likely improved educators' response to compensation reform.

In addition to school-based educators, turnaround leaders improved the employment prospects for several community-based partners and enrichment providers. One central office leader describes the mood among these stakeholders in the early phase of turnaround planning:

There were a lot of questions... from an after school provider perspective, "are you taking away my job?" And instead, what happened was... You can still have your after school program... But we also may be asking you to come in and provide support that you usually

⁵ Although the contract increased pay, Figure 9 shows that average LPS salaries actually decreased over this period. This is likely because the teaching population became younger over this period, as illustrated in Figure 10.

would be doing after school but during the day. And for them, they are like, "Wait a second. This is a whole new revenue stream and an opportunity for us to... get to see the kids."

Enrichment providers echoed the idea that they appreciated the opportunity to play a role in the school system's ELT effort. In sum, although staffing-related decisions were some of the most controversial reforms, several of these choices helped to reduce resistance.

Producing Early Results While Minimizing Disruption. The final factor that seemed to improve the turnaround's reception was leaders' focus on producing early positive results while minimizing disruptions for families. Interviewees agreed that reports of academic improvements after the first year of implementation created support for the turnaround among parents who felt their students were benefitting and among retained educators and district partners who felt they had produced. Encouraging results also made it more difficult for critical groups to actively oppose the turnaround without being viewed as resistant to positive change.

Turnaround leaders intentionally prioritized early results. To identify policy priorities, district leaders remembered asking themselves "what is going to make a difference for kids now?" Programs like Acceleration Academies contributed to producing first year impacts (Schueler, Goodman, Deming, 2016) while the district built out reforms geared toward longer-term improvement. One district administrator argued, "schools need some strategies where they can help the kids in front of them right now before they have had time to redesign everything." Another explained that the central office was cautious about generating publicity about upcoming initiatives, arguing, "we would rather talk about the results after they are achieved."

Several interviewees argued that early positive results helped build momentum for further progress by illustrating that improvement was possible, particularly when educators felt like they were part of producing those improvements. One district leader cited the following examples:

Acceleration Academies... had a really big role in showing people, early on, that you can... work hard to meet the individual needs of students and you will see the dividends... there were teachers who taught at Academies and were looking around at the other teachers and saying, "Wow, he's leading a Socratic seminar in there with my kids. I didn't even think that was possible. I'm going to try that next week."... Another was ELT... people received fresh infusions of ideas, of things they could do right away to change their kids' experience. And then they saw that it got results and thought, "Okay we can do this." ... teachers have been accepting of the changes because they actually see that it's working and they're doing it.

One principal described the excitement of being a part of a reform getting positive attention:

I went to Boston to speak to a panel yesterday...people are coming to us like we're the model...it was pretty exciting... It's like, wow. They're not going to [wealthy districts]...we were kind of beaten up for a while that it's nice to be acknowledged for hard work.

Leaders also focused on avoiding initiatives that would cause major disruptions without contributing much to early outcomes. One leader of a partner organization explained, “[the Receiver’s] skill was always to do the least amount of change, except for all the really important things, till they get the results. But everything else he looks at as potentially disruptive, potentially distracting.” This seemed particularly true with regard to disruptions for families. The team decided against implementing a school choice system, a common component of other high-profile district turnaround efforts. Leaders argued that avoiding choice and allowing families to keep their children at their neighborhood schools led to a smoother implementation and helped in their effort to win the hearts and minds of educators and parents. One district leader explained:

From a parent perspective, I'm still going to be sending my kid to the same neighborhood school... instead of, "Wait a second...I have to choose five different schools and then I'm going to get choice four but I really wanted choice one and I didn't maybe have the best information to make the right choice and I have to send my kid halfway across the district."

District leaders also tried to minimize disruptions for school leaders. One explained, “there are a lot of... ‘ed reform’ initiatives out there that... ideally, that would be great to have but it may actually literally not help the school in a really dramatic way in the short term.” Based on this premise, in the early years, leaders avoided implementing a new school accountability

system or funding formula. As schools were adapting to the turnaround, leaders tried to provide funding stability to assist principals with their planning and allow them to focus on instructional improvement rather than, “cost accounting and micromanaging over a few thousand dollars.”

Another example of turnaround leaders’ effort to minimize disruption was their intentional effort to sequence reforms, focusing on the elementary and middle grades, while putting high school reform on the back burner for the first few years of receivership. One leader of a partner organization argued that this allowed the district to lay the foundation for future high school success and was politically useful, “[The Receiver] correctly understood... high school reform is much harder... when the eighth graders are much less well prepared... the high schools are the hotbed for the most oppositional union members. It's the last place you want to go early.”

In sum, district leaders focused on producing early successes while minimizing disruptive changes and sequencing reforms rather than trying to do everything at once. Early positive results appeared to create momentum for further improvements and minimize opposition. Positive results alone cannot explain the lack of major resistance given other known district reforms that have generated significant opposition despite positive outcomes (Harris, 2015). However, positive results did seem to help when combined with efforts to minimize disruption.

Discussion

The Lawrence turnaround has generated considerably less public resistance than more typical cases of state takeover and district turnaround. Contextual factors help explain why the turnaround was not more contentious, including the local political environment and broader state accountability system providing turnaround leaders with broad authorities in cases of particularly poor district performance. Within this context, several features of the turnaround leaders’ approach also contributed to limiting negative stakeholder response. These include leaders’ focus

on building relationships and civic capacity within Lawrence, differentiated district-school relations, a third way framing and policy approach, strategic staffing decisions, and producing early results while minimizing disruption. It is difficult to say whether any of the three factors (local context, state authorities, turnaround strategy) would have been sufficient to produce the observed stakeholder response on their own, but taken together, they help to explain the public reaction. These findings have several implications for states and districts considering turnaround.

First, characteristics of the local Lawrence context played a role in limiting resistance. Leaders should not necessarily expect to replicate the public response in districts that are radically different from LPS. A system with declining enrollment, no evidence of misconduct among public officials, a strong school administrators' union, and a strong alliance between parents and the teachers union may require different strategies tailored to the context. At the same time, my findings provide guidance for state leaders on selecting districts ripe for this type of intervention. Additionally, I find that LPS's size allowed district leaders to spend time learning each school's strengths and needs and building relationships with school-level staff. Large districts may have less success with a similar approach or may consider implementing turnaround reforms in a more manageable subset of their lowest-performing schools.

Importantly, I find that the new authorities granted to the Receiver by the AGA played a key role in determining the stakeholder response to turnaround reforms. The law appeared to help state and district officials recruit talented leaders by offering candidates broad authority and autonomy. The turnaround's success was not simply driven by the chance involvement of an exceptional leader—a condition that seems difficult to reproduce. Instead, the presence of skilled leaders was, at least in part, the result of a replicable policy. However, recruitment of effective leaders is also likely dependent on the available supply of talent and state capacity.

My finding that the new authorities contributed to the stakeholder response also has implications for the political sustainability of the reforms. Given state takeovers are typically temporary arrangements, states might consider alternative approaches to district improvement that change governance structures in ways that are more difficult to undo. Looking forward for Lawrence, the political dynamics will surely shift if and when the state returns local control. A lack of outrage will not necessarily translate to durable support for the policy changes. While most groups believed conditions were better than they had been prior to receivership, stakeholders will not necessarily “settle” if they feel things could improve further. Concerns over compensation, ELT, non-renewals, teacher retention, excessive test prep, disciplinary practices at charter-run schools, and other issues could build and create challenges for sustaining support in the future. In preparation for a transition away from receivership, leaders would be wise to work on solidifying support for their reforms, particularly among the stakeholder groups that will have greater influence in a locally governed system. The mobilization of groups with an interest in the preservation of the policy changes will improve the durability of the reforms (Patashnik, 2003).

Finally, within the Lawrence context, the turnaround leaders’ approach improved the public reception of the reforms. These findings provide guidance for district leaders on implementing politically viable change. In an education policy climate often characterized by polarization, Lawrence provides an exciting case in which leaders and local stakeholders were able to transcend either/or thinking to promote district collaboration with both union leaders and charter organizations, decentralize decision-making while increasing accountability, raise academic standards while bolstering extracurricular offerings, and empower local stakeholders to take ownership over reforms even under a system of state control. As a result, Lawrence’s third way provides encouraging lessons for school systems seeking improvement.

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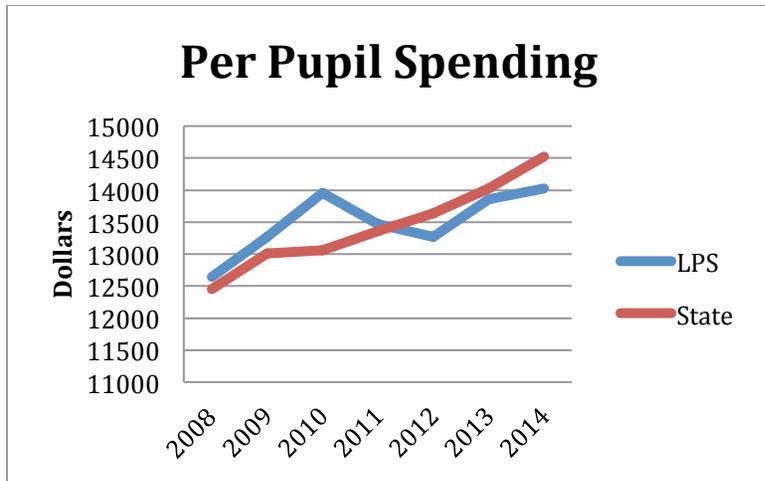


Figure 1. Per pupil spending in LPS and MA as reported by MA DESE.

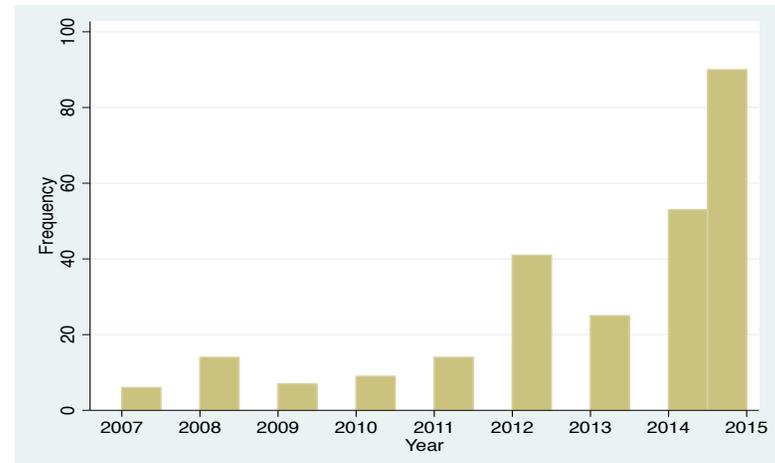


Figure 2. Frequency of press articles on LPS, fall 2007 - fall 2015

Figure 3. Dominant themes in press coverage of the LPS from fall 2007 to fall 2015.

2007-2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Scandal/allegations against public officials					
	Low-achievement				
	State takes over				
	Mayor pro-takeover				
		Turnaround plan			
		Riley			
		Charter partners			
			Academic improvement		
			How they got results		
			Union criticism of turnaround		
			Union run school		
				New contract	
				School activities	
				Union support for turnaround	
				Union-district cooperation	
					Lawrence as model

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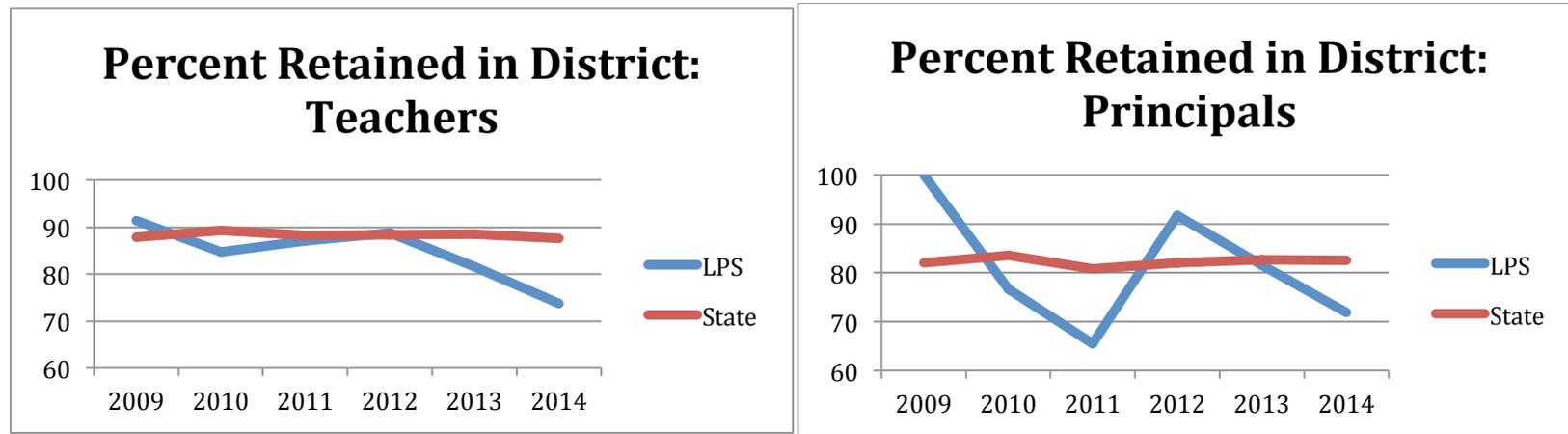


Figure 4. Educator retention rates in LPS and Massachusetts as a whole over time as reported by MA DESE.

Grade levels of schools with new management during the first two years of the turnaround

Original School Name	New School Name	Manager Name	Manager Description	Grades	
				Year 1 (2012-13)	Year 2 (2013-14)
Arlington Elementary	Community Day Arlington	Community Group	Lawrence-based early childhood education and charter school operator	K-1	K-4
South Lawrence East Middle	SPARK Academy	SPARK	Duo of educators run a fitness-themed program that integrates physical activity throughout an extended school day	5	5-6
Leonard Middle	UP Leonard	Unlocking Potential (UP)	Boston-based non-profit middle school turnaround organization	6	6-8
Oliver	UP Oliver	Unlocking Potential (UP)	Boston-based non-profit middle school turnaround organization	-	6
Oliver	Oliver Partnership	Lawrence Teachers Union	Local labor union	-	1-5
N/A (new school)	Phoenix Academy	Phoenix Foundation	Chelsea-based high school charter school provider targets students at risk of dropout	9-12	9-12

Figure 6. Grade levels of schools with new management during the first two years of the turnaround.

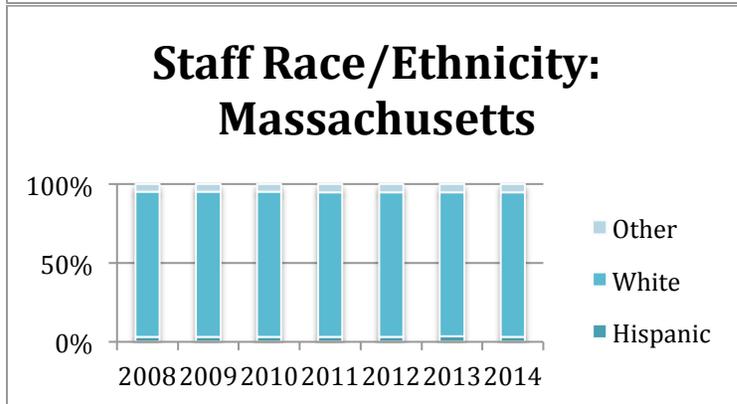
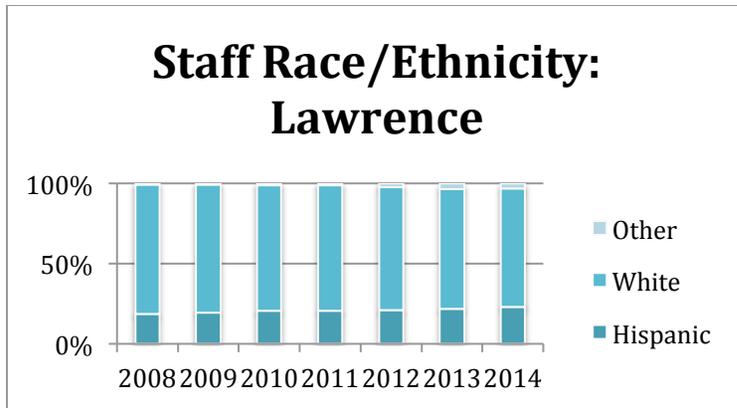


Figure 7. Staff race/ethnicity in LPS and MA as a whole over time as reported by MA DESE.

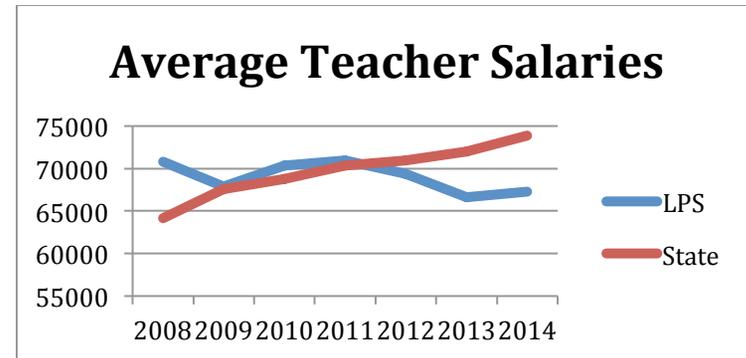


Figure 8. Salaries in LPS and MA, reported by MA DESE.

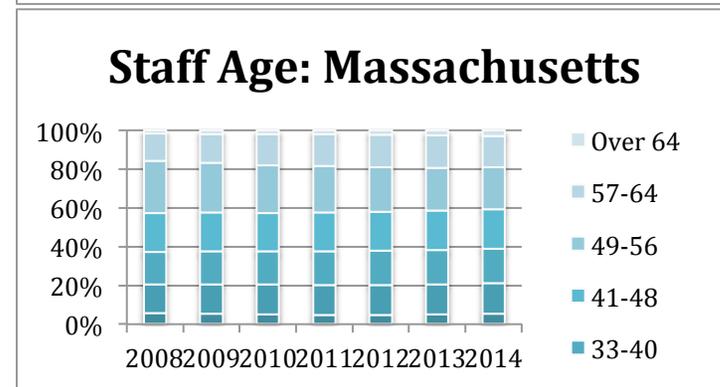
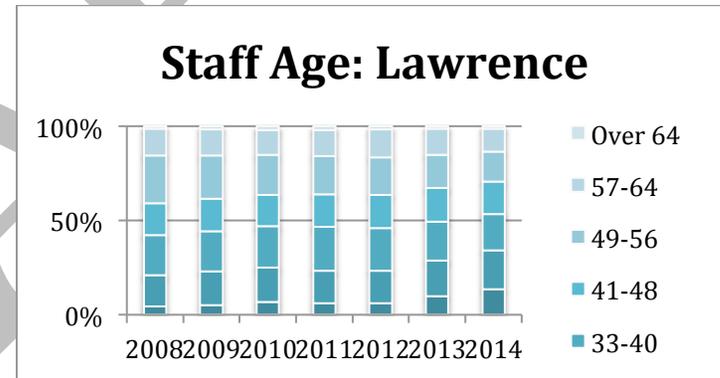


Figure 9. Staff age in LPS and MA, reported by MA DESE.

Appendix

Table A1. MassINC Polling Group data on Lawrence parents' perceptions of Lawrence schools (n=404)

Overall approval of turnaround plan			
As you may know, the state has appointed a receiver to overhaul the Lawrence public schools, and the receiver has recently published a plan for improving the schools. Based on what you have heard or read about this plan, do you approve or disapprove of the receiver's plan? And do you strongly (approve / disapprove) or just somewhat? [IF RESPONDENT SAYS DON'T KNOW] Have you heard about the plan and are undecided about it? Or have you not heard about the plan?	Strongly approve	.45	
	Somewhat approve	.23	
	Somewhat disapprove	.02	
	Strongly disapprove	.03	
	Heard about it, undecided	.05	
	Not heard about	.17	
Don't know / refused	.05		
Charter involvement in turnaround			
As a part of the plan to improve Lawrence's schools, the receiver has recommended significant involvement in the process from charter schools. Do you think it is a good idea for charter schools to be involved in this process, or should charter schools not be involved?	Charters should be involved	.80	
	Charters should not be involved	.10	
	Don't know / refused	.10	
Overall approval of turnaround plan (with plan description)			
The state receiver's plan calls for extending the school day, providing targeted support for English Language Learners and special education students, making it easier to dismiss ineffective principals and teachers, and working with charter school operators to improve school performance in the city's worst schools. Based on what you now know, do you approve or disapprove of the receiver's plan or disapprove of it? And do you strongly (approve / disapprove) or just somewhat?	Strongly approve	.55	
	Somewhat approve	.28	
	Somewhat disapprove	.07	
	Strongly disapprove	.05	
	Don't know / refused	.06	
			2010
Race/ethnic background	Hispanic or Latino	.80	.74
	Other	.19	
	Don't know / refused	.01	
Age	18 to 29	.15	
	30 to 44	.42	
	45 to 59	.30	
	60+	.12	
	Don't know / refused	.01	
Gender	Female	.75	.52
Education	Less than high school	.35	
	High school graduate	.32	
	Some college	.22	
	Bachelor's degree or higher	.10	.12
	Don't know / refused	.01	