



PRAIRIE VIEW A&M UNIVERSITY

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WHITLOWE R. GREEN COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

Doctoral Defense Announcement

ABSTRACT

THE PRINCIPAL AS A CHANGE AGENT IN A TURNAROUND SCHOOL:

A SINGLE SITE PHENOMENOLOGICAL CASE STUDY

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In today's educational setting there are far too many public schools that are failing. In the state of Texas, school administrators are held responsible by their state academic accountability rating. Across the country, state legislators are passing more stringent and extensive school reform legislations. Poor performing or *failing schools* are potentially being taken over by state governments and charter schools. The purpose of this phenomenological case study was to examine and determine the central phenomenon that occurred at a school in Texas that attributed to the campus obtaining the accountability rating of "exemplary." At this stage of the research,

the essence of these experiences and phenomenon are generally defined as steps, initiatives, frameworks, and leadership skills. This study endeavored to determine what fundamental change initiatives or processes were implemented by the campus leadership. The conceptual framework provided by Dr. John Kotter (1996) was the measuring guide to determine the overall effectiveness of the new leaders' change effort. The target population of the study was all campuses across the state of Texas that received an academically unacceptable accountability rating for the 2008-2009 school year. Of the 7,729 public school campuses across the state of Texas, only 250 were rated academically unacceptable during the 2008-2009 school year. Elementary campuses accounted for 73 of these unacceptable schools. Of these 73 unacceptable schools, only one campus met the criteria for transforming and turning around its campus to the rating of exemplary in just one short year.

To determine the common themes, phenomena, and lived experiences of stakeholders at a school in Texas, that experienced the successful turnaround of their school, this qualitative, phenomenological case study will focus on the following primary research question and six sub-questions:

1. What did the principal do to turn around the campus from "academically unacceptable" to "exemplary"?
 - How did the new principal create and sustain a "sense of urgency" for change?
 - How did the new principal build a guiding coalition or team to develop the new campus vision for change?
 - How was the new change vision communicated? What communication tools or methods were utilized?

- What barriers, obstacles, or hurdles were removed (that previously impeded progress) by the new principal to empower people to allow the new change to take place?
- How were "short term wins" on the campus generated? Were these wins consolidated to generate more wins and change?
- What did the principal do to "anchor" the new changes into the new climate and culture of the campus?

The research design utilized for this study was qualitative in nature. Specifically, the qualitative design was that of a phenomenological case study. This study was a single-site case study, performed at one elementary campus in Texas. This study helped to develop a portrait and framework of the principal's actions and leadership abilities on the campus. The study took place on a turnaround campus that has improved its accountability rating from academically unacceptable to exemplary. Document analysis, and interviews were the primary forms of data collected. Relevant AEIS documents, campus demographic information, memos, newsletters, newspaper articles, e-mails, faculty meeting minutes, school board meeting minutes and agendas, as well as other documents were analyzed for the study. Interviews were conducted with the campus leaders, counselors, and faculty and staff members and other knowledgeable stakeholders. This study was conducted during the Spring of 2014.

References

Kotter, J. (1996). *Leading Change*. Boston, Massachusetts: Harvard Business School Press.

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