DIALOG FROM THE FIELD

Leading Head Start Turnaround: A Four-stage Turnaround Model for Transforming Program Performance

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Head Start programs must meet federal performance standards or may now face a process of "recompetition", a situation where the current grantee could lose the Head Start program to other agencies. This article is based on interviews with Head Start directors who were faced with the threat of recompetition, but were able to turn around their programs in time to avoid the possibility of losing them. A model for Head Start turnaround emerged in these interviews and is shared in this article.

Keywords: recompetition; federal performance standards; Head Start; turnaround; turnaround model; program improvements; federal review; low-performance; high-performance; monitoring tools; program transformation; organizational change

Many Head Start programs are faced with the problem of chronic non-compliance and deficient statuses. Recent Reports to Congress (2014) indicate that chronic poor performance is an increasing epidemic for Head Start Grantees. However, there is an absence of literature that investigates the action steps of Head Start leaders during the turnaround process. This study addressed the urgent need to investigate the approaches used in non-compliant and deficient programs to successfully meet the HSPS and achieve a Federal Monitoring Review with no findings. Accordingly, the purpose of this article applies the turnaround practices as identified by six Head Start directors that improved their low-performing programs and transformed the programs to full compliance with all Head Start Performance Standards to achieve a successful Federal Monitoring Review and introduces a Four-Stage Turnaround model to transform low program performance.

The Research Participants. Participants were selected from a list generated by OHS identifying grantees that met the study criteria. 41 grantees were identified as meeting the criteria. The selection criteria for participants included: (a) each participant must be a grantee or delegate operating a Head Start program; (b) at the grantee's Federal Monitoring Review 2 (FR2), the program must have achieved a full compliance finding; and (c) the grantee must have previously received a finding of six or more non-compliances or one or more deficient findings from their Federal Monitoring Review 1 (FR1) during 2007- 2009.

The researchers invited all eligible grantees and its delegates to participate in the study. The participants represented Head Start grantees across 25 states: located in Arizona, Arkansas, California, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Missouri, Nevada, New York, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Texas, Utah, Washington, West Virginia, and Wisconsin. The programs are operated by a mix of private nonprofit (n= 19), public schools (n=9), universities (n=2), and Native-American Tribal (n=11) programs. The participants included Head Start directors who have led their programs from non-compliant or deficient status to achieve full compliance over the past two reviews. This accomplishment demonstrates substantial improvement in program performance. All of the eligible Head Start directors were invited to participate via email. The selections of participants were determined by the number of respondents that agreed to participate. A total of six programs agreed to participate. However, rich data about Head Start directors' competencies and action steps were gathered.

The interview process commenced over four months. Interviews were conducted from April through July 2013. Head Start directors selected were asked to participate in one telephone interview and complete one questionnaire to gather demographic data about the director and Head Start program. The questionnaire was administered online, and data were collect using Qualtrics, a web-based survey collection software. Each telephone interview ranged between 40 and 75 minutes long. In addition to the questionnaire, the researchers requested the participant's report of findings from FR1 and FR2 in addition to the most recent program information report (PIR). Interview questions focused on how the Head Start turnaround directors facilitated the change process, described challenges during the process, and the culture and climate of the program during the change process. More specifically, the questions focused on strategies used to facilitate the improvement process, monitoring practices, communication, and professional development.

The employment of a qualitative cross-case analysis guided this study in documenting Head Start turnaround practices and created a road map for other Head Start programs to facilitate program turnaround from low-performing and operating out of compliance to high-performing programs operating in full compliance with the HSPS. Furthermore, the qualitative design offered in-depth reflective insight into leadership practices, monitoring procedures, organizational culture, and turnaround practices implemented by Head Start directors. Currently, this phenomenon is not explored, so there is a critical need to introduce discourse about the practices of Head Start directors as they facilitate the improvement processes. The introduction of their respective reflections on how they facilitated change will provide programs that are currently low-performing a road-map to lead to improvements that ultimately benefit the children served. The researchers ascribed meaning from the data provided by Head Start turnaround directors as they detailed the improvement trajectory in achieving full compliance status.

Improving Head Start.   In 1975, ten years after the inception of Head Start, the Administration for Children and Families (2013) (ACF) developed a set of performance standards that were issued in compliance with the Code of Federal Regulations (Federal Register, 1975) and programs were mandated to adhere to these standards to maintain their OHS funding.

In 2007, Congress reauthorized Head Start with new implications. The Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act, better known as the Head Start Act of 2007, was developed to strengthen the quality of programs. Operating under a new framework, the Act a) encompassed state early learning standards; b) increased stringency in teaching qualifications; c) developed a

system of designation and renewal for grantees; d) increased program monitoring; and e) enhanced the HSPSs (Policies and Procedures for Designation Renewal, 2011).

Program monitoring.   During a federal monitoring review, a program is evaluated on its ability to provide evidence of meeting the standards. Reviewers act as evidence finders evaluating program performance. Grantee compliance outcomes are determined by the Review Team. At the review's completion, grantees achieve one of three determinations: (a) compliant, (b) noncompliant, and (c) deficient. A grantee with no findings identified during the review will be determined as compliant. A grantee with one or more areas of non-compliance and no deficiencies is determined as noncompliant. Grantees with one or more deficiencies are deemed deficient (Report to Congress on Head Start Monitoring, 2008). Deficiencies are more serious than non-compliances, a performance failure in one of the following eight areas: (a) a threat to the health, safety, or civil rights of children; (b) denying parents their rights to exercise their full roles and responsibilities related to the operation of the program; (c) failing to comply with the program standards; (d) misuse of funds; (e) loss of legal status, childcare license, debarment from receiving federal grants or contracts; (f) failure to meet or correct any agency requirement; (g) failure of the governing body to exercise its legal and fiscal responsibilities; and (h) failure to resolve an area of non-compliance (42 USC 9801). Grantees are expected to correct non-compliances and deficiencies. A deficiency finding will almost guarantee a grantee an immediate pathway to recompetition.

Recompetition.   In the 2007 Head Start Act, recompetition *mandates that any grantee which fails to provide high-quality services set by new federal quality regulations must reapply and compete for its grant against other potential community providers.* Under the rules of recompetition, 25 percent of Head Start grantees are evaluated annually for compliance with the standards (Policies and Procedures for Designation Renewal, 2011). If a program is considered a high quality Head Start program, the system offers continued grants to the existing grantee for a period of five years noncompetitively.

In the past, Head Start grantees would automatically continue its funding despite its failure to comply with Head Start Performance Standards. Under recompetition guidelines the low-performing grantee may also reapply for the grant. This system of designation renewal also distinguishes grantees delivering high-quality Head Start services. Moreover, offering continued grants to high quality Head Start programs for a period of five years. The goal of recompetition is to raise the quality of services and defund low-performing grantees. Until now, a process of competition has never been part of the refunding of programs. In some instances, grantees have been the long standing sole grantee of the Head Start Grant (Headstartredesignation.com).

Evidence of low-performance.   The most recent Reports to Congress on Head Start Monitoring (2013 & 2014) provides evidence of the need for Congress to provide supports to thoroughly investigate the reasons for the poor-performance of grantees during monitoring reviews. In 2014, OHS conducted 850 monitoring reviews. Of the 850 reviews conducted, 502 Head Start grantees experienced a First-Year, Triennial Federal Monitoring Performance Review, or other review and 292 Follow-up reviews. Of the First-Year, Triennial, and Other reviews (558) 764 findings were identified. Monitoring reviews outcomes are as follows: 1) Compliant, 2) One or more non-compliances with no deficiencies, or 3) One or more deficiencies. Interestingly, 57 percent of the Grantees reviewed were identified as having one or

more non-compliances.   In 2013, OHS conducted 983 monitoring reviews. Only 32.4 percent of the grantees were deemed compliant. Moreover, in 2012, OHS conducted 949 monitoring reviews, only 20 percent of the grantees were deemed compliant. Albeit, the recent trend documents some improvement in Grantee compliance, however the numbers of Grantees demonstrating noncompliance findings provides evidence of low performance and the need for supports on Head Start turnaround.

Turnaround.   Studies of attempts to turn around organizations have been analyzed in the for-profit, not-for-profit, and public sectors, including schools. Within this literature, turnaround is theorized in three ways: (1) as a "condition" (Armenakis, Fredenberger, Cherones & Field, 1995, p. 231); (2) as a "process" (Short, Palmer, & Stimpert, 1998, p. 155) and (3) as a "consequence or end state, of successful strategic actions" (Short, Palmer, & Stimpert, 1998 p. 155). At their conclusion, turnaround efforts will result in one of two divergent end states: failure or recovery. (Hager et al, 1999; Slatter, 1984; Stewart, 1984).

Turnaround literature asserts that there are unique competencies of turnaround leaders (Public Impact, 2008). The researchers assert a set of core competencies that fall into four clusters: (a) driving for results; (b) influencing for results; (c) problem solving; and (d) showing confidence to lead. First, the turnaround leader sets, prioritizes, and monitors high performance goals. Secondly, the leader focuses on creating a team to support and influence others. The leader builds morale and empowers the team with a clear vision and ongoing professional development. Thirdly, the leader demonstrates competencies in resolving conflicts. Finally, the leader demonstrates the confidence and commitment to the mission and vision of the turnaround (Public Impact, 2008).

School turnaround models.   School turnaround research emerged in the late 1990s, and there are several scholars that have contributed to the leadership on school turnaround literature (Duke, 2006; Fullan, 2006a; Leithwood, Harris & Strauss, 2010; Murphy & Meyers, 2008).   Much literature is derived from cross-sector research on turnaround practices and analyzed to create a framework for districts and schools to develop turnaround plans based on research and best practices to transform chronically low-performing schools (Hess & Gift, 2009; Herman et al., 2008; Murphy, 2008b;). Much of the turnaround research provides evidence that turnaround efforts are not sustained and often student achievement regresses, school re-culturing energies diminish, and improvement efforts are limited (Duke & Landahl , 2011).

Turnaround models used in schools are derived from practices and models from the business sector, albeit the success of school turnaround is not as well documented as business sector turnaround (Meyers, 2008). According to Meyers (2008), there is a paucity of literature that is demonstrative of successful school turnaround. For example, in a study conducted by Aladejem, Birman, Orland, Harr-Robins, Heredia, Parrish, and Ruffini (2010) approximately 1,000 low-performing elementary schools were examined to recognize schools that demonstrated drastic and continued improvement, only 47 schools met the criteria. Moreover, the researchers assert that few schools within the U.S. demonstrate dramatic and sustainable achievements. Much literature details the strategy implemented by principals or districts to turn low-performing schools into higher performing successful schools. However, little empirical research documents the success of turnaround interventions and much less literature lends itself as a guide to successful turnaround (Meyers, 2008; Public Impact, 2007).

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) is the impetus for many initiatives at the federal and state levels to improve schools and implement turnaround strategies (Duke, 2012).   In addition, President Obama's reform of Head Start also has regulations that can identify low-performance and threaten a program with closure. Obama's stated mission is to ensure children have the best opportunities for school readiness. The Obama administration's plan to increase accountability in Head Start grantees that are chronically low-performing by imposing the concept of recompetition and forcing grantees to reapply for their Head Start grant and allow higher performing programs to vie for their grant (whitehouse.gov, 2011).

Interestingly, some critics blame the education policies that create accountability systems for low-performance of schools. Notably, Levine and Levine (2012) criticize No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and Race to the Top (RTTT) for the cycle of chronic low-performance in K-12 settings.   Under NCLB, low achievement scores are reasons to close or restructure schools; similarly, in Head Start programs, grantees that perform poorly during the Federal Review risk losing their Head Start Grant, consequently, another organization may apply for its grant to provide Head Start services in the existing grantee's community. Levine and Levine (2012) argue that low student achievement extends beyond low test scores and teacher accountability. They describe social factors that are attributed to low student achievement, for example, inequitable school resources in poor and more affluent communities. Furthermore, the critics posit that crowded schools and rapid growth are all attributes to low student achievement.

Additionally, Levine and Levine (2012) proffer systems of accountability modeled after business practices are creating unintended consequences like student test scores correlating with teacher performance, therefore creating an incentive for schools to cheat. The researchers assert that more businesses are investing in education due to the millions of dollars in funds available to corporations for developing software and tutoring services. Many private corporations are benefiting from business turnaround models intended to benefit the education of students. Levine and Levine (2012) argue that the turnaround model is "destructive to public education" (p. 113). Moreover, they posit replacing the turnaround model with individualized instruction and eliminate the business model trajectory. Whereas the researchers critique the turnaround model as an intervention for failing schools, they claim districts have limited influence over the implementation of turnaround as a model for improvement strategy. Moreover, the turnaround model is driven by federal mandate under President Obama's Race to the Top (RTTT) initiative.

At the Head Start level, there are no documented models of turnaround to choose from. However, there are organizations that take over grants of chronically low-performing Head Start programs and ensure that children have access to Head Start services. These programs have a specialized capability to put in place a team of staff to ensure children have a Head Start program to attend without interruption. Community Development Institute Head Start (CDIHS) based in Denver, Colorado is funded by OHS. CDIHS provides interim services when a Head Start program grant is relinquished, suspended, or terminated. CDIHS is awarded a new grant at the same funding amount as the former grantee. According to CDIHS, they provide a staff of highly qualified consultants to support and continue Head Start program operations. Existing staff of the former grantee will need to reapply for their jobs and begin the hiring process as new employees. CDIHS will typically serve as the grantee for one year until a replacement grantee is selected (www.cdiheadstart.org).

At the Head Start level, there are no documented models or studies of turnaround. With the threat of recompetition and the increase of low-performing Head Start programs, the field has an urgent need to focus on identifying the organizational change process and turnaround

strategies employed by Head Start directors. These leaders are faced with the task of guiding their programs from a state of low-performing to high-performing Head Start programs, but not much is known about what they actually do to make the turnaround happen. Consequently, the existing research identifies turnaround in the context of schools, nonprofits, churches, and organizational turnaround. The purpose of this study is to examine the dynamics of the turnaround process in Head Start programs as described by directors of underperforming programs that experienced turnaround and the leadership behaviors implemented to facilitate performance improvements in full compliance of the Head Start Performance Standards (HSPS) for Federal Review accountability.

Four-Stage Turnaround Model.   The researchers ascribed meaning to the data analyzed from study results documenting the strategies of the directors, compared them with the turnaround literature, and developed a model to operationalize the turnaround strategies that had some consensus. These actions fell into four stages: a) preparing self; b) accessing resources; c) leading others; and d) turning around systems.

Stage one: preparing self.   Turnaround depended on the leader's capacity for change. The directors described developing self-efficacy skills to guide the turnaround strategy, engaging in self-reflection and developing the inner strength for change.

Preparing Self activities varied in emphasis among the directors. However, all engaged in one or more of the following: (a) self-reflection to assess their personal readiness to guide turnaround; (b) gaining personal confidence; (c) working with a coach; and (d) staying connected to developments within the field.

Self-reflection. The directors described their process of self-reflection as they assessed their personal readiness to facilitate the change effort. Recognizing formidable challenges ahead, they checked their inner resources as well as their support from family to take on further work.

One director recounted the self-reflection of her predecessor, which ended in a decision to not continue in the position:

> A lot of departments had to make budget cuts and for the director at that time it was very stressful and she decided that (she had been in Head Start for a long time as well) for her family and for herself that leaving the program was what was in her best interest because of the high stress that was going on at that time. I think it was just too much for her.

This "gut check" was critical to committing to the process. Furthermore, directors who decided to take on the turnaround did so by *gaining confidence*, *working with a coach*, or *staying connected to developments within the field*.

Gaining confidence. The directors talked about their mentors as vital to preparing themselves for the turnaround. The directors sought advice from supervisors whom helped them gain personal confidence in preparing for the change process. Directors described personal factors attributed to the turnaround success and the importance of gaining support from the CEO and leadership team.   "I'm pretty fearless," said one director. "I was confident that it could be done." However, she stated that "institutionally, there was strong support from the president and CEO who is my direct supervisor and the rest of the senior leadership team."

The director later demonstrated self-efficacy skills in preparation to execute the course of action necessary for turnaround, which she attributed to her own attitude buttressed by the support of the leadership team.

Working with a coach. One director recounted that she went so far as to hire a personal coach. "I went through doing all these things and all of the changes," she said and she decided "I needed a life coach…. [I was] determined and committed, but I needed to get to know myself better." The director demonstrated readiness to improve herself with external help so that she could better lead others.

Staying connected to developments within the field. The directors described constantly assessing the Head Start landscape to stay abreast of policy changes: "As a management team, the leadership of this program are a lot smarter than we were [before the federal review] and have taken a much more proactive approach to constantly reading, trying to stay ahead of what requirements are and expectations. I honestly have to say Head Start has changed so fast in the last couple years… I truly can't hardly even get through all the e-mails we get on a daily basis with new webinars requested and new information requested. So there's been a rapid change." What was helpful was "trying to stay more engaged with local state and federal regs." The director described the need to a more proactive stance for dealing with the regulator rather than being reactive to it, and she said it helped.

Stage two: accessing resources.   The second stage, *Accessing Resources*, moves beyond the personal to the programmatic. The directors named resources necessary to strengthen the turnaround effort, accessing formal or informal technical assistance.

Formal technical assistance. Formal technical assistance included the support of an OHS or independent consultant. Formal technical assistance was established in legal contracts or terms defined by OHS. These agreements defined expectations and described functions and expectations for both the director and consultant. The consultants provided technical assistance to help directors develop capacity to lead turnaround.

Interestingly, some of the directors described their fear of sharing sub-standard performance information with OHS officials in concern of penalties: "We were very leery of sharing information with people because you want to be able to talk to your consultant and say, this is what we're doing, is this okay?" and recounted one Head Start director "if it's not okay, help me fix it, not tattle on me…so you need to have a consultant that you can trust." Consequently, she hired an independent consultant and kept questions with her OHS officials general. These concerns illustrate that independent consultants allowed directors to be more transparent in order to fix non-compliances.

In contrast, another director demonstrated satisfaction with the technical assistance OHS provided:

> We've had the same one for the last two or three years but, you know, for the two or three years before that we were constantly having a new grant specialist. I finally had somebody that I was familiar with and was familiar with me.

The researchers derived from director interviews that in addition to getting technical support the Head Start directors asked questions of people they trusted, ensuring they implemented the steps towards compliance.

Informal technical assistance. The directors also assessed the need to employ informal technical assistance, where the resources are not defined by OHS with specific outcomes and relationships. The directors engaged with these resources on an as-needed, casual basis, not requiring a formal agreement. Informal assistance materialized through: (a) the director's own previous experiences in other programs; (b) support from other Head Start directors; (c) serendipitous knowledge gained through Head Start trainings; (d) attendance at Head Start Association meetings; and (e) application of OHS tools.

Some directors implemented strategies learned in past jobs. One director described how she gained support from other directors: "Everywhere I went I asked every person I knew how their monitoring review went and what they were cited on and I had an ongoing list, about five pages of notes, and took the information and measured it against things I needed to fix, and I made sure it was done." The director described her process for gaining information about common Federal Review findings and utilized the information to assure her program was not cited for the same issues.

One of the veteran turnaround directors stated that exchanges of "trade information" were more frequent prior to recompetition. Consequently, the threat of recompetition had created a fear that other Head Start programs would compete for their grant. The directors only connected with individuals they trusted whether OHS officials, consultants, or other directors.

Stage three: leading others. After directors gained some technical assistance, they described an increase in confidence to achieve turnaround goals. They articulated a vision of success and communicated expectations to staff. The directors often described fragmentation within their agencies resulting in the need to transform employees' self-interest into a new concern for shared goals. The directors provided lessons on how to lead others during the turnaround through a) reculturing; b) improved communication; c) providing professional development; and d) monitoring plans for continuous improvement.

All directors acknowledged the situation with stakeholders and encouraged participation from their subordinates, parents and board, detailing the challenges with staff and stating that it would require concerted effort and new approaches to survive. The directors confirmed that not all staff committed to the vision and some decided to leave the program. "At first we had some staff that have been here longer than me," said one director, "and I remember hearing 'This is not broke. Why are we going to try to fix it? This is the way we've always done it.' The staff really weren't happy with change…. We really had to try to stay the course and work on helping them understand why the change was necessary." One director said in hindsight that she wished she would have been more specific with staff regarding the performance standards that pertained to their area: "I think that was something that we just never really did was share the Performance Standards with the staff—'Here's the standard, here's what we have to do, here's the change that's coming.'" Once the current situation and a plan for the future was established, the directors implemented efforts to re-culture that included steps to gain further staff support.

Reculturing. The directors stated that they accomplished re-culturing first by building different relationships with staff in an effort to shift the culture from 'this-is-how-we-have-always-done-it' to a culture of accountability and compliance. One director engaged staff in a two-day retreat to discuss long-standing issues and work towards healing and cohesiveness. Another sought support of an organizational coach to engage managers in monthly retreats and reorganize to ensure the appropriate structure for compliance. Directors coached staff through the change process, recognizing that more attention and feedback to staff on everyday practices

was needed. Some directors kept an intense focus on the standards and used them to monitor progress in combination with ongoing professional development to ensure staff were competent in meeting program outcomes. Through training, communication, and support, the directors redefined employees' work to support the vision and provided them with information throughout the change process through regular staff meetings.

One director placed all new policies online but quickly learned that the bus driver and other staff that did not have access to internet. The director corrected the change by creating binders customized for them. The binders included copies of all the operating policies and were placed in an area available to all staff. The director insisted that all staff have access to ensure alignment.

Improved communication. Directors engaged staff in regular communication which included staff meetings to ensure individuals stayed on point and were aware of new developments. One director described why he decided to have regular monthly staff meetings: "In reviewing, 'How did these simple errors that really were just simple human error happen…' That became one of the possibilities that maybe we needed to go back to a staff meeting every single month." Additionally, the director illustrated that follow-up and accountability were critical for the sustainability of program improvements. This included following up on action items and holding staff accountable for task completion.

Professional development. Directors said they transformed their organizations by rebuilding departments consisting of people wanting to work toward program compliance. Directors invested in training to ensure staff were competent in meeting program outcomes in the department they were assigned. Directors unpacked standards, reinforced policies and best practices, and provided clarity about roles, expectations, and the implications of change. Additionally, supervisors who reported to the directors received specific professional development around data monitoring and reflective supervision.

One director described professional development through mentoring: "So when a staff member comes in they also have a mentor or someone that is supporting them and it's ongoing." She described the importance of providing ongoing support to staff. What made a difference was "spending a lot of time and effort in promoting education for staff members, continuing education, and professional development goals. Quality is also investing in the staff members that work for the agency."

Through training and support, directors redefined employees' work and attitudes. Each director made reference to the importance of aligning staff to support the vision. One of the change leaders described the attitudinal shift in her program: "There was more of a sense of accountability that things are focused on the performance standard versus the way that we've always done them." Although directors recognized that compliance was ultimately their responsibility, they nurtured a culture of accountability where program success was a part of each employee's role.

Monitoring plans for continuous improvement. The directors' strategies included a plan to assess the effectiveness of staff through monitoring plans. They shared practices for improving operations for organizational efficiency and full compliance with the standards by detailing the importance of monitoring and ongoing efforts to evaluate their programs. They described the importance of regular classroom visits and being aware of health and safety related issues. One director explained that the program openly invited independent auditors to inspect the facility to ensure continuous improvement. "I didn't sit back and wait for somebody to come and find it," the director affirmed. "I wanted to find it first."

The Directors' ascribed the importance of being proactive in getting program performance information. As concerns are identified, the director must track and follow-up on goals to ensure the program is on the road to full compliance.

Three of the six directors discussed their use of the Protocol as a monitoring tool to guide program improvements. The Protocol is a comprehensive tool which encompasses the Head Start program content areas and includes a list of questions designed to measure grantee compliance with the standards. Annually, OHS develops a new monitoring tool to guide both Head Start programs and federal reviewers in gathering key indicators regarding grantee compliance with the Head Start Act, fiscal regulations, and the standards. The Protocol evaluates grantee performance in seven content areas: (a) Program Governance (GOV); (b) Management Systems (SYS); (c) Fiscal Integrity (FIS); (d) Eligibility, Recruitment, Selection, Enrollment, and Attendance (ERSEA); (e) Child Health and Safety (CHS); (f) Family and Community Engagement (FCE); and (g) Child Development and Education (CDE) (FY 2014 Office of Head Start Monitoring Protocol, 2013). Three of the six directors interviewed stated the Protocol was effective in supporting self-evaluation.

Self-monitoring became an ongoing process that consisted of effective monitoring tools. Directors implemented timelines to monitor program goal completion. They provided staff the administrative support necessary to meet target dates, establishing regular checks to ensure staff followed policies as prescribed. Additionally, the monitoring plans provided the directors with current data on goals and program outcomes.

Stage four: turning around systems.   The directors provided the researchers with important tips for how to lead yourself and others during the *Preparing Self*, *Accessing Resources*, and *Leading Others* stages. In the final stage, *Turning around Systems*, the directors utilized the skills gained in the previous stages to target deficient program areas. The action steps in this stage are related to systems that directors had to affect to avoid losing their programs. They exhibited some commonality in their deficiencies and targeted the following systems: (a) human resources, (b) finance, (c) shared governance, and (d) ongoing monitoring. Directors shared their practices for improving operations and meeting full compliance with the standards related to these areas.

Human resources. The directors championed overall improvements by concentrating on the Human Resource functions of the organization. All six directors stated that their programs improved in standing by having staff in positions where they met the educational requirements as stated in the standards. Job descriptions were updated to align with mandated educational requirements.

The directors revealed that they held staff accountable and provided them with clear expectations. One director insisted that the education supervisor follow written education plans and holds her staff accountable to assure program compliance. As roles changed, directors provided staff clarity as to the implications and new reporting structures. Program hiring policies were enhanced to assure that candidates met the mandated educational requirements prior to hire. Staff roles were redefined to ensure operational efficiency and effective service delivery.

Finance. The directors made significant improvements in the fiscal area, owning their need for financial literacy. The dramatic turn in program performance was attributable to building an internal capacity for knowing fiscal processes and procedures. Although the circumstances were very unique in each instance, directors confidently articulated financial

matters with an understanding of their role and responsibility to provide better oversight of the fiscal areas of the program.

Shared governance. The directors stated that improving shared governance also required a paradigm shift. They expanded professional development to include parents and board members to make certain they were aware of the standards. They aligned agendas with the standards, assuring that board and Policy Committee members understood and approved agenda items as needed. They also identified board and parent training needs to provide coaching and support on the deficiency issues. As the turnaround unfolded, board members and parents expressed more interest and subsequently became more engaged in governance activities.

Ongoing monitoring. The directors emphasized effective monitoring of performance as essential for successful turnaround. The directors monitored for: (a) staff performance and compliance; (b) accuracy of data and follow-up; (c) timely reporting; (d) fiscal performance; (e) governance policies; (f) program effectiveness; (g) service delivery; and (h) Head Start changes. They consistently monitored for updates and changes in regulations that affected the program and delivery of services, regularly checking the Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge (ECLKC) website and connecting to other programs about changes in order to remain aware of new developments that could affect their program's compliance status. One director warned that missing minor details was unacceptable and stressed monitoring the fine print.

The directors monitored their programs for compliance and engaged in informal or formal technical assistance and recognized the importance of data to monitor their programs. Kowal and Hassel (2011) found that turnaround leaders are driven by data.

Reflecting on and Implementing the Four-Stage Turnaround Model

The researchers analyzed the interview transcripts and compared strategies to the turnaround literature, and developed a Four-stage Turnaround Model to operationalize the unique steps these directors utilized to turn around their troubled Head Start programs. In the first stage, *Preparing Self*, the leaders developed self-efficacy skills and generative capabilities to guide the turnaround strategy. In the second stage *Accessing Resources*, the directors assessed the types of technical assistance resources available to guide the turnaround strategy. In the third stage, *Leading Others*, the participants led staff in a reculturing process, improving communications, executing ongoing monitoring systems, and providing professional development. All stages influenced the final stage, *Turning around Systems*, focused on turnaround efforts in human resources, finance, shared governance, and ongoing monitoring. Of course, other areas in Head Start systems could be addressed at this stage, including services for students with disabilities, but these happened to be the stages that these Head Start directors needed to turn around their situations.

Figure 1 provides an illustrative presentation of the model. The model provides flexibility in that the outer legs can be increased or decreased depending on the systems targeted for improvement. The unlabeled boxes would hold these other systems. For example, if a director determines that non-compliance concerns are only in the shared governance area, one outer leg would be depicted in the model. If the director determines change necessary in the fiscal and shared governance areas there would be two outer legs depicted and so on.

However, the Preparing Self, Accessing Resources, and Leading Others Stages are critical and do not provide the same flexibility as the outer legs. In sum, the Preparing Self and Accessing Resources stages support the Head Start turnaround leader in developing capabilities

and strategy. In the Leading Others stage, the leader influences staff change and performance to operate in alignments with the standards within the designated systems.

The interview findings revealed that there are specific competencies of a Head Start turnaround director and commonalties in the action steps taken to guarantee full compliance with the standards, accomplishing successful Federal Monitoring Reviews with no findings and in full compliance with the Head Start standards. As a result of the lessons learned, study participants offer valuable insights as to the specific issues that affect low-performing programs during the turnaround of a Head Start program. The lessons the directors provide offer detail regarding the turnaround leadership competencies and the actions steps necessary to turnaround troubled Head Start programs.
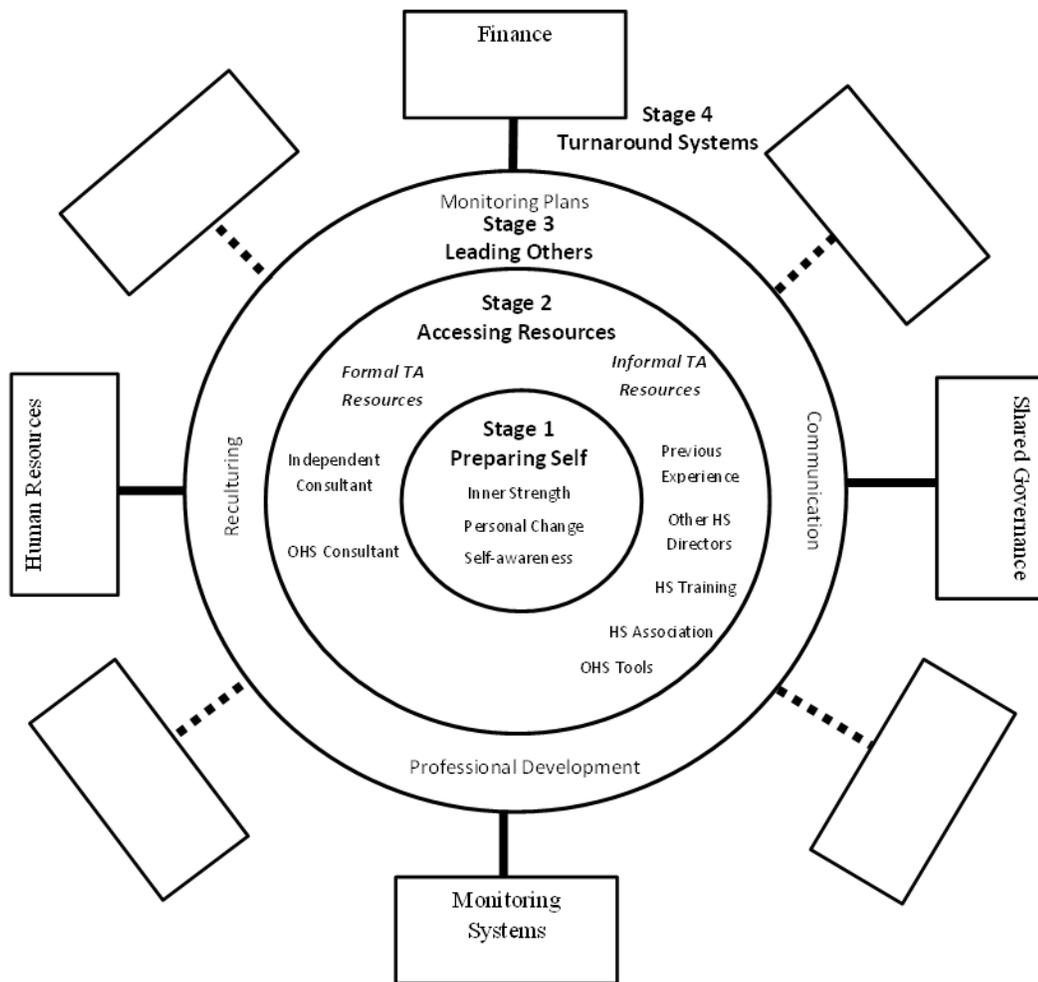

Figure 1. Four-stage turnaround model. Adapted from "Unveiling a Path to Head Start Turnaround: Investigating How Head Start Directors Transform Low-performing Programs into High-performing Programs" by S. Tracy, 2013.

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