

THE EXPERIENCES OF XAVIER GRACE'S DISTRICT LEADERS' ENGAGEMENT IN  
LARGE-SCALE SCHOOL REDESIGN: AN INTRINSIC CASE STUDY

by

Almecia M. Watkins

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

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APPROVED BY:

Chris D. Bellamy, D.B.A., Committee Chair

Kenneth R. Tierce, Ed.D., Methodologist

## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this intrinsic case study was to understand the experiences of district leaders and what they perceived as best practices for engaging in large-scale school redesign. The theory guiding this study was the 21<sup>st</sup> century learning theory developed by the extensive research of multiple educational theorists (Brown, 2005, 2006; United States Department of Education, 2018; P21, 2018). This study was designed to answer the following central question and three research questions: CQ) What are the unique experiences of Xavier Grace district leaders as the district implemented a 21st century school redesign? RQ1) How do professional development activities impact the preparation of district leaders and school administrators for the school redesign process? RQ2) How does personalized learning shape the methods implemented for redesigning school district instructional models? RQ3) How do pressures for student achievement impact the effectiveness of the school redesign process? The sample of the study consisted of the district leaders and school building administrators who facilitated the school redesign process within Xavier Grace School District (pseudonym) which resulted in a sample size of at least 10 to 12 participants. Interviews, a focus group, and documentary data were analyzed using Yin's (2018) logic model analytic technique as school redesign is a process that intends to promote student achievement. The analyzed data resulted in three major themes that shaped the findings of this study: accountability, change management, and constructivism.

*Keywords:* 21<sup>st</sup> century learning, change management, college and career ready, culture, distributive leadership, instructional design, organizational change, school redesign, student achievement, transactional leadership, transformational leadership, turn around, whole-school transformation

## Dedication

I am grateful for the favor that God has bestowed upon me to be a daughter, wife, and mother. My gratitude is extended unto those that have played the most pivotal role in my ability to complete this manuscript. I dedicate this manuscript to my spouse and children for the sacrifices they made to ensure I had the time and space needed to complete the work. I am humbled by the encouragement that my family gave to me to ensure I remained persistent during the process. To my parents, without the model for excellence that you demonstrated, I would not know that an opportunity of this magnitude would be viable.

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First, I take the time to acknowledge and thank God who is the head of my life—for without Him none of this would have been possible. The inspiration for this manuscript comes from the educational leaders that demonstrated transformative leadership within their schools and allowed me to see the lasting benefit it has on developing others. I want to thank each of my colleagues who served as mentors, personal friends, critical friends, and role models for reaching this goal.

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## **List of Abbreviations**

College and career readiness (CCR)

Computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS)

Elementary and secondary education act (ESEA)

Every student succeeds act (ESSA)

Organization for economic co-operation and development (OECD)

Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> century skills (P21)

Personalized learning coach (PLC)

Science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM)

Science, technology, engineering, art, and math (STEAM)

Socio-economic status (SES)

United States Department of Education (USDoE)

## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

### **Overview**

The 2015 Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) placed high-capacity learning environments as a top priority within school districts nationwide following (U.S. Department of Education, 2018c). The ESSA school reform standards shaped the measures of accountability for student achievement (U.S. Department of Education, 2018c). Chapter One provides insight into the background of school redesign and why this transformative reform drives the research into addressing the empirical gap that exists for understanding school redesign in context of district-wide transformation. The purpose of this intrinsic case study was to understand the experiences of district leaders and what they perceived as best practices for engaging in large-scale school redesign. Case study research is practical for district leaders that desire to understand school redesign process as an organizational leader. Therefore, Chapter One discussed the background of school redesign through the historical context of the problem, the theoretical framework, and social influences. Furthermore, Chapter One explained the researcher's motivation, philosophical assumptions, and the paradigm shaping the framework for the problem of the study.

### **Background**

Student achievement was a concern as there was a measure of accountability for district leaders to leverage achievement (Chenoweth, 2015) so that its graduates were able to productively contribute, economically, within their communities (Ansong, Ansong, Ampomah, & Adjabeng, 2015; Keller et al., 2015; Miller, 2013; Pitcher et al., 2016; Simpson, 2013; Wei, 2015; Wei, Xiao, Simon, Liu, & Ni, 2018). Despite the institutionalization of educational policies such as the ESSA, which revised the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act

(ESEA) and reprioritized equality in student achievement to increase high school graduation and student enrollment into college or placement within a career of choice (U.S. Department of Education, 2018c), student achievement continued to decline. The decline in student achievement left school systems teetering on the scale of failure to provide a structure of learning that provided academic success for all learners (Ansong et al., 2015; Camacho & Legare, 2016; Garcia & Weiss, 2017; Godsey, 2015; National Center for Education Statistics, 1993).

The factors that impacted student achievement were demonstrative of unequal accessibility to resources for students (Ansong et al., 2015; Wei, 2015; Wei et al., 2018). The disparity of learning was aligned to the inability of schools to relinquish formative, traditional academic approaches that had a long-standing impact on all students successfully achieving the intended outcomes of ESSA (Garcia & Weiss, 2017; Kim, 2014). To address the continual decline of student achievement, district leaders relied upon current legislation and funding to redesign their approach to education (U.S. Department of Education, 2018c).

School redesign was a challenge to many districts as th leaders had to discard learning models that served as barriers for learners (Camacho & Legare, 2016; Kim, 2014). The idea of redesigning the school structure, for 21<sup>st</sup> century learning, addressed the important role that the district (internal stakeholder) and parents and industry (external stakeholders) had on learning outcomes and student achievement (P21, 2018; U.S. Department of Education, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c). Communication between stakeholders was the social implications of the school redesign process as it pushed district leaders to assess the culture and accountability measures that were in place to ensure student achievement (American Psychological Association, 2017). The process of school redesign forced a reflective assessment as to how well a district incorporated the voice and input of all vested stakeholders (Applied Educational Systems, 2018; P21, 2018).

School redesign required hard work and strategic planning as it was a complex process (Hoover & Harder, 2015; Knight, 2006; Li, 2017; Nattoo, 2018; Noonan, 2014; Sporte & de la Torre, 2010). School leaders, with the support of the district, must consider the complexities of addressing school culture, the design of a student-centered curriculum, the implementation of personalized learning models, and the use of authentic assessments to ensure academic gaps were directly addressed (Abdul-Aim, 2016; Gewertz, 2016a; Little, Sobel, McCray, & Wang, 2015; Zubrzycki, 2016). Described as a multi-layered process, school redesign, reshaped traditional leading, teaching and learning models that were in place for the past 150 years and served as a long-standing hindrance to progressivism in education (Anderson, 2017; Camacho & Legare, 2016; Kim, 2014). While school redesign, with the focus of student achievement, was not a new phenomenon, there was little research that examined the process from the perspective of district leaders facilitating the complex, transformative task (Ansong et al., 2015; Nattoo, 2018). Research failed in clearly denoting the strategies and methodology that school leaders should implement to facilitate such a complex task (Anderson, 2017; Little et al., 2015).

### **Historical Context**

Shifting how learners experienced and accessed new knowledge was the strategic intent of school redesign (Abdul-Aim, 2016; Camacho & Legare, 2016; Zubrzycki, 2016). For more than 150 years, student learning experiences were an issue (Little et al., 2015; New Learning, n.d.). Educational philosophers, such as John Dewey, John Locke, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, led the educational movement to discard the traditional, non-progressive, models of education as those formative models had continuously failed to take into account the variation in which students received information, how they perceived themselves as learners, and the skills needed for teachers to meet a range of student learning needs (Cox, 2015; Dewey, 1990; Knowles, 1972;

Little et al., 2015; National Center for Education Statistics, 1993; Pavlis & Gkiosis, 2017; Simonsen et al., 2017). Over time, traditional measures of education did not meet minimal accountability toward its address for the differences in student needs and accessibility to resources beyond the classroom especially when considering the vast socioeconomic range of students (Godsey, 2015; National Center for Education Statistics, 1993). Data collected provided the needed evidence for school district leaders to make inequitable learning environments equitable (Ansong et al., 2015; Godsey, 2015; National Center for Education Statistics, 1993; Wei, 2015; Wei et al., 2018). The inequality, within the schools, resulted in an influx of students failing to meet grade-level standards of learning (Ansong et al., 2015; The Governor's Office of Student Achievement, 2017; Wei, 2015; Wei et al., 2018).

Transitions within society directly impacted how school systems resourced their learning institutions with the intent to engage students (Garcia & Weiss, 2017; Kim, 2014; U.S. Department of Education, 2018c). While there was a viable attempt to respond to societal pressures, there was also a long-standing awareness of the disproportionate allocation of advanced resources which greatly prepared students to access today's workforce and higher learning institution, also referred to as student preparation for career and college readiness (U.S. Department of Education, 2018a, 2018b). A challenge of the process was the appropriate integration of technology (Firmin & Genesi, 2013; Haran, 2015). The historical challenge was the institutionalization of the Internet and computer-based learning programs with minimal understanding of how to use these resources to enhance the curriculum (Firmin & Genesi, 2013; Haran, 2015). Given the advancement in technology, the overflow of information and the strategic need for effectively navigating students through processing the inundation of information and gaining needed knowledge and skills for today left school systems incapable of



leveraging student achievement (Applied Educational Systems, 2018; Gigliotti, 2017; Haran, 2015; P21, 2018).

### **Social Context**

School redesign, as a complex process, required that stakeholders work collaboratively to shape and establish the scope of what was valued as an outcome for learning and student achievement (Given, 2008; Keller et al., 2015). Given (2008) stated that a reflective lens was necessary as school districts engaged in the complex process. The complexity of school redesign required a detailed examination of how social impacts shaped the definition of knowledge for a district (Given, 2008). The premise of analytical reflection and social impacts shaped how Xavier Grace defined learning and knowledge acquisition.

Superintendents oversaw the directives of student achievement across all schools within the school district (Bjork, Browne-Ferrigno, & Kowalski, 2014; Community Tool Box, 2016; Dickson & Mitchell, 2014; Great Schools, 2015). To ensure school-level leaders fulfilled a supportive role within their schools, the superintendent had to guarantee that there was a clear vision articulated for the goals toward what the district desired to see in terms of academic achievement for students (Bjork et al., 2014; Dickson & Mitchell, 2014). The superintendent carried the responsibility for instituting professional development that built effective leadership skills to sustain leadership traits that affected envisioned changes as the result of facilitating the huge task of school redesign (Bjork et al., 2014; Branch, Hanushek, & Rivkin, 2013; Dickson & Mitchell, 2014).

While a large-scale, complex process, school redesign transforms an organization's construct for what it values as outcomes for its graduates (Franklin Covey, 2018; Given, 2008; Keller et al., 2015). Progressive leaders reported that the social context of redesigning a school

system on a large-scale required the use of clear lines of communication so that all stakeholders understood their roles in the process (Aas & Brandmo, 2016; Coleman, 2018; Franklin Covey, 2018). According to Anderson (2017), *Changing Minds* (n.d.), and Gewertz (2016b), effective extension of communication flow involves input and output between both internal and external stakeholders. This included bringing into the communication loop parents, teachers, business and industry, as well as students (Gewertz, 2016b; Keller et al., 2015; Wei, 2015). Furthermore, literature purported that it was vital that these parties be continually involved as a voice within the entire school redesign process (Mitchell, 2016). Research provided insight into the historical context of the learning institute as it proved that schools exist as a learning institution because of the stakeholders who shaped and built the institutions with the intent to educate and prepare learners for their experiences within the real-world and ensure graduates were successful economical-contributors within a global society (Gewertz, 2016b; P21, 2018). Authors, that have implemented whole-school transformation, agreed that stakeholder input served as informative and supportive to the redesign process (Applied Educational Systems, 2018; Franklin Covey, 2018; P21, 2018).

### **Theoretical Context**

The site for this present study used an approach to school redesign that reflected the theoretical perspective of 21<sup>st</sup> century learning (Applied Educational Systems, 2018; P21, 2018). Establishing a theoretical plan of action for educational transformative reform validated the process of educational reformation (Yanchar, South, Williams, Allen, & Wilson, 2010; Yin, 2018). The instructional learning theory required district leaders to strategically consider, understand, and effectively facilitate all constructs of an education-based organization on a large scale (Nattoo, 2018; P21, 2018).

The ideology of developing graduates with 21<sup>st</sup> century skills was shaped by the district's understanding of the 21<sup>st</sup> century learning framework for learning that identified the skill sets learners should acquire by graduation (P21, 2018; U.S. Department of Education, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c). Given the understanding that school redesign challenged the status quo of a traditional approach to learning, the framework was essential for shifting student achievement strategies to align to modern expectations for teaching and learning (P21, 2018). Through much research and collaboration, and with external partnerships, Xavier Grace School District, located in central Georgia, adopted the theoretical framework for 21<sup>st</sup> century learning (Applied Educational Systems, 2018; P21, 2018). The theoretical framework defined the components that shaped what success looked like for a student that was college or career ready (Applied Educational Systems, 2018; P21, 2018). The philosophy of 21<sup>st</sup> century learning embedded the theories of progressive and experiential education to encompass the moving parts required for a 21<sup>st</sup> century school redesign process (Dewey, 1990; Kolb, 2014; P21, 2018).

### **Situation to Self**

Researchers are not without their own biases; therefore, it was important that I be transparent concerning how I limited the influence of my biases throughout the research process (Galdas, 2017; Yin, 2018). It was certain that there would be influences that would likely distort the results of this study. As a result, this section addressed how I avoided allowing influences to inform what I perceived in the results of the study. The influences were averted as much as possible through identifying the assumptions of my perception philosophically and revealing my constructivist paradigm of the problem in which the research resonates (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Galdas, 2017; Knight, 2006; Yin, 2018).

As a former district-appointed personalized learning coach within the Xavier Grace

School District, I was motivated by my personal experiences to conduct this intrinsic case study. Through personal experience as a personalized learning coach (PLC), I observed school-building leaders struggle to grasp a conceptual understanding of what the school redesign process would entail. It was difficult for many of the leaders to know what the outcome for school redesign would be because there was not a clear picture nor a definition, in 2013, to collectively define the redesign goal. As a district PLC, I worked as a partner with school-building leaders and a liaison between the district to define the goal for the process as well as individualize it for each school per their autonomous allowance. Going through the struggle to shape the outcome of the process and by working closely with the district and school leaders, this study served as my earnest attempt to effectively highlight the work and achievements of our school district.

Assumptions of philosophy challenged and questioned foundational values (Creswell & Poth, 2018) and expound upon the paradigms used to gather, analyze, and interpret data to shape the significance of the research (Yin, 2018). Yin (2018) stated that every research begins with a rationale and some direction as perceived from the lens and perception of the researcher. The rationale was the assumption of what the researcher hoped to prove from research findings (Knight, 2006; Yin, 2018). This research sought to isolate my biases and prove my inquiry-based assumptions through the lens of axiology, epistemology, and ontology.

Studying the value of school redesign was the basis of the axiological constructs for this present case study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Case studies examine evidence from multiple perspectives (Yin, 2018). As I sought to explore the school redesign process, I did so grounded upon the value that I placed on approaching complex tasks with a clear vision and a methodical implementation plan (Knight, 2006). I understood that every major reform of education stemmed from the preferential expectations of the powers (leaders) that guide the reformation

(Knight, 2006). I desired to discover the perspectives and values of Xavier Grace district leaders as it led their decision to undergo district-wide school redesign. Through an axiological exploration, I wanted to assemble what the leaders saw as best strategies for approaching school redesign.

Epistemological orientations of a case study allowed for different orientations to be revealed through the process of conducting research (e.g., in this study I embraced a relativist orientation; Yin, 2018). Stake (2014) revealed that case studies evaluate the experience of the case in relation to the phenomena of unique interest. Through the research and interaction with the case it was important that I shared what was worth knowing as experienced from the case being studied (Stake, 2014).

Since it was my goal to capture the perspectives of the case participants, this study was conducted with a constructivist approach (Yin, 2018). The orientation of the case was based on a realist perspective (Yin, 2018). Theoretically framed by theories of learning and leadership, I was driven to explore the realistic struggles and outcomes of the complexities of the school redesign process; and, as a constructivist, I relied on the qualitative data to serve as documentation of the findings of the case experience.

I sought to understand the relative realities of the district leaders' experiences with facilitating school redesign on a large scale. The ontological nature of this research was to understand what school redesign was in relation to how Xavier Grace's district leaders perceived and defined school redesign (Dudovskiy, 2018). According to Creswell and Poth (2018), the methodology of ontology was showing relative relationships between the perceived realities of participants to enhance the knowledge of what the phenomena was within the study. Therefore, this intrinsic case study served as a way to reveal the unique findings from the research of the

identified site of study (Knight, 2006; Yin, 2018). While I had my own assumptions of what I might have discovered, the research questions drove the ontological discovery to bring forth meaning to the school redesign process.

The paradigm was a framework of what I knew and believed about the problem that I sought to explore during this research (Yin, 2018). The paradigm of this study was underpinned by the philosophical address of the assumptions. Theories of learning and leadership shaped the framework for how this research was analyzed based on the interviews and exploration of the research questions. The research and interview questions were shaped by the 21<sup>st</sup> century learning theory (Applied Educational Systems, 2018; P21, 2018). The theory also played a role in understanding what the district learned by employing the 21<sup>st</sup> century construct within school redesign. The theory shaped the framework for what I believed informed the district on how to best facilitate a complex, district-wide transformative initiative, and it also addressed the gap in the literature.

### **Problem Statement**

There was a general gap in the literature regarding studies that provided an in-depth understanding of the experiences of school districts that engaged in school redesign. The problem of the study was the experiences of district leaders and what they perceived as best practices for engaging in large-scale school redesign. For other districts, school redesign was a complex process that sought to deeply examine, challenge, and change several components that impacted the overall learning experiences of students (Li, 2017; Noonan, 2014; Spote & de la Torre, 2010). As a result, the accountability component of school redesign, at the district level, was addressed in many educational leadership publications (Li, 2017; Ylimaki, Brunderman, Bennett, & Dugan, 2014). As school systems attempted to redesign the instructional approach to

the core curriculum within schools, there was an increased expectation that district and school leaders be capable of taking on the role of an instructional leader who was skilled in enhancing the capacity of others (Baum & Krulwich, 2016; Stein, 2016; Ylimaki et al., 2014).

Given the complexities of school redesign, school leaders were most effective when they embodied a transformative leadership style that encouraged an autonomous approach to intertwining creative innovations in maintaining and improving student achievement (Litz & Scott, 2016). Anderson (2017) identified that effective measures of change were actualized when school leaders were trained and developed in implementing transformative leadership skills. Researchers agreed that school leaders benefitted from transformational training as there was a concern for the number of leaders that did not possess the skills needed to build strong performing schools (Anderson, 2017; Stein, 2016; Ylimaki et al., 2014). With the implementation of current accountability requirements, the lack in leadership preparedness was a problem that was important to address. There were many leaders who desired to provide an environment that supported student achievement and propelled students toward an ability to succeed in work and life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Anderson, 2017; Applied Educational Systems, 2018; Baum & Krulwich, 2016; Camacho & Legare, 2017; Gigliotti, 2017; P21, 2018; Stein, 2016; Ylimaki et al., 2014). However, the research failed in clearly denoting the strategies and methodology that school leaders should implement to facilitate such a complex task (Anderson, 2017; Little et al., 2015). Exploring the case addressed the gap in literature that empirically discussed an in-depth understanding of the school redesign from the perspective of the district. As school districts used school redesign as a method for improving student achievement, an in-depth study on understanding strategies and methodologies from the district's perspective for the best approach in facilitating a complex task becomes important. Therefore, the problem of the

study was the experiences of district leaders and what they perceived as best practices for engaging in large-scale school redesign in a Georgia school district.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this intrinsic case study was to understand the experiences of district leaders and what they perceived as best practices for engaging in large-scale school redesign. At this stage in the research, the transformation of the instructional model was generally defined as school redesign and the personalized learning model was defined as 21<sup>st</sup> century career and college ready as it was the goal of the district to equip students with the cognitive and non-cognitive skills needed to succeed in life beyond the classroom with a comprehensive application of digital literacy (P21, 2018). The theory guiding this study was the 21<sup>st</sup> century learning theory (P21, 2018). The learning theory provided an overarching framework to examine the school redesign efforts of the district.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study was significant as it added to the body of knowledge toward understanding the experiences of a district that engaged in the school redesign process utilizing a model of personalized learning (Little et al., 2015; Rooney, 2016; Rowe & Sikes, 2006; Semczuk, 2017; Wilder & Herro, 2016). There was a lack of research that examined the use of a formalized process that informed district and school building leaders on how to strategically navigate the complexities of school redesign with an autonomous approach rendered for each school. Empirical research advanced the knowledge base of a phenomenon (Yin, 2018). Findings from this case study added empirical knowledge for both district and school leaders as school redesign held these groups of leaders accountable for following policies that were in place to ensure that districts were employing turnaround measures that moved their schools from failing to high-



capacity (Mitchell, 2016; Stein, 2016; U.S. Department of Education, 2018a, 2018c; Ylimaki et al., 2014; Zubrzycki, 2016). A case study of this nature extended the reports that were made by both elementary and high school educators following their experiences with school redesign; however, their reports did not provide an in-depth understanding of the complexities or perspectives of the district or school leaders facilitating the complex transformative process (Ansong et al., 2015; Jerald, Campbell, & Roth, 2017; Roberston-Kraft & Bronstein, 2016; Spote & de la Torre, 2010).

The findings of this study justified the school district's use of the 21<sup>st</sup> century theoretical framework to shape the school redesign process for impacting positive student achievement. Theory was significant in reflecting critical insight (Yin, 2018) into the complex constructs that districts should have considered when addressing achievement needs for learners and establishing a collective vision for helping schools meet those outcome goals.

Large-scale reforms required that strategic protocols be in place to ensure the effectiveness of the work (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006; Little et al., 2015; Manganaro, 2013; Yang, 2014). The practicality of the research aligned the applicative benefit district and school leaders faced when redesigning their schools to increase student achievement. The results from the study provided insight for district leaders joining the employment ranks of Xavier Grace. While this study was not designed to generalize findings (Yin, 2018), the results also served as informative to districts leaders external to Xavier Grace. The information provided insight into what worked and did not work during the school redesign process as well as what methods were implemented to ensure leaders were trained and developed to handle the task (Stein, 2016; Ylimaki et al., 2014).

## **Research Questions**

This study was to understand the school redesign process of a Georgia school district and the strategies and methodology that was employed by district leaders to improve student achievement. This intrinsically designed research was guided by one central research question and three subordinate research questions.

### **Central Research Question**

What are the unique experiences of Xavier Grace district leaders as the district implemented a 21<sup>st</sup> century school redesign?

The research failed to identify the strategies and methodology that district leaders and school administrators should implement to facilitate the complexities of school redesign (Anderson, 2017; Little et al., 2015). A solidified approach for shaping the school redesign process was not clearly defined by research.

### **Sub-questions**

**SQ1.** How do professional development activities impact the preparation of district leaders and school administrators for the school redesign process?

Leaders, not managers, play a vital role in establishing high-capacity turnaround schools (Bjork et al., 2014; Dickson & Mitchell, 2014; Li, Mitchell, & Boyle, 2015; Stein, 2016; Wang, Wilhite, & Martino, 2016; Yang, 2014; Ylimaki et al., 2014). District leaders must be intentional in developing school leaders that possess transformative leadership skills. Studies performed within public American K-12 institutions reported that leaders struggled to differentiate between managerial and effective leadership roles (Stein, 2016; Ylimaki et al., 2014). However, educational researchers have found that strategic school redesign efforts (Bramante & Colby, 2012; Hess & Saxberg, 2014; March & Peters, 2013) resulted in high-

capacity school success (Ylimaki et al., 2014). These results were extensions of efforts produced by school leaders who understood how to differentiate between multiple roles and were competent in implementing strategies of a transformative leader (Anderson, 2017; Bass, 1985; Bass, Avolio, & Atwater, 1996; Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999). Therefore, seeking to understand how the district approached leadership development informed the sustainable measures implemented to professionally develop leaders.

**SQ2.** How does personalized learning shape the methods used for redesigning school district instructional models?

Studies conducted in Arizona and New Hampshire served as documented support of work facilitated to redesign school system structures to reboot schooling (Hess & Saxberg, 2014) and support student achievement in alignment with 21<sup>st</sup> century learning frameworks (Anderson, 2017; Bramante & Colby, 2012; March & Peters, 2013); however, much of the research isolated the use of personalized learning as a school redesign model to increase the rigor of learning for high school learners (Sporte & de la Torre, 2010). There was little research that suggested personalized learning as a model for driving school redesign for districts with a large number of failing schools.

**SQ3.** How does pressure from stakeholders impact the effectiveness of the school redesign process?

This question provided insight on the challenges endured by the superintendent to engage all vested members of the learning process within the school redesign process (Wang et al., 2016; Wei, 2015). School districts have a complex structure with intricate components that work interdependently to produce productive outcomes and propels forward the successes of all vested partnerships, especially those of the students (Bertalanffy, 1969; Bjork et al., 2014; Dickson &

Mitchell, 2014; Met, 2012).

### **Definitions**

*21 century learning*— 21<sup>st</sup> century learning is the ability for students to apply life, learning, innovation, and career skills such as critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity beyond the learning environment; it is also an ability for students to continue to sharpen knowledge through acquiring and sharing information while utilizing media and technology effectively (Applied Educational Systems, 2018; P21, 2018).

*Cognitive skills*— An ability to demonstrate competency in a core subject area will be referred to in the present study as cognitive skill (Phang, 2014).

*College and career readiness*— College and career readiness is defined as a standard that identifies the qualifications, skills, knowledge, and abilities of a high school graduate to successfully compete in a global market whether entering directly into college or a career post-secondary (U.S. Department of Education, 2018a, 2018b.).

*Failing school*— A school that is the bottom 10% of state performance is identified as being a low-performing school within minimal gains in student achievement (Bracey, 2009; Poiner, 2016)

*Non-cognitive skills*— An ability for students to effectively apply social and verbal skills to build relationships is demonstrative of non-cognitive skills essential for student achievement outcomes within this present study (Phang, 2014).

*Participants*— The participants in this present study are educators who have and are currently engaged in the school redesign process. This term was also interchangeable with the term case as Yin (2018) identified these as individuals whose perspectives lend to a broader understanding of the phenomenon being studied. In this study, the case refers to the district and

its role in training and holding school building leaders (nested cases) accountable throughout the school redesign process.

*Personalized learning*— Personalized learning is the ideology that all components of the learning environment (school culture, access to a range of resources, differentiation in curricular choices, and a research-based pedagogy) interconnectedly are tailored to meet the learning needs and experiences of each learner (The Office of Educational Technology, 2017).

*School redesign*— School redesign is the ability to transform the way stakeholders think about education with the intent of turning around a failing school using a 21<sup>st</sup> century framework for student outcomes and support structures (U.S. Department of Education, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c; P21, 2018).

### **Summary**

The purpose of this intrinsic case study was to understand the experiences of district leaders and what they perceived as best practices for engaging in large-scale school redesign. Ansong et al. (2015) stated that “extant studies have examined [student achievement] outcomes at the student-level but not at the district level” (p. 137). Therefore, the empirical gap in literature was understanding the strategies and methodology that district and school leaders should implement to facilitate such a complex task as school redesign for the sake of student achievement (Anderson, 2017; Anson et al., 2015; Little et al., 2015). Mindset must be considered when engaging in school redesign because of the amount of work that was reported for how the leader would successfully ensure the entire system experienced positive results from the redesign process (Bjork et al., 2014; Dickson & Mitchell, 2014; Simpson, 2013).

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Overview**

Chapter Two synthesizes empirical information on school redesign and leadership. This chapter is organized to provide a conceptual understanding of the school redesign process and the impact that leadership has on large-scale, complex change initiatives. The breadth of understanding on the topic of study is addressed in three sections. The theoretical framework section explains the theory toward the unique school redesign efforts of the district being studied. The detailed literature review provided empirically based support for what researchers and educational philosophers purported as a paradigm understanding of the topic. Lastly, the summary section provides a reconnection between the theoretical framework and literature review as collective knowledge for the research.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The nature of the phenomenon studied was shaped by an understanding of the 21<sup>st</sup> century learning theory (P21, 2018). The theoretical constructs provided an opportunity to develop meaning, understand the challenges, and assumptions of the lessons that surfaced as the district learned from its implementation of a school redesign initiative. The following sections identify what educational theorists defined as learning that fits the expectation of 21<sup>st</sup> century careers and colleges and why the theory drove the transformative efforts of the district being studied. Abend (2003) and Swanson (2013) stated that theories were a conceptual way to investigate the social and historical relationships that surround a phenomenon, such as the school redesign initiative implemented by Xavier Grace School District.

## 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning Theory

The conceptual framework of the 21<sup>st</sup> century learning was a paradigm for the skills students must master to be successful in life and in their experience in school in accordance with a digital and connected age (Learning Theories, 2014). Twenty-first century learning was coined by the educational research of several vested entities: a) United States Department of Education; b) two institutions of learning: Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills and MacArthur Foundation; c) and three theorists, Henry Jenkins, Mimi Ito, and John Seely Brown (Learning Theories, 2014). Based on extensive empirical publications, 21<sup>st</sup> century learning addressed skills and competencies that prepare learners with the readiness needed to be successful in a career or college (Bernhardt, 2015; P21, 2018). In collaboration with both business and education experts, the Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills (P21) defined 21<sup>st</sup> century learning as the “skills, knowledge, expertise, and support systems that students need to succeed in work, life, and citizenship” (p. 1). The central focus of the 21<sup>st</sup> century learning framework was to increase student engagement during the learning process and ensure learners continue to thrive beyond graduation in a digital-rich and globally connected society (Bernhardt, 2015; Brown, 2005, 2006; Cervantes, Hemmer, & Kouzekanai, 2015; O’Neal, Gibson, & Cotton, 2017; Ramey, 2016; Sipila, 2014). P21 (2018) outlines 21<sup>st</sup> century student outcomes with four topic-themes: subjects and 21<sup>st</sup> century themes, learning and innovation skills, information and media technology skills, and life and career skills. The following topics provide an overview of the direct competencies that 21<sup>st</sup> century learning aims to address for learners of today and the correlation for shaping graduates to excel in both college and a chosen career (Ornstein & Eng, 2015).

**Subjects and 21st century themes.** Twenty-first century subjects were not isolated to mastery demonstration in just literacy and mathematical knowledge, but rather, mastery was extended to the demonstration of competency among nine key subjects: English, reading/language arts, world languages, arts, mathematics, economics, science, geography, history, and government and civics (P21, 2018). As educators provide opportunities for learners to master the key subjects, the learning theory outlined seamless integration of one's health, the environment, economic, and entrepreneurial literacy competency to successfully compete in a diverse workplace or in a rigorous college institution (P21, 2018). Ramey (2016) reported that the integration of learning was structured through cross-curricular collaboration with the intended outcome of developing learners that were able to combine the multi-subject concepts across all cultural constructs—globally aware citizens.

The production of globally aware citizens was a criterion toward continued student achievement for learners as it made them more aware of the interconnectivity of the world around them in connection with the academic subjects (Brown, 2005; P21, 2018; Ramey, 2016; Tyran, 2017). Building upon the ideas presented by John Dewey (1990), 21<sup>st</sup> century learning focused on fostering and promoting the way learners think and engage both concretely and abstractly (American Association for the Advancement of Science, 1990; Bruyckere, Kirschner, & Hulshof, 2016; O'Neal et al., 2017; Ramey, 2016). Kolb (2014) and Dewey (1990) both agreed that learners must be directly involved within the new learning experiences as this was pivotal to their concrete learning experiences and the beginning of shifting from passive learners to active learners.

High-levels of curricular engagement transitions learners from being passive to active receivers of knowledge (American Association for the Advancement of Science, 1990;



Bernhardt, 2015; O’Neal et al., 2017) which was a foundational theme for 21<sup>st</sup> century learning (P21, 2018). When learners put into context, with relevancy, application of learned skills, this was evident of learners effectively taking concrete learning experiences and conceptually applying them within a structured environment beyond the initial learning environment (American Association for the Advancement of Science, 1990; Bruyckere et al., 2016; O’Neal et al., 2017; P21, 2018). Gagne’s (1985) learning constructs established an understanding that quality instructional designs—complemented with technology—was the driver of learning and innovation for 21<sup>st</sup> century skill acquisition (Culatta, 2018; Gutierrez, 2018; Kurt, 2018; O’Neal et al., 2017; Woo, 2016).

**Learning and innovation skills.** Learning skills were developed from concrete experiences actualized in the learners’ ability to be creative, think critically, communicate effectively, and work collaboratively (Applied Educational Systems, 2018; Dewey, 1990; Kolb, 2014; P21, 2018). As learners acquired these skills, the ability to be innovative was developed. Innovation skills provided the ability for a learner to abstractly explain what has been learned and to actively apply those skills to make decisions and solve problems (Applied Educational Systems, 2018; Kolb, 2014; P21, 2018). Just as redesigning an educational organization was considered complex, life and work environments were equally considered complex within a 21<sup>st</sup> century career or college environment. Realizing these complexities, skills within this topic-theme revealed a focus on shifting from concrete experiences to abstract applications to ensure high student engagement and an output toward an increase in student achievement to promote higher graduation rates and career placements (U.S. Department of Education, 2018b).

Innovative learning environments support active (Brown, 2005, 2006; Dewey, 1990), experiential (Kolb, 2014), and globally-collaborative learning (P21, 2018; Ramey, 2016; Tyran,

2017). Outcomes of the innovative environment, reportedly, allowed learners to enact and, when necessary, adapt to social and environmental changes (Applied Educational Systems, 2018; P21, 2018). Pedler and Brook (2017) defined this form of adaptive learning as action learning which was the reason a learner applied knowledge to improve one's environment or engagement in a task. Action learning (Pedler & Brook, 2017), which aligned to experiential learning (Dewey, 1990; Kolb, 2014), summarily helped learners obtain critical skills in navigating complex situations (Campbell & Kresyman, 2015). Learning environments that promoted innovative skill development were ones that strategically embedded 21st century learning competencies as to ensure graduates were able to smoothly transition into a diversified educational or business setting (P21, 2018; United States Department of Education, 2018c; Voogt, Erstad, Dede, & Mishra, 2013).

Twenty-first century learning and innovation opened opportunities for graduates to be adaptable, creative, and portray resourcefulness which was an expectation that stakeholders perceived as essential for graduates exposed to a 21<sup>st</sup> century curriculum (Campbell & Kresyman, 2015; Mendes, Gomes, Marques-Quinteiro, Lind, & Curren, 2016; Voogt et al., 2013). Educational and business leaders noted that 21<sup>st</sup> century graduates were more likely to work in a variety of settings and required strong learning skills to succeed in diverse work environments (Applied Educational Systems, 2018; Herman, 1999; OECD, 2008; P21, 2018; Selingo, 2016). Brown (2005) identified a strong connection between 21<sup>st</sup> century learning skills and one's ability to innovate in response to new opportunities and challenges. Focusing on 21<sup>st</sup> century learning skills prepared students to compete in spite of the dynamic and consistent changes occurring all over the world (Applied Educational Systems, 2018; Brown, 2005, 2006; P21, 2018).

Responding to dynamic changes was a key part of the phases of learning and the achievement of students in college and a career (Applied Educational Systems, 2018; Culatta, 2018; Gagne, 1985; P21, 2018; Woo, 2016). Brown (2005, 2006) and the National Education Association of the United States (2012) purported that students, as a result of acquiring the four essential skills of learning - critical thinking and problem solving, communication, collaboration, and creativity and innovation - learn productivity in a range of settings. Student achievement outcomes were based upon students moving from learning about content (passive/concrete) to learning to be an active member of a globally-connected community (active/abstract; Applied Educational Systems, 2018; Bernhardt, 2015; Brown, 2005, 2006; Franklin Covey, 2018; Tyran, 2017). Moments of authentic, abstract learning were presented through instructional design models such as project-based learning, service-based learning, problem-based learning, production-based learning which all support global-competence and career-technical learning experiences (Barrows, 1996; Brown, 2005, 2006; Cambourne, 2002; Cervantes et al., 2015; Hidayat, 2015; Pappas, 2014) with each presenting opportunities for students to develop innovative skills toward abstract application of learned skills. Each of the experiential learning strategies offered benefits to the learning environment and the organization as these opportunities, for school systems to build a culture for learning, extended beyond the classroom (Boss & Larmer, 2018).

The 21<sup>st</sup> century framework acknowledged that there was an ability for all learners, regardless of ability, to learn innovation and the ability to combine strategies to formulate new ideas (Lindfors & Hilmola, 2016). Given the globalization of learning and our economies, the P21 framework specifically addressed the how, why, and application of learning that supported the successful transition of a learner into the workplace as it was all about changing the

assumptions of the transferable skills that were needed beyond how students learn (Brown, 2014; Campbell & Kresyman, 2015; Haggans, 2016; Lindfors & Hilmola, 2016; Smith & Paton, 2014). Global competence was a complex skill to teach for many academic and business organizations, despite the existence of digital tools and the increased accessibility to cultural-rich information (Mendes et al., 2016).

The structure of learning and innovation, the paradigm of the P21 framework, was centered on the strategic goal of shaping graduates toward global competence and capability of communicating and collaborating with others across cultures (Applied Educational Systems, 2018; Flammia & Sadri, 2015; Mendes et al., 2016; Murphy & Brookes, 2017; P21, 2018; Redmond, 2014). The curriculum required change to incorporate perspectives that encouraged students to approach a problem or project using interdisciplinary knowledge and intercultural awareness (Cervantes et al., 2015; Flammia & Sadri, 2015; Murphy & Brookes, 2017). By ensuring instruction aligned with those constructs, graduates were able to engage civically within and beyond their local communities (Flammia & Sadri, 2015; P21, 2018). A graduate's ability to collaborate and communicate with their peers was based on their level of civic engagement within the classroom and across the globe which was an essential competency (Murphy & Brookes, 2017). Redmond (2014) stated that learners demonstrated mastery in global competence when they were prepared to interact with others that were not from their same cultural backgrounds or neighborhoods (Wei, 2015). Thus, there was relevance in the claim made about skill development in global competence as it was demonstrative of their ability to thrive as a productive, economically-contributive member of society (Cervantes et al., 2015; Flammia & Sadri, 2015; Murphy & Brookes, 2017; P21, 2018; U.S. Department of Education, 2018a, 2018b). Using the P21 (2018) paradigm followed in response to the consideration made for

global education from vested stakeholders who shaped the 21<sup>st</sup> century learning theory (Redmond, 2014; U.S. Department of Education, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c).

Skills developed in the area of global competence allowed students to offer solutions to global problems (Newton & Newton, 2014). Through strategic opportunities, theorists stated that learners were afforded opportunities to view issues through a cultural lens when educators purposely developed global awareness competence among learners (Newton & Newton, 2014). Experiential learning projects (Redmond, 2014), such as the aforementioned project-based learning, service-based learning, problem-based learning, and production-based learning (Cervantes et al., 2015; Murphy & Brooks, 2017) were embedded within the curriculum as these projects provided learners with authentic, abstract experiences which promote real-world alignment for career or college enrollment post-graduation (Ornstein & Eng, 2015).

As learners applied higher-level thinking skills, they were prepared for life beyond secondary learning as there was a development of ownership for learning (Eng, 2015; Newton & Newton, 2014). Post-secondary readiness was an expected output of the 21<sup>st</sup> century learning framework which was attributed to Dewey's philosophy of progressive education (Brown, 2005, 2006; Mason, 2017; National Education Association of the United States, 2012). Learners were more successful when they experienced learning versus being a passive recipient of learning (American Association for the Advancement of Science, 1990; Bernhardt, 2015; Kolb, 2014; O'Neal et al., 2017). Cambourne (2002) stated the brain was designed to learn. Brown (2005, 2006) extended the learning theory of both Dewey (1990) and Gagne (1985) by his argument that learning needed to be continuous, relevant, and applicable. In accordance with this argument, P21 (2018) developed a strong theoretical approach that expressed the priority for districts to support 21<sup>st</sup> century learning experiences that were relevant for a 21<sup>st</sup> century world.

**Information, media, and technology skills.** The relevance for learning experiences that aligned with a 21st century learning or working environment stemmed from a successful integration of information, media, and technology themed-topics across all curriculum areas (Ramey, 2016). Student achievement was aligned and actualized as a result of the educational leader's belief, knowledge, and ability to produce learning environments that supported the natural setting for life-long learning through progressive and experiential experiences that allowed students to acquire 21<sup>st</sup> century skills through the effective use of 21<sup>st</sup> century tools (Brown, 2005, 2006; Cambourne, 2002; Dewey, 1990; Gagne, 1985; P21, 2018; Pappas, 2014). The use of relevant 21<sup>st</sup> century tools were key to learners gleaning skills that allowed them to be well-equipped and digitally literate (Kivunja, 2015).

Success in a 21<sup>st</sup> century learning or career environment was also dependent upon the student's ability to effectively manage time, use acquired information, and evaluate the relevancy and validity of acquired information for effective use (Kolb, 2014; P21, 2018). Twenty-first century college and career experiences were deeply immersed in technology and media accessibility and easily inundated a person that was not prepared to handle the abundance of information (Brown, 2006; Gagne, 1985; Huber & Bates, 2016; P21, 2018). Therefore, the learning paradigm suggested the ability of 21<sup>st</sup> century learners acquire digital literacy skills necessary for navigating and analyzing media messages and critically thinking through the breadth of information that was encountered through daily activities (P21, 2018). Twenty-first century theorists believed that learners were capable of effectively integrating the use of technology as a support to deepening their learning experiences in researching, organizing and retrieving data/knowledge, evaluating findings, and communicating effectively across and within

cultures effectively (Culatta, 2018; Gagne, 1985; Gutierrez, 2018; Kurt, 2018; P21, 2018; Woo, 2016).

The concept of adapting instruction to integrate the use of new technology was not a new educational idea (Buchanan, 2018; Farisi, 2016; Voogt et al., 2013). Wang and Huang (2018) argued that a technology-supported virtual learning environment was not intended to replace the classroom experience. However, being able to adapt the method in which knowledge and skills were acquired was a component of digital literacy (Kivunja, 2015; Voogt et al., 2013). Mioduser, Nachmias, and Forkosh-Baruch (2008) noted that literacy was multifaceted and “not constrained solely to [traditional] knowledge and skills” (p. 2). Kivunja (2015) encouraged that new technologies be embraced instead of discouraged within the classroom. As learners engaged with relevant digital tools, skill development and content retention was increased with greater efficiency (Bray & Tangney, 2016; Farisi, 2016; Kivunja, 2015). In fact, Yen, Lo, Lee, and Enriquez (2018), along with Malczyk (2018), stated that learner equity was enhanced through an effective combination on instruction that used traditional and digital tools. With proper training, quality instruction was achieved through the use of a 21<sup>st</sup> century aligned learning environment (Yen et al., 2018).

Sustained student achievement within and beyond the classroom revolved around digital competence which was the ability of the user to use technology to find information through the use of a range of media tools and control how that information was applied through effective evaluation, interpretation, or analysis in a creatively critical approach (Voogt et al., 2013). Ultimately, graduates that efficiently navigated the Internet, media, and other digital tools to effectively obtain needed information were identified as digitally literate (Kivunja, 2015; P21, 2018). The ability for graduates to independently engage in learning and knowledge without

prior interaction from an instructor is defined as digital literacy (Kivunja, 2015; P21, 2018; U.S. Department of Education, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c). Digital-literate graduates were capable of the implementation of the information acquired to solve problems and make a decision (Applied Educational Systems, 2018; Kivunja, 2015; P21, 2018).

**Life and career skills.** The concept of life and career skills provided a clear alignment and summarization of skills that students were expected to apply after graduation (P21, 2018). By graduation, researchers acknowledged that a learner should be able to successfully cope with the complexities of life and the conflicts of a world that has become increasingly globally interdependent (Johnson & Johnson, 2014; P21, 2018). Those credited with formulating the 21<sup>st</sup> century learning framework has identified the ideal graduate as one that is capable of adapting to change, flexible and adaptive with the use of information and 21<sup>st</sup> century digital tools, self-directed, and capable of working either independently or collaboratively with a global awareness of social impacts (Brown, 2005, 2006; Jenkins, Purushotma, Wiegel, Clinton, & Robison, 2009; P21, 2018; U.S. Department of Education, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c). These skills were developed in context of the learning, being innovative, obtaining information, access with media, and the use of technology as discussed in the former sections (Jenkins, Purushotma, Wiegel, Clinton, & Robison, 2009; P21, 2018). Basically, the acquirement of these skills made a student ready to successfully enter a career or college (P21, 2018; U.S. Department of Education, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c). Career and college readiness are standards for student achievement in accordance with the 21<sup>st</sup> century paradigm (P21, 2018; U.S. Department of Education, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c). The idea was that as students demonstrated certain competences they were more likely to productively utilize acquired skills on the job or within a post-secondary setting (Cisternas,



2018; P21, 2018; Ray, Winzerling, & Staten, 2017; U.S. Department of Education, 2018b, 2018c).

Career and life skills prepared students for sustained success upon graduation (Kivunja, 2014; P21, 2018). Although it was expected that employees will become more skilled within their course of employment, there are skills or competencies that a graduate needed in order to establish a foundation upon which the learners built their employable capacity (Curry, 2017; P21, 2018; Ray et al., 2017; U.S. Department of Education, 2018b, 2018c). Graduates that were competitively marketable within a globally-connected economy were able to move beyond rote memory recall, critically problem-solve, and collaborate with members that are located both within and beyond their immediate workstation: a life and career readiness indicator (Brown, 2005, 2006; Kolb, 2014; O'Neal et al., 2017; Ornstein & Eng, 2015; P21, 2018; U.S. Department of Education, 2018b, 2018c). Lastly, skills mastery was dependent upon the graduates' ability to possess and demonstrate leadership and management skills as discussed earlier (Cisternas, 2018; Curry, 2017; Ray et al., 2017; U.S. Department of Education, 2018b, 2018c).

The learning paradigm was essential for shaping graduates to succeed within the 21<sup>st</sup> century age of information (Kivunja, 2014; P21, 2018; U.S. Department of Education, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c). The differences in shaping learners for the 21<sup>st</sup> century versus the preparatory measures that were used for shaping industrially-prepared 20<sup>th</sup> century graduates were that today's learners were in the mindset of being flexible-versatile learners versus learners learned a specific industry skill (Beauregard, 2011; Kivunja, 2014). Kivunja (2014) stated that, "in times of change, learners inherit the earth, while the learned find themselves beautifully equipped to deal with a world that no longer exists" (p. 3). With the speed at which learners were able to access information, and given the digitalization of the economy, it was of significance that

learners embody skills for being: (a) flexible and adaptive, (b) initiative and self-directive, (c) social and cross-cultural, (d) productive and accountable, and (e) accepting responsibility and moments to lead (Applied Educational Systems, 2018; Kivunja, 2014; P21, 2018; U.S. Department of Education, 2018a, 2018b).

### **Related Literature**

High-capacity schools were developed and sustained through the ability of a leader to develop the capacity of others in alignment to a shared vision or outcome (Anderson, 2017; Bass, 1985; Bass et al., 1996; Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999). School redesign was meant to be a district-led change initiative that relied upon strong leadership abilities to ensure intended outcomes were actualized and sustained (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006; Little et al., 2015; Marzano, Timothy, & McNulty, 2005; Press Office, 2013). Changing the organizational blueprint was a process that required the collaborative support of district leaders and stakeholders (Anderson, 2017; Camacho & Legare, 2016; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006; Little et al., 2015; Manganaro, 2013; Moen, Kojola, & Schaefer, 2016; Press Office, 2013). This literature review provided empirical understanding of school redesign, the depth of district leadership in facilitating school redesign, and how each collectively impacts school culture and student achievement.

### **School Redesign Initiative: Implementation Outcome Expectation**

The application of 21<sup>st</sup> century goals and expectations required 20<sup>th</sup> century curricular structures to be adjusted for the purposes and outcomes of preparing 21<sup>st</sup> century graduates for the 21<sup>st</sup> century workplace (Kivunja, 2014, 2015; P21, 2018; U.S. Department of Education, 2018c; Spote & de la Torre, 2010). Large-scale transformative initiatives, such as the school redesign initiative, were implemented in response to changes in policy, to address student achievement, and enhance organizational outcomes (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006; Little et al.,

2015; Manganaro, 2013; Yang, 2014). President Obama proposed the ESSA school redesign initiative to stimulate a response from school district leaders and partnering stakeholders to transform the learning experience so that more of America's youth would actualize a productive role in society (Press Office, 2013; U.S. Department of Education, 2018a, 2018b). Economic benefits were actualized at all levels as the ESSA proposal suggested that more students progressed into a career or college upon successful completion of a post-secondary learning experience that was applicably aligned (Applied Educational Systems, 2018; P21, 2018; Press Office, 2013). School districts that engaged in the school redesign process were more aware of the realistic learning needs of their students to be 21<sup>st</sup> century college and career ready (Bernhardt, 2015; P21, 2018; Press Office, 2013). The address of school redesign was a process that involved a broad understanding of the many components that were required to be in place for the transformation to make the outcome expected a reality (Nattoo, 2018).

Existing research documented that the school redesign process was difficult work and that the change process in schools was complex and multi-layered (Li, 2017; Nattoo, 2018; Slegers, Thoonen, Oort, & Peetsma, 2014). Poiner (2016) stated that implementation of the ESSA required a greater responsibility for districts to intervene in persistently low-performing schools. Leithwood and Azah (2016) agreed that districts were in a position where their leadership roles were able to increase the capacities of all, not some, schools. School districts that have demonstrated leading performances in high-capacity schools were those that played a direct role in leading turnaround expectations within low-performing schools (Cosner & Jones, 2016; Grissom, Kalogrides, & Loeb, 2017; Leithwood & McCullough, 2016; Meyes & Sadler, 2018; Stringer, 2013).

Responsible actions required that systems be purposeful about multi-layered approaches to differentiation and account for the needed to be addressed throughout the school redesign process (Poiner, 2016). A characteristic of addressing the intensities of school redesign (Meyers & Sadler, 2018) was the application of reciprocal interaction between the district, school personnel, and external stakeholders (Leithwood & Azah, 2016). Understanding that leaders were the lever for change put pressure upon those leaders to be held at a higher level of accountability for shifting organizational behaviors so that there was alignment within the school district (Leithwood & McCulloch, 2016; Meyers & Sadler, 2018). Indicators of accountability were aligned to and measured by the equity of learning for all learners (Ansong et al., 2015; Leithwood & Azah, 2016; Wei, 2015), student achievement across and within curriculum (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006; Poiner, 2016), and a graduate's ability to successfully progress into a career or college (Bernhardt, 2015; P21, 2018; Press Office, 2013). The following sub sections cover four of the high-priority concepts that supported a successful school redesign implementation: curriculum and technology, funding, staff, and stakeholders.

**Curriculum and technology.** An important indicator for aligning student achievement to real-world learning experiences was the design of the instructional blueprint (Manganaro, 2013). The instructional blueprint involved real-world learning experience integration throughout the use of the learning strategies that were based in projects that were authentic and relevant for the student (Cervantes et al., 2015; Flammia & Sadri, 2015; Murphy & Brookes, 2017). The concept of learning that was active, experiential, and provides moments of abstract-conceptual cross curricular synthesis (Gary, 2015) was derived from as far back as Dewey (1990) to the present-day theories of Brown (2005, 2006) and Kolb (2014). In considering a curriculum that sustained learning in a way that students obtain 21st century learning skills in an authentic environment,

researchers referenced the attributes of project-based learning, problem-based learning, and service-based learning as strategies for enhancing cognitive and non-cognitive skills within graduates (Knight, 2016; P21, 2018; Phang, 2014; Schalges, Pajunen, & Brotherton, 2018; Wiek, Xiong, Brundiers, & van der Leeuw, 2014). Educators set the tone for and provided opportunities for sustainable learning (Coklar & Yurdakul, 2017). Project learning took theoretical concepts and put them into action for students in a way that allowed them to work on problem-solving, critical thinking, induction of contextual information, and cross-cultural awareness (Flammia & Sadri, 2015; Murphy & Brookes, 2017; P21, 2018; Redmond, 2014; Schalges et al., 2018). Schalges et al. (2018) reported on the relevance and value in students acquiring these skills. The author stated that “respect for and appreciation of diversity; enhanced leadership and citizenship skills; deeper understanding of social issues; improved academic understanding; and personal and professional development [for career placement]” (Schalges et al., 2018, p. 7). Using a blend of instructional strategies increased the flexibility of learning and equalized the learning experiences for students (Malczyk, 2018). Blau and Shamir-Inbal (2018) stated that blended instruction empowered all students to actively engage, thus, removing the stigma of inequitable learning between advantaged and disadvantaged students.

Integrating digital tools was a component of curricular redesign that encouraged effective use of technology to enhance 21<sup>st</sup> century learning (Vermeulen, Acker, Kreigns, & van Buuren, 2015). The effectiveness of the integration required that districts consider how it supported a strong curricular design that effectively integrated an appropriate use of digital learning with other needed changes in curriculum (Bray & Tangney, 2016; Farisi, 2016; Izmirlı & Kirmaci, 2017; The Office of Educational Technology, 2017). Intertwining digital learning into curriculum was an innovative performance among curriculum writers and implementers

(Vermeulen et al., 2015). Furthermore, it required that implementers (e.g., teachers, administrators, and district coordinators) receive professional development (Akaline & Sucuoglu, 2015), have access to equitable digital resources (Manganaro, 2013), and know how to seamlessly integrate digital learning daily (Kreijns, Van Acker, Vermeulen, & van Buuren, 2013; Van Acker, van Buuren, Kreijns, & Vermeulen, 2013; Vermeulen, Kreijns, van Buuren, & Acker, 2017; Vermeulen et al., 2015). Effective implementation was based on the current status of an organization's learning climate relative to adults' capacity to learn and the time needed to improve the learning climate (Darling-Hammond, 2014; Slegers et al., 2014; Vermeulen et al., 2017). Vermeulen et al. (2017) referred to the adult capacity to learn as self-efficacy or the belief that one was capable of execution of acquired knowledge. The learning climate of an organization was best addressed through strategic professional development on technology integration with curriculum (Burke, 2014; Kreijns et al., 2013; Manganaro, 2013; Slegers et al., 2014; Van Acker et al., 2013; Vermeulen et al., 2015; Vermeulen et al., 2017). Jones and Dexter (2018), seeking to understand the perspective of enhancing the learning climate from the teachers' perspective, found that teachers did not feel adequately supported in acquiring formal professional development, however, the learning climate was changed due to informal professional development offered by district leaders outside of the structured work day. In fact, literature on leadership within school districts, highlight that digital learning integration was an intentional effort (Kreijns et al., 2013; Van Acker et al., 2013; Vermeulen et al., 2015; Vermeulen et al., 2017).

Digital integration supported the ability of an educator to shift gears when personalizing the learning for students with differentiated learning needs and interests (Camacho & Legare, 2016; P21, 2018). Personalized learning, ideally, required interconnected tailoring of all

components of the learning environment (e.g., school culture, access to a range of resources, differentiation in curricular choices, and a research-based pedagogy) with the intent of meeting the learning needs and experiences of each learner (The Office of Educational Technology, 2017). With the effective support of digital tools, the differentiated pace and location of the learning was optimized for the individualized needs of each learner (Bramante & Colby, 2012; Camacho & Legare, 2016; K12 Education Team, 2015a, 2015b; P21, 2018). The concept of using technology to assign human or digital resources to the unique needs of learners was the basis of adaptive learning for the 21<sup>st</sup> century (The Office of Educational Technology, 2017). Teachers were expected to model adaptability in how they adapted to using developing technologies (Coklar & Yurdakul, 2017). However, Izmirli and Kirmaci (2017) acknowledged that barriers existed within this philosophical construct.

School redesign, guided by the policies of ESSA, challenged schools to effectively implement the eight standards of a rigorous learning institution as outlined by the U.S. Department of Education (Press Office, 2013). The standards of high-capacity, rigorous learning institutions are those that were able to redesign the academic content so that students were competitively capable of entering into a college or career of choice (Applied Educational Systems, 2018; P21, 2018; Press Office, 2013). Schools that implemented curricular change had to consider strategies for personalizing learning opportunities (Applied Educational Systems, 2018; P21, 2018; Press Office, 2013). According to the developers of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Framework for Learning (P21, 2018), districts leading the charge of personalized learning had to be fully aware of the what it meant and what it looked like to facilitate a curriculum that was personalized to the intellectual and social needs of its learners and instructors (Camacho & Legare, 2016). At the very least, ESSA held districts accountable for ensuring curricular

programs provide comprehensive supports despite the abilities of the learner (Applied Educational Systems, 2018; P21, 2018; Press Office, 2013). Furthermore, curriculum was to provide pathways for students to explore a range of interests that are available for post-secondary pursuit (Applied Educational Systems, 2018; P21, 2018; Press Office, 2013). Lastly, school districts had to consider how to maximize learning time whether it take place within the classroom or beyond the classroom (Applied Educational Systems, 2018; Bramante & Colby, 2012; P21, 2018; Press Office, 2013).

**Funding.** Facilitating school redesign required adequate and equitable funding to address the multi-layered components of the change process (Noguera, Darling-Hammond, & Friedlaender, 2015). The ESSA instituted funding for redesigning schools from the federal, state, and local levels (Press Office, 2013; The Governor’s Office of Student Achievement, 2018). Jerald et al. (2017) stated that state funding was essential for accelerating and assuring school redesign success as there were many financial-heavy requirements for implementing the changes that moved the process forward. Bill and Melinda Gates, at the local levels, awarded districts up to \$1.5 million to facilitate school redesign (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2018). Funding addressed the high-need areas such as providing professional development to educators, purchasing updated technology, hiring consultants and qualified staff, as well as building additional schools to accommodate innovative practices for instruction and learning (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2018; Jerald et al., 2017; The Governor’s Office of Student Achievement, 2018).

Reports on the funding for education agreed that disparities existed when it came to policies that required funding for programs (Arclean & Schiopu, 2016; Bramante & Colby, 2012; Noguera et al., 2015). Noguera et al. (2015) documented that policies were in place which



granted a greater amount of funds to districts with a higher-socioeconomic status versus those with a lower-socioeconomic status. Bramante and Colby (2012) acknowledged that legislature policies were implemented to channel additional funding to districts with learners that were in need of additional academic supports. While this was the case, Arcalean and Schioppa (2016) noted that the inequality drives “education spending in opposite directions in poor and rich economies” (p. 813). The concern with the inequality for funding was the low quality of public schools that existed (Arcalean & Schioppa, 2016) and the lack of equality of reform across all schools as the ESSA intended (Ansong et al., 2015; U.S. Department of Education, 2018c; Wei, 2015; Wei et al., 2018).

The 21<sup>st</sup> century framework for paradigm reform resulted in a change of trajectory when it came to the curriculum, the design of the school building, and staff expectations (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2018; Bramante & Colby, 2012; Haggans, 2016; Jerald et al., 2017; Palaima & Skarzauskiene, 2010; The Governor’s Office of Student Achievement, 2018). Haggans (2016) stated that equitable funding will be needed to cover the required adaptations for school redesign. While the design of the building and providing students with equitable resources were important, the school redesign process was not adequately sustained without leaders who were cognizant of instruction and learning as well as school management (Bramante & Colby, 2012; Haggans, 2016; Manganaro, 2013; Noguera et al., 2015).

**Staffing.** Hiring qualified staff was essential for the sustained success of school redesign (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2018; Jerald et al., 2017; Palaima & Skarzauskiene, 2010; The Governor’s Office of Student Achievement, 2018) as educational leaders were noted as being the leverage for change (Meyers & Sadler, 2018). Therefore, school districts were careful and strategic about the personnel that were hired and charged to lead and support the change

initiatives (Bramante & Colby, 2012). Effective leadership was relationally-rooted (Cherry, 2016). Salehazadeh (2017) reported that districts should, intentionally, hire leaders that people wanted to follow. For the benefit of enhancing the organizational culture, districts supported school leaders in hiring staff that they felt were best fits for their schools (Hughes, Matt, & O'Reilly, 2015; Jabbar, 2018). Districts also demonstrated support by training and encouraging school administrators to empower classroom-level instructors to share in the school improvement process, including taking leadership roles during decision-making opportunities (Smylie & Eckert, 2018). As districts engaged in large-scale organizational shifts, there was a continual focus on hiring staff that was capable of building the capacity of others with the intent of achieving organizational goals (Blau & Shamir-Inbal, 2018; Smylie & Eckert, 2018; Udoewa, 2018).

Educational leaders, working at either the district or school level, had the capacity to lead others while also being able to solve current and complex problems that occurred through the school redesign process (P21, 2018; Taylor & Storey, 2013). Twenty-first century educators were able to keep up with the ongoing changes for today's learning environments (OECD, 2008). Changes that were likely to occur within the construct of learning were a result of the issues that impacted the local communities of the school district (Boss & Larmer, 2018). The philosophical thought was that when the correct staff were hired a knowledge-oriented society was nurtured and supported the paradigm of developing lifelong learners (OECD, 2008; P21, 2018; U.S. Department of Education, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c). The justification was that these staff members were skilled in providing a learning environment that was flexible, engaging, and where on-going coaching existed from the educator to the student (Boss & Larmer, 2018). Udeowa (2018) stated that in addition to the coaching relationship, teachers and students should be co-designers

and there should also be an inclusion of the community in every stage of the design process. Giving a voice to stakeholders ensured that the organization's mission, vision, and core values aligned to the climate of the culture to be developed during the school redesign process (Smylie & Eckert, 2018). Culture development was based on the staff's social relationships between staff with community and with students (Smylie & Eckert, 2018).

Intentional staffing strategies were implemented to increase the organizational capacity during the school redesign initiatives (Pohland & Bova, 2010). Stakeholders strategically worked together to promote an improved educational experience for students within and beyond the classroom (Udeowa, 2018). Researchers reported that districts encouraged staff and stakeholders to embrace the changes that were expected to ensure experiential learning and knowledge remained the central focus within the local schools (Pohland & Bova, 2010; Vermeulen et al., 2015). As districts put experiential learning in the forefront of the transformative process, staff and stakeholders provided support through their participation of supporting social and emotional competence training with graduates (Wang et al., 2016). Wang et al. (2016) credited James McGregor Burns (1978) for his research on leadership and the roles that transformational leaders played in "raising followers' consciousness beyond personal interests to be more in line with organizational goals and vision" (p. 469). Raising consciousness was the result of the social and emotional competence development (Wang et al., 2016).

Staffing and staff development was the basis of the power of andragogy to develop leaders for 21<sup>st</sup> century school redesign (Pohland & Bova, 2010). Therefore, district leaders had to be purposeful in developing the school leader's ability to build relationships with their staff; likewise, the leaders were expected to train their staff to develop and maintain relationships with all stakeholders (Pohland & Bova, 2010; Smylie & Eckert, 2018; Udoewa, 2018).

**Internal and external stakeholders.** External stakeholder involvement increased as the curriculum moved from the four walls of the learning institution into the interconnected, global communities (Magalhaes, Veiga, & Amaral, 2016; Steghofer et al., 2018). External stakeholders increased involvement, according to Magalhaes et al. (2016), and shifted the academic structure of the learning environment. During the large-scale redesign initiative, stakeholder engagement put additional pressure on district-wide student achievement along with meeting the needs of all vested individuals (Anderson, 2017; Easton, 2016; Hoch, Bommer, Dulebohn, & Wu, 2018; Palaima & Skarzauskiene, 2010; Thornton & Cherrington, 2014). Policies and legislations (Press Office, 2013), parents and parent-run organizations (Robertson-Kraft & Bronstein, 2016), and the extenuating needs of businesses surrounding local schools also put additional pressures on districts to perform at a high-capacity (P21, 2018; Press Office, 2018; Robertson-Kraft & Bronstein, 2016). As a result of the culminating pressure, district personnel found it difficult to positively navigate through the pressures placed upon it by external stakeholders; seemingly, it was viewed as negative that the district personnel struggled to positively respond to the pressures (Leithwood, 2013). However, what it seemed to be, Onorato (2013) stated that external interests and pressures were an opportunity to open dialogue between the schools and community members and to elicit their financial, intellectual, and hands-on support throughout and beyond the school redesign process (Anderson, 2017; Hoch et al., 2018; Leithwood, 2013). Reddy (2018) stated the pressures to meet stakeholder expectations eventually balanced out positively as a result of including families in the redesign process. Transparent discussions with external stakeholders extended the scope of support and effectiveness in reaching intended outcomes (Nancarrow, Roots, Grace, Moran, & Vanniekerk-Lyons, 2013).

The voice of teachers and students were just as important as external stakeholders in the school redesign process (P21, 2018). As the school district engaged in the large-scale change initiative, Udoewa (2018) stated that redesign efforts were effective because they were centered on the “beneficiaries or the community” (p. 82). While it was common that district leaders focused on dealing with big-picture tasks, systems thinking leaders (Met, 2012; Palaima & Skarzauskiene, 2010) considered all functional parts that impacted the development of an organization (Smylie & Eckert, 2018). In education, the most critical function of development is students’ achievement; thus, the organization put the student’s needs at the center of its mission for development (Blau & Shamir-Inbal, 2018). Anderson (2017) stated that organizational leaders are systemic thinkers and thus they were noted for their consideration of the needs of all stakeholders during the process of school-wide transformation. Easton (2016) reported that internal stakeholders were critical for roles in developing small communities of professional and instructional supports. Professional learning communities included the voice of teachers, students, and staff as they were instrumental to the effectiveness of school-reformation which transformed the culture along with other factors essential to transformational shifts (Thornton & Cherrington, 2014).

### **District Leaders: Call to Accountability**

District leaders were expected to establish change within the educational environments of schools and school systems, address performance and achievement of students, and responsively support the need for exceptional school leadership to facilitate needed school change (Anderson, 2017). District leaders, as a result of engaging in school reform, were accountable for educational results and were responsible for addressing student achievement (Kelley & Shaw, 2014; Onorato, 2013; Press Office, 2013; Snow & Williamson, 2015). Just as the 21st century

paradigm was aligned to performance indicators for career and college ready graduates (P21, 2018), accountability also aligned with a performance-based policy (Onorato, 2013; Sun, Chen, & Zhang, 2017). District leaders were expected to address the varying complexities of a globally-connected, technologically advanced society in addition to watching the bottom-line of progressing and turning around schools into high-capacity learning institutions (Press Office, 2013; Quin, Deris, Bischoff, & Johnson, 2015). Successfully improving schools on a large scale was closely aligned with the quality of leadership skills demonstrated by the district and at the school level (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006). In meeting the needs of internal stakeholders, districts assessed their roles in supporting external partners in the transformative process (Darling-Hammond, 2014; Slegers et al., 2014).

Hough (2014) defined accountability as measures in which districts monitor their attainment of student achievement goals and transparently report those goals and achievement measures with stakeholders. Districts that utilized high-capacity indicators and held all stakeholder groups accountable for their roles in turning around student achievement were districts that were concerned with equity for all learners regardless of their needs (Elbaum, 2014; Hough, 2014; Snow & Williamson, 2015). The assurance of learner equity (i.e., ensuring all students have similar access to mastering core contents) was the responsibility of superintendents; district leaders were held accountable for effective school redesign expectations that addressed learner equity (Hough, 2014; Snow & Williamson, 2015).

As districts implemented measures to prepare their graduates for entering into the real world, equitable accountability encouraged leaders to consider the college and career readiness of students with disabilities (Elbaum, 2014). While the goal of school redesign did not seek to isolate students with disabilities, Elbaum (2014) noted that districts were required to plan for and

report measures it utilized to ensure their equitable approaches strategically included achievement protocols for learners with differentiated needs. Snow and Williamson (2015) stated that “school reform prescriptions, most notably school-based budgeting” (p. 223) was a way for districts to be held accountable for ensuring equity in resources that were available for all learners regardless of ability. Holding district leaders accountable in all areas of student achievement was an element of improving school leadership (Halverson, Kelly, & Shaw, 2014).

**Leadership in context of school redesign.** The process of transforming the way instructional leaders and educators think about the educational institution was the definitional perspective of school redesign (P21, 2018; U.S. Department of Education, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c). Educational reforms, such as school redesign initiatives, were successfully sustained when transformative leaders were at the helm of reformative initiatives as it was a large, complex task (Anderson, 2017; Leithwood & Jantizi, 2006; Onorato, 2013). The leverage of leaders was the ultimate component of the school redesign process. In context of school redesign, leaders who were transformative worked directly alongside staff to identify needed changes, collaboratively created a vision, and stood by staff to see the vision develop into a successful outcome (Anderson, 2017; Bjork et al., 2014; Dickson & Mitchell, 2014; Franklin Covey, 2018; Li et al., 2015; Spote & de la Torre, 2010; Stein, 2016; Wang et al., 2016; Yang, 2014; Ylimaki et al., 2014).

For all activities that occurred throughout the redesign process, the district and school-level leaders were held responsible (Marzano et al., 2005; Onorato, 2013). Reflecting upon the range of complexities previously addressed, much rode upon the shoulders of district leaders. Ultimately, in the context of school redesign, several researchers found that leaders were capable of facilitating innovation, incorporating the ideas of both internal and external stakeholders, and

enhancing the culture of the school and system structure (Anderson, Potocnik, & Zhou, 2014; Gigliotti, 2017; Nijstad, Berger-Selman, & De Dreu, 2014). Districts were accountable for establishing and sustaining the vision of the team and ensuring that members of the organization were driven toward the redesign agenda (Li et al., 2015). Mathew and Rakesh (2016) reported findings that held leaders accountable for stimulating the intellectual capacity of staff and students, inspiring motivation, and influencing transformation among stakeholders toward a collective vision. Accountable leaders understood the stages of development and were able to nourish the capacity of other leaders through the growth and development stages of turning schools into high-capacity learning institutes (Yang, 2014).

**Leadership style and its impact on transformative initiatives.** Extensive empirical research was conducted on the impact of leadership in transforming the culture, curriculum, and mindset of staff and stakeholders during large-scale redesign initiatives (Anderson, 2017; Hoch et al., 2018; Karadag, Bektas, Cogaltay, & Yalcin, 2015; Stein, 2016). Leadership theorists conducted several empirical and meta-analyses with a conclusive understanding that transformative change initiatives were best facilitated by leaders who possessed one of the three following identified leadership styles: transformational, transactional, and distributive leadership (Bass, 1985; Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999; Bass et al., 1996; Burns, 1978). Since the mid-1980s, transformational, transactional, and distributive leadership remained the three most-identified leadership styles credited for large-scale school reform initiatives (Anderson, 2017; Cherry, 2018; Day, Gu, & Sammons, 2016; Gunter, Hall, & Bragg, 2013; Hoch et al., 2018; Karadag et al., 2015; Shatzer, Caldarella, Hallam, & Brown, 2014; Stein, 2016; Tian, Risku, & Collin, 2016). Of the three, transformational school leadership was noted for being the most impactful



form of leadership in shifting schools that implemented an appreciation of diversity in both a national and cultural context (Sun et al., 2017).

Research showed that leaders that built positive relationships had significant outcomes toward successful outcomes for large-scale initiatives (Hoch et al., 2018; Onorato, 2013; Palaima & Skarzauskiene, 2010; Tait, 2015; Zimmerman, 2015). Outcomes, revealed through the extensive research, demonstrated that people who followed a leader that portrayed either transformational, transactional, or distributive leadership traits were committed, trusted the process, were satisfied with their work environment, and were more likely to perform at a high-capacity compared to employees working with leaders whom displayed autocratic or democratic styles of leadership (Cherry, 2016, 2018; Gunter et al., 2013; Tian et al., 2016).

The findings of Burns (1978), Hoch et al. (2018), and Onorato (2013) were in agreement with educational researchers who defined the qualities of a specific leadership style that they noted as being effective for progressive change: transformative leadership. Qualities that have been identified are idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Hoch et al., 2018; Onorato, 2013). Empirically, leaders were key to followers achieving performance beyond everyday limits (Aas & Brandmo, 2016; Anderson, 2017; Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978; Changing Minds, n.d.; Hoch et al., 2018). Extending the performance of followers and achieving transformative outcomes was a highly regarded expectation for leaders leading change initiatives on such a large scale.

Large-scale transformation within organizations required leaders that were “adaptive, administrative, and enabling” (Mendes et al., 2016, p. 302). Empirical evidence suggested a positive relationship between increased innovation and learning as a result of school redesign efforts that were led by leaders who engaged and empowered behaviors of 21<sup>st</sup> century

competencies as this was the essence of establishing an organizational culture for transformative initiatives (Campbell & Kresyman, 2015; Carbone & Ware, 2017; Haggans, 2016; Mendes et al., 2016). Responding to the shifts required to facilitate a fully-aligned 21<sup>st</sup> century school redesign district leaders, as well as building-level leaders, were expected to utilize situation specific leadership protocols to ensure they were effective in shifting organizational norms and its culture to promote outcomes for the innovations intended to align with the 21<sup>st</sup> century learning framework (Arar & Oneren, 2016; Burke, 2014; Naqshbandi & Tabche, 2018; Waters, 2013; West & Bogers, 2017).

### **Organizational Culture and Innovation**

School redesign was dependent upon the fostering of an innovative culture that was empowered by the impact of leaders who were skilled in building relationships and determining transformative outcomes for implementations toward student achievement (Hargrave, 2011; Jerald et al., 2017; Naqshbandi & Tabche, 2018; Nattoo, 2018; Polding, 2016; Robertson-Kraft & Bronstein, 2016; Sporte & de la Torre, 2010; West & Bogers, 2017; Whitehurst, 2016; Yu, 2017). In the past seven years, studies coined the term organizational capacity to indicate what district leaders did to achieve intended outcomes (Balduck, Lucidarme, Marlier, & Willem, 2015; Hargreaves, 2011; Hutchinson & Hyden, 2016). Balduck et al. (2015) defined capacity as “the ability of the organization to acquire the resources necessary to fulfill its mission” (p. 2027). In the context of school redesign, organizational culture established an environment where staff reported feeling as though they were a part of friendly, family culture (Polding, 2016). Polding (2016) stated that most districts were able to establish a culture where staff bonded through shared values because districts were strategic in hiring leaders who were capable of building the capacity of staff toward result-orientation. Polding (2016), Yu (2017), and Whitehurst (2016)

each reported data that effective outcomes of organizational culture was established through the development of creativity, innovation, and how people within the organization interacted with one another. Whitehurst (2016) stated that culture resulted as behavior that was modeled by leaders and learned by followers.

Learning to implement innovate practices was developed as leaders engaged in applying innovative practices (Whitehurst, 2016). An innovative culture was enhanced by leaders that encouraged innovation as it shaped ingenuity, inventiveness, and originality within the organization (Whitehurst, 2016; Yu, 2017). Innovative organizational culture leaned toward an organization that was strong with innovation and capable of actualizing the intended outcomes of a school redesign initiative (Jerald et al., 2017; Nattoo, 2018; Robertson-Kraft & Bronstein, 2016; Spote & de la Torre, 2010). Leithwood, Harris, and Strauss (2010) accredited school redesign success to leaders that were able to create a shared sense of direction for the organization. Staff motivation and capacity was strengthened when they felt as though they were a part of establishing what organizational change looked like within their schools/district (Leithwood et al., 2010).

Organizational capacity was further enhanced through the implementation of an educational community also referred to as a professional learning community (Pohland & Bova, 2010). Taylor and Storey (2013) suggested that the concept of critical friends, as a concept of building an educational community, was an effect reform strategy. Innovation and a strong organizational culture were sustained when leaders facilitated activities that supported building relationships and offered opportunities for stakeholders to share fresh ideas, knowledge, and critical thought to processes implemented throughout the redesign process (Salehzadeh, 2017; Taylor & Storey, 2013). Skill sets needed to facilitate and embrace the concept of critical friends

was attributed, by Yang (2014), to transformative leadership. Yang (2014) reported that organizational capacity was demonstrative of leaders who were capable of building shared vision, power sharing, gaining credence, and forming ideas in collaboration with vested stakeholders. Building organizational capacity was complex and there were many challenges to overcome to ensure there was equity of learning and supports for changing leadership to handle the reformative expectations (Burke, 2014).

Empirical studies on organizational culture for learning and innovation had a heavy focus on enhancing organization culture of innovation through an implementation process referred to as open innovation (Arar & Oneren, 2016; Naqshbandi & Tabche, 2018; West & Bogers, 2017). Open innovation management (West & Bogers, 2017) stemmed from the discussion on contingency and complexity leadership theory (Naqshbandi & Tabche, 2018; Waters, 2013) and the variations between a closed structure of innovation versus one that embraced the core of a globalized organization (Arar & Oneren, 2016). Expanding innovative efforts within a large organization required that leaders allow synergism and collaboration beyond the boundaries of the organization (Arar & Oneren, 2016; West & Bogers, 2017). Leaders bore a responsibility in strategically fostering an environment where tasks and relationships enabled a culture that served as a conduit for knowledge-based activities (Naqshbandi & Tabche, 2018). Application of this approach was an essential component for large-school districts that were seeking to transform their organizational culture from traditional innovation paradigms (Arar & Oneren, 2016; Naqshbandi & Tabche, 2018; Waters, 2013; West & Bogers, 2017).

### **Summary**

Reviewing literature provided a deeper understanding of the constructs that propelled and defined a 21<sup>st</sup> century school redesign initiative. The empirical research that currently existed

informed future researchers that school redesign was a complex process that required district leaders to consider multiple construct of development beyond the immediate needs of the district engaging the ESSA aligned school redesign initiative. Value for the standards of 21<sup>st</sup> century learning, and facilitation of large-scale reformation, were revealed through a synthesis of the research data reported from educational researchers on large-scale transformational reform initiatives.

The theory that drove the paradigm of this study attributed to what school districts believed were effective approaches to shaping a graduate that is 21<sup>st</sup> century ready. Given that the general outcome for school redesign was student achievement coupled with a graduate's ability to be career or college ready, the literature was vital to the development of a conceptual connection of school redesign. Understanding what it took to shape a 21<sup>st</sup> century graduate connected the depth of work that a district must engage in to bring all stakeholders on board with successful whole-system transformation. The research provided insight into the importance for hiring the staff that served as a best fit at both the district and school levels. As a result, an understanding of the essence of funding and allocation of resources denoted that the process was not a lightly entered task and required the extensive support of not only internal stakeholders but also of external stakeholders such as local businesses and parents.

Leadership styles and their impact on transformational initiatives were greatly underdeveloped in literature. The connection between leadership styles and large-scale school redesign was not readily apparent in current studies despite the influence leadership played in establishing the vision for an organization. Because the connection was possibly underdeveloped, there was an implication for further research to demonstrate a plausible connection between large school redesign and large-scale school redesign as it pertained to 21<sup>st</sup>

century school redesign initiatives. While the connection was not apparent at this time study explored school redesign initiative from the perspective of the leaders that were responsible for the transformation process.

Discovery of organizational culture development was understood throughout the research. Organizational culture tied in with the learning and innovation skill theme of the 21<sup>st</sup> century learning paradigm. Thinking on a large scale was an outcome for the system thinking skill development for graduates that displayed readiness for entrance into a career or college setting. Bertalanffy (1969), theorist of system thinking, suggested that system thinking was mostly the ability of one to make informed decisions that were impactful on a large scale or beyond one's immediate benefit. Because current societies were closely knit with the advancements with technology and global nature of today's economies, district leaders and matriculating graduates were able to think through complex issues and solve globally-connected problems on a large-scale.

Thinking beyond one's initial interest was a strategic goal of building 21st century global and cultural awareness within graduates that engage in the 21st century learning constructs. An organization thrived when the culture nurtured an orientation and basis for acquiring knowledge within and beyond the school district structure. Thus, the literature promoted that capacity building was nurtured through the relationships that a district built with both internal and external stakeholders so that the organization thrived being innovative and upholding a climate for acquiring knowledge that went beyond the concrete application. Building capacity within schools was, per the literature, also connected with the staffing strategies implemented by the superintendent and district leaders. Hiring candidates that were able to empower others to be

innovative and to buy-into the vision of the district was a strong indicator for the effectiveness of the school redesign initiative.

## **CHAPTER THREE: METHODS**

### **Overview**

The purpose of this intrinsic case study was to understand the experiences of district leaders and what they perceived as best practices for engaging in large-scale school redesign. The problem that this study sought to understand was the experiences of a Georgia school district and the strategies and methodology employed by the district leaders to improve student achievement through the implementation of a large-scale school redesign initiative. The use of an intrinsic case study allowed for a clearer understanding of the unique approach used specifically by the Xavier Grace School District as it sought to turn around its 52 schools. Chapter Three details the case study protocol that guided the research procedure of examining Xavier Grace School District. The chapter also details the design that shaped the case study, the questions that were used in collecting evidence, how data were collected, analyzed, and protected, and a methodological approach for overall procedures that was performed.

### **Design**

This was a qualitative study using a case study approach. As this study involved an exploration of the district's approach to school research, a qualitative intrinsic case study design was a fitting method for the conducting the research. An intrinsic case study design was used as this research was guided by my personal experiences and specific interest in the case of study (Stake, 2014). There was no interest to extend theory or generalize across multiple cases (Stake, 2014). An instrumental case study, while closely related to an intrinsic case study, was not an applicable research design because the case was not secondary to understanding the phenomenon, the school redesign process (Stake, 2014). Although both an intrinsic and instrumental case study design provide intent of learning, the intrinsic case study design was



appropriate due to the purpose of the study (Stake, 2014). The purpose of this intrinsic case study was to understand the experiences of district leaders and what they perceived as best practices for engaging in large-scale school redesign as it was not apparent, before the research began, what established methods existed or structured the school redesign process at the district level (Stake, 2014).

Case studies have been used to promote an understanding of real-world cases with a distinct assumption that the understanding would reveal new contexts to the phenomenon of interest (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018). The case study focused on the experiences of district leaders as Xavier Grace School District rolled out school redesign efforts within many of its 52 local schools. While school redesign was not a new phenomenon, understanding the process in context of this specific district provided a real-world connection to the complexities of facilitating a large-scale transformation from the perspective of district leaders.

The use of an intrinsic case study design was most appropriate as it was used to present a deeper understanding of the school redesign process and student achievement from the perspective of the district leaders (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Stake, 2014). My interests were specific to the strategies and methods used only by Xavier Grace School District to facilitate school redesign. An intrinsic case study centralized research upon a unique case of interest without the intent to generalize the findings or conclusions (Stake, 2014). While Yin (2018) stated that the inability to generalize could possibly serve as a concern, the findings of Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier (2013), as well as Stake (2014), also purported that an intrinsic case study is fitting for some case studies. The case study design was the best option for understanding the phenomenon from the perspective of district leaders within this case study. Furthermore, the intrinsic design allowed for a perceptual understanding that was not revealed in existing studies

as those studies did not examine learned lessons (Rowe & Sikes, 2006; Semczuk, 2017) of school redesign and student achievement from the perspective of the district (Ansong et al., 2015).

Xavier Grace, the organization as a whole represented by its district leaders, was the case explored. Stake (2014) stated that intrinsic case studies sought to study a unique case of interest. By conducting this research, there was a personal desire to intently explore the experiences of district leaders (Rowe & Sikes, 2006; Semczuk, 2017) as Xavier Grace school district implemented a large-scale school redesign initiative among several of its schools. Choosing to turn around 52 schools presented as a unique case to study (Stake, 2014). The study was relative to the perspective and experiences of the district leaders and school-level leaders as they engaged in such a complex transformative process (Rowe & Sikes, 2006; Semczuk, 2017; Yin, 2018). At the time of the study, Xavier Grace was described as a large school district with several school leaders. The school leaders served as embedded cases within the research (Yin, 2018) as they were pivotal liaisons effectively implementing the protocols envisioned by the district leaders of Xavier Grace (Appelbaum et al., 2017; Hoover & Harder, 2015).

## **Research Questions**

### **Central Question**

What are the unique experiences of Xavier Grace district leaders as the district implemented a 21st century school redesign?

### **Subquestions**

SQ1. How do professional development activities impact the preparation of district leaders and school administrators for the school redesign process?

SQ2. How does personalized learning shape the methods implemented for redesigning school district instructional models?

SQ3. How do pressures for student achievement impact the effectiveness of the school redesign process?

### **Setting**

The setting for this qualitative case study was a suburban school district in Georgia where there was a disproportionate variance between the three socioeconomic levels. Xavier Grace (pseudonym) was among the largest of school districts in the central region of Georgia. The district had, at the time of the study, a student-body population of 42,000 students, 5,000 educators and staff, and 52 schools serving all academic and ability levels ranging from pre-kindergarten to 12<sup>th</sup> grade.

In context with historical literature, Xavier Grace was a central Georgia school district that recognized that the inequity of learning negatively impacted achievement across its 52 local schools. The district leaders acknowledged that changes were needed to best support its learners. State assessments scores and reports identified Xavier Grace as being an overall failing school district. Prior to 2010, the demographics of the district were mixed with distinct district lines drawn between varying socio-economic classes. Demographic data noted that this district's homogeneous shift was due to a huge influx of immigrants moving in along with the fact that this district was identified as one of the fastest-growing districts on the East coast (Keating & Karklis, 2016; Lichter, 2015). With the heterogeneous make-up, came a shift in equitable access to both in and out-of-school resources (Haggans, 2016; Manganaro, 2013; Noguera et al., 2015). There was a greater challenge to meet a wider range of student needs. This need resulted in the district building 10 schools within a 5-year period.

The diversity of the student body population increased the number of Title I schools from two to 25 schools, also within the 5-year period (The Governor's Office of Student Achievement, 2017). This growth presented the district with several additional challenges in terms of funding the range of students' needs while being able to allocate resources to supply for the ideology of a learning environment that promoted 21<sup>st</sup> century learning. Having a strategic plan for addressing the needs of all ability students proved to be a challenge for Xavier Grace School district (The Governor's Office of Student Achievement, 2017).

A data driven response strategy led to a design philosophy that was girded in 21<sup>st</sup> century learning, teaching, and support structures (Applied Educational Systems, 2018; P21, 2018). Using the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Framework as a model, the district developed a five-tenet personalized learning model for what it envisioned as an instructional approach for personalizing the learning experiences for each student. The school redesign approach implemented by the Xavier Grace Schools uniquely allowed for each of the district's 52 schools to autonomously decide their tactic to turn around their school's student achievement through an application process: which identifies the enrolling schools selected as cohort schools.

Beginning in 2013, the district decided to strategically redesign each of its 52 schools by the end of the 2020 school year. The goal was that it would be accomplished through an autonomous application process of cohort schools. Each cohort was expected to enroll between five to nine schools with the strategic plan to shift instructional models within a 3-year period. The first cohort established in Xavier Grace consisted of five schools and thus those five schools were identified as Cohort 15. The schools launched redesign in August 2015.

As revealed in the review of literature in Chapter Two of the present study, leadership style and skill sets were pivotal to the success of organizational transformative efforts (Baum &

Krulwich, 2016; Stein, 2016; Ylimaki et al., 2014). While the current leadership styles of district and school-leaders was not assessed, it was necessary to analyze the leaders' perceptions of how his style or skill of leading impacted the transformative progressions toward district objectives for school redesign. It was important to use collected interview and focus group data to assess leader preparedness for facilitating the implementation of district announced changes (Anderson, 2017; Applebaum et al., 2017; Baum & Krulwich, 2016; Hoch et al., 2018; Little et al., 2015; Stein, 2016; Ylimaki et al., 2014).

### **Participants**

Participants for this case study were selected from among the district staffed at Xavier Grace School District. The school building leaders that were selected was from schools that had completed an application to engage in the district's school redesign rollout initiative. The sample size for this study consisted of 10 participants: (a) the district's assistant superintendent for learning and leadership services, (b) the district's professional learning coordinator, (c) two district personalized learning coaches, and (d) two school building leaders from each of the three identified cohort schools. While Yin (2018) did not specifically state a set number for a purposive sample size, a sample size of a minimum of 10 participants was an appropriate number to facilitate an intrinsically designed case study (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Stake, 2014).

The selection of the participants was based on their role within Xavier Grace School District. The assistant superintendent for learning and leadership services worked as a liaison for the district's superintendent to oversee curriculum and leadership effectiveness. Overall progression of each school's continuous improvement, the district collectively, rested under the supervision of the assistant superintendent for learning and leadership services. The district's professional learning coordinator coordinated district-level professional development for all

employed staff as it aligned with the district's vision and strategic goals for improvement. Personalized learning coaches (PLC) worked under the advisement and direction of the professional learning coordinator to assist, train, and provide specific professional development for rolling out the school redesign initiative at the school level. PLCs worked as district representatives within local-cohort schools to assess growth toward addressing student achievement within the assigned schools. Building leaders were accountable for the implementation of district approved curriculum effectiveness within the classrooms. However, in addition to that level of accountability, building leaders that opted to participate in the school redesign rollout had to account for the implementation of personalized learning initiatives as outlined by the district.

Selectively interviewing key players in the process allowed for a broad understanding of how the district approached and learned from the school redesign process. While the stakeholders from the different schools provided insight of their learned experiences, the findings collectively provided assessment of the district's learned lessons.

The purposive sample for the study was educators who had engaged in school redesign. At this time in the research, these schools were supported in some capacity by a district, assigned personalized learning coach. Thus, the participating schools studied were conveniently selected from among those cohort schools that had experienced at least one-full academic school year of school redesign.

### **Procedures**

Effectively designed case studies begin with a well-developed procedural plan for data collection and analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Stake, 2014; Yin, 2018). Having a procedure in place ensures that the design is appropriate for studying the case of interest (Stake, 2014) as well

as provide a detailed overview that promotes easy replication of the methods used by future researchers (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018). Prior to beginning data collection, it is critical that written approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) is obtained. The researcher also obtained district approval prior to collecting data and diligently acquired all required informed consents from all participating adults. A demographic collection tool was utilized to define the demographic profile of the case being studied (Yin, 2018). The profile identified the age, gender, race, ethnicity, education, years of experience with school redesign, current position within district. Sharing the demographic profile provided a characteristic of the case's population.

The utilization of multiple data sources is the core of composing a credible case study (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yin, 2018). Collected data will serve as a source for analyzing the pieces that provide for a holistic understanding of the case in its entirety (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Stake, 2014; Yin, 2018). Data collection will consist of individual interviews that will be designed in a semi-structured format to allow for flexibility of the depth of information collected through the natural conversations between researcher and participants (Yin, 2018). To test the validity of the interview questions, Yin (2018) recommended a pilot study. Furthermore, the researcher asked an expert consultant in school redesign to validate the interview questions.

The data collection procedure will closely align to the original research questions that will shape the focus of the case study research (Yin, 2018). Interview questions addressed the case of study as well as the identified embedded case. In addition to the individual interviews, one focus group interview was conducted with participants identified for this research. The procedure of organizing a focus group allowed for a natural flow of discussion between the participants (Yin, 2018). The intent was to promote relevant context of the case (Yin, 2018). As a

third measure of corroborating evidence, documents were collected and analyzed (Yin, 2018). Maintaining a database of the documentation and gathered data was a procedure used to track, organize, and increase the reliability of the case study (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Stake, 2014; Yin, 2018).

Properly securing and storing database files was the most critical component of the procedures that were put in place. IRB standards required that researchers properly secure data and help researcher accountable for protecting participants from more than minimal harm (Hicks, 2018). Another data protection and organizing procedure that was used involved assigning codes to the data with each representing a concept of interest to the case (Yin, 2018). Within the process, the researcher continued to cycle back to the original research questions to ensure findings from the data were defensible and interpretive of the findings reported (Yin, 2018).

### **The Researcher's Role**

My specific relationship with the district, at the time of the study, was an instructor within the district's only career focused charter school. I was employed with the district for the 12 years when the study began. Within those 12 years, I held several job titles and performed a range of roles to support student achievement through individualized learning methods as expected by instructional best practices adopted by the district. Just before starting the data collection, I spent nine months working as a personalized learning coach for the district. I had a close working relationship with those that were facilitating the rollout of the school redesign at the district level. Of the 20 schools that were enrolled in the rollout process, I worked as an assigned PLC with three schools. When I began the data collection and selection of participants, I was resolute about not selecting those three school leaders as participants for this study as to avoid any potential conflicts with data collection.



As the human instrument in this qualitative study, my role was to listen, observe, document, and transcribe collected responses from the participants that lived the experience of school redesign. As a former personalized learning coach, I was involved with the school redesign as both a district representative and as a classroom instructor. I implemented strategies of personalized learning within my classroom, and I coached educators on the models designed by the district. As a result, I was in a position of understanding what data needed to be collected and how to analyze the collected data.

I refrained from implicating my assumptions and judgment during the research phase, I was careful to only document the direct perspectives of the participants to ensure their voice led the output of the analysis, as this study was all about presenting the lessons learned from this case (Yin, 2018). Memoing provided me an opportunity to separate my biases from the data transcribed for the intents of identifying themes that arose from the participant's interviews (Yin, 2018). Flyvbjerg (2006) identified that researchers tend to make assumptions based on their attempts to validate personal biases or preconceived notions which result in a misunderstood opportunity for understanding the data. My biases were centralized upon my understanding relative to my role as a personalized learning coach and the limitations my role placed in fully understanding the objectives of the case. Therefore, my interest in the case was to gain a deeper understanding of the case as a whole (Stake, 2014; Yin, 2018).

### **Data Collection**

Case studies are validated through the ability of the researcher to strategically apply data collection protocols (Yin, 2018). Collecting data from multiple sources allowed for a better understanding of how the district navigated the school redesign process and strategies that were implemented to reach identified objectives. The pieces of data also served as insight into the

systemic process implemented by the district as it reshaped objectives and strategies in response to their experiences throughout the process. This section overviewed the sources in which data were collected for the current case study: interviews, focus group, and documents.

### **Interviews**

The data collection protocol that was utilized began with the individual interviews. Themes found in the interviews were coded and further analyzed in addition to the themes that arise from the focus group interviews (Yin, 2018). Audio recordings, with granted permission from each participant, were used to ensure the voice of participants were reflected in the findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018). Interviews were essential in evaluating the collected data (Patton, 2015; Yin, 2018). As the researcher sought to build rapport with the participants in the study, the goal was to ensure that the interviews maintained a flow as closely to a natural conversation as possible—given that the researcher utilized a semi-structured interview approach (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015; Yin, 2018). During the collection process, there was a deliberate attempt to safeguard data collected to reduce harm to the participants and to separate the data between that of the phenomenon and the case (Yin, 2018). According to researchers, the separation of data was implemented strategically via interviews which allowed for the discovery of the phenomenon, and the focus group which allowed the researchers to collect data specifically to the individuals who were vested in the experience (Patton, 2015; Yin, 2018).

### **Standardized Open-Ended Interview Questions: District Leaders**

1. Please introduce yourself to me providing me with your name, highest degree earned, current position, number of years with the district, and total years in education.

2. Describe your experience throughout the school redesign process: Identify your role and in what ways you were responsible for facilitating the process also share any challenges and success as you engaged in the process
3. What were the objectives of the school redesign process? How were they communicated??
4. In what ways, if at all, did those objectives change during the school redesign process?
5. Do you feel that you were prepared to engage in large-scale transformative process? If so, how were you prepared? If not, what, if any, professional development was provided to ensure your preparedness?
6. As you reflect on the process, what challenges did you face in communicating expectations, objectives, goals, and involving both internal and external stakeholders?
7. Were there challenges in getting internal and external stakeholders to commit to the school redesign process?

**Standardized Open-Ended Interview Questions: School-Building Leaders**

8. Please introduce yourself to me providing me with your name, highest degree earned, current position, number of years with the district, and total years in education.
9. Describe your experience throughout the school redesign process: include challenges and successes and share your understanding of the school redesign goals as defined to you by the district.
10. As school building leader, in what ways have you been supported during the school redesign process including any andragogical training/development on the 21<sup>st</sup> century framework?

11. What curricular shifts, if any, did you have to ensure were being met to ensure alignment with the school redesign goals?

Question one served as an introductory opening for dialogue and went beyond the use of a systematic tool to develop the demographic profile discussed earlier in the chapter (Yin, 2018). Building rapport with a participant through generalized questioning was a protocol strategy during the interview collection process (Yin, 2018). Understanding the participants' educational background, years in the district, and existence of any prior experience with school redesign revealed participant-level attributes toward the school redesign process.

Questions two through four sought to establish precedence of the districts role in clearly establishing and communicating the objectives of the school redesign process (Franklin Covey, 2018; Mathew & Rakesh, 2016; Ylimaki et al., 2014). Authors stated that transformative processes are effective when stakeholders understand the expected outcomes of the process; and, by ensuring objectives were communicated was evidence of effective leadership skill sets (Bass, 1985; Bass et al., 1996; Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999).

Questions five through seven provided real-world insight into the district's perspective of the relative complexities that were experienced with leading organizational-wide transformation (Hoover & Harder, 2015; Nattoo, 2018; Palaima & Skarzauskiene, 2010). Gigliotti (2017) stated that leadership preparedness was an essential component for organizational objectives to be effectively actualized. Therefore, each question was designed to provide assessment of the leadership preparedness for the school redesign process. Collected responses were analyzed as part of the holistic lessons learned from the school redesign experience.

Questions eight and nine were repeated inquiries to gain the same insights for leaders at the school level. It was important to understand their experiences and how their educational

backgrounds impacted the school redesign process at a level of leadership that closely involved with the facilitation of the school redesign rollout process.

Question 10 sought to understand the participants' experiences through the lens of followership and working relationship with district leaders (Bass, 1985; Bass et al., 1996; Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999). Both questions were designed to allow insight on the district's role in supporting and clearly communicating goals and objectives to those that were instrumental in effectively facilitating the school redesign efforts. Effective leaders were identified as being supportive and capable of empowering others to build the capacities of their staff utilizing a specific skill set of leadership (Bass, 1985; Bass et al., 1996; Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999). Furthermore, a broader perspective of how leadership impacted progress was analyzed through the multiple responses given by the embedded cases within this study (Bass et al., 1996; Yin, 2018).

Question 11 was designed to gain a broader perspective of the applicability of the implementation of the 21<sup>st</sup> century learning framework institutionalized within the schools identified within the case (Applied Educational Systems, 2018; P21, 2018; U.S. Department of Education, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c). Each question allowed for a deeper understanding of the school redesign process and the preparedness that such a large overhaul required as an informative tool for future school districts or schools that delved into turning around their failing schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c).

### **Focus Group Interviews**

Focus groups allowed for a richer conversation on a specific aspect of the case study (Kruger & Casey, 2015; Yin, 2018). During this phase of the data collection protocol, I desired to obtain a broad, multi-perspective of the school redesign process in correlation to the impact of

leadership support and if, in fact, student achievement was indeed being positively shifted during the turnaround efforts of Xavier Grace School District; therefore, one distinct focus group was conducted (Krueger & Casey, 2015; Yin, 2018). The focus group included district leaders, which were representatives of the case, and selected school-level leaders who represented the embedded case.

The initial focus group consisted of district-level leaders of the school redesign process. Selected participants were those that were identified as being hired, at the district level, to lead the implementation of school redesign across all schools within the Xavier Grace School District. This focus group consisted of two personalized learning coaches, the professional learning coordinator, the assistant superintendent of learning and leadership, and a member of the educational board. The discussions allowed for an analysis that specifically assessed the impact of the implementations from the perspective of the district and the effort of the district leaders to adjust and support the process.

Six school-level leaders from across the three schools were invited to partake in a conversation specific to their experiences during the school redesign process. This group consisted of the principal and at a least one assistant principal from each of the three schools. The school level leaders were purposefully selected from the three schools that demonstrated effective outcomes based on results posted on the district's website. Discussions among these school leaders allowed for an analysis that specifically assessed the impact of the implementations within the schools and lessons that were learned to promote continued success with the school redesign process. It was anticipated that the discussions would reveal amendments to the objectives and strategies that the school leaders implemented to overcome challenges that surfaced during the transformative process.

The use of the literature review helped to develop the questions guiding the discussion of the focus group. Each of the five questions allowed for a deeper understanding of the participants experience with school redesign as it aligned with knowledge gleaned through the literature review.

**Standardized Open-Ended Focus Group Interview Questions: School-Building Leaders**

1. How has the school redesign process impacted student achievement district-wide?
2. How did you, as a united front—representing different departments, ensure curriculum and technology were effectively transformed to meet the vision and goals pushed out to school leaders?
3. What is the district’s definition of career and college readiness and how do you describe the districts progress toward district-wide improvement based on that definition in student achievement?
4. How was the initiative funded to ensure objectives, goals, and the vision of school redesign was maintained throughout the process?
5. In what ways was the organizational culture ready or impacted by the school redesign process?

**Standardized Open-Ended Focus Group Interview Questions: School-Building Leaders**

1. How has the school redesign process impacted student achievement within your respective schools?
2. How did you ensure curriculum and technology were effectively transformed to meet the vision and goals pushed down by the district?

3. What is your school's definition of career and college readiness and how do you describe your school's progress toward school-wide improvement in student achievement based on that definition?
4. How was the initiative funded to ensure objectives, goals, and the vision of school redesign was maintained throughout the process?
5. In what ways was your school culture ready or impacted by the school redesign process?

Question one acknowledged that the district was in the business of addressing student achievement. However, specifically, with the implementation of the school redesign, the district was held accountable for the policies of the ESSA which addressed the use of school redesign with the intent of transforming schools with the intent of improving student achievement (U.S. Department of Education, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c).

Question two addressed the instructional design efforts to align curriculum with the 21<sup>st</sup> century learning framework (P21, 2018) that shaped the district's use of a personalized learning model.

Question three sought to better understand how the school and district leaders defined career and college readiness. The ability of each school to define its approach to preparing graduates for career and college readiness was based on the district's expectation for school-based autonomy. School-based autonomy played a role in how the district and school leaders defined and progressed toward students demonstrating competency in college and career readiness (Newton & da Costa, 2016; U.S. Department of Education, 2018b, 2018c). This also impacted the alignment between the district's definition and the school's understanding of those definitions.



Question four addressed the literary findings that advised of the importance and struggle experienced with districts and school leaders' access to adequate funding to support legislative policies for student achievement (Jerald et al., 2017; Newton & da Costa, 2016).

Question five provided insight into the culture of the organization as a whole and its individual parts (schools) to support and sustain school redesign as expected through the legislative policies (Hargrave, 2011; Jerald et al., 2017; Nattoo, 2018; Polding, 2016; Robertson-Kraft & Bronstein, 2016; Spote & de la Torre, 2010; U.S. Department of Education, 2018a; Whitehurst, 2016; Yu, 2017).

### **Documents**

Yin (2018) stated that documentation has a likely relevant role in every case study design as it provides documented information that is necessary and can provide a stable perspective of the case being studied. Because this study sought to explore the lessons learned, the documentation collected was derived from preexisting district notes, board meeting minutes, administrative documents, and progress reports. The documentation was qualitatively analyzed as a supportive analysis to delineate preconceived assumptions and biases for conducting the research (Bowen, 2009). Therefore, incomplete documentation was discarded as incomplete data collection was noted as a leverage for biases within research (Yin, 2018).

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis was a critical protocol of a case study (Yin, 2018). The data that were analyzed for the study extended empirical knowledge surrounding the problem studied. The first step used to analyze the data was coding the interviews for a theme (Gläser & Laudel, 2013; Yin, 2018). Review of transcribed interviews was a part of the analysis phase (Yin, 2018). The individual and focus group interviews were transcribed so all observable patterns were identified

(Yin, 2018). Observable patterns were sorted into themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018). Theme identification was done following the transcription of the interview data (Yin, 2018). To increase the efficiency with coding and theme identification, the NVivo CAQDAS tool was utilized. Once themes were identified, five to 10 themes was used to analyze the collected data (Yin, 2018). The NVivo was the tool of choice because the coding assistant structures 'nodes' to assist the researcher with coding, storing, and organizing large quantities of collected data from multiple sources (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Houghton, Murphy, Shaw, & Casey, 2015; Yin, 2018). Based on a study conducted by Zamawe (2015), the use of the NVivo tool was highly recommended for rigorous case study analysis (Robertson, 2017).

Maintaining validity and explaining real-world rivals was the general purpose for utilizing an analytic technique (Yin, 2018). Yin (2018) addressed five analytic techniques: (a) pattern matching, (b) explanation building, (c) time-series analysis, (d) logic models, and (e) cross-case synthesis. Of the five techniques, matching for patterns that appeared within the case was the best analytic technique used to strengthen internal validity (Yin, 2018). Pattern matching was essential for understanding the process and outcomes for this case study (Yin, 2018).

Analyzing the case using time-series was not relevant for this case study as there was no presumed end to the school redesign process implemented by Xavier Grace School District. Yin (2018) stated that time-series analysis was a great way to trace changes over time. While identifying changes over time was not the basis of this study, data did reveal trends that supported a connection between studies and rival trends surrounding school redesign and student achievement (Yin, 2018). For example, data revealed that in some instances student

achievement efforts were more successful prior to the implementation of school redesign (Cervantes et al., 2015; Nattoo, 2018; Spote & de la Torre, 2010).

As the data was analyzed, Yin's (2018) approach to defining codes that support the rival trends, backtracking, was consistently considered. It was important that I remained aware of opportunities to backtrack to clarify collected data that was relevant for understanding the practices engaged by district leaders that did not have a connection with student achievement within the case of study (Yin, 2018). As participant perceptions were revealed, it was necessary to analyze interview data with chronological sequence to describe the case's learned lessons (Yin, 2018). Since the study was a single, intrinsic study it was not applicable to use a cross-case synthesis and analysis (Yin, 2018). This was not necessary as I did not compare and contrast cases (Yin, 2018).

### **Trustworthiness**

Yin (2018) defined credible, dependable, confirmable, and transferable research as valid. The trustworthiness of collected data depended on the nature of the source (Yin, 2018). Therefore, it was important that the research established bias-free protocols to ensure the rigor of the case study and demonstration of trustworthiness (Yin, 2018).

### **Credibility**

The credibility of the research was based on the findings' accurate description of the participants' real experiences within the context being studied (Stake, 2014). Conducting 10 individual interviews, one focus group interview, and collecting documents allowed for a triangulated insight into the realities and experiences of the school redesign process (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Stake, 2014; Yin, 2018). Triangulation provided the distinct effort to use more than one research method to report on the case being studied (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Stake, 2014;

Yin, 2018). Therefore, triangulation was exercised through analysis of pertinent documents to the study, interviews, and focus group. Interviewees reviewed transcripts as an external audit of transcription accuracy (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Member checking was used to gauge the credibility of the findings and interpretations from the individual interviews (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Stake (2014) suggested allowing participants to play a role in directing case study research. Ultimately, the protocol for triangulating the data for credibility fits the model of theory and data triangulation (Yin, 2018).

### **Dependability and Confirmability**

Dependability and confirmability were research strategies that involved the protocol of the researcher to provide rich, descriptive data (Chowdhury, 2015; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Stake, 2014; Yin, 2018). The methodological steps of the data collection, the direct quotation from transcribed interviews, along with the enumeration of data were examples of the dependability implementations that informed readers that the data were consistent with the collection protocol and served as a reliable depiction of the findings (Chowdhury, 2015; Stake, 2014). Therefore, the use of a single intrinsic case with an embedded case focused on school-building leaders increased the accuracy of the data collection and conclusive composition of the lessons learned (Stake, 2014; Yin, 2018). The use of state assessment data demonstrated neutrality and objectivity in confirming the experiences and outcomes of the school redesign process as depicted from the collected interview and focus group data (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Stake, 2014; Yin, 2018).

### **Transferability**

Detailed descriptions were utilized to inform future researchers of the protocol governing the collection of data during interviews and focus group responses (Creswell & Poth, 2018;

Stake, 2014; Yin, 2018). The research included detailed descriptions of the analytical protocol and the findings of the research as it justified substantiation for this research to be replicated by others that seek to access the turnaround approach used within their respective school districts (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018).

### **Ethical Considerations**

Research did not begin without first receiving the approval of IRB and from those of the district. The researcher obtained informed consent of each of the adult participants in this study prior to engaging in interviews and focus group discussions. Participants were informed of their ability to withdraw from the study at any time as participation was voluntary. Data remained confidential to protect and reduce harm to participants and the identity of the site that was studied via the use of pseudonyms (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Stake, 2014; Yin, 2018).

Electronically collected data were protected through the use of password protected computer and tangibly collected data were stored in a locked filing cabinet.

Despite being a employee within the district, at the time of the study, I was intentional not to report deceptive findings of collected data (Yin, 2018). This was upheld by ensuring an equitable selection of participants. Equitable selection prevented unfair inclusion or exclusion from research and ensured equality and fairness of relevant data from interviews and focus group responses (Yin, 2018).

### **Summary**

Chapter Three described how the research of the Xavier Grace School District was facilitated. Utilizing an intrinsic, single case study design provided for a breadth of data collection that allowed for a deeper analysis of such a unique case that needed to be described and detailed (Stake, 2014). Triangulating multiple sources of data ensured the case study

research was rigorous and demonstrative of all efforts to construct credible, dependable, and transferable data that fairly reported findings of the study. The case study was designed to explore the participant's experiences (Yin, 2018).

## **CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS**

### **Overview**

This phenomenological study sought to understand the experiences of district leaders and what they perceived as best practices for engaging in large-scale school redesign. Data from 10 educational experts were obtained through their participation in semi-structured interviews and a focus group along with data from public record documents.

The following research questions served as a guide for determining the alignment for derived themes and codes: Central Question. What are the unique experiences of Xavier Grace district leaders as the district implemented a 21st century school redesign? SQ1. How do professional development activities impact the preparation of district leaders and school administrators for the school redesign process? SQ2. How does personalized learning shape the methods implemented for redesigning school district instructional models? SQ3. How do pressures for student achievement impact the effectiveness of the school redesign process?

### **Participants**

The experience of the group of participants provide authentication and authority of the results (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018). These 10 educators worked within the Xavier Grace School District located in central Georgia. Of the 10 educators, three were males and six were females. At the time of the study, each of the educators had a least 1-year of experience in school redesign with a distinct focus of using personalized learning to develop curriculum. All of the participants had at least a master's degree. All of the participants, but two, received their post-graduate degrees in educational leadership.

In Table 1, there is a brief overview of each participant. The information came from the demographic questions that were a part of the participant's letter of consent. Participant

identities are confidential and therefore a pseudonym was given to minimize risks of harm as a result of the participants' participation in the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018).

Following the information in the table is a descriptive overview of each participant. Participant descriptions came from information that was gathered in the semi-structured individual interviews.

Table 1

*Participant Demographic Information*

Name	Total years in Education	Highest Completed Degree	Area of Study	Years Facilitating School Redesign	Years Using a Model of Personalized Learning to Develop Curriculum
Participant 1	18	Doctorate	Instructional Supervision	>10	4
Participant 2	13	Specialist	Ed. Leadership	6 to 10	3
Participant 3	20	Master	Occupational Studies & Ed. Leadership	6 to 10	6 to 10
Participant 4	24	Master	Ed. Leadership	5	5
Participant 5	32	Specialist	Administration & Supervision	6	6
Participant 6	23	Doctorate	Ed. Leadership	3	1
Participant 7	21	Specialist	Curriculum & Instruction	12	4
Participant 8	28	Master	Curriculum & Instruction	5	2
Participant 9	25	Doctorate	Curriculum & Instruction	2	2
Participant 10	21	Specialist	Ed. Leadership	5	5

At the time of the study, each leadership participant had no less than 10 years of experience in education. Their depth of educational experience has led to their ability to be competent in maintaining solid academic practices. Of the 10 participants, two had more than 10 years of experience facilitating school redesign. Three participants had six to 10 years of experience facilitating school redesign while the other four had at least two to five years of



experience in facilitating school redesign. While school redesign, with a specific focus in personalized learning, has been in effect for less than six years within Xavier Grace School District, all but two leaders had less than six years of experience with the construct of personalized learning being foundational to curriculum development.

All leaders had a minimum of a master's degree, with a focus of curriculum, instruction, and leadership that bred their abilities to be strong instructional leaders within the process of school redesign specific to the district's focus. Each participant completed at least one of their post-graduate degrees in the state of Georgia. The participants felt that sharing this information for providing a strong demonstration of the quality of education derived from their experiences at the post-secondary level within their learning communities.

### **Participant 1**

Participant 1 had 18 years of experience in education at the time she completed the preliminary demographic survey. A former English teacher who taught in one district prior to joining Xavier Grace School District, Participant 1 spent 15 years serving as an educator within the site of study. She was a building-level leader who graduated from a post-secondary program within the same state as the case. Out of the 15 years, Participant 1 lead the instructional redesign of a middle school that was three years into its personalized learning cohort. Participant 1 recounted the experience of transforming instruction, using the personalized model, as uncertain. Participant 1 stated,

When I began to understand exactly the concept of Personalized Learning, and the goal, and the school's role at that time, I quickly realized that there were some challenges in terms of how the implementation part went out. The school wasn't very clear on expectations and how to implement Personalized Learning.

**Participant 2**

Participant 2 earned a specialist degree with a concentration in Educational Leadership from a university within the same state as the case study. She was a former Special Education teacher who taught in four prior districts before joining Xavier Grace as district appointed Personalized Learning Coach. At the time of this study, Participant 2 had 13 years of experience in education with more than six years of experience facilitating school redesign. Within those six to 10 years, Participant 2 employed the concept of personalized learning to develop meaningful curriculum for learners. Participant 2 spent three years supporting schools, as a district representative, in utilizing the personalized learning model designed by the district. When asked to describe her any experienced challenges, Participant 2 stated that “the autonomous approach provided an opportunity to help schools shape their instructional approach for students.” Participant 2 found that the biggest challenge was “getting teachers to understand personalized learning. I noticed that teachers often misconstrued the concept.”

**Participant 3**

At the time of the study, Participant 3 was a 20-year-instructional veteran with six to 10 years facilitating school redesign using personalized learning to shape curriculum for future ready learners. Participant 3 was a former Agriculture and Veterinary Science educator with experience in one other district besides Xavier Grace as an Engineering instructor. Participant 3’s experiences prepared him to lead a redesign initiative that supported instructional autonomy. Participant 3 stated that he believed in “shifting the status quo for education” and having the support of the district allowed him to employ his beliefs within his building. Participant 3 experienced two major challenges as he engaged in school redesign at his local site.

It was a challenge for me to change the mindsets of instructors and external stakeholders. I also had to creatively find ways to navigate the process without the same access to financial and external supports as other schools that were a part of the traditional cohort model.

#### **Participant 4**

Participant 4, at the time of the study, had 24 years of experience in education. She graduated with a post-graduate degree in Educational Leadership from a Georgia university. Participant 4 had five years of experience facilitating school redesign using a model of personalized learning to develop curriculum. Of the 24 years, Participant 4 spent 18 years with Xavier Grace and six years teaching out of state. Participant 4 taught Social Studies and served as a high school graduation coach. As leader of the district's redesign initiative, Participant 4 recounted three challenges that drove and shaped her experiences as she navigated the process of institutionalizing change in Xavier Grace School District.

When you start talking about changing the learning experience, people get a little anxious. It was important that we get stakeholders to see and understand the process. So, we began thinking through strategies for reducing anxieties over changing the learning environment. As we started rolling out the framework, we quickly realized that we initially underestimated the complexity of the process.

#### **Participant 5**

At the time of the study, Participant 5 was a 32-year educational veteran with a specialist degree in Administration and Supervision from an out-of-state university. Participant 5 proudly shared that prior to enrolling in the district's redesign cohort, he facilitated a STEAM Academy. Participant 5 was challenged in

developing [a] design team that was going to ensure a rigorous approach for the benefit of the students. It's critical that you be very intentional in picking your team that's going to design your program and actually help you present that program to your staff, your community, all of your stakeholders; that is a very critical point.

### **Participant 6**

Participant 6 had 23 years of experience in education at the time of this study. She earned a Doctorate in Educational Leadership from a Georgia university. Participant 6 taught in one district before coming to Xavier Grace as an elementary school administrator. She had three years of experience facilitating school redesign with one year overseeing the implementation of the personalized learning model to develop curriculum. While Participant 6 did not have direct experience utilizing personalized learning, Participant 6 was charged with “overseeing personalized learning coaches during the transition of leadership.”

At one point, I was appointed to step in with the assigned task of bringing all stakeholders together on one page. The greatest challenge was to get building leaders to give up control and share the load of responsibility with appointed Personalized Learning Coaches.

### **Participant 7**

Participant 7 earned a Specialist in Curriculum and Instruction from an out of state university. At the time of the study, he had 21 years of experience in education. Within those 21 years, Participant 7 had more than 10 years of experience facilitating school redesign and four years using a personalized learning model to develop curriculum. Participant 7 has been with Xavier Grace for five years serving as both an elementary and middle school administrator.

Given his extensive background in operational procedures, Participant 7 mentioned that his greatest challenge in the redesign process was “teaching teachers how to use data.”

### **Participant 8**

Participant 8, who earned a post-graduate degree in Curriculum and Instruction from a university in the state of Georgia, had 28 years of experience in education at the time of the study. She had five years of experience facilitating school redesign with two years implementing a model of personalized learning to develop curriculum. As Participant 8 engaged in the process, she recounted being cognizant in attending to parental stakeholders. Participant 8 stated,

Parents did not feel that students were learning as they would often say ‘my child does not have tangible items in from of them to learn.’ So, it was important to me to seek professional development in how to shift mindsets in regards to instruction.

### **Participant 9**

Participant 9 was a 25-year educational veteran at the time of this study. She had earned a Doctorate in a Georgia university with a concentration in Curriculum and Instruction. At the time of the individual interview, Participant 9 had two years of experience facilitating school redesign using a model of personalized learning to develop curriculum. Participant 9 worked as a professional development consultant in a prior district. As a designer of the district’s personalized learning framework, Participant 9 discussed two challenges of introducing and overseeing the implementation of the framework within the local schools.

I found that it was challenging to get the external community to receive the knowledge and confidence that the coaches were competent and capable of handling the work. I was not prepared for resistance. It became apparent that leaders struggled to give up control.

**Participant 10**

Participant 10 was a 21-year educational veteran who earned a Specialist in Educational Leadership from an out of state university. At the time of the study, Participant 10 had five years of experience facilitating school redesign using a model of personalized learning to develop curriculum. Participant 10 had experience a gifted teacher, media specialist, project manager, and personalized learning lead before taking on her new role as a district level school improvement facilitator. When Participant 10 started the school redesign process, she felt very supported with minimal challenges in the beginning.

And fortunately I had been at my school for a number of years so I had a lot of, I felt like, support from my community because a lot of people knew me, and they'd say, 'Well, if you believe in this, if you're behind this, Karen, we believe, we trust you. We know you're doing what's best for kids.' But there were people that were skeptical because what they had heard from the middle schools and some of the schools that turned personalized learning into sticking the kid on a computer, it really gave personalized learning a bad rap.

**Case Description**

The case that shaped the study involved the site, participants that have at least one year of experience with school redesign, and the uniqueness of the school redesign process as it pertained to the site (Stake, 2014). The site, Xavier Grace School District, was selected as the location for the study due to the timeframe in which it implemented school redesign. Participants were purposefully selected as their experience provided authentication and authority of the school redesign process from inception to ongoing development (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018). A total of 10 participants were selected using purposeful criterion sampling. The

site was of unique interest (Stake, 2014) because it utilized a 21<sup>st</sup> century model of personalization to shape its approach to large-scale transformation.

### **Results**

The results from the data collected were analyzed using a methodological approach that sought to ensure the trustworthiness of the data analysis protocol. As discussed in Chapter Three, research validity is based on the credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability of the data collected and analyzed (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Data were collected from 10 individual interviews, one focused group interview, and archived documents. Interviews were scheduled at the convenience of the participants, and they were recorded via a recording device with the approval of the participants. The recording device served as a data collection tool in which to transcribe the semi-constructed interviews. During the focus group interview, the participants engaged in natural conversation around strategically structured questions. As the participants discussed their experiences in collaboration of the focus, the interview discussion was recorded and transcribed.

Once the data were transcribed, the transcription was shared with each participant utilizing the data analysis protocol Creswell and Poth (2018) referred to as member checking. Allowing the participants to review the transcription and discussing the interpretations and analysis with them gave the participants an opportunity clarify their experiences and ensure that their experiences were accurately captured, interpreted, and reported (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

While analyzing the data, it was important to take annotated notes to ensure biases were separated from the collected data. Each transcribed interview was combed through to identify codes that defined the analysis of the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Coded data were highlighted and placed into digital folders within the NVivo software. NVivo was used to provide secondary

support to bias-free data analysis and memoing. NVivo is a computer software that was designed for researchers who use a qualitative approach to data analysis (Yin, 2018).

Coded data were also handwritten and placed on color-coded sticky notes to provide a hands-on approach to grouping the codes to formulate themes. As the data was collected, both the digital and hand-written codes were compared to ensure consistency with theme identification. Once all data were analyzed, it was important to go through each group of coded data (digital folders and handwritten codes) to ensure consistency and alignment with the research questions that governed the process of the case study. Going through the process of checking and rechecking the collected data, as a researcher and with participants, is a validity protocol that ensured the analysis met confirmability (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In Chapter Three, it was discussed that this research would be vetted through triangulation, multiple data source collection, and confirmability—data was confirmed and corroborated (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

As the codes were grouped, themes for the study began to surface. As themes were revealed it was important that the development of the themes was authentic to the responses of the participants. Data was highlighted and annotated on several occasions during the phase of data analysis. It was critical to ensure that more than one method of data analysis was used to remove the likelihood of the researcher to force results from the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Multiple layers of review involved reading through the transcriptions several times while also reflecting on the research questions to determine where the coded data belonged so that all codes were reflected in the data. It also involved going through pertinent archived documents from the Governor's Office of Student Achievement (2017, 2018) to further understand the student achievement impact of the school redesign process as it aligns to the experience within Xavier Grace School District. The Governor's Office of Student Achievement data required intentional



and purposeful engagement to ensure that collected archived data met the data collection criteria. Student achievement data that predated the timeframe more than a year before the district began its engagement with school redesign was disregarded and was not a part of the data analysis protocol. This research also did not collect data from schools or district beyond the scope of the case.

Therefore, once the data were analyzed multiple times using data that conformed to the data collection criteria, the development of the themes were the result of several grouping strategies used through the coding process. As the data were coded, a descriptive explanation of the case was provided through the exploration of the themes that was revealed. Through the lens of constructivism, the paradigm of the themes was derivative of the thoughts that shaped the roll out of the school redesign process. The themes provided a clear description of the experience's leaders had while engaging in the process of school redesign. This was the intent of this case study to understand the experiences of district leaders and what they perceived as best practices for engaging in large-scale school redesign.

This study sought to understand the experiences of purposefully identified leaders: district and school-building leaders. Their perspectives were analyzed separately to determine what themes were specific to school redesign from the designation of those that serve as both administrative and instructional leaders within the facilitation of the district's student-achievement growth protocol—which was the foundation of the school redesign platform.

### **Major Theme 1: Accountability**

The analysis of the interviews, focus group responses, and documents revealed consistency with leaders ensuring that they are holding themselves and those that are involved in the work responsible for the results produced throughout the redesign process. The analysis of

all data revealed the first major theme: accountability. The subthemes that emerged from the interview and focus group discussions were leaders taking calculated risks and ensuring readiness and preparedness (see Table 2).

Table 2

*Theme 1: Accountability*

Theme 1: Accountability	
Subtheme	Code
Risk	Figure it out on your own (10), Transforming the process (8), Learn from failures and successes (8), Self-exploration (6), Creating a framework from nothing to design the experience (4), Setting goals to manage risks (4), Chaos (3)
Readiness/Preparedness	Self-taught (15), Read books (6), Watched Videos (6), Rubric (3), Content competency (3), Andragogical training (3), concentrated time to develop district leaders (3), External consultants (3)

*Note.* Numbers in parentheses indicate the number of times the specific response was provided.

While autonomy was a code within the change management theme, many of the school building leaders felt that the level of autonomy given to them by the district allowed them to take a range of necessary calculated risks as needed to implement innovative practices within their local schools. The risks, a subtheme within accountability, required that the leaders set goals for outcomes and used those goals to measure the effectiveness of their risks. Several of the building leaders stated that they were appreciative of the district allowing them the space and time to figure things out and to try several options without being squared isolated to a particular approach.

Participant 5 felt that the level of autonomy granted him greater accountability to the measures taken toward student achievement. He was confident that his approaches demonstrated accountability as they were supported through his extensive use of research-based strategies. In

interviewing, many of the participants did demonstrate consistency with engaging in meaningful research and using the research to support strategic implementations toward redesign.

Participant 5, a school level leader, developed a team of design experts to support the redesign efforts. His team of experts was designed to ensure that the process remained accountable to the district's goals toward student achievement. Participant 7, a school level leader, was hired to lead the data team at his site. At his school, instead of working with an instructional design team, as was developed at Participant 5's school, his sole purpose was to look at the data to drive the changes that were needed as the instructional team developed the curriculum and approach to instruction. Participant 7 stated that their measure of accountability toward student achievement was based on the results of the changes that his school made to the way that they graded students and how teachers' mindsets shifted as they begin to reassess how they inventoried student needs.

The data from the interviews demonstrated results that strongly aligned how district and school leaders felt about being accountable for student achievement. Both groups stated that they had to ensure that they were setting goals and implementing practices that were research-based. In fact, all participants transparently stated that it was not initially clear what those goals would be to help ensure accountability nor was it objectively stated as to what the reachable goal would be as the engagement with school redesign was a new experience for this district.

One school leader shared that data-driven practices were not a part of the initial phase of school redesign for her school. She stated that it was frustrating not to have clear measurable goals in place when first engaging in the school redesign process. However, when the school was granted a second opportunity to redesign its approach, she shared that the process was more focused as data-driven practices were embedded in the second redesign phase for her assigned

location. This participant's reflection of her experience was not isolated as Participant 3 also shared that when he began designing his school, all he knew was that he had to prove that his approach to creating a future ready environment was based on research.

Participant 3's personal leadership goal, toward being accountable, was to change the norms for the expectation of learning. Participant 3 felt that he took a big risk with his school redesign approach; he also felt that his risk was the greatest as his model for school redesign did not fit the mold of any of his peers nor did fit the mold for what the district had ever experienced prior to his proposal for the changes he would make in his building. However, at the end of it all, he knew that he would be accountable for moving practices, ensuring student achievement, and having a program that aligned to the ultimate ideology of a school that embodied personalized learning and preparing students for the future.

Schools' ownership of the school redesign process was unanimously important to each district leader that reflected on what they envisioned to be the most important aspect of the redesign process from each of their starts with the process through the day in which they participated in the interview.

Participant 4, a district leader, said that it was important that "we [the district] get people committed and not just compliant" to the process. When asked to further clarify this statement, in a focus group setting, the district leaders said that they felt that wanted school leaders to embrace the fact that the process was not perfect and they wanted school leaders to be committed to "taking risks and figuring it out as they made progress." Participant 4 stated that as a district it was important that those leaders' journeys be celebrated "because this is really hard work."

Resolvedly, all five district leaders transparently stated that it was important that schools owned the process, owned their decision to participate, and owned all outcomes of the school

redesign engagement. The district leaders felt that, in the initial phase of the roll out, each school had to be given flexibility to determine what the process would look like within their schools. District leaders felt that the space to take risks and explore the process allowed building leaders more ownership of the results and promoted accountability of their choices in engaging in school redesign.

Other measures of accountability that emerged in the data analysis process were all leaders' experiences with their leadership keys where they had to set measurable goals in alignment with student achievement measures. The district felt it was accountable to the process as they took granted funds to hire consultants to support the process. When looking at the recurrent responses for readiness and preparedness, the leaders provided a mix response between engaging in self-research and leaning upon the professional development offered by the district. This concept will be further developed in the research question section as the leaders provided a depth of reflection in this regard as they spoke about their personal experiences and assessing their level of preparedness for engaging in the school redesign process.

The data from the documents were not included in the interview conversations as the documents seemed to be an isolated entity of support to the experience of the school redesign process. However, the documented data from the Governor's Office of Student Achievement supported the feelings of the leaders. The process was big, complex, and the results would be uncertain as Participant 10, Participant 4, Participant 2, Participant 3, and Participant 7 transparently stated in their reflections of their experiences.

Tables 2, 3, and 4 show how the school and district leaders provided strong transparent reflections in the focus group. They all agreed that the data spoke to the quantifiable struggles of navigating a complex process; but, at the end of the process, the leaders were charged with

providing an experience for learners where they owned their learning, had a mindset for achievement, and were able to demonstrate future-readiness (a term frequently used by Participant 3 and Participant 4). This will also be further explained in the results section of the research questions.

### **Major Theme 2: Change management**

The second major theme to emerge from the data, change management, addressed the aspects of change that had to manage to foster effectiveness in addressing student achievement and ensuring all stakeholders understood the vision and goals of Xavier Grace's mission to redesign all of its 50 schools. The aspects include systemic processes and the culture within the schools as they engaged and learn from the experience. Within the second major theme of change management, two subthemes emerge: systemic processes and culture (see Table 3).

Table 3

#### *Theme 2: Change Management*

Theme 2: Change Management	
Subtheme	Code
Systemic Processes	Defining instructional practices (11), Data-driven (10), Operations and Procedures (7), Support structures (7), Classroom design (5), Defining instructional terms (3), Shifts in roles (2), Adding and Modifying Positions (2), Lean-to-thick (2), Pillars of learning (2)
Culture	Autonomy (13), Feedback and guidance (8), Coaching (8), Managing conflict (7), Collaborative learning (5), Celebrate journey (4), Celebrate risks (2), Equity (3), Collaborative learning (3), Professional learning communities (2), Design teams (2)

*Note.* Numbers in parentheses indicate the number of times the specific response was provided.

The participants repeatedly shared that the process of school redesign was a large endeavor with many operating parts. While many of the participants did not say that the experience required that they be change management focused, the data revealed consistency in

terms that aligned with leadership goals that strategically required the leaders to identify what they wanted changed, implement required changes, and develop results in accordance with those changes. The leaders spoke on systemic processes such as operations and procedures, data-driven rich strategies and professional development, and planting support structures through the establishment of frameworks and hiring of specialized personnel. The leaders also referred to cultural shifts that were specific to autonomy, collaborative learning, and managing conflict.

The systemic processes were a big part of how the leaders described their experiences with school redesign. Operations and procedures were initially discussed when interviewing Participant 9. Participant 9 shared that in her role she was charged with developing the framework for the operational procedures of personalized learning for the district. When the district began the work, the district did not have a concrete vision for personalized learning; however, the leaders that applied for the personalized learning grant knew, abstractly, what they envisioned for personalized learning for the Xavier Grace School District per Participant 4 and Participant 6. Participant 9 was their person for shaping a concrete concept for the procedures that would be implemented with the districts' personalized learning coaches and rolled out within the cohorts.

Of all the school leaders, Participant 3 reported that he developed his own operational procedure for structuring the program of his engagement with school redesign as his location was not a part of any of the cohorts nor was his location identified as a standard instructional institution. In other words, Participant 3 did not rely on the framework of the district as he began to build and develop what future readiness would like on his campus. Participant 1 shared that operational procedures in her building were consistently changing as the vision of new leaders impacted a consistent process for school redesign within her building. Participant 8 did not

speak directly on operational procedures but did spend time discussing “using data to drive decisions.” This was a procedural goal for justifying the changes that she desired to see with instruction and educator mindsets.

Participant 5 established a design team that looked at the framework from the district and used that as a platform for developing a rigorous, research-based approach for student achievement. The design team looked at what the schedule, looked at programs, mindset strategies, and developed a model that would be used to govern the operations of the school redesign efforts within his building. A key concept that Participant 5 shared was that it was critical that his team of design leaders be competent, loyal, and committed— “not just compliant”—to the process.

When Participant 7 spoke about his experiences, he spoke a great deal about his use of data to ensure that his school was continuously reaching improvement goals and that students were getting what they needed as learners within the personalized learning school redesign phase. Participant 1, also a school building leader, mentioned that data began to be used during the second phase of the school redesign within her school. Of the several schools in the district to engage in school redesign, Participant 1’s school was one of five schools that were granted additional funding to engage in a second phase of school redesign. In spite of the additional funding, Participant 7 continued to use data to defend the changes made with classroom design, justify the professional development that was offered to his staff, and shaping the instructional practices to be used to personalize the learning experiences for students. Participant 8, when discussing andragogical training, mentioned that she used professional development to shift the mindset of her staff towards personalized, student-centered instruction.



District leaders said that it was embedded in their operational framework to create professional learning communities around data specific to school needs. The district used personalized learning coaches to model their framework for professional learning communities. The district also paid external consultants to support schools as they navigated the operational components of designing curriculum, instruction, staffing, use of funding, and implementing professional development within their local schools. Participant 6 was a district leader who was brought in to provide training to leaders through various leadership programs to ensure the leaders were supported with strategically planned andragogical, research-based training.

The data from the interviews demonstrated that support was a code for change management of the redesign process. The district used personalized learning coaches, in the initial phases of the school redesign process, to support building leaders as they autonomously navigating their approach through school redesign. The district, as mentioned before, hired external consultants to support various aspects of the school redesign to ensure the process remained rigorous and goal oriented. As Participant 6 stated, it was important that “all stakeholders were on the same page.”

The culture of the schools fluctuated as changes were being rolled out within the schools and at the district level. Participant 5, Participant 7, and Participant 6 each mentioned that the morale and culture of their work environments took a negative dip as change began to take place. At the district level, Participant 6 served as a neutral liaison for conflict resolution when leadership changes occurred. Participant 5 said that he had to be thoughtful about who he placed on his design team because people began to demonstrate uncertainty toward the effectiveness of the changes that were being implemented. Participant 7 said that he worked purposefully to “get [teachers] to buy into what [the district] was trying to do for [students].” He said that building

morale was “under construction all the time.” Participant 4 stated that it was essential that school leaders were celebrated because the district realized that the journey would be hard and that they would have to navigate through a lot of changes that would negatively impact their schools in some way due to the range of risks that that they would engage in during the process.

### **Major Theme 3: Constructivism**

Results from the interviews revealed collective attributes of an experience that was geared toward the mindset of how one learns and how one engages with the process. The district leaders, more so than the school level leaders, gave answers that resulted in consistency in their motives for the basis of autonomy being based on the ideology of the paradigm of the constructivism theory. Within the third major theme, constructivism, three subthemes emerged: mindset, transparency, and communication (see Table 4).

Table 4

#### *Theme 3: Constructivism*

Theme 3: Constructivism	
Subtheme	Code
Mindset	Willing to make changes (9), Commitment not compliant to the process (9), Student-capable (8), Involve all in the process (8), Agency (4), Consistent learners (4), Design team (4), Setting SMART goals (3), Voice and choice (2)
Transparency	Exhibitions and school tours (9), Honestly identifying what works (8), Communication (4), Board meetings (3)
Communication	Pilots (8), Experience (6), Share and explain the why (5)

*Note.* Numbers in parentheses indicate the number of times the specific response was provided.

Mindset was the result of the leaders’ reflection of the use of agency to guide the changes that would be implemented in alignment to instructor and student needs. The concept of the growth mindset focus was introduced to the district through a book study and presentation on a concept developed by Carol Dweck per leaders that were involved in the initial design phase of

personalized learning for Xavier Grace. The term for agency was initially voice and choice per the reflections of three leaders. Nonetheless, all leaders used the concept of their mindset when reflecting on their experience to describe that they learned throughout the process based on the approach they took when engaging in the process.

Each leader spoke to the challenges of how individuals on their staff, and external to their staff, either excitedly or hesitantly approached change through the engagement of the process. Participant 9, when designing the district's personalized learning framework, stated that it was important that "the work [school redesign] communicated the learning opportunities that were important to those that were engaged in the work." Participant 4 stated that through the work with National Youth Leadership Council (NYLC) it was important that leaders understand the agency in students building projects that are centered on their interests. Participant 9, working directly with district personalized learning coaches, took time to ensure that coaches were developed with the mindset to own the approach to the coaching process and strategically use techniques to support the autonomous endeavors of the building leaders in which they were assigned to work alongside.

As a building leader, Participant 3 spoke strategically about the mindset of educators and their prior experiences of the expectation and how it was his goal to support their ideology of pedagogy within their classes, but also challenge the educators in ways that their mindsets were grown to embrace the changes that were required for a future ready learning environment. Participant 7, Participant 2, Participant 5, Participant 8, and Participant 1 also shared their experiences with getting staff, parents, and other stakeholders to shift their mindsets about the personalized learning experience. However, just as Participant 3 stated, these leaders did not want to stifle the instructors' independent ability to construct their own understanding of what

would be most important for implementing personalized learning strategies in their classrooms. The same was true for the district leaders that were interviewed. Participant 4, Participant 9, and Participant 2 also spoke in regards ensuring the process of the school redesign efforts were true to how school building leaders decided to engage in the process. Most importantly, the leaders all agreed that the most important aspect of the process was the leaders' ability to reflect on what they have learned and to be responsible for moving forward practices of change in accordance with the framework of personalized learning.

Transparency was a code that supported the constructivism embedded in the school redesign process. Leaders were frequently reflecting and sharing, honestly, what worked and what did not work during the process. These authentic reflective moments took place in board meetings where parents and community members were able to ask questions of school and district leaders. School leaders were able to present their schools' progresses and student works during school tours. Participant 10 spoke specifically about the ways in which the district transparently invited in external district leaders to share their experiences. She also said that it was through these transparent moments that the leaders were able to swap ideas as each group of leaders spoke through their experiences. Reflective discussions with the initial models of personalized learning and how those models changed within the year of the date of this study were a result of the definitive transparent conversations that took place between school leaders, district leaders, consultants, and external community. Participant 4 readily shared those documents and spoke candidly about how the process changed. Participant 6 and Participant 10 also shared their insights with the experiences of how the transparent conversations changed their roles and engagement with school redesign.

Communication was the most important constructed code for defining the participants' experiences with the school redesign process. In reviewing the transcripts, the leaders shared various aspects of how they defended the why of the school redesign initiative. Initially, the district leaders used board meetings to share the thoughts behind transitioning the district from a traditional learning structure to one that embodies personalized approaches to student learning. As the progress of school redesign began to cause further uncertainties among stakeholders, the district felt that it was important to involve key players in the communication process. Participant 4 shared that the district partnered with the Georgia Public Broadcasting organization, the state's superintendent (at the time of the study this was Richard Woods), and the local Chamber of Commerce to highlight the school redesign process and to ease any uncertainties with the changes that Xavier Grace was implementing for the benefit of the students. The district and school leaders all felt that it was important for stakeholders to see what has happening within the schools. Several leaders said that it was important that the district and schools "let them [stakeholders] see" and "let them [stakeholders] experience" the messiness (as described by Participant 10) of the process because they will appreciate the end results says Participant 3, Participant 4, Participant 5, and Participant 7.

### **Research Question Responses**

As all three data sources were analyzed, information that emerged was used to answer the central and subquestions that served as a guide for this case study. Outlined in this section are the results of how district leaders described their experience of the school redesign initiative within Xavier Grace School district.

#### **Central Research Question**

The central research question of the study was: What are the unique experiences of

Xavier Grace district leaders as the district implemented a 21st century school redesign? The unique experiences of the participants are summed up by the collected and analyzed data which revealed the three major themes that shaped an understanding of the participant's experiences: accountability (Major Theme 1), change management (Major Theme 2), and constructivism (Major Theme 3).

Results analyzed from the individual interviews and the focus group sessions revealed insight into the experiences of the participants as they implemented the district's 21<sup>st</sup> century school redesign initiative. The transcribed data from the leaders provided a general description of their experience that was, while generally positive, uncertain. Their journey through the school redesign process required participants to take risks (Major Theme 1), strategically plan to ensure systemic processes are put into place to strengthen student achievement (Major Theme 2), and transparently reflect on lessons learned (Major Theme 3).

As participants moved from year one onward through the school redesign process, a process that was described as a rollout by the district leaders, leaders were required to demonstrate measures of accountability for school achievement data (Major Theme 1 and Major Theme 3). The leaders were required to demonstrate how they were building sustained commitment toward the transformative initiative (Major Theme 2 and Major Theme 3). The leaders were also expected to demonstrate on-going construction of implementation that meet the needs of internal and external stakeholders (Major Theme 1, Major Theme 2, and Major Theme 3) all while ensuring equitable access to every learner (Major Theme 2).

### **Research Subquestion 1**

The first subquestion of the study was: How do professional development activities impact the preparation of district leaders and school administrators for the school redesign

process? The responses of the participants addressed the essentiality of professional development. Demonstrating readiness and preparedness (Major Theme 1) for the venture spoke to the level of accountability that the schools were held as each leader progressed through the school redesign process. With each year, the leaders shared that engaging in professional development improved their experience and the results of the school redesign initiative. The leaders all stated that the development of specific trainings evolved throughout the district-wide engagement with school redesign (Major Theme 1). In both the individual interviews and the focus group, the leaders shared that the district implemented an extension of support to ensure measures of accountability were maintained as extensive systemic processes were being implemented and shifted (Major Theme 2); and, the leaders all agreed that their experience was a direct result of their engagement to construct and understanding pursuit their involvement with redesigning their respective schools and being involved with district level planning (Major Theme 3). In fact, the data continued to show a consistent connection with the leaders shifting and challenging the mindset of participants as they worked to align the vision with the work that was needed to prepare for the complexities of the school redesign process (Major Theme 1, Major Theme 2, Major Theme 3).

As the leaders reflected on the process of how they worked to prepare for the school redesign initiative, several of them shared that the district hired a professional development specialist whose background was specific to working with coaches and consulting leaders through strategies of change. Participant 9 was brought in as a full-time district leader in designing the framework with the feedback of Participant 4 and support of Participant 2 and Participant 10. Participant 6, at the time the objectives were being framed, was not a part of the development phases of the district's proposal for school redesign initiative. When Participant 9

began, she knew that this would be a big task for the personalized learning coaches that she would lead. As she began in her role, she requested “to spend a little time actually developing them [the personalized learning coaches] before they are assigned to schools.” It was critical to her that the coaches be clear on the objectives had the “provisions needed to support the range of autonomy identified for personalized learning at the different sites [schools].”

The leaders mentioned that during the initial phase of the process there was little to no change with curriculum. Participant 8, however, shared that it was critical within her local site to ensure instruction remained rigorous and that the role of technology be used as a tool and not as the means for education. Participant 1, Participant 5, and Participant 7 as stated that instructional practices did not change in the initial phase of learning. Still, over time, the leaders began to implement data-driven practices and mindset exercises so that teachers felt comfortable with changing instruction in ways that was most meaningful to students. While Participant 5 noted that instruction did not change, he was clear to define that his school was already engaged in using STEAM and STEM programs to enrich learning for his students. Engagement with school redesign was an experience that was new not only for Xavier Grace School District, but also for the leaders themselves. Each leader was forthright in stating that they did not have prior experience with personalized learning, but they were competent enough to seek out the necessary information and determined to obtain the knowledge needed to facilitate the change that they envisioned.

Participant 4 spent time doing a lot of reading, partnering with consultants, and visiting districts that were doing the work that they envisioned developing in Xavier Grace. Participant 6, while in her role she did not work directly with schools, she did play a role in building the capacity of leaders within the district. Therefore, she stated that her three years of change



management experience was pivotal in preparing her to serve as a support to both district and school leaders. She mentioned that she was trained in Kotter's Eight Steps of Change.

Participant 9, likewise, did not have prior experience with personalized learning, but was skilled in leading professional learning and developing instructional coaches to support changes in curriculum and instruction. She spent a little of a month engaged in research on personalized learning and using prior knowledge to design a framework that would involve constructivism and a cycle of support as school leaders determined their autonomous approach for redesigning their local schools. Participant 10 shared that she also engaged in her own research for the expectations of personalized learning; upon moving into her new role, she watched educational films and read books to further understand the best strategies for moving practices in school improvement.

Given that her role, at the time of the study, was new to the district it was expected that it would take some time for the role to be fully developed in the measures that the district deemed fully effective for the long process that was still to come, as Participant 4 referenced, for school redesign. Candance also was a self-preparation leader. Prior to her engagement at the district level, Candance had not implemented any strategies of personalized learning.

Just like the district leaders, the school level leaders also engaged in self-directed research to better understand school redesign and personalized learning. Participant 7 reported that he went through three iterations of a district-developed lead program "to obtain insight into what the district envisioned." Participant 5, Participant 8, and Participant 1 mentioned that they were supported with the installation of consultants and district facilitated professional development. Participant 3, however, was not provided district facilitated professional development because his approach to school redesign was not a norm for the expectations that

the district initially envisioned for what school redesign would look like within the district. However, he was supported through financial means so that he could purchase needed material to support the autonomy he granted for the staff to implement authentic and meaningful learning within their classrooms.

### **Research Subquestion 2**

The second subquestion of the study was: How does personalized learning shape the methods implemented for redesigning school district instructional models? Shaping and implementing the initial rollout of the personalized learning model was centralized on shaping the culture for the learning experience (Major Theme 2). The participants equivocally stated as they went through the process it became essential that instructional terms and practices be clearly defined to ensure effective implementation of the district's designed personalized learning model. Two of the founding designers of the school redesign initiative recounted the development of the district's Parthenon. The Parthenon had pillars to show how the district provide support, voice and choice, ensure readiness, and develop support of the proposed systemic plan (Major Theme 1, Major Theme 2, and Major Theme 3). As the experience was recounted, the leaders realized that the Parthenon was an implementation that needed to be redesigned.

According to the participants, the objectives of the school redesign process were vague when the process was implemented within the Xavier Grace School District. The district desired to establish a culture of autonomy and flexibility as it sought to take a leap of faith into redesigning the large district. The leaders that developed the proposal for school redesign admitted that objectives were intentionally broad with the specific intent of giving school leaders and district coaches as much professionally-sound freedom needed to do what was best in the

interest of their learners. Obtaining an understanding of the district's perspective towards its initial objective for a personalized implementation of school redesign was synthesized from the descriptions of autonomy and constructivism elements shared by four of the five district leaders.

Other aspects of the implemented methods that changed was the development of a district-wide rubric which was also developed in 2018, per Participant 4. During the individual interview, she provided a rubric for review that did not exist in the initial phases of the school redesign process. One that she had wish existed when they began the work in 2014. Participant 4 stated that the 2018 rubric "describes the conditions for what personalized learning looks like all the way out...this is one that could not exist in this sort of quality [if not for the lessons] learned from earliest adopters." She transparently shared that the document that she presented was changed several times before its publication.

The school leaders understood that the district wanted to implement a re-imagination for school environments. All five leaders stated they understood they were expected to implement an approach to redesigning instructional measures with the key focus of implementing personalized learning constructs. Four leaders did not share defined goals more than stating that the district provide them the autonomy to design their schools as they deemed necessary for student achievement. One leader, Participant 3, was afforded the ability to go beyond redesigning and moving forward to a developing an entire program that went beyond the norms of the traditional learning barriers and was focused on authentic career ready measures for high school learners. Participant 3 did not have the challenge of change the practices of an already developed learning institution rather he had the challenge of shifts the status quo and mindset of those that could not imagine the independent development of such a program.

The leaders mentioned that during the initial phase of the process there was little to no change with curriculum. Participant 8, however, shared that it was critical within her local site to ensure instruction remained rigorous and that the role of technology be used as a tool and not as the means for education. Participant 1, Participant 5, and Participant 7 as stated that instructional practices did not change in the initial phase of learning. Still, over time, the leaders began to implement data-driven practices and mindset exercises so that teachers felt comfortable with changing instruction in ways that was most meaningful to students. While Participant 5 noted that instruction did not change, he was clear to define that his school was already engaged in using STEAM and STEM programs to enrich learning for his students.

### **Research Subquestion 3**

The third subquestion of the study was: How do pressures for student achievement impact the effectiveness of the school redesign process? The individual interviews and focus group helped to better understand why district leaders had to be accountable (Major Theme 1) and transparent about what they were doing, why they were doing what they were doing, and how they were growing from the initiative (Major Theme 3).

From the perspective of Participant 4, the objectives were simply for the schools to be “willing to take a risk” and be “willing to reimagine the student experience” with the sole purpose of providing a personalized experience for learners. Each of the district leaders admittedly stated that “from the beginning we didn’t know all the answers” but “we knew that we wanted to be a pillar of support to schools and their autonomy.” This objective was referenced with a reminder of the school’s initial Parthenon design which served as a visual for what the district knew and believed would be a sound, objective approach to school redesign with their district.

Being that the process was large, larger than Participant 4, Participant 9, Participant 10, Candance, or Participant 6 had expected, the district knew that support structures needed to be in place to help the local schools. Two years into the beginning process of the redesign, the district “had about 13 personalized learning coaches” to support 23 schools per the reflection of Participant 9. Participant 10, in her reflection, agreed that this was not enough to support the growing needs of the schools. Participant 10 shared that this level of support changed, and the district went from being a “lean district office” to

[adding] positions, and I think they were needed positions because our assistant superintendents had a heavy burden on them to try to do all this [work] and they couldn't [do it on their own]. They each had so many schools and they couldn't do all this on their own, so I think that the schools hopefully are going to feel the layer of support where they need us.

The data on support were a component of the district leaders' initial experience with the changes in the objectives of the school redesign process. Their first approach was to increase support structures. Participant 10 shared that new positions were created to ensure that each school had an instructional personalized learning leader versus multiple schools sharing a single district coach. Other positions were added to increase measures of accountability between the schools and the alignment with the district's vision of redesigning schools. For instance, Participant 4, Participant 2, and Participant 10 all shared that their roles or titles have changed since 2014, but in a capacity where they were facilitating measures of change in a different capacity.

The objective of increased autonomy was narrowed in 2018 per the reflections of Participant 4, Participant 6, and Participant 10. In 2018, the district hired a new superintendent who felt that the district would benefit from having a more unified approach across all 52

schools. Participant 10, in her new role, was hired to provide increased support in accountability for school improvement. Participant 10 shared that the district hired four school improvement specialists. This new role moved Participant 10 from being a district assigned personalized learning project manager where she assisted personalized learning coaches in the management of school redesign.

Another change that came from the shifts in the personalized objective were the use of terminology. First, the district redefined personalized learning, per Participant 2. The district changed the “term student voice and choice to student agency” as Participant 4 went over the rubric. This was where she also shared insightful thoughts about how the district broadened its focus from “just talking about narrow PBL [to talking about] service learning and authentic learning experiences more broadly.”

The biggest objective change was the use of technology. In the initial roll out of school redesign, the district knew that it was essential to for technology to play a role in the classroom, but it did not expect to see teachers place students on devices without providing any formative, traditional instruction said Participant 2 and Participant 10, both of whom were district personnel whom worked closely at the school levels with instructors. This caused the district to reform the types of professional development it offered schools and to redefine the expectations of a “future ready school” per the reflections of Participant 4.

The experience of the leaders led to an increasingly purposeful regiment of communication with stakeholders. For internal stakeholders, the district implemented “monthly drive meetings” to keep them in the loop of the district’s vision and to ensure all were on the same page as with the common language that the district hoped to develop when speaking to external stakeholders about the school redesign process as Participant 10 explained. For external

stakeholders, Participant 2 shared that the district urged school leaders to host parent meetings; the district also developed videos, informational documents, and hosted board meetings to communicate the on-going progress of school redesign.

The board meetings were also designed in a way that there was more engagement with external stakeholders versus just reporting changes as Participant 4 felt that many of her leadership team felt that there was a strong “difference between communicating at people and engaging with people.” This mindset also shaped the types of professional development the district offered leaders during its monthly drive meetings. According to Participant 4, this required that schools have design teams that included parents and community so that they were also looped in on the languages and experience of the school redesign process. Increasing the communication with stakeholders has provided an opportunity for external stakeholders “to see the kind of learning [that the district] was talking about,” said Participant 4. Participant 2 stated that this approach “encouraged parents to trust the process of learning [at the school level] and this was a great way to “share the district’s vision with parents.”

It was important, from all five of the district participants, that stakeholders be committed and not just compliant to the process. Within the past five years, the district leaders have seen an increase in parental and community commitment to the process. The increase in commitment has come from the websites that the schools have been asked to create: (a) allowing parents to see learning in action with school tours, (b) developing pilot programs for fellow colleagues to see the transition of the redesign at the local level, (c) redirecting parents to resolve conflicts with school leaders to build and sustain meaningful relationships, and (d) in purposeful celebration of small-wins.

### **Summary**

The case study sought to understand the experience of school redesign from the perspective of leaders within the Xavier Grace School District. Participants were selected based on their level of experience with school redesign at the time of the study. Therefore, the participants were purposefully selected to share their experiences.

The research for this case study was developed with the use of questions specific to district and school level leaders. The transcriptions from the interviews were coded for themes. Those themes were used to provide a succinct description of the experience from the perspective of the leaders involved in the work. Documents and focus group questions were an additional measure to triangulate the analysis of the transcribed interviews to ensure the interviewer refrained from using bias in reporting the results.



## **CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION**

### **Overview**

The purpose of this intrinsic case study was to understand the experiences of district leaders and what they perceived as best practices for engaging in large-scale school redesign. The study used the experiences of 10 participants to understand their experience with engaging in school redesign within the Xavier Grace School District. This study was designed to provide an answer to the study's central question and three sub-questions to better understand the experiences and reflections of what the leaders perceived as best practices from their engagement with school redesign. The findings and implications of this study are presented in this chapter.

Findings from this study are not intended to extend theory or generalize across multiple cases. However, the findings did provide relevant correlation with current literature and theory. The findings serve to identify implications and practicality of engaging in school redesign on a large-scale. This chapter discusses delimitations and limitations as well as recommendations for future research.

### **Summary of Findings**

After conducting the interview, reviewing documents, and engaging participants in a deeper reflective process via the focus group, the findings from the analysis of the transcripts and data revealed three themes and provided answers to the central and sub-questions for this study. The major themes that resulted from the data analysis were (a) accountability, (b) change management, (c) constructivism. The central question for this study was, "What are the unique experiences of Xavier Grace district leaders as the district implemented a 21st century school redesign?" Xavier Grace is a school district, unlike most districts that have engaged in school redesign that implemented an initiative to redesign the directives of instruction so that each of its

42,000 students experience a personalized approach to learning. The initiative was large, complex, and one that the district had not engaged in prior to 2014. Over the past five years, the district embraced the critical essence of transparent communication, meaningful professional development, unifying strategies, and increasing the layers of support. The 10 participants of this study facilitated unique roles within the redesign process of the school district's initiative. Each district leader had a different position, at the time of data collection, which provided for five distinct reflections of experiences within their roles while engaging in the school redesign process.

All of the building leaders shared the same level of responsibilities but were able to approach redesigning their local school in a way that aligned to their prior experiences, andragogical development, and understanding of what the district expected objectively for the outputs for student achievement. As a result, the data demonstrated that the unique experiences of the participants were specific to their roles and the fact that while they were all willing to try this new process, it was a process that none of them had engaged in prior to the onset of the 2014 implementation of the school redesign initiative.

Sub question one was, "How did professional development activities impact the preparation of district leaders and school administrators for the school redesign process?" Before starting the process, the district leaders and school administrators did not engage in structured professional development as the process of school redesign was uncharted territory for Xavier Grace School District. Leaders become more prepared to navigate the changes and challenges of large-scale redesign by their fifth year of engagement due to professional development activities. As the leaders gained experience within their first year of engagement, the leaders began to develop their own constructs for professional knowledge. The activities that

the leaders engaged in, either on their own or through their work with consultants, impacted the changes that were implemented by year four of the process. By year four, the leaders were able to develop a rubric for personalized learning. In the same year, 2018, the leaders also developed district-wide learning progressions and standards of learning for all courses. Consequently, professional development has directly impacted the significant gains in how the leaders support and involve stakeholders in engaging in the school redesign process. All leaders agree that with only five years in, there is more work to be done over the next five to 10 years; however, they are in a position where they are more prepared for the school redesign process.

Sub question two, “How did personalized learning shape the methods implemented for redesigning school district instructional models?” The ideology that the district had of personalized learning centered on the terms agency (initially voice and choice), autonomy, and interest. It was through the use of these terms that the district implemented objectives that provided a culture for how flexible the approach was for school redesign. Methods for taking risks that were aligned to current research and the bravery to navigate murky trials for change were celebrated.

Personalized learning was the caveat for the implementation of technology within the classroom reported most of the participants. Participants also shared that personalized learning also caused an increase in partnerships with community leaders, parents, and other leading educational leaders. The approach for personalizing learning led to the district using book studies, pilot programs, consultants, school tours, and the establishment of a common language to effectively communicate the terms and expectations of personalized learning.

Sub question three, “How did pressures for student achievement impact the effectiveness of the school redesign process?” Pressures placed upon the district from stakeholders caused the

district to consistently evaluate its approach to school redesign. The objectives of the approach changed to ensure effectiveness as the leaders were intentional to listen to the feedback and input of stakeholders as they engaged in school redesign. Leaders reported that it was important that the community were invested partners of the process.

### **Discussion**

The purpose of this section was to discuss the findings of this intrinsic case study in relation to both the empirical and theoretical literature reviewed in Chapter Two. This section will explain the transferability of the findings to demonstrate how this study contributes to the field. This section will also detail how this study confirmed or extended research.

### **Theoretical Literature**

While a theoretical construct was reviewed, there was no interest to extend theory or generalize the constructs of the theory reviewed across multiple cases (Stake, 2014). The nature of the phenomenon that was studied shaped the research questions, interview questions, focus group questions, and the design of the documents to further understand the application of the 21<sup>st</sup> century learning theory within this study. Therefore, theoretical constructs provided an opportunity to develop meaning, understand the challenges, and assumptions of the experience that Xavier Grace gleaned through the implementation of a school redesign initiative.

The majority of the P21 (2018) learning framework focused on the student's engagement within the classroom. It provided constructs of what a teacher should do and what a learner should do to achieve the outcomes for career and college ready skills within graduates. The participants reported of their experience demonstrated that they obtained an understanding for a viable framework that addressed skills and competence that prepared learners with the readiness needed to be successful in a career or college. Their experiences led to objective changes which

sought to implement approaches that increased student engagement during the learning process and ensured learners continued to thrive beyond graduation in a digital-rich and globally connected society.

Ramey (2016) stated that 21<sup>st</sup> century college and career environments set the tone for what would be required to develop skills within learners that taught them how to retrieve information, access media, and use technology. As the participants discussed how they rolled out the expectation of technology in the classroom, they were honest that the initial phase of technological integration consumed the classroom. They stated that technology was used in a way that they did not expect for it to be used.

When they introduced the concept of one-to-one technology, it was based on what they knew and believed about the importance of a 21<sup>st</sup> century learner being competent in information, media, and technology. This report of their experiences aligned with Kivunja's (2015) theoretical views that learners excel in a college or career environment when they are well-equipped with digital literacy skills. Several of the leaders said that in the first two years they saw teachers doing every lesson, every discussion, and every aspect of learning through the medium of their assigned one-to-one device. The district leaders all agreed that this is not what they intended when they made the decision to support instruction with the one-to-one devices.

Wang and Huang (2018) argued that a technology-supported learning environment was not a method to replace the classroom experience. However, the learning environment needed to be one that was designed to give an adapted avenue in which knowledge and skills were acquired as a component of digital literacy (Kivunja, 2015; Voogt et al., 2013). This was realized by the leaders as they continued in the large-scale redesign initiative. As a result, the schools that began the process were granted additional support and funding to re-redesign their schools—which will

be further discussed in the empirical section. Nonetheless, the second attempt to redesign the schools was mentioned by the building leaders that were a part of the second run of school redesign. The second attempt allowed the school leaders to encourage the use of technology (Kivunja, 2015), but also ensure there was an effective combination of traditional and digital tools used to support instruction (Yen et al., 2018). All 10 of the participants shared perspective on their experiences with the need to implement, receive, or facilitate training on how to align the learning environment with the theoretical concepts for a balanced learning environment.

Theory was used to understand the findings and to determine if there was corroboration between the P21 (2018) framework and the experiences of the district leaders. The results of the interviews, focus group questions, and documents confirmed elements of the 21<sup>st</sup> century learning framework. The greatest confirmation came through the leaders' discussion on technology especially when looking at what the leaders had to say about technology, and how it was used when they began the process in 2014.

In reflection of the theory, the results confirmed the theoretical literature. While the leaders did not specifically speak in terms of passive and active learning (Dewey, 1990; Kolb, 2014), there was a discussion on the best practices for increasing student agency (originally the district called this student voice and choice). The theoretical skill of learning and innovation was a paradigm for why the district leaders partnered with consultants to broaden their approach with active learning strategies such as project-based learning, service-based learning, and capstones. The leaders' reflection of their external partnerships was a contribution to the extension of the research on what theorists believe about experiential learning strategies. The results of this study did not address, however, the theoretical constructs of life and career skills. The leaders addressed a future ready school, but the results did not reveal corroboration with the theoretical

thoughts of a graduate and learning strategies for coping with complex measures (Johnson & Johnson, 2014; P21, 2018). Nonetheless, the documents did show that there was accountability for the district's graduation rate and the percentage of students that proceeded to enter a post-secondary setting.

### **Empirical Literature**

The findings of this study demonstrated the impact that leaders had on the large-scale change initiative. Reviewed literature provided an empirical extension of assumptions on the role leaders played in developing and sustaining high-capacity schools as a result of engaging in large-scale school redesign and will be discussed in this section.

Empirical studies revealed that large-scale transformative initiatives are implemented to address student achievement and enhance organizational outcomes (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006; Little et al., 2015; Manganaro, 2013; Yang, 2014). The documents from the Governor's Office of Student Achievement confirmed that student achievement was the district's basis for engaging in large-scale school redesign. The data presented represented the roll out approach that was implemented by the district per the experiences shared by the district and school-building leaders.

The district allowed schools to volunteer in the redesign initiative. The data from those first, participating schools showed that their data for student achievement qualified those schools for redesign. As the district continued to develop their approach, as the leaders stated, data began to be a part of the discussion at the district level and began to be comparative of the district's progress against state expectations.

School redesign was a process that involved a broad understanding of the many components that must be in place for the transformation to make the outcome expected a reality

(Nattoo, 2018). Research on the process of school redesign documented that the transformative reform was difficult work and that the change process in schools was complex and multi-layered (Li, 2017; Nattoo, 2018; Slegers et al., 2014). The interviews revealed that the leaders had to shift gears and add-in additional supports because the work was larger than they initially expected.

The leaders from the district transparently admitted that the process was complex, and it still required many more years for them to navigate through the process. A few of the district leaders shared that, as they have come to see that multiple layers were necessary, the district has added in new and restructured positions to ensure that they remain accountable to school leaders in terms of support. The support was for one another (district leader to district leader) and for the schools (district to school leader and school leader to instructor) per the reflection of two district leaders.

Leithwood and McCulloch (2016) and Meyers and Sadler (2018) stated that leaders were the lever for change and accountable for shifting organizational behaviors so that there was alignment within the school district. Each leader's reflection demonstrated that as shifts occurred with superintendents, the superintendent at the time of this study began to push for purposeful balance. In 2018, the district presented documents that provided an overview of the superintendent's entry phase analysis. It was this same year that the leaders shared that the district began to unify the system through a unity, strengthen, and ensure change initiative (Henry County Schools, 2018).

Manganaro (2013) stated that the design of the instructional blueprint was an important indicator for aligning student achievement to real-world learning experiences. The district leaders that facilitated the framework design and continued to provide instructional support at the



district level spoke to the development of project, service, and capstone learning projects as a result of their partnerships with NYLC and other external consultants. The district and school leaders also mentioned that, as Vermeulen et al. (2015) empirically purported effective use of technology is essential to enhancing 21<sup>st</sup> century learning.

As a result, the leaders stated that they saw the need to implement professional development to provide andragogical support to seamlessly integrate digital learning and technological use into the curriculum which a confirmation to empirical literature published by Burke (2014), Manganaro (2013), Kreijns et al. (2013), Slegers et al. (2014), Van Acker et al. (2013), Vermeulen et al. (2015), and Vermeulen et al. (2017).

Of all the district leaders interviewed, two demonstrated strong knowledge of how the initiative was funded. Empirical research was confirmed as the district wrote and received grants and other special funding to facilitate school redesign. The funding also supported the district's ability to hire the needed staff to support the sustained success of school redesign.

### **Implications**

The purpose of this section was to address the theoretical, empirical, and practical implications of this intrinsic case study. In the following subsections, an explanation of how this study has implications related to P21's (2018) 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning theory. Empirical implications was explored to demonstrate how this study corroborated previous research on the complexities of large-scale transformative initiatives. Practical implications are discussed to demonstrate the leverage educational leaders have on student achievement. The implied results are not generalized beyond Xavier Grace as this is an intrinsic case study.

## **Theoretical Implications**

Theory was used to provide a construct for the district's use of the 21<sup>st</sup> century theoretical framework to shape the school redesign process for impacting positive student achievement. This subsection provides the impact of the district's decision. Discussion of the theoretical implications also presents the results and offer suggestions in alignment with the theoretical framework of the 21<sup>st</sup> century learning framework.

This study was designed to understand the phenomenon of school redesign in a large-scale turnaround initiative. The district began the process in 2014, but in 2018, the same year in which the P21 (2018) produced its effective use framework for structuring a 21<sup>st</sup> century learning environment, the district designed and implemented its rubric for personalized learning. Inferences of the results were the pieces that the district leaders shared as they reflected on their roles and engagement in the process. When the district began the process, the leaders openly discussed that they had no prior knowledge of what it would take to restructure the district; however, they used perceptual understandings to devise a plan for its initial framework for approaching personalized learning and student achievement turnaround to establish future ready schools.

The theory of the 21<sup>st</sup> century learning (P21, 2018) encourages a display of key competencies and developmental preparedness for career and college readiness. As a collective goal for the theory used to analyze the district's approach, the output of what the theory purports is a timely endeavor. The data analyzed and the results from the conversations with the district leaders and school level leaders suggests that school redesign be thoughtfully engaged. The data from the documents imply that it takes time to see the results intended. The process was bigger than the leaders had anticipated and required an adjusted approach after four years of a strategic

risk-tasking approach. The district is commended for realizing that change was needed and for seeking a viable approach to increasing curricular engagement for learners.

The theory focused on the way learners think (American Association for the Advancement of Science, 1990; Bruyckere et al., 2016; O’Neal et al., 2017; Ramey, 2016). In this case study, the focus was on what the leaders thought about what was essential for them to learn and know in their roles as levers of change during the implementation of the turnaround initiative. Promising areas in which the district will continue to work on are aligning terms and outcomes for what is expected of learners, instructors, and leaders. The leaders demonstrated that it is dedicated to the process and know that it will be a long-haul engagement as seeks to address student achievement among all of its 42,000-student population.

### **Empirical Implications**

Empirical results demonstrate the accountability measures for student achievement that tied directly to the effectiveness of decisions made by the district and school leaders. The strategies that the district used were all in the alignment of what empirical literature discusses for the intent of school redesign’s initiatives to turnaround failing schools and move them to high-capacity institutions (Mitchell, 2016; Stein, 2016; U.S. Department of Education, 2018a, 2018c; Ylimaki et al., 2014; Zubrzycki, 2016). Research shows that leaders develop the capacity of others as they seek to share a vision for an expected outcome (Anderson, 2017; Bass, 1985; Bass et al., 1996; Bass & Steidlemeier, 1999).

The significance of this study was to use empirical literature to draw out the connections of the case study’s findings for the field of education. The connections for the results of the literature and what the research revealed are the following areas: effective use of technology, funding, changes in outcome, staffing, stakeholder engagement, and leadership accountability.

The implications of the findings reveal that it is important for leaders to be prepared to lead the change that they desire. While it was courageous for the leaders to jump in and try an approach that was new, it did cause minor setbacks that had to be addressed.

This study sought to address the empirical gaps in the literature regarding the experiences of school districts that engaged in school redesign. The problem of the present study was to use Xavier Grace leaders to understand the experiences of district leaders and what they perceived as best practices for engaging in large-scale school redesign. Therefore, the leaders of Xavier Grace used their best educational judgments to do what they felt was in the best interest of their student body. There was not a lot of literature for them to review when they began the work in 2014. In 2014, there were just a few school districts, who were much smaller than Xavier Grace, engaging in school redesign for their districts. Consequently, the problem of the study was to conduct research to share the experiences of district leaders and what they perceived as best practices for engaging in large-scale school redesign.

The design of this study, the research questions, and the purpose were based on the empirical gaps. The findings of this study contextualize the leaders' experiences. The findings from this study imply that leaders need support and guidance just as instructors need support and guidance. While this study did not assess the roles of policymakers, the need to make changes were a derivative of policies that came from the federal level (e.g., the ESSA; U.S. Department of Education, 2018c). Being a responsive district, the leaders immediately transposed the policy into a viable approach for its district. The district leaders hired a specialist to figure out the best approach based on research-based practices of that time, and employed staff to help facilitate the process with the knowledge available. However, the gaps in the literature suggests that if policy makers had provided a framework and provided more than financial support, then the process

would have been one that provided the leaders the support and guidance needed to navigate the process with efficiency. Rather the district served as its own pilot for the outcomes for anticipated change. Navigating the transformative process gave the district an opportunity to continuously reflect on the alignment of accountability based on the data it began to collect. Establishing a baseline for data was not discussed in the literature. This is an aspect of guiding change that the district leaders realized and began to implement.

With the implementation of current accountability requirements, leadership preparedness was a problem that the district found essentially important to address. The leaders interviewed desired to provide an environment that supports student achievement and propel students toward an ability to succeed in work and life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. However, current research failed in clearly denoting the strategies and methodology that school leaders should implement to facilitate such a complex task (Anderson, 2017; Little et al., 2015).

### **Practical Implications**

Given that this study was intrinsic to the site, the study was designed to understand the unique experiences of Xavier Grace's participants. Therefore, the practical implications serve as reflective, non-generalized suggestions (Stake, 2014). The analysis of the data, from individual interviews, documents, and the focus group allowed for insight into strategies that might help reduce uncertainties for current leaders as they continue to rollout the process or for new district leaders as the district seeks to broaden its district-wide initiative.

The data purport that large-scale transformative practices focus on clear protocols that shape the methods that individual schools will use to ensure all understand the input that is needed to output student achievement.

The data imply that there were unclear definitions of the objectives, instructional terms and practices, what level of readiness one must have prior to engagement, as well as how to continually prepare leaders for leading and managing change. The data suggested that the district found that piloting programs, increasing support, involving stakeholders, and implementing specific professional development would be essential to enhancing the experience for rising leaders and new school cohorts.

At the time of the study, the district had been a year into its second phase of redesigning. Therefore, it is realistic to use the results from the findings to infer what strategies will be most important for Xavier Grace to employ over the next five years based on the experiences from the first five years. As a result, the district will continue to seek ways to engage stakeholders. During the rollout phases, it became apparent that stakeholders found the process more valuable when they could be a part of the process versus being told about the process. When the schools opened their doors to provide tours, parent meetings, and involving them in meaningful way, the district reported that they saw an increase in positive support from both internal and external stakeholder engagement.

The district will use pilot programs to provide evidence and support for what works as the district continues to transform the institution of learning. Instructors, per the feedback received by the district as they reflected on the growth process of the transformative initiative, stated that they feared the uncertainty of the changes that they were expected to make. Based on the leaders, using the pilot programs were essential to minimize the push back from the instructors. The pilot programs also provided the school leaders with data to support strategies for other instructors to use as they transform their learning environments. The district will use measures to assess the effective use of technology within the classroom to ensure there is a

balanced process between the use of traditional and digital instructional tools. The district saw that when it began in 2014 the classroom became as offices where students sat all day in front of a computer. This is not what the district envisioned when it developed its one-to-one technology plan. The district will continue to develop meaningful positions at both the district and school levels to support the complexities of navigating the transformative process, and be thoughtful about the allocation of funding as it places importance on what supports best practices for student learning and educational leadership for large-scale changes.

### **Delimitations and Limitations**

Staying current in educational trends is a viable aspect of a forward-thinking educational leaders; however, forward-thinking trends are often implemented with little to no previous research to vet the process or to transcend the path for trailblazing educational leaders. Therefore, it was important to use an intrinsic case study that was focused on the unique experiences of a district that engaged in an initiative that was new and not being done by other districts of its size. This methodological approach was essential as the results were not intended for generalization as other districts were not assessed during this research. Given that the large-scale approach was led by a small group of leaders, the population of participants were strategically selected based on model of the 2014 school redesign framework.

The decision to focus on leaders and not teachers or even students was because the current empirical research lacked in providing guidance for the leaders that were held accountable for ensuring the changes that were being pushed down by policy makers. The leaders were being told to move the needle, but not given directives on how to move the needle. It was important to highlight the work of the Xavier Grace leaders; there was an overwhelming

amount of research that highlights the work of instructors and not the leaders that provide the leverage for extraordinary change.

Limitations of this study include the intrinsic case only sought to understand the perspectives of leaders. This study did not seek to understand the experience of students, teachers, parents, business partners, or state educational leaders. The research was intended to sample the experience of purposefully selected participants. Two key weaknesses of this study are that the participant sample lacked gender diversity and the data were specific to a region in Georgia. Of the participants interviewed, three were males and seven were females. Males and females reflect on processes differently and it would have been a great additive to have acquired an even perceptual reflection between the two gender groups.

Another limitation of this study is the decision to isolate the document analysis from one source and on a limited range of data points. While it was purposeful for the questions that this study sought to answer, the findings and implications were not as broad as I had hoped for them to be pursuant the phase of analysis. However, all questions were successfully answered, but the data analysis phase left me with many more questions as I desired to dig deeper and broaden my scope of analysis. It was a struggle not to go back and ask more questions or pull more data. If I were to do so, it would have changed the trajectory of the problems that this intrinsic case study sought to address. This study was designed to be an intrinsic case study that assessed the unique experience of Xavier Grace. Therefore, it was essential that I kept the data collection narrow and specific to the site as I did not intend for this study to serve as a generalization for sites beyond the case (Stake, 2014).



### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Providing a learning experience that is forward-looking (Bikalova, 2018), innovative, progressive, and promotes students' ability to achieve in a future career or college setting is the goal for many 21<sup>st</sup> century educational institutions (Brown, 2005, 2006; Cambourne, 2002; Dewey, 1990; Gagne, 1985; Haran, 2015; P21, 2018; Pappas, 2014). There continues to be a general gap in the literature regarding the experience of school redesign as it pertains to the engagement of a large-scale redesign effort that is centralized toward personalized learning. The purpose was to understand the experiences of district leaders and what they perceived as best practices for engaging in large-scale school redesign. Rich, qualitative data were collected as it pertained to the participants experiences with facilitating school redesign as a leader within Xavier Grace School District. To further understand a broader perspective of the school redesign process within other districts, additional case study research is warranted to compare the experiences of leaders and to determine measures for accountability, change management, and implementing constructivist approach in designing a viable for a district-wide initiative. Additionally, this same intrinsic study could be designed to include classroom instructors, students, and stakeholders. Including this population of participants will broaden the justification for the strategies implementing school redesign for low-performing school systems.

Instead of an intrinsic case study, future researchers may intend to generalize the findings and by doing so it is recommended that a grounded theory or collective case study be used to shape the research. A grounded theory study would be prime for understanding the systemic procedures of school redesign based on the saturation of data collected from purposefully identified participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The data collection would provide an explanation for engaging in school redesign based on the experiences of all key stakeholders. A

grounded theory case would seek to use participants from the school level such as students, teachers, and administrators. The study would also seek to understand the experience from district leaders as well as external stakeholders like parents, local businesses, and policy makers. While it would be a big population of participants, it would be essential to have a wide range of input to shape a theory that supports the actions of educational leaders to address student achievement using large-scale change initiatives. A collective case study would use the questions from this present study to assess the experience of district leaders from multiple districts (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

For statisticians, who rely on numerical data to support analytical decisions, a quantitative design that was either causal-comparative or correlational. Either approach would see to use the variation of resources such as funding, staffing, and resources to a dependent variable such as students or teachers. Given the design of the present study, it is recommended that a quantitative design be used to look at the following independent and dependent variables. A future study, that is quantitatively designed, will look at a specific group of leaders and teachers and determine the results of student achievement based on their leadership styles and access to resources used to facilitate the school redesign process. The data for student achievement would be the quantitative bases for the output of the school redesign process.

Participants within the site strongly indicate that additional research would benefit their ability to confidently navigate large-scale redesign that seeks to embed instructional practices of personalized learning. Additional research would be significant to district leaders that are new to implementing a large-scale transformative process that is girded with 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations for personalized learning that prepares students for college or career readiness (Phang, 2014).

## Summary

This study was an intrinsic case study. The was to understand the experiences of district leaders and what they perceived as best practices for engaging in large-scale school redesign. From the implications derived from the study's findings, I consider the reflective practices to be the most important take-away from the results of the research. The district leaders recognized that its district was in need of addressing student achievement. It is not apparent at this time what questions led to using school redesign to address student achievement. It is presumed that the data from the Governor's Office of Student Achievement, as demonstrated in Chapter Four, served as a basis for turning around the failing scores for many of the schools within the district.

The reflection of the leaders' experience demonstrated that the open discussion allowed the district leaders to reassess and revisit its approach to the large-scale transformative initiative. A district engaging in a change process should see to establish a cycle for assessing its progress and ensuring that it is being reflective of its engagement. As stated earlier, educational initiatives change and responsive district leaders will take the necessary risks to stay ahead of the curve. A part of taking those risks, as demonstrated in the findings and discussions, is that there has to be a high-level of accountability for school districts that desire to create and sustain high-capacity institutions. Therefore, this study has sought to answer questions that will address the gaps in literature for leaders that desire to engage in large-scale transformative initiatives.

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## APPENDIX A: INFORMED CONSENT

### Consent Form

#### A CASE STUDY EXAMINING THE SCHOOL REDESIGN PROCESS OF A LARGE GEORGIA SCHOOL DISTRICT: UNDERSTANDING LESSONS LEARNED FROM A DISTRICT'S PERSPECTIVE

Almecia Monique Watkins

Liberty University

School of Education

You are invited to be in a research study on the redesign process. This study seeks to examine the school redesign process of a large school district from the perspective of the district and school-building leaders. You were selected as a possible participant because you currently hold or have held either a district or school-leader level position and possess at least one-full academic school year of school redesign experience. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Almecia Monique Watkins, a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

**Background Information:** The purpose of this study is to understand what a large, Georgia school district learned through its engagement with school redesign by understanding and articulating an answer to the learned lessons that contribute to the district facilitating a 21<sup>st</sup> century school redesign from the distinct perspective of district and school-building leaders.

**Procedures:** If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

1. Respond to a set of interview questions. This task will take approximately 60 minutes to complete at a time and location convenient to the participant. To ensure the accuracy of data collection, interview responses will be audio recorded.
2. Participate in a focus group session. The session will last no longer than 90 minutes. To ensure accuracy of data collection this session will be audio recorded.

**Risks:** The risks involved in this study are minimal which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

**Benefits:** Results of this study will benefit current and future school district leaders that decide to engage in large-scale school redesign.

**Compensation:** Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

**Confidentiality:** The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report, I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participants will be assigned a pseudonym. I will conduct the interviews in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.
- I cannot assure participants that other members of the focus group will not share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.

The researcher serves as a teacher at The Academy for Advanced Studies. To limit potential conflicts a research assistant will ensure that all data is stripped of identifiers before the researcher receives it. This disclosure is made so that you can decide if this relationship will affect your willingness to participate in this study. No action will be taken against an individual based on his or her decision to participate in this study.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:** Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

**How to Withdraw from the Study:**

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

**Contacts and Questions:** The researcher conducting this study is Almecia Monique Watkins. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at 770.864.8808 or [amwatkins2@liberty.edu](mailto:amwatkins2@liberty.edu). You may also contact the researcher's faculty chair, Dr. Chris D. Bellamy, at [cdbellamy1@liberty.edu](mailto:cdbellamy1@liberty.edu).

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu).

*Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information for your records.*



**Statement of Consent:** I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

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Signature of Participant

Date

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Signature of Investigator

Date

**APPENDIX B: Institutional Review Board (IRB) Permission Letter****LIBERTY UNIVERSITY**  
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

May 14, 2019

Almeia Monique Watkins

IRB Approval 3779.051419: The Experiences of Xavier Grace's District Leaders' Engagement in Large-Scale School Redesign: An Intrinsic Case Study

Dear Almeia Monique Watkins,

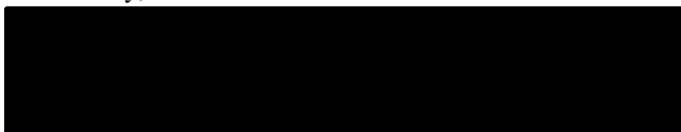
We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty University IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year from the date provided above with your protocol number. If data collection proceeds past one year or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Your study falls under the expedited review category (45 CFR 46.110), which is applicable to specific, minimal risk studies and minor changes to approved studies for the following reason(s):

7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies. (NOTE: Some research in this category may be exempt from the HHS regulations for the protection of human subjects. [45 CFR 46.101\(b\)\(2\)](#) and (b)(3). This listing refers only to research that is not exempt.)

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,



Research Ethics Office

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