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A case study with Green Dot Public Schools on managing the tension between fidelity and adaptation when scaling-up.

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by

Pedro Felipe Cevallos Jr.

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

A case study with Green Dot Public Schools on managing the tension between fidelity and adaptation when scaling-up.

by

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Doctor of Education
University of California, Los Angeles, 2009
Professor Eugene Tucker, Co-Chair
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This dissertation was a single case study with Green Dot Public Schools (GDPS) describing their rapid scale-up process. Specifically, it investigates the phenomenon of the inherent tension between maintaining the fidelity of the original model school's design, culture and values with local adaptation of the brand by stakeholders at the expansion sites. 28 GDPS stakeholders were interviewed and a co-research team composed of eight members from four different school clusters volunteered to help guide the study as well as analyze and check the validity of the emerging findings and interpretations. Ultimately, this study aimed to assist GDPS in increasing student achievement by formulating recommended practices that will most effectively assure implementation of its core values and brand at all expansion schools.

CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Background

Charter schools operate in 40 states and the District of Columbia, educating more than 1 million students in close to 4000 schools (NCED, 2009; NCSRP, 2008). They are mostly small, serving an average of 267 students (CER, 2007) or approximately one-third the size of a typical American public school . Despite their steady growth over the last 18 years, charter schools in 2009 only enrolled approximately 2% of all public school students in the country (NCED, 2009). By comparison private and parochial schools nationwide serve close to 10% of all students (Broughman, Swaim, & Keaton, 2009). In 2007, California had 687 charter schools in operation serving close to 7% of students statewide (NCSRP, 2008).

Charter school movement leaders have identified managed growth as being crucial to their strategy for public school reform (Harvey & Rainey, 2006) with the goal being to create and operate enough high-quality charter schools to compete with school districts (Chester E. Finn, Manno, & Vanourek, 2000; C.E. Finn & Vanourek, 2005). The rationale, according to charter school leaders, is that this will force school districts to make systemic changes in their practices in order to prevent teachers and students from defecting in large numbers to charters (R. Lake, et al., 2007). They further contended that this will either give students the schools they need through competition or drive school districts out of business to be replaced by a system of charter schools mandated by law (Harvey & Rainey, 2006). Since the 1990s, charter school advocates have promised

that there will be a large demand by parents and students interested in matriculating in charters as well as a large supply of educators ready to open and operate them (NCSRP, 2007). While they were correct in forecasting the demand, the supply has not yet materialized. As a result, most charter schools have opened with an over-enrollment of students and have not been able to expand beyond their initial schools (R. Lake, et al., 2007).

By their very nature charter schools are entrepreneurial and face challenges similar to those confronted by small businesses such as access to adequate capital, creating a sustainable infrastructure, growth, and expansion. Since half of all business start-ups fail every year, yet only a quarter of all franchises experience the same outcome (Bradach, 2003), charter schools (as a general rule) attempt to modify franchising and branding models as their managed growth strategy (R. Lake & Hill, 2005; NCSRP, 2007). Charter schools almost always begin with a single school and once it is successful some replicate their original model and open a second expansion school hoping to lure more students with their original brand. This process continues until multi-school charters are finally able to exploit the economies of scale that traditional public schools are afforded merely by being part of a larger system within the school district. Whereas the average traditional public school is part of an organization of six feeder schools, with one-third of all public schools being part of organizations much larger than that, traditional public schools are able to exploit economies of scale quite easily (Chubb, 2005; Paul Hill, 2006). Charter schools, in order to attempt to capture similar economies

of scale, have formed Management Organizations (MOs[1]) in order to pool their resources together. In spite of this, less than 9 percent of all charter schools in the nation, are administered or supported by MOs leaving most charter schools without any of the benefits economies of scale can bring to an organization (NCSRP, 2007).

In 2009, however, charter schools nationwide are in a unique position to scale-up at an explosive rate for three key reasons: (1) President Obama's commitment to remove restrictions on charters expanding nationwide (Obama, 2009), (2) the $4.3 billion in federal stimulus "Race to the Top" funds that charters can tap into (Tomsho, 2009) and (3) the continued funding already in the pipeline by philanthropic organizations (Beller, 2007; Childress & Kim, 2007; Dillon, 2007; R. Lake, 2008). Whereas funding has traditionally been one of the major obstacles charter schools have faced when attempting to scale-up, the last six years have been a time of intense interest by philanthropic organizations in helping charter schools accomplish this goal (R. Lake, 2008; R. Lake & Hill, 2005; NCSRP, 2007). The Bill and Melinda Gates, Pisces, Broad and Walton Family Foundations have collectively committed hundreds of millions of dollars in replication grants to expand charter schools from their individual successful school model into a cohesive system of expansion schools with their own unique brand that can have a positive impact on student achievement on a larger magnitude (R. Lake, 2008; R. J. Lake & Hill, 2006; NCSRP, 2007). From 2002 through 2007, California charter schools received more than $100 million from these donors and were awarded more than $81

[1] Management Organizations (MOs) is the collective term for both non-profit Charter Management Organizations (CMOs) and for-profit Educational Management Organizations (EMOs) that administer and support charter schools nationally.

million in start up and dissemination grants from the US Department of Education (R. Lake, et al., 2007; Young, 2007). In the summer of 2007, Charter Management Organizations (CMOs) in Los Angeles were funded close to $12 million to scale-up their operations and as a result have pledged to open nearly 100 charter schools in the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) in the next few years (Beller, 2007; Childress & Kim, 2007; Dillon, 2007; Gao, 2006; GDPS, 2007; Rivera, 2007; Robelen, 2007; Rubin, 2007; Williams & Mirga, 2006). Never before have charter schools had such an opportunity to take advantage of the economies of scale available to school districts.

The two chief benefits charter schools reap when they scale-up are: (1) they gain bargaining leverage in the marketplace and (2) they have significant savings by consolidating back office support operations (Halsband, et al., 2003). Most importantly, however, students benefit the most when charter schools scale-up because "through economies of scale an organization supporting many schools may be able to provide those schools far more and better services than any school could provide or purchase on its own" (Chubb, 2005, p. 25). Therefore, student achievement could be one of the core benefit economies of scale can bring to charter schools and thus the crux of this study (Chubb, 2005; Paul Hill, 2006; R. Lake, 2008).

A key factor in the success or failure of scaling up, however, will be how well charter schools are able to manage the inherent tension between maintaining the fidelity of the original model school's design, culture and values with local adaptation of the brand by stakeholders at the expansion schools (Flamholtz & Randle, 2007b; Harvey & Rainey, 2006; Horowitz, 2007; Ketelsen, 2004; McDermott, 2000; McDonald, Klein, &

Riordan, 2009; Schneider & McDonald, 2007a, 2007b). While the original school model may work in its own specific context, when the expansion school opens it has to balance very carefully the degree of adherence to the fidelity of the original design with necessary local adaptation of the brand to its new context and student population served. Following the original school model too strictly does not always translate into the success of the expansion school but at the same time straying too far from the original paradigm also limits its efficacy and dilutes its original vision and brand. Joseph McDonald best described this tension experienced by CMOs: **"**Ignore fidelity and what will you take to scale? Ignore adaptation and your design will crack. This is more than just a challenge. It is a dilemma. It can only be managed, never resolved" (McDonald, et al., 2009, p. 19).

As a result, it is important to investigate the recommended practices to employ when balancing this tension in order to inform the charter school movement nationally as well as locally. With charters expanding at such an unprecedented rate, the 2008-2009 academic year was a crucial time to undertake in this investigation. The ultimate goal of this study was to assist Green Dot in increasing student achievement by developing policies and practices that will most efficaciously assure implementation of its core beliefs and brand at all expansion school sites while simultaneously allowing for an appropriate amount of local control at each site.

Site Selection

Green Dot Public Schools (GDPS) the largest and best funded CMO in the county of Los Angeles and the state of California serving more than 7000 students (Beller, 2007;

Childress & Kim, 2007; Dillon, 2007; Rivera, 2007; Robelen, 2007; Rubin, 2007; Scott, 2009; Williams & Mirga, 2006). It was founded in 1999 by Steve Barr to serve high-risk economically disadvantaged secondary school children more effectively than the public school system was doing. The explicit focus of Green Dot is to influence the LAUSD to convert its low performing high schools into collections of successful small schools predicated on a two-pronged approach: (1) the "Six Tenets of High Performing Schools" and (2) recommended practices for all GDPS schools to follow.

Initially the "Six Tenets of High Performing Schools" are: (1) small, safe, personalized schools; (2) high expectations for all students; (3) local control with extensive professional development and accountability; (4) parent participation; (5) maximize funding to the classroom; and (6) keep schools open later (GDPS, 2007). The second part of the GDPS strategy centers on recommended practices their schools are strongly encouraged follow. These include that all students are required to wear uniforms, all curriculum and assessment must be standards-based, the size of each school cannot exceed more than 525 students and every teacher can only have 22 students per class, schools must remain open until 5 P.M., families must volunteer a minimum of 35 hours per school year and each Green Dot school site principal has autonomy over hiring, firing and budgets (Childress & Kim, 2007).

In the Fall of 2006 GDPS received a $1.8 million grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation designed to replicate its original school model and brand as well as a $10.5 million grant from the Broad Foundation to create twenty-one new small high schools in Los Angeles by 2010 (Robelen, 2007). Green Dot planned to create five new

secondary schools in the Jefferson High School attendance area to compete directly with Jefferson High School and thus pressure the LAUSD to make systemic changes in the way it operates its secondary schools (Williams & Mirga, 2006). In the summer of 2007, GDPS again scaled-up its original school model and brand with an additional $7.8 million grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation earmarked to open 10 secondary schools in the Watts community to compete directly with Locke High School (Dillon, 2007). In less than a year, GDPS went from operating and supporting five high schools to an ambitious plan to scale-up to eight times its size in Los Angeles – making it an excellent site to study the phenomenon of the tension between fidelity and adaptation in the context of scaling-up.

Steve Barr, the CEO and founder of Green Dot, as of 2009 had raised more than $40 million from philanthropies and other donors to support his educational reform efforts (Beller, 2007; Scott, 2009). His expansion ambitions also extended beyond the Los Angeles basin and across the country to New York City where he opened a Green Dot New York expansion school in the South Bronx in 2008 (Duncan-Poitier, 2008) with the support of Randi Weingarten, the president of both the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and The United Federation of Teachers (UFT) in New York City (Beller, 2007; Rubin, 2007).

The 2008-2009 academic year was a key time to study the best way to manage the tension between the organization's "non-negotiables" and local school autonomy. Some of the areas of tension Green Dot had been experiencing included creating uniformity in unit plans, discipline policies, pacing guides, the implementation of the recommended

practices and the uniform use of benchmark assessments. The latter was the focus of this study for two reasons: (1) it was most closely aligned with student achievement (Wolf, 2007) and (2) it was the main focus GDPS wanted to study and work on.

Case Study: "The Green Dot Benchmark Exams Program"

GDPS began using periodic assessments in the 2005-2006 academic year and the program grew over the last four years as they have scaled-up. These quarterly exams were developed by an outside vendor in order to gauge student achievement periodically and diagnose specific standards the students did not master. Teachers would then use these data to more strategically target their instruction and reteach. While the home office strongly suggested that all teachers participate in Green Dot Benchmark Exams Program, teachers could technically opt out. All teachers, however, were required to evaluate and assess their students' progress periodically using any instrument of their own design.

"The benchmark exams program" aligned with Green Dot's goal "to transform public education in Los Angeles and beyond so that all children receive the education they need to be successful in college, leadership, and life" (GDPS, 2009) as they diagnosed the students' level of proficiency and help inform instruction (Herman & Baker, 2005; NRC, 2001; Porter & Simthson, 2002; Rothman, Slattery, Vranek, & Resnick, 2002; Wolf, 2007). Green Dot stakeholders viewed these benchmark exams as predictors of students' future success on high stakes accountabilities like the California

Standards Test (CST)[2] and the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) [3]. Similarly, in the national context of high stakes accountability, the benchmark exams were also congruent with No Child Left Behind's mandates to assess student progress periodically (United States. Dept. of Education. Office of the Under Secretary. & United States. Office of Elementary and Secondary Education., 2002). Neighboring districts, mainly the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), have also been using their "Periodic Assessment Program" to monitor student achievement for the last six years.

Green Dot home office managers experienced a push back from teachers and administrators who pointed to the third tenet of "local control" when asked by the home office to administer, analyze and use data from adopted benchmark assessments in order to target instruction. Founder Steve Barr explained the "Green Dot Benchmark Exams Program" best when The New Yorker reported in early May 2009:

> Barr promised teachers more freedom in the classroom. At his schools, the principals lay out firm curricular guidelines, in keeping with California state standards and Green Dot benchmarks, but teachers are free to huddle, and decide what to teach and how to teach it, for the most part, as long as students pass quarterly assessments (McGray, 2009).

This is one of the most concrete examples of the tension GDPS faced between balancing the fidelity of its original model with local adaptation of the brand by the expansion schools and thus it served as the explicit focus of the research questions.

[2] The California Standards Test (CST) is a standardized assessment used to rank schools statewide.
[3] The California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) is a standardized test that all students must pass before they can graduate.

Strategic Issues in CMO Scale-Up

CMOs will have to contend with the three fundamental issues of financial, political and organizational strategies when they scale-up. Financially, they could strive to be self-sufficient like The Alliance – which aims to operate every single charter school at maturity (grades 9-12) without any outside philanthropic contributions or be dependant on outside funding streams like all other CMOs. Politically, charters can either be apolitical like Aspire and KIPP (Knowledge Is Power Program) where they purposefully try to fly under the radar; or they can be politically combative like The Alliance and Green Dot where their explicit goal is to target one specific school district and compete against them until they either make systemic changes to their operations or are driven "out of business". Organizationally, CMOs will have to structure their operations to allow for an adequate balance between fidelity and adaptation. The strategic scale-up issue this dissertation focused on was the latter.

Research Questions

In order to better understand the previously outlined problem, Green Dot Public Schools (GDPS) and I entered into an agreement to work collaboratively on a single case study aimed at answering the following three research questions:

1. In the perception of Green Dot Public Schools' home office-based managers and site-based teachers and administrators, what are the barriers that school leaders and teachers believe inhibit the fidelity of implementing the mandates regarding benchmark assessments?

2. What are the perceptions of Green Dot Public Schools' site-based teachers and administrators, regarding the extent to which they adopt or do not adopt with fidelity home office mandates regarding benchmark assessments? What are some of the reasons they offer for the varying degrees of adoption of these home office mandates?
3. In the opinion of Green Dot Public Schools' home office-based managers and site-based teachers and administrators, what are the policies and/or practices that should be adopted in order to balance the tension between home office mandates and teacher autonomy in the use of benchmark assessments?

Research Methods

The overarching qualitative research design for this project was a case study, which has been defined as "inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (Yin, 2009, p. 15). In the context of Green Dot's scale-up process, I describe the phenomenon of the tension between balancing fidelity to the benchmark exams program as an accountability mechanism and adaptation at each expansion site. The benchmark exams program was the unit of analysis in this case study. Ultimately, this study aimed to assist GDPS in increasing student achievement by formulating recommended practices that will most effectively assure implementation of its core values and brand at all expansion schools.

Public Persuasion

The Green Dot management team agreed to grant me access as a researcher, to sponsor this study and to enact its recommendations. In addition, GDPS leaders and I will jointly plan and present our findings in national and state conferences as well as write articles for publication in academic journals and other periodicals. Furthermore, we will partner with other academics, researchers and charter school movement leaders to disseminate the findings of the study farther.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature on which this study is predicated spreads across several academic domains including: the history of charter schools in this nation, barriers charters have faced when attempting to scale-up, non-education scale-up research, curriculum interventions that have attempted to scale-up, studies by the Interagency Educational Research Initiative (IERI) on scaling-up and finally organizational life cycle theory is reviewed as a theoretical framework. I begin this literature review by contextualizing socio-historically the different scale-up phases American public schools have undergone since their inception. Since it is nearly impossible to understand education in a vacuum, special attention was given to the history of the charter school movement from its nascent ideological stage in the mid-1970s through its national expansion in the early-1990s and culminating with the state of affairs in 2009. The barriers that charter schools have faced when attempting to scale-up are chronicled in detail before delving into the scale-up literature as a whole. While the majority of the scale-up literature does not come from educational research, I draw parallels to how it can be used it to inform our understanding of how to successfully scale-up educational innovations and interventions. Curriculum interventions that have been scaled-up are explained and studies from the Interagency Educational Research Initiative (IERI) are recounted to illustrate the application to this study. The focus is further sharpened on the literature dealing with balancing fidelity and adaptation specifically. Finally, the conceptual framework for this study is organizational life cycle theory and I utilize this to structure my case study with Green Dot.

Socio-historical Context

The contemporary model of American public schooling began as a very small-scale endeavor in the mid-1800s when Horace Mann set up the first "common schools" in Massachusetts (Cuban, 1993; Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Schooling at that time was mostly community-based, with the exception of a few large city school systems (e.g., Boston, New York and San Francisco), totaling close to 100,000 school organizations across the nation (Chubb, 2005; Cuban, 1993; Driver, Thorp, & Kuo, 1997). These early school districts had on average fewer than two schools with each of them educating a little more than 200 students (Cuban, 1993; Driver, et al., 1997; Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Most of these were one-room school houses usually with an unmarried woman simultaneously teaching children across multiple grade levels and age ranges (Chubb, 2005; Tyack & Cuban, 1995). This all began to change in the early 1900s with the introduction of Frederick Taylor's theories of scientific management to education (Cuban, 1993; Tyack & Cuban, 1995). The thinking at the time dictated that in order "to be organized scientifically, schools and school systems needed greater scale" (Chubb, 2005, p. 6) and as a result the original 100,000 school organizations were consolidated into less than 15,000 much larger and more homogenous school districts by the 1930s (Cuban, 1993; Driver, et al., 1997). Schools also more than doubled in size educating on average over 500 students each (Cuban, 1993; Tyack & Cuban, 1995) and school districts increased in size by 12 times in the last seven decades (Driver, et al., 1997), creating the modern large American public schools and districts that have dominated most of the twentieth century.

In sharp contrast, charter schools are independent public schools of choice managed by private organizations (non-profit or for-profit) under an agreement with the charter-granting agency (school district, university, State Board of Education, County Office of Education, etc.) (NCSRP, 2007). The charter school movement in the United States developed from several ideas of educational reform with the earliest use of the term ascribed to New England educator Dr. Ray Budde (Negri, 2005). In 1974, Dr. Budde coined the term "charter school" when he presented his ideas for the reorganization of school districts to the Society for General Systems Research in a paper titled "Education by Charter" (Budde, 1974). In this document Budde advocated that school boards should grant contracts (or "charters") directly to educators thus cutting through layers of bureaucracy and improving education drastically (Budde, 1974; Negri, 2005). Even though Budde's ideas were published in the mid-seventies, they did not gain much traction from the education community until a decade later when the political climate of the nation had changed to focus more attention on restructuring the educational system as a whole. Fourteen years after his original paper, Dr. Budde republished his work with the difference being that this time around it was widely circulated and discussed (Budde, 1988; Negri, 2005). At the same time, American Federation of Teachers (AFT) President, Albert Shanker called for the reform of public schools by setting up "charter schools". His ideas were inspired both by Dr. Budde's work and by his visit to the German Holweide Comprehensive School in Cologne where he witnessed a flexible schedule, genuine accountability, and a very different structure than the American public school system he was accustomed to (Shanker, 1988). He widely

publicized this concept helping to galvanize the charter school movement nationwide (Murphy & Shiffman, 2002). Three years later in 1991 Minnesota became the first state to pass charter school legislation with California following their lead the next year (NCSRP, 2007). Charter schools have continuously grown and attempted to take advantage of economies of scale but have faced numerous barriers along the way.

Barriers to Scale-Up

Charters have had to confront numerous systemic barriers to replication and scale-up including consistently being funded below public school levels (Chubb, 2005; C.E. Finn & Osberg, 2005; Vergari, 2007). Charter schools nationally receive on average 21.7 % less funding per pupil than their non-charter counterparts, or $1,801 per student (C.E. Finn & Osberg, 2005). With close to one million children being educated nationwide by charter schools, the shortfall is in the range of $1.8 billion that charter school students must either do without or Management Organizations (MOs) must find creative ways to fundraise on their own. The gap in California is worse with charter school students receiving 31.5% less funding than traditional public school students are allocated (C.E. Finn & Osberg, 2005). The problem is further exacerbated because "charter schools, unlike traditional public schools, must cover facility costs from operating funds" (J. Smith & Wells, 2006, p. 6) and therefore most often have to lease their sites instead of being able to purchase them. If charters were capable of purchasing their own sites, they could utilize them as assets instead of draining their operating funds. In California, where 15% of the country's charter schools students reside, the law (Proposition 39)

requires school districts to provide facilities to charter students on an equitable basis with non-charter public school students. School districts, however, seldom comply with this law leading to suits being filed by charters against school districts (Gao, 2006).

State legislation similarly discourages charter school scale-up efforts by capping the number and size of charter schools that can operate within a district or across a state (C.E. Finn & Osberg, 2005; R. Lake, et al., 2007; Vergari, 2007). When possible, charter school opponents also attempt to prevent state legislatures from enacting charter laws. If the laws are already on the books, they instead aim to keep them weak (e.g. allowing only school districts to grant charters) or place heavy burdens on charters that non-charters don't have to abide by (e.g. 100% certified teachers at every charter school) (C.E. Finn & Osberg, 2005). Most states also require that MOs that administer charter schools be non-profit entities, directly excluding Educational Management Organizations (EMOs) from replicating and scaling-up (Chubb, 2005; Harvey & Rainey, 2006; Vergari, 2007). Only three states grant charters directly to EMOs and several states also explicitly prohibit them from partnering with Charter Management Organizations (CMOs) to administer and support charter schools (Chubb, 2005). As a result EMOs have tried to circumvent these restrictions by contracting directly with other charter granting bodies with mixed results (Hentschke, Oschman, & Snell, 2002).

Another constant obstacle is dealing with volatile local political support as school board compositions and superintendents can quickly change from year to year and even political issues can shift within a single academic year (Kirst, 2006; R. Lake & Hill, 2005). This makes school districts unlikely partners for charters to scale-up with (Harvey

& Rainey, 2006). Overall, the chartering structure is set up for one school with one charter and one board effectively preventing charter schools from ever becoming systems (Chubb, 2005). In fact "only five states allow charter holders to operate more than a single school" (Chubb, 2005, p. 3) and quite often mandate that each school has its own unique board.

Even when they have been successfully opened, another vital challenge charter schools faced was that they do not have the infrastructure in place to secure key services like facilities, insurance, payroll, information management, professional development, special education, counseling, psychological services, etc. (Chubb, 2005; Paul Hill, 2006). Similarly due to their small size, charter schools struggle to negotiate favorable prices for all the goods (computers, textbooks, desks, etc.) and services (professional development, special education, student information systems, etc.) they must purchase or lease (buildings, office space, etc.) (Chubb, 2005). Since the charter school movement is relatively new, it does not yet have an extensive network of companies that can bundle these goods and services for their schools at competitive prices (Halsband, et al., 2003).

Furthermore, one of the biggest barriers preventing charters without philanthropic funding sources from scaling-up is the lack of access to start up capital and replication capital funds. Whereas the LAUSD employs a small team of educators to plan newly constructed schools during the year prior to opening, charters are not afforded this crucial first step when opening their schools. Charters have only limited capital and pre-petition approval grants that used to be available through the California Department of Education (CDE) using federal funds are no longer approved by the US Department of Education

thus further limiting access to start up capital. This lack of access capital shrinks the talent pool charter schools can draw from as few people are willing to work for free for an entire year before opening up their charter. All of these challenges have been documented and chronicled extensively by leaders of the charter school movement (Harvey & Rainey, 2006).

As a result all of these historical antecedents, the scale of public schooling in this nation has been solely a matter of public policy where each state sets up both the educational and financial parameters for local educational agencies and in turn each one of them determines the size and scope of its schools. As such, scale has never been put to a test in the marketplace and thus school districts and schools have become their current size only through long-term state and local political compromises (Chubb, 2005). Education in the United States, unlike the private sector, is not organized to capitalize on what consumers value the most and as a result it has been impossible to ascertain what the optimal scale for public schools should be.

Private and parochial schools are the nearest example we have of educational scale being tested in the marketplace but the limitations of the comparison are noteworthy as these schools are usually significantly smaller than traditional public schools, only educate one out of every ten students in this country (Broughman & Swaim, 2006) who can afford them and don't always have other schools in their system. The market, in conjunction with public policy, can help to best determine the type of organization and scale that will help increase student achievement most significantly in our public schools (Chubb, 2005, 2006; P. Hill & Lake, 2006). Charter schools offer an excellent

instrument to assess how scale and alternate forms of organizing schools could ultimately achieve this.

The Scale-Up Literature

The scale-up literature in education is limited; most studies have been conducted in such diverse fields such as manufacturing, engineering (software and chemical), medicine, public health, international development, computer science, economics, sociology, social welfare policy, business, management and organization theory (Schneider & McDonald, 2007a). In 1999, the Interagency Educational Research Initiative (IERI) was created as a federal partnership between the National Science Foundation (NSF), the Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences (IES) and the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) in order to explicitly support educational research on scale-up. Specifically, "the ultimate aim of IERI is to identify the conditions under which evidence-based interventions to improve preK-12 student learning succeed when applied on a large scale" (IERI, 2007). Two years later, the NSF established the Data Research and Development Center (DRDC) to support and disseminate the findings of IERI research projects nationwide. One of its major goals "is to build a science of scale-up based on insights from other disciplines and the results of original research conducted within and outside the IERI community" (Schneider & McDonald, 2007a, p. 1). In November 2003, the DRDC sponsored a conference in Washington DC for members of the IERI research community titled "Conceptualizing Scale-Up: Multidisciplinary Perspectives" (DRDC, 2003). The chief

goal of the conference was "to explore how educational research on scale-up might be enriched with theories, traditions, models and practices found in other fields that routinely extend successful innovations into products and practices in different types of organizations" (Schneider & McDonald, 2007a, p. 2). Schneider and McDonald (2007) offer the most cogent synthesis of these conference proceedings and other scale-up research both in education and other fields in their two volume tomes titled "Scale-Up in Education".

Researchers define the concept of "scale-up" in a variety of ways. Baker offers one of the simplest designations when she defines "scaling-up" as "adapting innovation for widespread and supported use" (Baker, 2007, p. 37) Schneider & McDonald contend that "scale-up is the enactment of interventions whose efficacy has already been established in new contexts with the goal of producing similarly positive impacts in larger, frequently more diverse populations."(Schneider & McDonald, 2007a). Similarly, Constas & Brown (2007) argue that scale-up is "the process of testing the broad effectiveness of an already-proven educational intervention as it is implemented in large numbers of complex educational contexts" (p. 253). GDPS' efforts fit under all of these definitions as their school model and brand is both an innovation and an intervention and their attempts to replicate their schools to eight times their current size illustrate the process of implementing these in large numbers and increasing complexity. The efficacy of their model, or as Flamholtz & Randle (2007b) refer to as their "proof of concept", is demonstrated by the fact that GDPS schools consistently outperform their LAUSD counterparts (Childress & Kim, 2007; GDPS, 2007) and from 1999 through the summer

of 2009 they have been funded close to $40 million by major philanthropies and businesses to replicate and expand their original school model (Scott, 2009). Horowitz contends that there are three stages of successful scale-up: (1) prove the educational innovation is effective, (2) show it can be replicated and (3) have an institutional mechanism in place to accomplish this (Horowitz, 2007). GDPS has succeeded in all three of these phases by substantiating the efficacy of their model and brand through their "proof of concept" as outlined above, by replicating their original model and brand to a total of 12 schools and by securing sufficient funding to complete this process.

The nexus between the case study research method and the scale-up literature is also evident as Schneider & McDonald explain:

> Scale-up research is translational research. It is conducted with the explicit objective of informing practice – which means not only documenting the importance of implementing interventions with integrity, but documenting the benefits of balancing fidelity of implementation with adaptation to dynamic local contexts" (p. 11)

As such, this type of research should elucidate the recommended practices to follow when scaling-up while recognizing that it must be contextualized to each local site. Schneider & McDonald further expound on this notion when they content that "scale-up is inherently about numbers. Because it is also inherently all about context, the strategies required to achieve this objective (e.g. replication with difference, implementation with fidelity) vary." (Schneider & McDonald, 2007b, p. 11). Explicit in their analysis is the fact that all scale-up efforts will differ depending on the needs of each local school's context and there can be no one-size-fits-all model.

Scaling-Up Curriculum Interventions

The existing scale-up educational literature tends to focus on three different types of interventions: (1) those that concentrate on the schools explicitly, (2) those that are subject specific and center on individual teachers and (3) those that emphasize clusters of schools (Glennan & RAND, 2004). The majority of educational interventions that have been able to scale-up fit in the first category that focuses specifically on schools and include programs such as Direct Instruction (DI), Success for All (SFA), Different Ways of Knowing and Co-nect (Glennan & RAND, 2004). DI is an elementary teaching model that stresses well thought out and planned lessons that focus on small learning increments with clearly defined teaching tasks (Engelmann & Engelmann, 2004). They scaled-up from 26 original schools to more than 10,000 in close to forty years with varied success (Engelmann & Engelmann, 2004). SFA is an elementary language arts program with close to two decades in existence and used in approximately 1,900 schools (Hassel & Steiner, 2000). Their scale-up strategy was different in that they went from being run by professors and graduate students at Johns Hopkins University to a fee for service program (Engelmann & Engelmann, 2004). Different Ways of Knowing is a K-12 reform effort aimed at working "with schools to identify student learning and professional development goals and choose appropriate school improvement strategies and tools to meet school goals" (Glennan & RAND, 2004, p. 7). Their scale-up strategy is predicated on three phases: (1) planning, (2) implementation and (3) evaluation and seeded their reform in Kentucky first where it developed for five years before being scaled-up nationally (Johannesen, 2004). Co-nect is a K-12 program that provides Professional

Development (PD) for schools focusing on curriculum, instruction, technology and data-driven decision making in order to help them increase student achievement (Goldberg, 2004). Founded in Massachusetts in 1992, Co-nect's scale-up strategy was to grow their company steadily by providing customized PD solutions to school districts. This was a very effective tactic and every year from 1996 until 2004, they doubled the number of school districts they serviced (Goldberg, 2004) until they were bought out by the educational publisher Pearson in 2005.

The two major scale-up reforms that are subject specific and center on individual teachers are Cognitively Guided Instruction (CGI) and the National Writing Project (NWP). CGI provides PD to teachers regarding K-6 students' mathematical thinking (Carpenter & Franke, 2004) and the NWP attempts to improve the way K-12 educators teach writing (McDonald, Buchanan, & Sterling, 2004). CGI specifically has scaled-up not by developing organizational infrastructure for elementary mathematics reform, but rather by concentrating on changing the practices of professional learning communities of teachers and growing from within (Carpenter & Franke, 2004). Specifically, they attempt to change the way elementary mathematics is taught in two ways: (1) by utilizing teachers' successful experiences using CGI as a motivation for changing practice and (2) by drawing on the influence of cadre experts to mentor and coach novice teachers in the process (Carpenter & Franke, 2004). Similarly, the NWP also relies on PD and professional writing communities of teachers to foster reform using its three-pronged improvement infrastructure: (1) an annual review process, (2) developing specialized cross-site networks and (3) internal and external independent research. Their main

strategy has been to scale-up by scaling-down – meaning that they expand their network through "the creation of autonomous local sites able to adapt to local strengths and challenges and to build local capacity." (Joseph P. McDonald, et al., 2004, p. 87). As such they are a decentralized reform focused on the individual contexts of each local site.

Finally scale-up interventions that emphasize clusters of schools include programs such as America's Choice, Project GRAD, the Institute for Learning (IFL) and the Bay Area School Reform Collaborative (BASRC). America's Choice is a K-12 intervention that aims to "ensure all students are academically successful by creating coherent educational systems focused on instruction and building the capacity of all levels of the system to sustain improvement." (Glennan & RAND, 2004, p. 9). Their extensive international research has been an integral part of their scale-up strategy as has been their intense focus on systemic change through coherence (Tucker, 2004). Project GRAD is a comprehensive preK-12 program focused on improving math and reading scores in economically disadvantaged inner city schools (Glennan & RAND, 2004). Their scale-up strategy has been slower than other programs in part because it requires each local community to set up a non-profit corporation and board to support the programs (Ketelsen, 2004). The IFL is an organization that began at the Learning Research and Development Center at the University of Pittsburgh in 1995 and since then it has partnered with more than 25 urban school districts and thousands of schools in order to bring about systemic changes in teaching and learning (Glennan & Resnick, 2004). This K-12 intervention is focused on the core academic subjects and unlike other reform efforts they contend that they already begin at scale – meaning that they work both "top

down" as well as "bottom up" (Glennan & Resnick, 2004). Where most other interventions begin at one site and attempt to replicate its success to more locations, IFL works within the framework of large urban school districts and thus are at scale as soon as the partnership begins. Implicit in this strategy, however, is the notion that everybody in the district from the Superintendent and School Board all the way to down to every classroom teacher will be onboard with this reform. This is obviously not always the case. High level school district officials as well as local school site administrators are empowered to bring about change in the schools they are responsible for through Professional Development, teaching tools and systems for measuring outcomes (Glennan & Resnick, 2004). Finally the BASRC is a K-12 educational intervention that aims to improve student achievement by fostering school site capacity (Vargo, 2004). It began in 1995 and changed its name to Springboard Schools a decade later, yet throughout the entire time it has maintained three dimensions of scale: (1) breath, (2) depth and (3) sustainability. By breath they mean broad involvement in reform efforts as well geographically distributed, depth refers to meaningful changes in classroom teaching and learning and sustainability deals with maintaining specific modifications while recognizing that school reform is a continuous process (Vargo, 2004). While all of these curriculum intervention efforts can inform the ways in which scaling-up could be accomplished, there has only been one study to date dealing explicitly with the challenges Charter Management Organizations (CMOs) face when scaling-up (Joseph P. McDonald, et al., 2004; McDonald, Klein, & Riordan, 2003a, 2003b, 2004a, 2004b; McDonald, et al., 2009).

Balancing Fidelity and Adaptation

In 2003 and 2004, New York University Professor Joseph McDonald and his two doctoral students studied the Big Picture Company (BPC). BPC is a Rhode Island based CMO that embarked on an ambitious scale-up effort with the help of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation at the turn of the millennium. In 2002 they received funding from the Noyce Foundation to study this scale-up process and as a result, they partnered with Dr. McDonald. McDonald and his team (2003, 2004, 2009) engaged in a multi-year qualitative study of BPC and its trials and tribulations as it scaled up. Their work delineated eight key challenges charter schools face when they attempt to scale-up: (1) balancing fidelity and adaptation, (2) teaching and learning the school design, (3) instilling shared ownership of the design among all stakeholders, (4) communicating effectively across contexts, (5) using experience in new settings to improve the school design, (6) obtaining and managing the resources sufficient to scale and (7) negotiating the politics of local adoption and (8) coping with the difference in mindset (McDonald, et al., 2003a, 2003b; J. P. McDonald, et al., 2004a, 2004b; McDonald, et al., 2009).

It is due to the of extensive research underscoring the importance of balancing fidelity with adaptation when scaling-up (Augustine, et al., 2005; Bradach, 2003; Bulkley, 2003; Childress & Kim, 2007; Chubb, 2005; Datnow, Hubbard, & Mehan, 2002; Elmore, 1996; Finnigan, 2007; Gamson, 1998; Glennan & RAND, 2004; Halsband, et al., 2003; Harvey & Rainey, 2006; Hassel & Steiner, 2000; Horowitz, 2007; R. J. Lake & Hill, 2006; R. J. Lake & Rainey, 2005; Joseph P. McDonald, et al., 2004; McDonald, et

al., 2003a, 2003b; J. P. McDonald, et al., 2004a, 2004b; McDonald, et al., 2009; NCSRP, 2007; Schneider & McDonald, 2007a, 2007b; Wilson, 2006; Wohlstetter, Wenning, & Briggs, 1995) as well as GDPS' interests in studying this problem that sharpened this as the main focus of this study. The theoretical framework used to support this study is organizational life cycle theory.

Theoretical Framework

Organizational life cycle theory is a biological metaphor applied to firms that postulates that businesses move in predictable sequences of developmental stages in hierarchical progressions that are not easily reversed (Adizes, 1979; Churchill & Lewis, 1983; Dodge, Fullerton, & Robbins, 1994; Dodge & Robbins, 1992; Flamholtz & Randle, 2007a; Fletcher & Taplin, 2000; Gerloff, 1985; Greiner, 1972; Haire & Foundation for Research on Human Behavior., 1987; Hanks, Watson, Jansen, & Chandler, 1993; Kazanjian, 1988; Miller & Friesen, 1984; Quinn & Cameron, 1983; Sharken Simon & Donovan, 2001; K. G. Smith, Mitchell, & Summer, 1985). The strength of this theoretical framework is that it is both descriptive as well as prescriptive, meaning that it can both explain what happens at each stage as well as recommend specific courses of action at all phases. It is for this reason that it is best suited to guide this case study with Green Dot since each of the different phases the organization goes through requires modifications to the their objectives, strategies, managerial processes, technology, culture, and decision making (Flamholtz, 1995; Flamholtz & Randle, 2007a, 2007b). As

such this theoretical framework played a critical role in formulating recommendations for GDPS to adopt.

Flamholtz & Randle (2007b), building on organizational life cycle theory, define scale-up "as 'the extent to which an organization's design (systems, process, and structures) fits with its stage of growth/development'" (p. 218). Even though GDPS is a relatively young firm, it has managed to raise a significant amount of capital in its short existence and has plans to scale-up drastically in the next couple of years. As such, this theoretical framework can also help connect the organization's design with the stage of development they are currently situated in as well as the stage of growth they will transition into next. Specifically, Flamholtz & Randle delineate five major stages of organizational growth: (1) birth/new venture, (2) growth/expansion, (3) maturity/professionalization, (4) consolidation, diversification and integration and (5) decline and revitalization (Flamholtz, 1995; Flamholtz & Randle, 2007a, 2007b).

The first stage of birth/new venture occurs when an entrepreneur identifies a market need and develops a product or service to meet that need (Flamholtz & Randle, 2007a, 2007b). In the case of GDPS this occurred in 1999 when Steve Barr recognized that the LAUSD was not successfully graduating economically disadvantaged minority children and developed the first Green Dot Public School, Ánimo[4] Leadership (Childress & Kim, 2007). Organizational life cycle theorists advocate that this stage can last 10 years or until the company can achieve $1 million in revenue for manufacturing firms or $333,000 for service corporations. The primary function at this stage is "proof of

[4] All Green Dot schools in Los Angeles use the Spanish term "Ánimo", meaning "zest" and "courage", in their school name.

concept", meaning that there is evidence of the economic viability of the business model. (Flamholtz & Randle, 2007b) GDPS has been in operation for a decade, has surpassed this revenue target forty times and has shown that their model works. This stage usually ends when there is a rapid increase in sales. Since GDPS is a non-profit entity, slight modifications need to be made to the each of these stages.

The second stage of growth/expansion is characterized by rapid growth usually in the range of revenues from over $1 million to $100 million. The two effects of rapid growth are: (1) resources are stretched to their limit and (2) members feel that the business is "out of control" (Flamholtz, 1995; Flamholtz & Randle, 2007a, 2007b). In this stage, the firm needs to acquire adequate resources for continued growth, set operational systems in place and develop a formalized management development program. This stage is also characterized by a more formalized division of labor within the company as well as changes in the size of the administrative components (Flamholtz & Randle, 2007a, 2007b). The central problem for firms at this stage is the ability for the organization to scale-up its form or capabilities to match its current or anticipated size. GDPS is currently in this stage as it is planning to grow exponentially in the upcoming few years. This case study will center on evaluating what GDPS needs to concentrate on in order to be successful in this stage and move on to the next phase.

The third stage is maturity/professionalization and it occurs when a company reaches over $100 million in revenue for a manufacturing firm of $33 million for a services company (Flamholtz, 1995; Flamholtz & Randle, 2007a, 2007b). At this stage, the organization is "professionalized" – meaning that it possess formal operating, control

and planning systems and its structure (roles, responsibilities and relationships between roles) is clearly defined (Flamholtz & Randle, 2007a, 2007b). The main focus at this stage is to increase the efficiency of the systems as a whole. This stage is critical in transitioning from pure entrepreneurship to an entrepreneurially-oriented professionally managed firm. GDPS has not yet reached this and later stages.

The fourth stage of consolidation, diversification and integration occurs when the organization reaches an excess of $500 million in revenue (Flamholtz, 1995; Flamholtz & Randle, 2007a, 2007b). This usually takes place when there is a rapid increase in sales due to the company entering a new market niches. The focus of management at this point needs to be on identifying new markets, creating new products and services that meet those needs and securing the resources to support their production (Flamholtz & Randle, 2007a, 2007b). Only a handful companies have reached this stage including General Electric, Nestle and Johnson & Johnson.

The final stage is decline and revitalization and it occurs "when demand for products levels off, product innovation is minimal, and profitability starts to drop" (Flamholtz & Randle, 2007b, p. 225). Similarly to the previous stage, the management's focus needs to be on seeking new markets or defining new markets from their existing products and services. This stage can be characterized by either a scale-up (mergers and acquisitions) or a scale-down (consolidation strategy of acquiring competitors).

To summarize, the literature on this topic spans over many realms including the historical antecedents of charter schools in this nation and the barriers charters have faced when attempting to scale-up. A vast number of research studies on scaling-up outside of

education were also consulted in order to construct a larger sense of where the topic is nested in the academic literature. Explicit studies on curriculum interventions were discussed in order to contextualize the scale-up literature within educational research. The work of the Interagency Educational Research Initiative (IERI) on scaling-up was similarly analyzed in depth and organizational life cycle theory was advanced as the theoretical framework for my case study.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

Introduction

The winter of 2009 was an optimal time to study the key challenge of how to balance the mandates of the Green Dot home office with the local autonomy of teachers and administrators at each site as it plans to scale-up to eight times its current size in the next few years in both the west and east coasts of the United States (Duncan-Poitier, 2008; Scott, 2009). As such, my study aimed to identify suggested recommended practices to manage specifically the tension between the fidelity of implementation of the Green Dot original school model and brand with local adaptation at the expansion schools. Since the academic literature on this topic is limited, the intent of my study was to generate new knowledge that can inform charter school scale-up practices both locally as well as nationally.

My dissertation was a single case study that I conducted collaboratively with Green Dot home office-based managers, site-based administrators and teachers in order to answer the three research questions:

1. In the perception of Green Dot Public Schools' home office-based managers and site-based teachers and administrators, what are the barriers that school leaders and teachers believe inhibit the fidelity of implementing the mandates regarding benchmark assessments?
2. What are the perceptions of Green Dot Public Schools' site-based teachers and administrators, regarding the extent to which they adopt or do not adopt with

fidelity home office mandates regarding benchmark assessments? What are some of the reasons they offer for the varying degrees of adoption of these home office mandates?

3. In the opinion of Green Dot Public Schools' home office-based managers and site-based teachers and administrators, what are the policies and/or practices that should be adopted in order to balance the tension between home office mandates and teacher autonomy in the use of benchmark assessments?

Research Design

I utilized a descriptive single case study of the Green Dot benchmark exams program in order to understand the complex social phenomenon of the tension between fidelity and adaptation in the context of their scale-up process. This research design was chosen because the focus of the dissertation followed Yin's (2009) three requisite conditions for case studies: (1) it was the most appropriate and effective manner to answer all of the research questions since they involved the perceptions and opinions of GDPS stakeholders, (2) as an outside researcher I had little to no control over the behavioral events (both managerial and organizational) within Green Dot and (3) my case study focused explicitly on a contemporary phenomenon instead of a historical one. Specifically, a single case study was chosen over multiple cases because the GDPS benchmark exams program was a unique case (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2009) of this tension within the context of a large CMO scaling-up very quickly. Merriam (1998) argues that the uniqueness of such a case study is instrumental "for what it can reveal about a

phenomenon" giving us "knowledge we would not otherwise have access to" (p. 33). Finally, this dissertation would most likely be characterized by Creswell (2003) and Yin (2009) as a "descriptive case study" due to the fact that its main focus was on creating a "rich and thick description of the phenomenon under study" (Merriam, 1998, p. 29).

The use of this qualitative research design to study the previously outlined problem yielded five key advantages. First, "the case study method allows investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events – such as individual life cycles, organizational and managerial processes, neighborhood change, international relations, and the maturation of industries" (Yin, 2009, p. 2). This is critical since my dissertation focused explicitly on the real-life events of an organization faced with, what Flamholtz & Randle's (2007) termed "growing pains", as it transformed itself from a large CMO serving five high schools in Los Angeles to eight times that size with the possibility of even more national scale-up. Secondly, case study knowledge is more tangible as it "resonates with our own experience because it is more vivid, concrete and sensory than abstract" (Merriam, 1998, p. 31). The study aimed to provide Green Dot with clear and material recommendations to manage the tension of fidelity and adaptation. Thirdly, case study knowledge is developed by reader interpretation as "readers bring to the case study their own experience and understanding, which leads to generalizations, when the new data for the case are added to old data" (Merriam, 1998, p. 32). Fourthly, the knowledge gained from this case study was contextualized to the specific culture, values and lived experiences of GDPS stakeholders and as such the recommendations were tailored explicitly to meet their needs. Since I am a Green Dot

outsider, I needed to rely on their insider tacit knowledge to ensure that my claims and interpretations were both accurate and valid. This lead to the final advantage: the use of this participatory or collaborative mode of research ultimately enhanced the internal interpretive validity of the study (Merriam, 1998) and fostered cogenerative learning in which "the quality of the research can be enhanced because the insiders are able to contribute crucial local knowledge and analysis to the research, and can comment effectively on external interpretive frameworks as well" (Greenwood & Levin, 2007, p. 110). As an outsider I could offer multiple and distinct perspectives from which to analyze the problem but as insiders, GDPS stakeholders had a significant amount of tacit knowledge that was crucial to understanding the problem and formulating the best solutions to it.

Site and Sample Selection

Green Dot was chosen because it was the largest and best funded CMO in the county of Los Angeles as well as the state of California (Beller, 2007; Childress & Kim, 2007; Dillon, 2007; Rivera, 2007; Robelen, 2007; Rubin, 2007; Williams & Mirga, 2006) and as such it had positioned itself to scale-up exponentially in the next few years. This created a unique context for studying the phenomenon of the tension between fidelity and adaptation and ultimately formulating recommended practices to manage it. Since all Green Dot sites serve a predominantly homogeneous population of economically disadvantaged inner city children of color, sample selection focused instead on the stage of implementation taking place at each school site. The original model school was

Ánimo Leadership which opened in 2000 and was followed by four expansion schools (Ánimo Inglewood, Oscar de la Hoya Ánimo, Ánimo South Los Angeles and Ánimo Venice) which opened from 2002 through 2004 to form "the Founding Five Schools" (GDPS, 2007). The next phase was comprised of five more schools that were established as "the Jefferson Transformation Project" (GDPS, 2007) in 2006 and included Ánimo Ralph Bunche, Ánimo Pat Brown, Ánimo Jackie Robinson, Ánimo Justice and Ánimo Film & Theater Arts. The final stage was the Locke Transformation Project that included a cluster of six schools (Ánimo Locke Launch to College Academies, Ánimo Locke Tech, Ánimo Watts 2, and Ánimo Locke 1, 2, 3 and 4) with a seventh scale-up school set to open in the Fall of 2009 (Ánimo Locke ACE Academy).

The case study co-research team was composed of eight members from three different GDPS sites at different stages of implementation: (1) two from the original five founding schools (2) two from the five schools in the Jefferson Transformation Project and (3) two from the two schools in the Locke Transformation Project as well as two home office based administrators (nine members in total counting me). They were recruited through an electronic solicitation from me forwarded to the entire organization by the Chief Academic Officer (CAO). The role of the co-research team was to help guide this project as well as analyze and check the validity of the interpretations. It was my sole responsibility, however, to write this dissertation in its entirety.

This study was conducted with both GDPS home office-based managers as well as representatives from all three school clusters in order to ensure that a blend of older and newer stakeholders were included in the co-research team and thus assure a more

balanced analysis. By selecting sites that run the entire gamut from the original model school which opened in 2000 to expansion sites that will open their doors for the first time in the Fall of 2009, I was able to conduct a longitudinal analysis of schools at many different stages of implementation, with differing local needs and contexts and with a variety of accountability measures. (See appendix B)

Data Collection

The data in this study were collected using four different and overlapping qualitative methods: (1) documents, (2) interviews, (3) direct-observation and (4) asynchronous online focus groups.

Documents

Green Dot granted me access to key documents including memoranda, correspondence (hard copies and electronic), research reports, business plans, strategic and operating plans as well as internal surveys they conducted on the benchmark exams program.

Interviews

I interviewed and recorded 28 Green Dot stakeholders including all co-research team members (at least once) as well as the majority of home office-based managers, school-based administrators and teachers that the co-research team deemed to be key informants for this case study.

Direct-observation

All field notes were kept in my researcher's journal and became a fluid document that recorded and planned the next steps of the research project. The purpose of my journal was to capture as much thick and rich detail about the phenomenon of the tension between fidelity and adaptation using the case of the benchmark exams program in the context of Green Dot's scale-up.

Asynchronous Online Focus Groups

Since the late 1990s, "the use of online qualitative research (particularly online focus groups) has gained increasing consensus" (Bosio, Graffigna, & Lozza, 2008, p. 192) in the areas of marketing (Grover & Vriens, 2006), health (Tates, et al., 2009), criminology (King & Wincup, 2008) and educational research (Creswell, 2007; Flick, 2006; Merriam, 2009; Moyle & Fitzgerald, 2008; D. W. Stewart, Shamdasani, & Rook, 2007; K. Stewart & Williams, 2005; Turney & Pocknee, 2005; Walden, 2008). Online focus group discussions can be either synchronous (where the participants and the moderator discuss the issues in real time) or asynchronous (where the participants and the moderator discuss the issues at separate times). Synchronous online focus group discussions tend to use tools like Internet Relay Chat (IRC) while asynchronous online focus groups use forums, email and mailing lists. This study specifically used asynchronous text-based online focus groups (Anderson & Kanuka, 2003) in the form of an email mailing list where I served as the moderator and the participants, through the discussion, validated the emergent findings and shaped each next phase of the study. The chief benefit of using this data collection method is that the use of the online discussion

environment, in contrast to face-to-face focus groups, promotes a "reflective" conversation rather than a "spontaneous" conversation by allowing members time to read and consider postings before responding. (Kralik, Price, Warren, & Koch, 2006).

Data Analysis

Documents were analyzed first in order to contextualize the historical antecedents of the Green Dot benchmark exams program and figure out where the study should be oriented next in order to answer the research questions. Secondly, 28 interviews were conducted with Green Dot stakeholders in order to learn the issues surrounding the pushback from school-based teachers and administrators regarding implementation of curriculum and related benchmark assessment mandates from the home office. From this group of participants, a subset of eight members volunteered to serve as co-researchers in my case study and helped to validate the emerging findings and formulate the recommendations through the asynchronous online focus groups.

Specifically, I conducted and analyzed a total of five asynchronous online focus groups with the co-research team as well as with cadres of stakeholders. There were three homogeneous populations (home office based managers, school based administrators and teachers) and two heterogeneous groups made up of the co-research team and a group of key informants they selected. In order to construct "larger meaning of the data" (Creswell, 2003, p. 190) all sources, including direct-observation, were coded utilizing the following four categories: (1) barriers that inhibit fidelity of implementation, (2) perceptions of the extent to which mandates are adopted with

fidelity, (3) perceived reasons for the varying degrees of adoption of benchmark assessments and (4) suggested best policies/practices.

Credibility and Interpretive Validity

The three principal strategies that were used to ensure the interpretive validity of the study were: (1) member-checking, (2) peer debriefing, (3) triangulation (Creswell, 2003) and (4) participatory/collaborative modes of research (Merriam, 1998). Initially, every asynchronous online focus group discussion with the co-research team began with a review of the transcript of the previous meeting's notes ensuring accuracy and transparency. All co-research team members were an integral part of the validation process as they checked for misinterpretations or biased points of view. Similarly, a fellow doctoral student agreed to peer debrief with me once a month during the study. She reviewed my work to date and asked critical questions "about the qualitative study so that the account will resonate with people other than the researcher" (Creswell, 2003, p. 196). Thirdly, the data was triangulated from the multiple data sources and different methods in order "to confirm the emergent findings." (Merriam, 1998, p. 204) Ultimately this study aimed to have consistency in the findings through these three strategies as well as by leaving an audit trail (Merriam, 1998) for other researcher to replicate.

Ethical Issues

Maintaining confidentiality was of paramount importance during all phases of the case study. I was the only person who had access to all of the transcripts in their entirety and they were stored in my laptop where I was the only person with access to it. The laptop was controlled by password protection. When the transcripts were presented to the co-research team, all names mentioned were removed electronically or blacked out in hard copies and all interviewees were labeled using unidentifiable codes.

There were no other major ethical issues I faced as a researcher since I am a GDPS outsider and did not benefit in any way from skewing the findings or interpretations in any direction. I am not a Green Dot employee nor do I supervise or have any other type of undue influence on any of the stakeholders. My sole motivation was to produce a high quality case study that could help shape Green Dot's policies and practices and inform the charter school movement as a whole

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Introduction

In 2009, charter schools are poised to scale-up at an unprecedented rate due to the educational policy directives of the Obama administration as well as the philanthropic funding already in the pipeline. Green Dot, specifically, will continue to expand their original charter school model and brand in Los Angeles and New York. The key challenge Green Dot and all other CMOs will face as they scale-up is how well they will be able to manage the tension between maintaining the fidelity of the original model school's design, culture, values and brand with local adaptation by stakeholders at each of the scale-up schools. As such, the chief goal of this case study was to formulate recommended policies and practices that Green Dot can adopt to assure implementation of its core beliefs and brand at all scale-up schools while simultaneously allowing for an appropriate amount of local autonomy. In the context of benchmark assessments, specifically, balancing this tension is crucial to monitoring student achievement (Wolf, 2007).

The direct means for accomplishing this goal was a case study whereby I enlisted the help of 28 GDPS stakeholders (15 teachers, nine school based administrators and four home office based managers) for an initial interview in order to make the first contact and locate key members to recruit for the co-research team. Eight GDPS employees ultimately joined the co-research team including two participants from each of the three cluster schools (Founding Five, Jefferson Transformation and Locke Transformation) and

two home office based administrators. Through this process, the co-research team and I answered the following three research questions:

1. In the perception of Green Dot Public Schools' home office-based managers and site-based teachers and administrators, what are the barriers that school leaders and teachers believe inhibit the fidelity of implementing the mandates regarding benchmark assessments?
2. What are the perceptions of Green Dot Public Schools' site-based teachers and administrators, regarding the extent to which they adopt or do not adopt with fidelity home office mandates regarding benchmark assessments? What are some of the reasons they offer for the varying degrees of adoption of these home office mandates?
3. In the opinion of Green Dot Public Schools' home office-based managers and site-based teachers and administrators, what are the policies and/or practices that should be adopted in order to balance the tension between home office mandates and teacher autonomy in the use of benchmark assessments?

Research Question # 1: In the perception of Green Dot Public Schools' home office-based managers and site-based teachers and administrators, what are the barriers that school leaders and teachers believe inhibit the fidelity of implementing the mandates regarding benchmark assessments?

As data were collected and analyzed for the first research question, three findings emerged that helped to explain the perception of GDPS stakeholders regarding the barriers that school leaders and teachers believe inhibit the fidelity of implementing the benchmark assessments. The three findings that emerged were:

1. Teachers feel vulnerable about discussing their benchmark assessment data in public.
2. There is a lack of uniformity across Green Dot sites in calendars and pacing.
3. There is a lack of an explicit follow-through mechanism for using the benchmark data to reteach.

Finding # 1: Teachers feel vulnerable about discussing their benchmark assessment data in public.

> Teachers do not want their results to be shared among the other schools and maybe they feel like it is going to be a gotcha moment instead of like…this is something we need to work on, we can we improve this because it does take a certain amount of confidence to say okay, this is how my kids did, everybody look at it, judge me!
>
> -- Founding Five Cluster Math Teacher # 2

More than 70% of all GDPS stakeholders interviewed (n = 28) cited teacher vulnerability as a key barrier inhibiting the fidelity of implementation of benchmark assessments. The 20 stakeholders who reported this finding included 14 teachers, two home office managers and four school-based administrators. Transparency was the overarching theme that emerged from these interviews. Fourteen teachers out of the 20 stakeholders who reported this finding (70%) spoke of feeling vulnerable due to the inherent transparency in the process of analyzing the benchmark assessment data. Even

though all teacher names are withheld when the data are presented, Green Dot's small size makes it very simple to figure out which scores correspond to which teachers. The uneasiness of the situation was best described by Founding Five Cluster Principal # 2:

> Some people struggle with their data being transparent to other people so I think there's some discomfort with other people knowing how your kids did and it becomes a little bit more personal than it's supposed to be.

These same teachers also worried that the transparency of the process would lend itself to be used as an evaluative tool regarding their own performance. While it is reasonable to assume that the principal would incorporate his or her understanding of a teacher's benchmark scores in how he or she assesses that teacher's performance, in follow-up conversations, all school site based administrators interviewed (n = 9) reiterated the position of the home office that benchmarks are not to be used as performance metrics. Despite that, it is still a lingering perception among GDPS teachers. As Founding Five Cluster Principal # 1 concluded:

> My teachers know and I reinforce the fact that I'm not using the benchmarks as a tool for their evaluation. It does become a very competitive tool and it becomes very competitive between schools.

This lingering perception served as a key barrier inhibiting the fidelity of implementation of benchmark assessments. In addition, the benchmarks scores also became a source of competition amongst schools. This competition is also predicated on the inherent transparency of the task. Even though GDPS does not set up the benchmark assessments to foster competition among teachers or schools, that is what takes place. As Founding Five Cluster Science Teacher # 2 explains:

> They [benchmark assessments] become a competition where scores and data are put up for all to see kind of like a scoreboard….and since the

> schools are so small, you can attribute those scores directly to a specific person, to a specific teacher in that school. Schools and departments get very competitive about the scores.

The theme of transparency also extended to administrators. As half of all home office based managers interviewed (n = 4) and close to half of all school site based administrators interviewed (n = 9) contended that in a data oriented organization like GDPS, leaders at all levels need to set the tone for transparency. As Founding Five Cluster Administrator # 3 maintains:

> Green Dot is just data driven and our teachers start really afraid of data because we make it pretty much public from the first moment they walk into our schools and it is public for us as administrators as well.

It is important to note that the three school site based administrators who spoke of cultivating a culture of transparency in their schools, were all from the Founding Five Schools. The co-research team concluded that it is probably due to the fact that those administrators serve in schools that have been open the longest and as such have had more time to foster such a culture and experiment with ways to roll out the benchmark exams program. Similarly, the co-research team also concluded that this barrier dissipates over time as the "Green Dot Benchmark Exams Program" continues to grow.

In conclusion, teacher vulnerability to the inherent transparency of the benchmark assessment process was a key barrier inhibiting the fidelity of implementing the benchmark assessments. Specifically, teachers' uneasiness about the entire process made it difficult to execute with a high degree of fidelity.

Finding # 2: There is a lack of uniformity across Green Dot schools in calendars and pacing.

> Ironically, we as the principals have actually approached Green Dot [home office] and said we want to start having greater consistency across our schools because we think that is what is going to take us to the next level.
>
> -- Founding Five Cluster Principal # 3

Close to two-thirds of all GDPS stakeholders interviewed (n = 28) described the lack of uniformity across school sites as a key barrier that inhibits the implementation of the benchmark assessments mandate with fidelity. The nine Green Dot stakeholders who reported on this finding specifically delineated two areas where variations were perceived to be the most problematic: (1) calendars and (2) pacing. The lack of uniformity in calendars across the organization resulted in less instructional time afforded to teachers in schools that began the academic year later – much to the detriment to teachers and students in those schools. Similarly, the variation in the pacing guides teachers developed and what the benchmark assessments covered, created a similar disconnect that also placed certain students at a disadvantage as they did not cover all the standards the benchmark was assessing.

Even though Green Dot uses two different calendars, the benchmark assessments and all high stakes accountability tests still take place within the same time frames. As a result schools that start later in the year want the latest possible dates for their assessments in order to give their students the most time possible to prepare. This lack of uniformity in calendars across Green Dot was best captured by Founding Five Cluster Principal # 1:

> It goes back to the fact that in the past we've had three or four different calendars that the schools were on. This year we made it down to two

> [calendars] so that is definitely helping a lot more because we all want uniformity – for the most part – across the schools.

This lack of uniformity in school calendars results in some teachers and students having less instructional time to cover the same standards that were assessed on the benchmark. As Locke Cluster English Teacher #1 explained:

> The Ánimo schools start at different times and many of them started the year earlier than we did. This gives me less time in which to teach the material and to get the information to my students. Yet they will be held responsible for the same content that is tested in the first benchmark as other schools that had more teaching time. That's not really fair to my kids.

The second area of variation that the nine Green Dot stakeholders found problematic was pacing. Before the benchmark assessments were introduced, most teachers constructed their own pacing guides but those were never taken into account by the vendor when they constructed their benchmark assessments. This resulted in a lot of resistance from teachers toward the implementation of the benchmarks, as Founding Five Principal # 1 chronicled:

> Some of the teachers just don't see the correlation of the pacing guide with the benchmarks and so that's where the biggest fights come from. I think that some [benchmarks] work but most are not aligned to the pacing, you know, and that's what I have to deal with and go back to my teachers and fight them on it, but yes, definitely, the better the benchmark is aligned to the CSTs [California Standards Test], the less battles an administrator would have.

Teachers were particularly resentful about the fact that they had to construct new pacing guides that correlated with the benchmarks – even if those new pacing guides did not reflect the best sequence to teach their specific content. As Jefferson Cluster Science Teacher # 2 contended:

> I've also heard it right from the mouth of other teachers. They don't like being put on somebody else's strict pacing because they might fall behind or need to teach their content in a specific order. Once the benchmarks were made, we all had to scrap our own pacing guides and teach what was going to be covered on the benchmark.

In addition, teachers (and the co-research team) also noted that the rollout of the benchmarks seemed backwards in that instead of the exams correlating to the pacing the teachers had already created, teachers were instead asked to adapt their pacing to meet the standards that the exam was assessing. Founding Five Cluster Math Teacher # 2 captured the frustration best when she said:

> So at first there are a lot of complaints about errors in the benchmark exams. Also the other thing that the teachers did not like was that they felt like they had to adjust their curriculum maps and their unit plans to match the standards that were tested on the benchmark as opposed to the benchmark adapting to our curriculum, the way it should be. It was very frustrating for teachers.

Much of this frustration centered on the fact that most of teachers felt that their autonomy was being eroded. It is important to also note that the majority of Green Dot teachers are attracted to the school because of their third tenet of "local control". As a result most Green Dot teachers (14 out of the 15 teachers interviewed) joined the organization in order to have more instructional autonomy than they did at their previous large urban school district. At first the benchmarks were perceived as a threat to their newfound autonomy. Founding Five Cluster Principal #3 captured it best when he said:

> The issue that I have heard is pacing. Teachers like to have the flexibility in when they teach what, you know, especially in subjects like algebra. Some teachers want to be able to teach these concepts up front. Others want to teach them during a different time of the year. Teachers felt that they were giving up some of their autonomy in terms of designing their

> curriculum and pacing when having to align instruction to the benchmarks, instead of the other way around.

In conclusion, calendars and pacing were the two areas of variation GDPS stakeholders and the co-research team felt formed a key barrier in inhibiting the implementation of the benchmark assessments mandate with fidelity across their organization. Specifically, the lack of uniformity in calendars resulted in teachers and students at different schools not having equitable time to cover the material that would be tested on the benchmarks and this in turn caused implementations that strayed away from the original spirit and letter of the program. Similarly, the differences in pacing calendars across the organization made it more difficult to implement the benchmark program with a high degree of fidelity.

Finding # 3: There is a lack of an explicit follow-through mechanism for using the benchmark data to reteach.

> Unfortunately we don't have a support mechanism built in to go from the test data right back into reteaching. I'm not even sure if all students got their data back but even if they did, there is nothing specific in place for how to use it.
>
> -- Founding Five Cluster Math Teacher # 1

One-third of all teachers interviewed (n = 15) noted that while significant attention has been paid to analyzing the benchmark assessment data over the last four years, not as much has been devoted to specific ways those data can be used to reteach. The co-research team agreed with the five teachers who reported this finding and added that as an organization they are ready to move into the next phase of implementation.

Most GDPS stakeholders are comfortable with the first part of the task, making sense of the data but feel they need to learn the next step in the feedback loop, reteaching. The most vivid description of this process was captured when Locke Cluster Math Teacher # 1 said:

> Another barrier is how they [benchmark assessments] are used afterwards. I think that, you know, you take a test that gives you some information about what might not be happening or happening in the classroom but then I don't think that there's follow through with that. We do have meetings, we do debrief, we talk about what the things are, but then it's kind of just there. It doesn't go to the actual implementation stage and there is never any follow up. We take a benchmark to assess where students are or are not. We talk about what we're going to do. But then there's not a follow up assessment discussed school wide or district wide on what you can actually do to reteach those topics. There's not enough of, well, how am I going to reteach this and all the new material for the same benchmark at the same time.

While this teacher pointed out the challenges faced in the classroom, Founding Five Cluster Science Teacher # 2 advocated for a specific course of action while reorienting us to the most important stakeholder of all:

> After each benchmark, the department needs to go over the questions and answers with students. And I think that really should be done at the school site. A school should be looking at that information with the student. I think we were missing that part of the student reflection because this is supposed to be for students. Students need to see where they are in relationship to their goal of mastery of the standard or mastery of some specific concept and so I think that is a huge part of it. It is not supposed to be. They put too much pressure on --- they put too much emphasis and this is for the home office. This is for the teacher. But really it should be mostly, this is for the students.

The co-research team concurred with this teacher's analysis that the benchmarks need to be for the students but also pointed out that teachers play an integral role in using

the data from these benchmarks to inform their instruction. As such, the co-research team concluded that the review of the benchmark tests should be discussed explicitly with each student at their local site. In conclusion, the co-research team and I believe that Green Dot is ready to tackle the next phase of this project, showing teachers explicitly how to use that data to reteach. The fact that this has not been implemented yet has been a chief reason for the variations in implementing the benchmark programs with fidelity.

Research Question # 2: What are the perceptions of Green Dot Public Schools' site-based teachers and administrators, regarding the extent to which they adopt or do not adopt with fidelity home office mandates regarding benchmark assessments? What are some of the reasons they offer for the varying degrees of adoption of these home office mandates?

As data were collected and analyzed for the second research question, two key findings emerged that described the perceptions of GDPS' site-based teachers and administrators, regarding the extent to which they adopt or do not adopt with fidelity home office mandates regarding benchmark assessments. Special attention was given to finding explanations for some of the reasons for the varying degrees of adoption of these home office mandates. The dual findings were:

1. The majority of teachers adopted the GDPS' home office benchmark assessments mandate with a high degree of fidelity.

2. Adaptations to the benchmark assessments mandate should be made for specific subjects and different pedagogical philosophies.

Finding #1: The majority of teachers adopted the GDPS' home office benchmark assessments mandate with a high degree of fidelity.

Thirteen out of the fifteen teachers interviewed (86%) self-reported that they adopt benchmark assessments as faithfully as possible in the way they are constructed and rolled out by the home office. The co-research team confirmed this finding and further clarified that the program only has seven requirements, four of which teachers are directly responsible for and are simple to implement with a high degree of fidelity. The four requirements are: (1) all teachers must administer all 4 benchmark exams within the specified window of time (approximately two weeks), (2) all teachers must agree to follow the blueprints/pacing guides for all benchmark exams, (3) school sites must scan their own answer documents into the student information system software at least 3 days prior to the collaboration day for each benchmark exam and (4) all teachers must meet after the first 3 benchmark exams to share reflections on their data and collaborate on next steps for unit planning (GDPS, 2008). If any modifications took place, the teachers reported that it involved simple tasks like correcting errors in the exam construction or content. It is important to point out, however, that even though the benchmark exams program is voluntary, most teachers choose to participate in it because it is much easier than having to construct your own benchmark assessments from scratch.

Finding # 2: Adaptations to the benchmark assessments mandate should be made for specific subjects and different pedagogical philosophies.

While most teachers self-reported that they implemented with a high degree of fidelity home office mandates regarding the benchmark assessments, two areas where adaptation would be beneficial emerged. Close to half (46%) of all teachers interviewed and one school based administrators interviewed believe that adaptations to the benchmark assessments are necessary in two areas: (1) specific subjects and (2) pedagogical philosophies. It is important to note that the seven teachers that reported this finding covered the entire core curriculum areas of mathematics, language arts, history and science and came from all three of the cluster schools. The one principal who reported this finding was from a Founding Five Cluster school. The co-research team felt that based on these two facts, as well as their own observations, this finding was accurate and valid. The best explanation for adapting the benchmark assessment based on the specific discipline was advanced by Founding Five Cluster Principal # 2:

> So for example, English standards are recursive so if you didn't get this standard on this exam, you're gonna (sic) see it on the next one. History, for example, which is more chronological, if whatever you get assessed on a benchmark one, you probably won't see those same standards on benchmark two. So it's tough for teachers to think long term like if I'm only thinking about the next benchmark and I'm not thinking about the CSTs on there, I'm not gonna (sic) necessarily put it at the top of my list to go back and reteach standards that they're not even gonna (sic) see on the next exam. So, I think part of some work to be done, I would say, in our school site, and in every school site, is providing teachers the tools so that they know how to go back and without messing up their pacing for the entire year we then start on activities and assessments that can sort of spiral back to what the original – what the original benchmark was for.

Currently the benchmark exams program does not take the specific subject area into account when constructing the tests. For example, close to one-third of Green Dot math teachers use the College Preparatory Mathematics (CPM) approach to teaching Algebra while the majority of them teach it from the traditional method. This creates a disconnection between the mathematics faculties both across the organization as well as within individual school sites, greatly limiting the potential for collaboration around the use of these benchmark data. Similarly, survey courses like World History and American History tend to be taught thematically while deemphasizing strict chronological approaches. It is very challenging to standardize the benchmarks exams to cover both thematic and strict chronological approaches to the teaching and learning of history. The co-research team and I agree that more attention needs to be paid to the specific discipline being assessed over the four benchmarks.

Adaptation of the benchmark assessments would also be beneficial for schools with different pedagogical philosophies. Ánimo Film and Theater Arts, specifically, is the only school in Green Dot that uses project based learning. This does not always lend itself to using the benchmark assessments as currently constructed, as Ánimo Film and Theater Arts Teacher # 1 chronicles:

> I think in the project based school one of my biggest difficulties would be struggling with putting the depth you want in a certain amount of time. So that's kind of my biggest issue 'cause I want the kids to go really deep into things and really explore. That's the model of our school. And sometimes it seems like there's a lot of benchmark assessments so the kids are not really getting that depth and things are crammed.

As a result, benchmark assessments in this school are modified to align with the school's philosophy. The same teacher explains how:

> I administer benchmark assessments but it's not like they all sit down in the room and take a traditional test. I administer it my way. We have a project based curriculum and are responsible for certain benchmarks that they [students] work on over a period of time. All benchmark assessments here are theme based essays and research papers and persuasive writings and compositions and multimedia presentations and films. So I distribute a different benchmark but they have a certain amount of time to work on this. It's because the school's project based and so everything we do here requires a lot of depth and it's less about multiple choice answers and more about explanation.

Adaptation of the benchmark exams would probably have to be the most radical at Ánimo Film and Theater Arts since their pedagogical approach of project-based learning is the least congruent with the multiple choice approach of the exams as currently designed and constructed.

In conclusion, most teachers in GDPS adopt with fidelity home office mandates regarding benchmark assessments. Two areas where adaptation would be beneficial for teachers and students are for (1) specific subjects and (2) different pedagogical philosophies.

Research Question # 3: In the opinion of Green Dot Public Schools' home office-based managers and site-based teachers and administrators, what are the policies and/or practices that should be adopted in order to balance the tension between home office mandates and teacher autonomy in the use of benchmark assessments?

As data were collected and analyzed for the third research question, four key findings emerged as recommendations of policies and/or practices that GDPS should adopt in order to balance the tension between home office mandates and teacher

autonomy in the use of benchmark assessments. The co-research team and I recommend that Green Dot Public Schools:

1. Continue the "Green Dot Benchmark Exam Program" with specific adaptations at the school and home office level.
2. Create and implement uniform calendars and pacing guides across the organization.
3. Create an implement explicit follow-through mechanism for using the benchmark data to reteach.

Recommendation # 1: Continue the "Green Dot Benchmark Exam Program" with specific adaptations at the school and home office level.

> The benefit is that I get far more Professional Development days with my peers than I would have otherwise had. Green Dot only does two PD days a year if you don't participate in the benchmarks. So I got four other days that I would sit with other history teachers and talk shop and talk strategy and it was all data based. And the teachers who haven't participated haven't had that experience yet.
>
> -- Jefferson Cluster History Teacher # 1

> I think on the collaboration days, we need to differentiate the PD a little bit more so that people can really feel like they're actually making the best use of that time and getting what they need out of it. It seems like some of the PD time or collaboration time is geared toward our newer teachers, which is fine, but it kind of leaves out those of us who have been teaching for a while. I would like to improve too but the needs of somebody who is brand new are not the same as those of a 8 year veteran.
>
> -- Jefferson Cluster Math Teacher # 1

All stakeholders interviewed (n = 28) agreed that the benchmark assessments are beneficial for teachers and students and need to be continued with some adaptations. At the school level, the co-research team felt that the revision should focus on making

benchmark assessments part of the explicit overall school wide goals in order to involve all teachers in the process. While at the home office level, the co-research team contended that the modifications should be in differentiating Professional Development (PD) for all GDPS stakeholders. These two adaptations would greatly benefit teachers and students and help build upon on all the four years of hard work that has been invested in the "Green Dot Benchmark Exam Program" to date.

At the school site, principals should link benchmark assessments explicitly to the overall school wide goals. As Founding Five Cluster Principal # 2 explains:

> I think the other thing that we could use support on is helping administrators to balance all the things that we're responsible for doing and still making sure that benchmark assessments are part of our cohesive school wide plan and not something that happens on the outskirts for four subject areas among the best.

By orienting each school's entire faculty and staff to the commitment by the principal to the benchmark assessments would set the tone for transparency while ensuring inclusion of all faculty members in the process. This would also signal to all of the students the importance of the benchmark assessments and the commitment by the entire faculty to their successful and faithful implementation. As Founding Five Cluster Principal # 2 once again clarifies:

> And I can say, in our school site, for example last year and the past two years there wasn't any necessarily whole school connection so Art and the Spanish teachers never heard about benchmarks. So they weren't really in the loop about what's going on. So I think that some work that we can do is how to connect the benchmarks as part of our overall school wide goals, how we can make those transparent to all content teachers and also build on some responsibility for teachers that aren't testing for helping out the other content areas in whatever

way they can.

At the home office level, the co-research team contended that in the very same way that instruction is differentiated for all students, Professional Development (PD) should also be targeted to meet the needs of all faculty members. The two specific areas where differentiation was felt necessary were based on (1) the amount of teaching experience and (2) the specific discipline. Since the average Green Dot teacher has only 4.3 years of experience (De Jesus, 2009), its logical for Professional Development to be geared toward educators at the beginning of their career. Teachers with more experience, however, also expressed the need for their own PD to be differentiated. As Jefferson Cluster History Teacher # 2 opined:

> Practices we should implement? Well…one is that we really need more targeted PD for specific teachers. The same way that one size doesn't fit all with kids, it's the same way with teachers. I think a lot of new teachers – and Green Dot does have a lot of brand new teachers -- are coming into this blind in that they don't know anything about curriculum, they don't know anything about instruction, they don't have any curriculum maps or pacing plans or anything to go on. All they have are the standards for their grade level and with just that it's hard to create a whole year calendar – especially if you've never done it. And I empathize with them but I already went through my masters and credentialing programs -- so my needs are very different than a novice. I need PD too but it has to meet me where I'm at and help me get to the next level.

The co-research team agreed with this teachers' sentiment and added that professional development activities should also be discipline specific for more experienced teachers. As Jefferson Cluster Science Teacher # 2 shared:

> Yeah there are mostly brand new teachers in this organization. So almost everything that we do in PD is a review for those of us who have been in the classroom for at least 5 years or more. I'd be

> interested in getting science specific PD like a workshop on how to modify specific labs for different types of learners or in something more specific to my discipline so I too can grow as a teacher rather than repeating what I learned in my credentialing program all over again. That's what I have asked for and hoped to get is that differentiated special event based on experience and my specific subject area

In conclusion, 100 percent of all GDPS stakeholders interviewed (n = 28) want the "Green Dot Benchmark Exam Program" to continue with two specific adaptations. Specifically, at the school site level they would like the program to be aligned explicitly with the school wide goals. The benefit is that this would engage all faculty members in the program – even if their content area is not currently tested. While at the home office level they would like to have differentiating Professional Development for all of the GDPS stakeholders. Special variation should occur in the areas of amount of teaching experience of the participants as well as their content area.

Recommendation # 2: Create and implement uniform calendars and pacing guides across the organization.

The second key finding in research question # 1 chronicled the challenges that arose for teachers and students due to the lack of uniformity across Green Dot schools in calendars and pacing. The co-research team and I believe that having a standardized school calendar across all sites as well as having common pacing plans directly aligned to the benchmark exams would greatly benefit both teachers and students. Even though GDPS appeals to more autonomy oriented educators through their second tenet of "local control", the emerging key finding was that stakeholders would be willing to trade some

of their autonomy for higher student achievement. This sentiment was captured best when Founding Five Cluster Principal # 3 said:

> We have this autonomy and we are also trying to implement with some degree of fidelity Green Dot's model, right? But we're all kind of doing our own little thing and we are all stuck at around 700 API. How is it that we're going to get to the next level? I believe that it really will necessitate that the five schools start giving up some of their autonomy so that we start doing things similarly, so that we can use each other as resources and we can start using common language around instruction, common language around lesson design, common language about evaluations, common language about modifications. I can see the benchmarks being an important piece of that.

It is important to note that that the co-research team agreed with the sentiment of this principal and also added that when teacher autonomy and student achievement come into conflict, one should always side with student achievement. Commonalities across each campus in terms of calendars and pacing guides would allow for more collaboration between teachers during the data analysis and discussion phases of the program.

Recommendation # 3: Create and implement an explicit follow-through mechanism for using the benchmark data to reteach.

As detailed in the third finding of research question # 1, the majority of GDPS stakeholders are comfortable with the data analysis phase of the program and are ready to delve into developing the specific mechanism for using that data to reteach. The co-research team concurred with this finding and contended that this should be added as the fifth goal of the program. So that the goals of this program would now read:

1. Provide the ability for schools to track individual student progress

2. Create a common assessment tools across the organization that allows teachers to use common data from which to inform instruction.
3. Create the opportunity for collaboration amongst teachers so that best practices can be shared across the organization.
4. Provide multiple opportunities for students to get accustomed to standardized testing.
5. Create an explicit follow-through mechanism for using the benchmark data to reteach.

The most passionate rationale for doing this was put forth by Founding Five Cluster Principal # 2 when he contended:

> Green Dot can help provide school sites with better tools, like realistic practice tools for reteaching. If I'm going to ask you to reteach this topic, and I don't have any way to help you understand how that's possible then that is not a realistic expectation to begin with.

In conclusion, Green Dot stakeholders want to focus their energies going forward on the reteaching component of the benchmark exams program. They understand the analysis component and now need an explicit follow-through mechanism that they can use to take that data and convert it into reteaching lessons and units.

The discussion of these findings and recommendations and how they relate to existing theory and research are discussed in depth in chapter five. In addition, the limitations of the study are also delineated with a special focus on opportunities for future research.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Introduction

In this chapter, I will first discuss the key findings and recommendations formulated by the co-research team and me. Next, I explain their connections and contributions to the organizational life cycle and educational scale-up literature. Special attention is devoted to the contributions of this study to the research base regarding the key scale-up challenge of balancing fidelity and adaptation. Thirdly, I describe some of the limitations of this study and continue by delineating possible opportunities for future research. I finish the chapter with my conclusions of the study.

Key Findings

The co-research team and I outline the three key barriers that GDPS stakeholders perceive to inhibit the fidelity of implementing the benchmark assessments: (1) teacher vulnerability, (2) lack of uniformity in calendars and pacing and (3) lack of an explicit follow-through mechanism for using the benchmark data to reteach. On face value this seems internally contradictory with key finding # 1 in research question # 2 that concluded that the majority of Green Dot teachers adopted the home office benchmark assessments with a high degree of fidelity. How can you adopt a mandate with a high degree of fidelity yet contend that there are three key barriers that prevent you from accomplishing this very goal? Upon closer analysis, however, there are three specific reasons that help explain the seeming discrepancy.

Initially, all of the qualitative data were self-reported by Green Dot teachers and the finding that they were implementing the benchmarks with a high degree of fidelity began emerging early in the study. At that point, I was a complete outsider and teachers treated me with a polite and professional distance reserved for outside evaluators and would choose to divulge only certain levels of information. Upon further probing in follow-up interviews my hunch was confirmed as teachers shared with me that they were unsure at first if I would report them to the home office for not following their mandates with fidelity. As the study progressed and the trust among the co-research team grew, I learned that some teachers did make modifications to the benchmark exams but they were usually very minimal like correcting errors in the exam construction (no right answer, two right answers, etc.) or content (facts, dates, formulas, etc.). The co-research team and I agreed that these adaptations were too small to not conclude that the teachers indeed adopted the benchmark assessments with a high degree of fidelity.

Secondly, in order to faithfully implement the "Green Dot Benchmark Exam Program" a teacher only had to complete four specific and simple tasks. Every teacher had to administer all benchmark assessments within the specified two-week timeframe, follow the blueprints/pacing guides, scan their own answers and meet after the first three benchmark exams for a collaboration day. Since participation in the program is voluntary and participating teachers signed a contract agreeing to the terms of the program, it can be concluded that the majority (86%) of teachers indeed implemented the benchmark exams with a high degree fidelity. It is important to point out, however, that even though teachers can always opt out of the benchmark exams program, they are still required to

assess their students' progress periodically. In essence, it is a lot simpler for teachers to be part of the program than to have to construct their own benchmarks to use with their students.

Thirdly, these apparent inconsistencies are further mitigated by the second key finding in research question # 1 which chronicled the lack of uniformity across Green Dot schools in calendars and pacing. This finding sharpens the focus and reveals a more complex picture where Green Dot stakeholders are constantly engaged in a mutually negotiated tension between uniformity across school sites (fidelity) and local variation (adaptation). This when coupled with the second key finding in research question # 2 which concluded that Green Dot stakeholders felt that specific adaptations to the benchmark assessments should be made for different subjects and pedagogical philosophies best illustrates the inherent paradox Green Dot teachers face: uniformity across campuses versus variation at each local site. On one hand, most of the teachers were drawn to the organization because of the third tenet of "local control" yet the three recommendations point to the fact that most GDPS teachers and stakeholders prefer uniformity across the organization and thus would give up some of their autonomy in the process. This sentiment was best captured when the co-research team concluded that when educator autonomy and student achievement come into conflict, one should always side with student achievement. What is not clear, however, is whether fidelity in the short term could undermine the development of teachers in the long term.

Recommendations

Building on those key findings, the three recommendations formulated were: (1) The "Green Dot Benchmark Exam Program" needs to be continued with adaptations at the school and home office level, (2) The Green Dot home office should create and implement uniform calendars and pacing guides across the organization and (3) The Green Dot home office should create an explicit follow-through mechanism for using the benchmark data to reteach. These recommendations were based on the explicit desire of all GDPS stakeholders to help improve student achievement across their campuses.

Initially, it is important to highlight the fact that 100 percent of all GDPS stakeholders interviewed (n = 28) found significant value in the "Green Dot Benchmark Exam Program" as an instrument for monitoring student achievement and as such they would like for it to continue. Specifically, they felt that the periodic monitoring of students gave them valuable data that they could use to make more strategic decisions about which standards to revisit and reteach, greatly enhancing student achievement. The two areas where adaptation was found by the co-research team to be necessary were: (1) at the school level the focus should be on making benchmark assessments part of the explicit overall school wide goals in order to involve all teachers in the process and (2) at the home office level there should be differentiation of Professional Development (PD) for all GDPS stakeholders. The co-research team felt that it was critical to involve all GDPS teachers in the benchmark exam program, regardless of the subject area they teach, as that would communicate to all students the importance of these assessments in monitoring their academic achievement. Similarly, the co-research team concluded that

the program needed to be modified at the home office level by adapting the Professional Development offerings to meet the needs of Green Dot teachers at different stages of their career as educators.

Secondly, the co-research team and I found that the lack of uniformity in calendars and pacing plans across the organization was perceived by Green Dot stakeholders as a major obstacle to implementing the benchmark assessments with fidelity. The issue of variation in school calendars was particularly problematic as it resulted in less instructional time afforded to teachers and students in schools that began the academic year later. Likewise, the difference in the pacing guides teachers developed and what the benchmark assessments covered also left some students at a disadvantage. As a result, the co-research team recommended uniformity instead of variation when it comes to calendars and pacing.

Thirdly, the co-research team and I recommend that the Green Dot home office should create an explicit follow-through mechanism for using the benchmark data to reteach. While significant PD time and effort has been devoted to teaching GDPS stakeholders how to analyze the benchmark assessment data, very little attention was paid to constructing explicit ways to use that data to reteach concepts and standards not mastered by students. This is critical next step in the instructional feedback loop.

Meta-recommendation

My overarching recommendation to GDPS is that they should plan strategically around their organizational growing pains. While some vulnerability is normal for

teachers to experience when sharing their data publicly with a few schools, the discomfort is amplified as the organization scales-up. As such, transparency can be a double-edged sword used to monitor student achievement but also evaluate teacher quality (whether consciously or not). Similarly, there is a paradox between "local control" and uniformity. While the third tenet of the Green Dot model advocates autonomous decision-making at each local site, the results of this study instead point to an organization where the majority of stakeholders prefer to have uniformity in calendars and pacing at all sites. This uniformity, however, still needs to allow for adaptations at each expansion site on the basis of subject area and pedagogical philosophy. This will become more evident as more scale-up sites adopt more of a project-based learning model like Ánimo Film & Theater Arts. Is essence, processes that might work with a few schools create a different dynamic as the organization grows quickly and uniformity must always be tempered with adaptation to each unique context and student population.

Connections and Contributions to the Literature

The findings and recommendations of this study are consistent with organizational life cycle theory as well as current educational scale-up research. Specifically, this study directly builds upon organizational life cycle theory and adapts it to the domain of non-profits in general, and to Charter Management Organizations (CMOs) in particular. Similarly, this study also contributes to the limited scale-up educational research base by reporting on the challenges and successes Green Dot faced when scaling-up their benchmark assessments program. This directly adds to the

research base in two out of the three different types of scale-up interventions currently studied: (1) those that concentrate on the schools explicitly and (2) those that emphasize clusters of schools. (Glennan & RAND, 2004). Finally, this study drills down explicitly on the key challenge CMOs experience when they scale-up, balancing fidelity and adaptation (McDonald, et al., 2009).

Organizational Life Cycle Theory

Organizational life cycle theory is based on a linear biological analogy applied to corporations scaling-up and it contends that businesses move in predictable sequences of developmental stages in hierarchical progressions that are not easily reversed (Adizes, 1979; Churchill & Lewis, 1983; Dodge, et al., 1994; Dodge & Robbins, 1992; Flamholtz & Randle, 2007a; Fletcher & Taplin, 2000; Gerloff, 1985; Greiner, 1972; Haire & Foundation for Research on Human Behavior., 1987; Hanks, et al., 1993; Kazanjian, 1988; Miller & Friesen, 1984; Quinn & Cameron, 1983; Sharken Simon & Donovan, 2001; K. G. Smith, et al., 1985). The five major stages of organizational growth according to the theory are: (1) birth/new venture, (2) growth/expansion, (3) maturity/professionalization, (4) consolidation, diversification and integration and (5) decline and revitalization (Flamholtz, 1995; Flamholtz & Randle, 2007a, 2007b). This theoretical framework was used because it is both descriptive as well as prescriptive and therefore it has the ability to explain what happens at each stage as well as recommend specific courses of action at all phases. This is particularly useful since each of the different phases the organization goes through requires modifications to the their

objectives, strategies, managerial processes, technology, culture, and decision making (Flamholtz, 1995; Flamholtz & Randle, 2007a, 2007b). It is important to note, however, that some adaptations to the theory are necessary since Green Dot Public Schools is a non-profit organization and the theory was originally developed for the profit-oriented model of business.

At the beginning of my study I incorrectly assumed that Green Dot was in phase 2, growth/expansion. My supposition was based on the matching of the theory's general description for each stage with my superficial initial observations of the case. On face value, GDPS seems to be in stage two as its plans to grow to eight times its current size fits with the characteristic of rapid expansion delineated by the theory. On closer look, however, a more accurate metric to use is the revenue attainment range. By its fifth year in operation, Green Dot raised close to $40 million to fund its schools (Beller, 2007; Childress & Kim, 2007; Dillon, 2007; Gao, 2006; GDPS, 2007; McGray, 2009; Rivera, 2007; Robelen, 2007; Rubin, 2007; Scott, 2009; Williams & Mirga, 2006) in half the time it takes most businesses to progress through the first stage of birth/new venture (Flamholtz & Randle, 2007a). This is an important distinction because the two "keys to a successful stage II firm" are (1) the ability to acquire resources and (2) the ability to develop complex operational systems (Flamholtz & Randle, 2007a, 2007b). Green Dot has been able to accomplish both of these with its success in the securing of financial, physical, technological and human resources as well as its continued scaling-up of the accounting, information systems, production, research & development, marketing, sales and human resources (Beller, 2007; Childress & Kim, 2007; Dillon, 2007; Gao, 2006;

GDPS, 2007; McGray, 2009; Rivera, 2007; Robelen, 2007; Rubin, 2007; Williams & Mirga, 2006). It is for all of the above outline reasons that I conclude that GDPS in 2009 is not in stage 2, growth/expansion but rather in stage 3, maturity/professionalization. It is important to note, however, that Green Dot scales-up in two distinct ways: (1) schools that build enrollment year by year (usually one grade at a time) and (2) conversion schools that have all four grade levels at the same time. Regardless of the type of scale-up, it can be concluded that GDPS is past phase 2.

The third stage of maturity/professionalization, according to organizational life cycle theory, occurs when a corporation exceeds $100 million in revenue for a manufacturing firm or $33 million for a services company (Flamholtz, 1995; Flamholtz & Randle, 2007a, 2007b). Green Dot has exceeded that revenue target as a Charter Management Organization (CMO) in the "educational services" marketplace. In addition it can be concluded that as an organization, Green Dot has become "professionalized" meaning that it possesses formal operating, control and planning systems and its structure is clearly defined (Flamholtz & Randle, 2007a, 2007b) – even though just a few years ago they had a fraction of their current enrollment with very little central infrastructure. One clear example of this is that Green Dot uses traditional business titles to refer to the 10 people who comprise its management team. By using terms like Founder, Chairman, President, Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Chief Academic Officer (CAO), Chief Operating Officer (COO), Chief Financial Officer (CFO), Vice President of New School Development, Vice President of Human Resources, Vice President of External & Government Affairs, Vice President of Marketing & Development and Vice President of

Operations – GDPS is able to delineate specific roles, responsibilities and relationships between roles across the organization. This is critical because as Flamholtz & Randle contend, the four "keys to a successful stage III firm" are: (1) the ability to plan and develop strategy, (2) the ability to develop an appropriate organizational structure and controls, (3) the ability to provide management development and (4) willingness to transform to professional management. Green Dot is definitely currently is in the process of establishing itself firmly as a successful stage 3 organization. The chief goal during this phase is to increase the efficiency of the systems as a whole in order to transition from pure entrepreneurship to an entrepreneurially-oriented professionally managed firm.

The fourth major stage of consolidation, diversification and integration takes place when the firm reaches between $100 million - $500 million in revenue for a manufacturing business and between $33 million - $167 million for a services organization (Flamholtz, 1995; Flamholtz & Randle, 2007a, 2007b). Even though Green Dot has reached that revenue target, it is currently not a phase 4 organization because this normally occurs when there is a rapid increase in sales due to the company entering new market niches. Unless Green Dot plans to consolidate, diversify or integrate varying operations from divergent fields, they will probably not reach this stage. Similarly, since the chief focus of management at this point needs to be to identify new markets, create new products and services that meet those needs and securing the resources to support their production (Flamholtz & Randle, 2007a, 2007b) it is unlikely Green Dot will advance to these higher stages in the next decade. In addition, it is important to note that only a few select companies have ever been able to reach this stage (i.e. General Electric,

Nestle and Johnson & Johnson) and they all transformed themselves over many decades of being professionally managed corporations. The only way Green Dot will be able to leave stage 3 behind and progress to phase 4 is if current reports about the possibility of scaling-up GDPS nationwide as "Green Dot America" materialize.

Educational Scale-Up Research

The vast majority of scale-up research to date has been conducted outside the field of education in disciplines ranging from manufacturing, engineering (software and chemical), medicine, public health, international development, computer science, economics, sociology, social welfare policy, business, management and organization theory (Schneider & McDonald, 2007a). This deficiency in educationally specific scale-up research has tried to be rectified through the founding of the Interagency Educational Research Initiative (IERI) and subsequently the Data Research and Development Center (DRDC) to support and disseminate the findings of IERI research projects nationwide (Schneider & McDonald, 2007a, 2007b). This study specifically adds to this limited literature by reporting on the challenges and successes a CMO (Green Dot) faced when scaling-up its educational intervention (benchmark assessments). While the current scale-up literature focuses on three specific areas: (1) interventions that concentrate on the schools explicitly, (2) interventions that are subject specific and center on individual teachers and (3) interventions that emphasize clusters of schools (Glennan & RAND, 2004), this study directly adds to the research base in two of these domains. Initially, this study concentrated on the educational intervention of using benchmark assessments to

monitor student achievement explicitly at the school site. Similarly, Green Dot's intervention also emphasized scaling-up the use of these benchmark assessment interventions throughout its entire clusters of schools. As such, this study elucidates explicitly recommended practices to follow when scaling-up while recognizing that these need to be contextualized to each local expansion site. This study's biggest contribution to the research base, however, is in sharpening the focus on the toughest challenge CMOs face when they scale-up, balancing fidelity and adaptation (Joseph P. McDonald, et al., 2004; McDonald, et al., 2003a, 2003b; J. P. McDonald, et al., 2004a, 2004b; McDonald, et al., 2009).

Balancing Fidelity and Adaptation

By far, the key challenge to scaling-up educational interventions and innovations is managing the delicate tension between fidelity and adaptation (Joseph P. McDonald, et al., 2004; McDonald, et al., 2003a, 2003b; J. P. McDonald, et al., 2004a, 2004b; McDonald, et al., 2009; Schneider & McDonald, 2007a, 2007b). Even though McDonald and his team spell out eight key challenges charter schools face when they attempt to scale-up: (1) balancing fidelity and adaptation, (2) teaching and learning the school design, (3) instilling shared ownership of the design among all stakeholders, (4) communicating effectively across contexts, (5) using experience in new settings to improve the school design, (6) obtaining and managing the resources sufficient to scale and (7) negotiating the politics of local adoption and (8) coping with the difference in mindset (McDonald, et al., 2003a, 2003b; J. P. McDonald, et al., 2004a, 2004b;

McDonald, et al., 2009) – the biggest challenge is the first one. The best strategy to manage this key challenge then is not to choose between fidelity or adaptation, but instead working on maximizing both (McDonald, et al., 2009). As such this dilemma will not be resolved but it can definitely be managed in specific constructive ways as evidenced by this study. A case study, similar to this one, could help another CMO explore recommended practices contextualized to their own specific needs and challenges. An important benefit to effectively managing this challenge is that it moves the organization from a single-loop learning model (problem-solution) to a double-loop learning model that not only uses the single-loop but also rethinks fundamental organizations (McDonald, et al., 2009).

Double looped learning, however, is not the only benefit reaped by balancing fidelity and adaptation. Effectively managing this also helps to deal with the third challenge, ownership. It is important to reiterate McDonald's analysis that "scale that goes beyond a handful of sites overwhelms the organization's capacity to coach the emergence of authentic practice. Otherwise, everyone remains dependent on the founders' opportunity to visit and personally approve or disapprove some local innovation" (McDonald, et al., 2009). The ultimate benefit, however, is helping to increase student achievement by allowing CMOs to scale-up efficiently in order to reap the benefits economies of scale afford their students (Chubb, 2005). Similarly, balancing this tension in the area of benchmark assessments is crucial to monitoring student achievement (Wolf, 2007).

Limitations of the Study

There are some specific limitations of this study that could have impacted the findings and recommendations. The three greatest ones are (1) generalizability, (2) sample size and (3) synchronous vs. asynchronous online focus groups. Each one of these limitations will be discussed in depth noting what steps were taken by the researcher in order to minimize the imperfection of the research design.

Initially it is important to point out that the narrow focus of this case study looks at only one CMO (Green Dot Public Schools) and only one educational intervention being scaled-up (benchmark assessments), greatly limiting its generalizability. Similarly, this entire study is predicated on "local control", only one out of the "Six Tenets of High Performing Schools" also mitigating the ability to apply universally the findings of this study. Furthermore, this study looked in depth at balancing fidelity and adaptation – only one of the eight specific challenges CMOs face when they scale-up – also making the extrapolation of the findings less likely. Even though great care was taken when selecting the site for the case study, Green Dot enjoys significantly more popular press and larger donations than all of its counterparts in Los Angeles, California and even the United States (Childress & Kim, 2007; McGray, 2009). Meaning that just because Green Dot was able to scale-up at such a rapid rate and move from stage 1 to phase 3 in a relatively short amount of time, it does not mean that all CMOs will have an analogous experience.

The second limitation of this study deals with sampling. Critics of this study could point to the fact that only 28 stakeholders were consulted out of the entire pool of 383

Green Dot teachers, administrators and home office managers. On face value it may seem that conferring with only percent of all of the stakeholders is insufficient to capture an accurate picture of the challenges taking place within Green Dot. Similarly, critics might also focus on the fact that the original 28 stakeholders interviewed (15 teachers, 9 school based administrators and 4 home office based managers) were not proportionally representative of the organization. Green Dot Public Schools is comprised of 88.7 percent teachers yet the original interviewees made up only 53.5 percent of the sample size. Similarly, the organization is led at the school sites by 33 administrators (principals and assistant principals) who collectively make up 8.6 percent of Green Dot stakeholders yet the sample size was close to four times that size consisting disproportionately of 32.1 percent administrators. Finally, the GDPS management team represents only 2.6 percent of the organization yet 14.2 percent (more than seven times that amount) of the sample size is made up of home office administrators. These criticisms, however, need to be balanced with the fact that unlike surveys; this case study was systematic and iterative and, therefore, had the advantage of being able to probe for depth and clarification immediately. Meaning that the response rate should not be measured in the percentage of respondents who turn in their survey, but rather on the value of the qualitative data collected. In order to mitigate the limitations of the study, the co-research team was very carefully composed of eight stakeholders: two participants from each of the three cluster schools (Founding Five, Jefferson Transformation and Locke Transformation) and two home office based administrators. This was done to ensure that an even blend of voices and viewpoints were heard from stakeholders in all the three different school clusters and

in varying stages of implementation of the "Green Dot Benchmark Exams Program". The co-research team was also instrumental in directing me to key informants, orienting the study and verifying the interpretive validity of the emerging findings.

Finally, the last limitation of this study had to do with the shift from traditional focus groups to asynchronous online focus groups during the study. I originally had intended to engage the co-research team in traditional focus groups that met at the same time (synchronous). The challenge of coordinating the schedules of nine hyper busy professionals was daunting. I finally came to the realization that the only way I was going to be able to make this happen was to switch from synchronous focus groups (we all meet and respond at the same time) to asynchronous online focus groups (we all meet and respond to each other's email comments and prompts on our own time). While the data sources and emerging findings could have been more efficiently fleshed out during traditional synchronous sessions, the fact that this was simply not possible meant more work for me as the lead researcher following up with subsequent interviews and probing through electronic means of communication as well as in person. At first, co-research team members did not want to respond to the prompts to the entire group but as time passed and they realized that I was taking their comments and suggestions seriously, the quality of the written evidence grew as did our lines of communication. If a co-research team member shared something with me "offline" and I found it to be important, I would bring it up myself to the other co-research team members (without mentioning the original source) and they would then validate or reject the emerging finding.

Future Research

This study applied the management theory of organizational life cycle to a non-profit organization with key modifications. Future research could center on comparative studies of the theory between non-profit Charter Management Organizations (CMOs) and for-profit Education Management Organizations (EMOs) trying to scale-up their operations. Such research could lead to a better understanding of the benefits and drawbacks of each type of organization as well as correlations, if any, that can be made about the impact on student achievement each organization offers.

Secondly, while this study concentrated explicitly on the key scale-up challenge of managing the tension between fidelity and adaptation, future research could look at the other seven key challenges McDonald delineates (McDonald, et al., 2009) more in depth. Specifically, links between the dilemma studied in this project and the third challenge of instilling shared ownership of the design among all stakeholders could be explored as it could prove or disprove the interrelatedness of all of these challenges. A final obstacle that could be explored in depth is the seventh one, negotiating the politics of local adoption, as it contextualizes the issue of scaling-up while directly linking it to the political processes that CMOs must deal with in order to scale-up their operations.

Thirdly, this study was based on the principle of "local control", only one of Green Dot's "Six Tenets of High Performing Schools". Future research could center on applying the key challenge of balancing fidelity and adaptation to the first tenet of "small, safe, personalized schools". Such a study could help make recommendations regarding the optimal size for schools depending on their pedagogical philosophy (project based

learning versus traditional learning) and the most advantageous size of student enrollment per class depending on the subject matter (mathematics versus art). Similarly, the fourth tenet of "parent participation", where a student's primary care giver must volunteer a minimum of 35 hours per school year, could also be studied more in depth. Research in this area could help illuminate recommended strategies to use with parents as schools scale-up in different contexts and cultures.

Finally, the financial and political strategic scale-up issues could also be explored in more detail. Specifically, future research could analyze the impact of the financial strategy of CMOs being self-sufficient versus dependent on their organizational behavior in general, and on student achievement in particular. Similarly, other researchers could study the benefits and drawbacks of the political strategy of CMOs being apolitical versus politically combative trying to illuminate which strategy, if any, if more likely to increase student achievement.

Conclusion

The ultimate goal of this study was to assist GDPS in improving student achievement by developing policies and practices that will ensure effective implementation of its core values and brand at all expansion school sites while concurrently fostering a balanced amount of local autonomy at each site. While it is too early to ascertain the effect of this study on student achievement, Green Dot has agreed to enact the recommendations of this study and help disseminate the findings. I will present my dissertation's findings and recommendations directly to the GDPS home office

management team. Similarly, I will present this study and its findings and implications at local, state and national conferences. Finally, I will distill the essence of this study into journal articles that I will submit for publication in peer reviewed academic journals and as white papers in other periodicals.

Appendix A

Memorandum of Understanding

TO: Dr. Sandy Blazer, Chief Academic Officer, Green Dot Public Schools

FROM: Pedro Cevallos, Doctoral Candidate, University of California, Los Angeles

SUBJECT: A Collaborative Case Study with Green Dot Public Schools.

DATE: April 24, 2008

Purpose, Goals, and Need for the Project:

Charter schools nationally are scaling up at an unprecedented rate and Green Dot Public Schools (GDPS), specifically, have expanded from one school in 2000 to twelve schools in 2008 and will continue to grow beyond the Los Angeles basin. A key factor in the success or failure of scaling up, however, will be how well Charter Management Organizations (CMO) are able to manage the inherent tension between maintaining the fidelity of the original model school's design, culture, values and brand with local adaptation by stakeholders at each new school (Chubb, 2005; Finnigan, 2007; R. Lake et al., 2007; J. P. McDonald, Klein, & Riordan, 2003a, 2003b, 2004a, 2004b). As a result, this study aims to collaboratively formulate recommended practices to employ when balancing this tension in order to inform the charter movement nationally as well as locally. The ultimate goal of this study is to assist GDPS in developing policies and practices that will most efficaciously assure implementation of their core beliefs at all new school sites while simultaneously allowing for an appropriate amount of local control at each site.

Research Questions:

In order to better understand the problem of balancing fidelity and adaptation when charter schools attempt to replicate and scale up their original school model, GDPS and I will enter into an agreement to work collaboratively on a case study aimed at answering the following three research questions:

1. In the perception of Green Dot Public Schools' home office-based managers and site-based teachers and administrators, what are the barriers that school leaders and teachers believe inhibit the fidelity of implementing the mandates regarding benchmark assessments?

2. What are the perceptions of Green Dot Public Schools' site-based teachers and administrators, regarding the extent to which they adopt or do not adopt with fidelity home office mandates regarding benchmark assessments? What are some

of the reasons they offer for the varying degrees of adoption of these home office mandates?

3. In the opinion of Green Dot Public Schools' home office-based managers and site-based teachers and administrators, what are the policies and/or practices that should be adopted in order to balance the tension between home office mandates and teacher autonomy in the use of benchmark assessments?

Research Methods:

The overarching study design for this project is a collaborative case study where GDPS teachers, administrators, home office managers and I will all act as co-researchers offering their valuable feedback and input all along the way.

By signing this document, all parties agree that:

- Pedro Cevallos has provided Green Dot Public Schools with the dissertation proposal and all supporting documentation.

- This research proposal fits within the rules and regulations of Green Dot Public Schools.

- This research meets with the approval of Green Dot Public Schools.

- All parties involved agree to abide and comply with the requirements of the UCLA Institutional Review Board (IRB) requirements for the protection of human subjects.

Dr. Sandy Blazer, Chief Academic Officer, GDPS Date

Cristina de Jesus, VP Curriculum and Instruction, GDPS Date

Pedro Cevallos, Doctoral Candidate, University of California, Los Angeles Date

Appendix B

Accountability Measures for Green Dot Public Schools

School	Year Opened	API [5]	API Growth Met	Passed CAHSEE ELA	Passed CAHSEE Math
Ánimo Leadership	2000	712	Yes	89%	83%
Ánimo Inglewood	2002	655	No	86%	80%
Oscar de la Hoya Ánimo	2003	662	No	73%	60%
Ánimo South LA	2004	677	No	84%	73%
Ánimo Venice	2004	703	Yes	85%	76%
Ánimo Ralph Bunche	2006	599	N/A	N/A	N/A
Ánimo Pat Brown	2006	671	N/A	N/A	N/A
Ánimo Jackie Robinson	2006	548	N/A	N/A	N/A
Ánimo Justice	2006	620	N/A	N/A	N/A
Ánimo Film & Theater Arts	2006	701	N/A	N/A	N/A
Ánimo Watts 1	2007	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Ánimo Watts 2	2007	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

[5] The foundation of California's Public Schools Accountability Act of 1999 is the Academic Performance Index (API). This indicator measures the educational achievement and growth of schools on several academic measures.

Appendix C

Interview Protocol: Teacher

Hello, my name is Pedro Cevallos and I want to thank you for taking time out of your busy day to speak with me. Is it okay with you if I record our conversation?

1. Please state your name and school site where you teach.
2. Did you administer the benchmark assessments to your students? Why or why not? Explain…
3. In your opinion, what are the barriers that inhibit the fidelity of implementing benchmark assessments?
4. To what extent do you adopt or not adopt with fidelity home office mandates regarding benchmark assessments?
5. What are some of the reasons for the varying degrees of adoption of these home office mandates?
6. What policies and/or practices do you believe should be adopted in order to balance the tension between home office mandates and teacher autonomy in the use of benchmark assessments?

Appendix D

Interview Protocol: School Site Administrator

Hello, my name is Pedro Cevallos and I want to thank you for taking time out of your busy day to speak with me. Is it okay with you if I record our conversation?

1. Please state your name, job title and your school site.
2. Are teachers in your school site asked to administer the benchmark assessments?
3. What percentage of the teachers in your school site complied with this request?
4. Why do you think some teachers administered the benchmark assessments while others did not?
5. In your opinion, what are the barriers that inhibit the fidelity of implementing benchmark assessments?
6. To what extent do your teachers adopt or not adopt with fidelity home office mandates regarding benchmark assessments?
7. What are some of the reasons for the varying degrees of adoption of these home office mandates?
8. What policies and/or practices do you believe should be adopted in order to balance the tension between home office mandates and teacher autonomy in the use of benchmark assessments? Explain…

Appendix E

Interview Protocol: Home Office Based Manager

Hello, my name is Pedro Cevallos and I want to thank you for taking time out of your busy day to speak with me. Is it okay with you if I record our conversation?

1. Please state your name and job title.
2. Please describe what your role consists of in Green Dot Public Schools.
3. Are teachers across school sites asked to administer the benchmark assessments? Are these voluntary on an individual school basis? On a teacher by teacher basis?
4. What percentage of teachers across all school sites complied with this request?
5. Why do you think some teachers administered the benchmark assessments while others did not?
6. In your opinion, what are the barriers that inhibit the fidelity of implementing benchmark assessments?
7. To what extent do your teachers adopt or not adopt with fidelity home office mandates regarding benchmark assessments?
8. What are some of the reasons for the varying degrees of adoption of these home office mandates?
9. What policies and/or practices do you believe should be adopted in order to balance the tension between home office mandates and teacher autonomy in the use of benchmark assessments?

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