Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership
for Learning Dissertations

Educational Leadership

Spring 4-11-2022

Alignment of Leadership to Constructs of Governance in Independent Schools

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April 11, 2022

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

ABSTRACT

This qualitative phenomenographic study articulates the different perceptions of independent school heads of school and executive board leaders in their understanding of key constructs of independent school governance, especially as the understanding may change during a crisis. The five constructs of independent school governance are the separation of governance and management activities, maintaining the confidentiality and trust of the board room, the relationship between the board and the head of school, maintaining a strategic mindset, and general board operations. The review of the literature examines the dynamics of leadership through historical crises of an economic nature, endogenous crises, world health crises, and crises caused by natural disasters. Different models of governance and management frameworks, including negotiated order theory, trust versus control theory, the chair-dominated board, the head-dominated board, and democratic management are also reviewed. With the backdrop of the current COVID-19 pandemic crisis, this study examines the effects of crisis on the alignment of understanding between heads of school and board chairs of key constructs of independent school governance.

Keywords: independent schools, governance, crisis leadership, management theory, board member, board chair, head of school, COVID-19, phenomenography

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

Chapter 1: Introduction

The intersection of governance and operations in independent schools is a carefully balanced negotiation between those on the board who govern the school and those who are employed to operate the school. Fulfilling the mission of an independent school requires stability in leadership. Misalignment between the board and the head in their understanding of core constructs of independent school governance may be exacerbated in times of crisis and may lead to abrupt or premature departures of leaders in independent schools. Board and head misalignment can create an atmosphere fraught with tension that can lead the school to decline, lose enrollment, and ultimately struggle for sustained existence. The better aligned the board and the head of school are in their understanding of core constructs of independent school governance and leadership theory, the more opportunity there is for growth and success of the school and the students it serves.

This study examines the knowledge base and understanding of effective independent school governance principles as defined by independent school associations and accrediting agencies among heads of school and executive board leaders during times of normalcy and times of crisis, especially a global pandemic. It relies on a synthesis of commonly held macro level beliefs about governance practices in the independent school community and the ways in which those beliefs are understood at the school, or micro, level. In his seminal work on phenomenography, Marton (1981) named the macro level a first-order perspective and the micro level a second-order perspective.

First-order perspectives are an examination of reality, and second-order perspectives inquire about perceptions of reality. Marton (1981) provided two simple exemplar questions: "why do some children succeed better than others in school?" and "what do people think about

8

why some children succeed better than others in school?" (p. 177-78). The first question is about a manifest reality that can be seen and measured, usually through quantitative inquiry. The second is about latent perceptions of reality that are usually measured through naturalistic or qualitative methods.

This study makes use of phenomenography which attempts to articulate perceptions of reality among a participant population by examining second-order perspectives and using what Marton (1981) called *categories of description*, or *metaphors of meaning*, which convey the perceptions of reality held, in this study, by heads of school and executive board leaders about independent school governance. Few, if any, studies exist which attempt to evaluate the ways in which independent school heads and executive board leaders are aligned in their knowledge and understanding of effective independent school governance practices (Baker et al., 2015; McCormik et al., 2006).

The Role of the Head and the Role of the Board

In defining the independent nature of independent schools, Bassett (n.d.) echoes the 1941 Roosevelt speech on the Four Freedoms, stating that independent schools offer their own four freedoms: the freedom to define their own mission, the freedom to regulate admissions, the freedom to define teacher credentials, and the freedom to teach what the teachers decide is important. Most independent schools, regardless of grade levels served, are college preparatory and enroll students who will matriculate at a four-year college. There is a great deal of variation of school type among independent schools: day schools, boarding schools, single-gender, grade levels served, large schools, small schools, high tuition schools, low tuition schools, religious schools, parish schools, and special purpose schools. A commonality is that independent schools are mission-driven, and the board has the responsibility of ensuring that the mission is fulfilled.

9

The roles and responsibilities of the board and the head are the foundation for the constructs of governance explored in this study. The independent schools in this study are organized as non-profit 501(c)(3) corporations and are obligated to follow what Orem and Wilson (2017) called the "fundamental legal obligations [of non-profits] generally considered to be the duty of care, the duty of loyalty, and the duty of obedience" (p. 17). In Georgia, for example, the legal obligations of board members and the standards of conduct for non-profit directors are encapsulated in state law (O.C.G.A. § 14-3-801) which describes the duties.

Leifer and Glomb (1997) provided descriptions of the three duties of non-profit organizations. The duty of care refers to acting in good faith and with the degree of care an ordinarily prudent person would exercise, regularly attending meetings, exercising independent judgment, and reviewing financials. The duty of loyalty refers to managing conflicts of interest and maintaining confidentiality. The duty of obedience is based in the public's trust that the organization will act according to state and federal laws, its own by-laws, and be faithful to the mission of the organization. The constructs of independent school governance in this study emanate from the three fundamental legal obligations of non-profits.

The five constructs in this study are the separation of governance and management activities, maintaining the confidentiality and trust of the board room, the relationship between the board and the head of school, maintaining a strategic mindset, and general board operations. The constructs of independent school governance form the basis for multiple governance guidebooks such as the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS) *Principles of Good Practice* (2007), Orem and Wilson's *Trustee Handbook* (2017), and Kavanagh and Robinson's *Independent School Governance Survey* (2016). The constructs also form the basis for governance standards promulgated by independent school accrediting groups such as the

Southern Association of Independent Schools (SAIS) and the International Council on

Accreditation of Independent Schools' (ICAISA) *Model Core Standards*.

Independent school boards of trustees are expected to accomplish three primary tasks: set

the mission of the school, fund the mission of the school, and operationalize the mission of the

school through a single employee, namely the head of school (DeKuyper, 2010; Holland et al.,

1989; Tecker, 2010). The head of school is expected to both partner with the board in the

formation of strategic, long-range initiatives, and implement those initiatives and manage the

day-to-day operations of the school (Orem & Wilson, 2017). The constructs of independent

school governance exist as guardrails to help heads and boards accomplish their tasks and

ultimately fulfill the mission of the school.

Training for board members in governance principles is sporadic across schools despite

requirements in accreditation standards, various independent school association principles of best

practices, and in texts about non-profit governance (McCormick et al., 2006; NAIS 2007). This

lack of training on governance principles leads to board engagement in activities that are not

productive for the school, creates tension between the head and the board, and has a negative

impact on mission and student outcomes. In their study on independent school boards' strategic

effectiveness, Baker et al. (2015) noted that boards are too often "a collection of high-powered

individuals engaged in low-level activities" which results in poor governance for the

organization (p. 84). Boards spend most of their time providing operational oversight by

engaging in "snoopervision," a term coined by Tecker (2010), instead of providing strategic and

cultural oversight.

As a point of comparison, this study traces the relevant history of public and independent

school systems and the relationship between heads and boards in independent schools and

superintendents and boards in public schools. The development of the role of superintendent of public schools dates to the mid-19th century and the educational innovations of Horace Mann and is explored in greater detail in Chapter 2. As there is no succinct history of the relationship between independent school heads and boards, the public school model offers a proxy, although an imperfect one, to understand how the relationship has developed.

The COVID-19 Pandemic and Crisis Leadership

While the primary focus of this study is the way in which the constructs of independent school governance are understood by heads and executive board leaders, given the time of the study, it would be difficult if not impossible to isolate the effects, if any, that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on the relationship between these two groups and their understanding of the constructs. Boards and heads have worked more closely together during the pandemic than previously, and heads have reported that boards are involved in operations more than they have seen in the past (NAIS, 2020). The pandemic may have led to evolving practices of governance that have not yet found their way into principles being taught or assessed and may largely be as yet undetected. Governance during crisis is a secondary focal point of this study.

The review of the literature examines crises in schools that fall into one of four categories: internal or external and predictable or unpredictable (see Table 1), as based on the work of Pepper et al. (2010) and describes leadership and the relationship between the board and the head during times of crisis. The current global pandemic is an external-unpredictable crisis that has increased stress on the economic viability of independent schools (Flaxman et al. 2020, Kavanagh & Scafidi, 2020; Kavanagh, Scafidi, and Tutterow, 2021).

Table 1

Location and Predictability of Crises based on Pepper et al. (2010)

Internal and predictable	Internal and unpredictable
External and predictable	External and unpredictable

Kane (1992) defined different types of crises that independent schools face including environmental influences, internal management issues, and governance issues. Crises test the relationship between the head of school and the board and challenge their understanding of the constructs of governance. As boards and heads work through a crisis together, their alignment to how they understand the constructs of governance may be strengthened or weakened.

Statement of the Problem

Stability in the leadership of independent schools may be threatened when there is a lack of alignment between heads and executive board leaders towards their understanding of the constructs of independent school governance – a type of crisis whose source may be internal or external and may be predictable or unpredictable. In an extreme case, the result of this crisis may be an abrupt or premature departure of the head of school. There has been such a spike in abrupt head of school departures, noted first among the Independent Schools Association of the Central States (ISACS), with head departure notice of less than two months accounting for a jump from 14% to 38% in the fall of 2017 (C. Daggett, personal communication, April 13, 2018).

Typically, head of school departures are announced and planned for 12-18 months in advance (ISACS, 2014; Pass, 2010). The trend of early head departures was confirmed by the Connecticut Association of Independent Schools (CAIS) where the failure rate of new heads (as measured by lack of receipt of a second contract) was 33% (D. Lyons, personal communication,

April 13, 2018). As this phenomenon became more pronounced, NAIS commissioned a study into the causes of early and abrupt head turnover.

Rowe (2020) analyzed results from the NAIS-UPenn Survey on Factors Affecting Head of School Tenure (FAHST) and was able to confirm that the phenomenon was occurring nationally and "found that head of school turnover is exacerbated at all levels by a lack of concordance between heads of school and their boards" (p. 4). The *lack of concordance* or misalignment is at the heart of this study which attempts to use the language of heads and boards to understand how they describe their understanding of their roles and responsibilities and what effect crisis has on their alignment to the constructs of governance.

Significance

Independent school leadership alignment is a key driver of the success of the school and the students being served by that school. Independent school associations and accrediting agencies have provided frameworks of generally accepted forms and practices to define the relationship between the head of school and the executive leaders of the board. Examples are the NAIS Principles of Good Practice, the model core standards promulgated by ICAISA, and the accreditation standards of associations such as the Florida Council of Independent Schools (FCIS) and the Southern Association of Independent Schools (SAIS). These governance models generally do not account for or help instruct about the variability of constructions of meaning that might exist between the head of school and the executive leadership of the board and might therefore have an unintended contributory role in the recent premature spike in head turnover.

A common refrain from industry association leaders is that premature departures are due to a lack of training and orientation about appropriate roles and boundaries for boards and heads (see for example Baker et al., 2015; Frantzreb, 1997; Mott, 2014; Rowe, 2020). The training

offered by consultants and associations generally is focused on describing the rules of governance rather than the perceptions of the rules of governance. The way in which the rules of governance are perceived by the board and by the head can differ from one school to another.

By examining the perceptions held by heads and executive board leaders about the constructs of independent school governance, a second order perspective (Marton, 1981), this study may lead to a deeper understanding of important relationships among leaders of an independent school. Industry practitioners may be able to provide heads and boards with better training about shared alignment to the constructs of governance, how to recognize and mitigate misalignment, and the results of the study may lead to new ways to assess the strength of the relationships between boards and heads. Independent school heads and board members should understand the variety of ways in which the constructs of independent school governance are perceived.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study centered on the perceptions of core constructs of independent school governance as understood and practiced by the leaders of independent schools. The leaders in this study were the head of school and board members who were board chairs or on the executive committee. During a crisis, the alignment of understanding of the constructs may change and the conceptual framework for this study attempted to account for the various types of crises that exist in independent schools and how those crises might alter the perception of independent school governance constructs (see Figure 1).

The conceptual framework is based on the process described by Ravitch and Riggan (2017). In their approach, the authors described a conceptual framework as "an argument about why the topic one wishes to study matters, and why the means proposed to study it are

appropriate and rigorous" (p. 5). The conceptual framework links together different aspects of the research process including the researcher's connection to the topic, worldview and positionality, the context and setting of the research, formal and informal theory, and the methods employed to investigate the topic. The "intellectual bins" that are discrete components of the research process combine to form the conceptual framework (p. 6).

Figure 1

Visual Representation of the Elements of Conceptual Framework
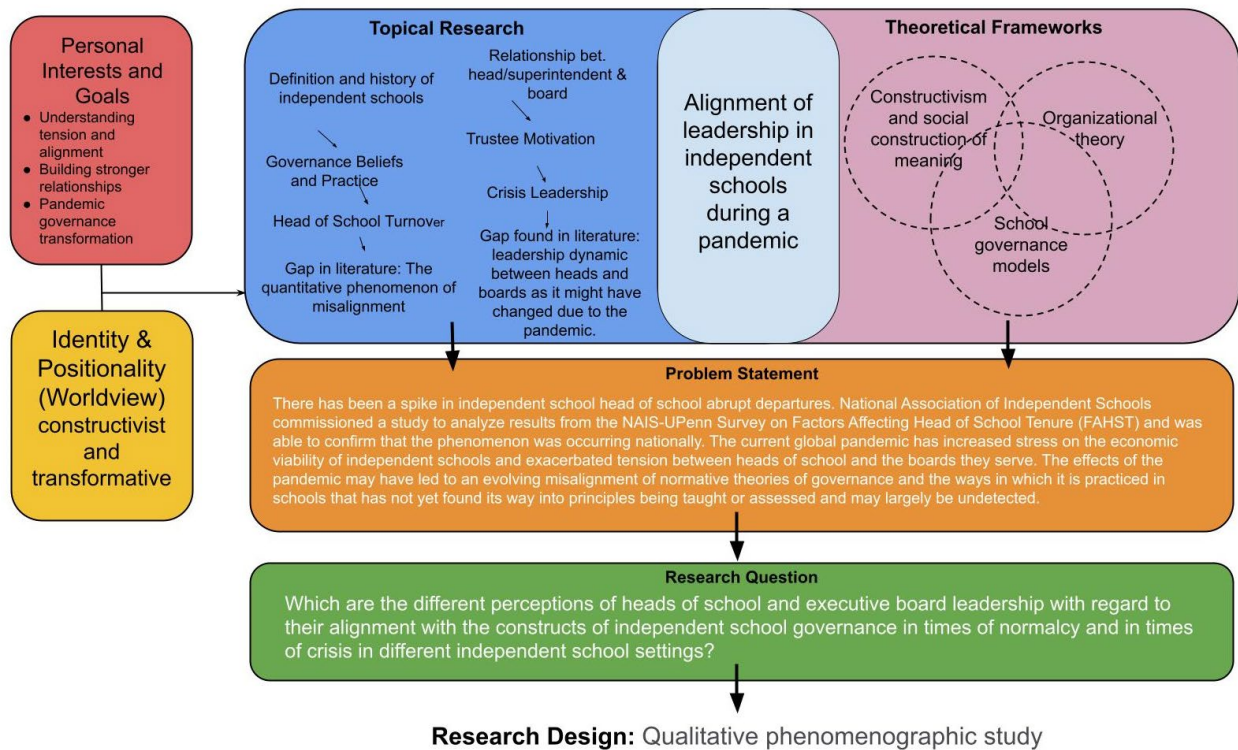
The significance of the study may vary depending on its relevance to an audience, whether small or large; however, the conceptual framework must *argue* for why the study matters to the community for which the study is ultimately conducted, and which might eventually consume the study. *Argument* is defined as "a series of sequenced, logical propositions the purpose of which is to ground the study and convince readers of the study's importance and rigor" (Ravitch and Riggan, 2017, p. 6).

The context and the way in which the research is conducted contribute to its appropriateness and assure the reader that the process followed was sufficiently rigorous. Ravitch and Riggan (2017) offered four ways in which research should be conducted to ensure that it is considered appropriate and rigorous:

1. the research questions are an outgrowth of the argument for relevance

2. the research design maps onto the study goals, questions, and context(s)

3. the data to be collected provide the researcher with the raw material needed to explore the research questions

4. the analytic approach allows the researcher(s) to effectively address (if not always answer) those questions

The authors emphasized that while their definition of a conceptual framework was different from others, their ideas are not new and are shared by other methodologists, especially Miles et al. (2014) and Creswell (2014).

There are several key elements that comprise a conceptual framework. The first of these is the philosophical worldview of the researcher. According to Creswell (2014), philosophical worldviews fall into four dominant categories: post-positivist, constructivist, transformative, and pragmatic. Postpositivists are deterministic and believe that reality is created through careful measurements and studying behaviors; quantitative research traditions are postpositivist and believe that there is one reality knowable within a specific level of probability. Constructivists believe that "individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live" (p. 8) and co-create subjective realities. In the transformative worldview, research is intertwined with politics, power, and oppression, and the researcher believes that reality, while unique, is only understood through

social positioning. In the pragmatic worldview, the researcher focuses on what works and is content to use mixed methods to discover pluralistic solutions.

The second key element of a conceptual framework is a statement about the researcher's personal connection with the topic and the curiosities and intellectual motivation that drives the researcher to the topic in the first place (Ravitch and Riggan, 2017). It is important to express the personal connection that the researcher has to the subject matter so that the reader can better understand the biases of the researcher.

The literature review is the third key element of a conceptual framework and there is some disagreement about its purpose and form. Ravitch and Riggan (2017) differentiated between relevance and thoroughness. Relevance in the literature review allows the researcher to focus on the books, articles, interviews, and other source material that is most closely related to the subject under study. Thoroughness in the literature review connotes that the researcher will include an exhaustive list of materials in the review going back as far in time as possible to lead to the current study. Boote and Beile (2005) described the literature review as the skill of scholarship and contrasted it with the skill of research. There are generally two parts to the literature review: topical research and theoretical frameworks. In several qualitative traditions, it is customary for the literature review to be embedded into the rest of the paper. In this study, the literature review is presented discretely in Chapter 2, but the theories represented are integrated into multiple sections of the paper.

The next parts of a conceptual framework are the problem statement and the research questions. The problem statement describes the context from which the research derives, expresses a void in the literature, and explains why the questions are relevant (Creswell, 2014). The research questions define the intended purpose of the research. Research traditions have

different approaches to the research question. In quantitative research, the research question can be framed as a null hypothesis. In qualitative traditions, the research question can be open-ended and descriptive in nature.

The final part of a conceptual framework is the proposed research design. Within quantitative research, there are generally four broad types of research design: descriptive, correlational, quasi-experimental, and experimental. Within qualitative research there are many more traditions that include grounded theory, ethnography, case study, phenomenology, symbolic interaction, hermeneutics, systems theory, social constructivism, etc. (Patton, 2015). An emerging theory that is less common is phenomenography, which is the research method used in this study.

Research Question

This study addressed the following research question: What are the different perceptions of heads of school and executive board leaders about their alignment with the constructs of independent school governance in times of normalcy and in times of crisis in different independent school settings?

Review of Relevant Terms

1. Independent school: in the United States, an independent school is substantially free from governmental oversight and is financed almost entirely through private sources (Wang, 2019).

2. Board of Trustees: non-profit associations and independent schools are overseen by a board of trustees. The term *board of directors* is nearly interchangeable.

a. Executive Board Leadership: the board chair and officers, sometimes also committee chairs, of an independent school board of trustees. The board chair is the chief elected officer of the governance structure.

b. Board Members: board members are the duly elected members of the board of trustees serving a term defined by the school's by-laws or board operation's manual.

3. Head of School: the head of school is the chief staff officer of an independent school. This person is typically the sole employee of the board of trustees and has authority over the operational areas of the school.

4. Constructs of independent school governance: separation, confidentiality, board-head relationship, strategic mindset, and board operations.

5. School settings: Independent school settings include characteristics such as religious affiliation and denomination, tuition level, size of school based on enrollment, special purpose school, pedagogically affiliated school (such as Waldorf or Montessori schools), grade levels served, geography (urban, suburban, rural), day and boarding, etc. There exists a greater variation within independent schools than can be disaggregated in this study. The settings considered in this study were therefore limited to enrollment, tuition, and grade levels served.

6. National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS): a national association of approximately 1,700 independent schools, NAIS conducts and distributes research on independent schools and created principles of good practice for a variety of areas of school life that are widely used at many independent schools.

7. International Council Advancing Independent School Accreditation of (ICAISA): an association of associations all of which accredit independent schools. Originally formed as a committee of the NAIS board, ICAISA creates model core standards that must be implemented by the accrediting associations that are its members.

8. Southern Association of Independent Schools (SAIS): the largest regional independent school accrediting association with approximately 400 member schools located primarily in the southeastern U.S.

Organization of the Study

Chapter 1 serves as an introduction to the study and orients the reader to independent schools. The purpose of this study and the rationale for conducting it are presented. A description of relevant terms used throughout this study is presented to guide understanding of the reader.

Chapter 2 reviews the literature relevant to understanding the topical and theoretical elements of the study. The topical elements include a brief history of independent schools and public schools, the history of the relationship between heads and their boards and superintendents and their boards, and the creation of the constructs of independent school governance. The theoretical elements include leadership during times of crisis, school leadership organizational theory, negotiated order theory, and constructivism and the co-construction of meaning.

Chapter 3 presents the methodology for the study. This chapter includes a description of the development of the interview protocol, the population selection criteria employed, and the tools used for analysis. Also discussed in the chapter is the rationale for choosing phenomenography and its appropriateness for this study.

Chapter 4 reviews the data and results of the interviews and focus groups of the study and introduces the categories of description or metaphors of meaning about the perceptions of the constructs of independent school governance.

Chapter 5 discusses the research question and findings, the limitations of the study and its generalizability, and implications for future research.

Personal connection with the research topic

I am one of six children, all of whom graduated from an independent school. I am in my twenty-eighth year working in independent education as a teacher, coach, administrator, head of school, or association executive. As a former head of school and now as the executive director of an association, I report to a board of volunteers selected from the stakeholder communities being served. I am currently on the boards or committees of three independent schools, serving in a leadership position on one. I have been on the boards of four non-profit organizations, serving as board chair on two of the organizations.

In my first association role, I served as chief accreditation officer for SAIS for seven years and consulted with approximately 350 independent schools throughout the southeastern U.S. on a variety of subjects. In this role, I helped create the constructs of independent school governance used in this study. I have provided workshops to boards and heads on governance at approximately seventy-five schools throughout the southeastern U.S. and Latin America and continue to do so in my current position.

I am interested in emerging innovations in the ways in which governance is understood and practiced in independent schools. I am driven by the idea of the co-creation of meaning between heads and executive board leaders from a constructivist worldview attempting to create shared understanding so that the school and the students can benefit. I am curious about the ways

in which we might improve how independent school governance is taught to aspiring leaders and to members of boards so that they each have an opportunity to create a shared understanding of basic principles of good practice.

With this research, I explored what I perceive as a gap in the ways in which independent school governance principles are understood by the executive leaders of the board and by the head of school. My experiences and my prior work as a head of school, as a chief accreditation officer, as a consultant to boards and heads, and as a researcher in the field has led me to question the ways in which boards and heads co-create meaning. The recent pandemic may have helped expose the depth of this gap in thinking about the constructs of independent school governance.

Through the lens of Lincoln and Guba (1985), this research is framed by the notion that we create subjective meaning in our reaction to phenomena and these lived experiences can be categorized and used to complement the normative principles of independent school governance. I consider myself to be a constructivist researcher - seeking shared meaning and understanding between populations (boards and heads). I also consider this research to be transformative as the dynamic between the head of school and executive board leadership can represent a power struggle with tension between trust and control that can lead to what Friere (1972) referred to as oppression.

The topical and conceptual framework for this study builds on the work of Baker et al. (2015). Their research was an explanatory sequential mixed methods study that attempted to articulate governance practices that have the greatest impact on school institutional performance. My study examined the alignment of understanding of those same governance practices between heads of school and executive board leaders.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

The review of the literature below begins with the definitions of independent schools and their purposes, contrasting them with public schools, with a focus on their management and funding sources (Wang, 2019). The history of schools in the U.S. dates from the earliest publicly supported schools in the Massachusetts Bay Colony and the founding of Boston Latin School in 1635 to the modern day. The oldest continuously running independent school in the U.S. is Collegiate School in New York which was founded in 1628.

The review of literature next describes the creation of the superintendent of public schools, a close equivalent to the head of school in independent schools, which is credited to Horace Mann during the late 1830s (Callahan, 1975). The history of the relationship between the superintendent and the board in a public system is documented in the historical record, but there are no parallel studies of the history of the relationship between the head of school and the board in an independent school. Callahan (1975) noted that the relationship was often tumultuous and marked by constant struggles for power by both sides.

Next, the literature review investigates the structure and functions of independent school boards compared to the functions of public-school boards. The role of the independent school board is to serve as a fiduciary for the organization and define the mission of the school, fund the mission, and operationalize the mission through a single employee, the head of school (DeKuyper, 2010; Tecker, 2010). According to the National School Board Association (2022), the role of the public school board is to represent the community's voice in public education, set policy, and serve as a guardian of taxpayer's resources.

The review of the literature next traces the creation of the five broad constructs of independent school governance used in this study. The constructs are derived from state laws

that articulate the duties of care, loyalty, and obedience, corporate fiduciary responsibilities, and independent school principles of good practice (Hopkins, 2009; Kavanagh & Robinson, 2016; Orem &Wilson, 2017). The model core accreditation standards promulgated by ICAISA (2021) reflect the constructs in their sections on leadership and governance. The model core standards are used by the twenty-one recognized independent school accrediting associations, such as SAIS, to create their standards.

The review of the literature investigates leadership models centered on the relationship between the executive and the board. These leadership models include negotiated order theory, mission versus management, and the trust-control dynamic (Cornforth & Macmillan, 2016; Reid &Turbide, 2014). Several frameworks are highlighted including that proposed by Murray et al. (1992) which described five broad patterns of relationships between boards and their executive leaders including the chair driven board, the CEO driven board, the power sharing board, the fragmented power board, and the powerless board.

Next, the literature review examines historical crises and leadership responses to crises. The review considers internal and external crises such as the 1918 flu pandemic and the 2008-09 economic downturn and those described by Kane (1992) created by environmental influences, internal management issues, and governance issues in independent schools. As described by Bassett and Mitchell (2006), the financial sustainability of independent schools can be threatened when an external or internal crisis impacts enrollment and the ability of the school to fundraise.

The final section of the literature review investigates the recent COVID-19 pandemic and the ways in which it has tested the relationship of boards and executive leaders. Several themes of leadership have emerged that are common to both independent schools and public schools (Flaxman et al., 2020, Lifto, 2020) which are explored in the review.

Defining Independent Schools

All independent schools are private schools, but not all private schools are independent. Wang (2019) in a report for the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) on school choice, limits his definition of private elementary and secondary schools to educational institutions financed almost entirely through private sources. Wang (2019) reported that private school student enrollment comprised 10.2% of the entire student enrollment in the U.S. (p. 20). The remaining 89.8% of students the U.S. attend a school classified as not private: either a home school or a school that is funded almost entirely through public sources, such as a traditional public school, a charter school, or an on-line publicly funded school. Funding sources are not the only way to define private schools.

In its *Digest of Education Statistics,* NCES (2019) divided private schools into five broad categories based on their religious orientation: Catholic, conservative Christian, affiliated religious, unaffiliated religious, and nonsectarian. NCES (2019) defined affiliated schools "as belonging to associations of schools with a specific religious orientation other than Catholic or conservative Christian. Unaffiliated schools have a religious orientation or purpose but are not classified as Catholic, conservative Christian, or affiliated" (note 1). Table 2 shows the percentage and student count in private schools according to the NCES (2019) data.

Table 2:

NCES Private school student count Fall 2015

	Percent of Students of the 10.2% in private schools	Number of Students
Private: Catholic	36%	2,082,660
Private: conservative Christian	13%	760,790
Private: affiliated religious	10%	587,490
Private: unaffiliated religious	16%	920,550
Private: nonsectarian	24%	1,399,030

There is a great deal more disaggregation of school type captured in the Private School Universe Survey conducted by NCES (2019) and used to populate the *Digest of Education Statistics.* Different classifications include urbanicity type (city, suburban, town, rural), school levels (elementary, secondary, combined), program emphasis (regular elementary and secondary, Montessori, special program emphasis, special education, vocational or technical, alternative, early childhood), size of school, and region of the country. Within the school types, NCES (2019) makes data available about enrollment by gender and ethnicity, average length of school year and school day, schools with media centers, FTE teacher counts and head counts, and school membership in select associations (religious, special emphasis, associations for exceptional children, and other school associations).

While the labels private and independent school are often used interchangeably, there are notable differences. Independent schools are a subset of private schools, and there is not a specific agreed upon definition of what constitutes an independent school. According to Baker et al. (2015):

> independent schools are non-profit organizations sustained by tuition, charitable giving, and ancillary revenue commonly drawn from interest on endowment. Private schools, conversely, are typically governed and subsidized, to a significant extent, by a religious body such a diocese, a corporate entity or a non-profit organization. These governing bodies and funding sources often have influence over many of a private school's important decisions: funding, hiring, curriculum, mission, and accountability. Although independent schools may align themselves with a specific faith tradition or church, they are self-governing institutions and, as such, are not funded by or subject to policies developed by religious or other organizations. (p. 13)

While Wang (2019) used the term "private" to refer to all non-public schools, Baker et al. (2015) used the term to refer to schools that are both non-public and not independent schools.

Kane (1992) stated succinctly that independent schools share six characteristics: "self-governance, self-support, self-defined curriculum, self-selected students, self-selected faculty, and small size" (p. 2). As noted above, Bassett (n.d.) used the format of Roosevelt's Four Freedoms to describe independent schools as possessing the freedom to define their own mission, the freedom to regulate admissions, the freedom to define teacher credentials, and the freedom to teach what the teachers decide is important. It is challenging to define independent school as the variety of these descriptions indicates, but perhaps a simple working definition is that an independent school mostly funds itself and is substantially free from external or government control.

The subjects in this study are heads of school and executive board leaders from schools that match Kane's (1992) and Bassett's (n.d.) definition and, as described by Baker et al. (2015), are organized as non-profits and are not affiliated with a religious body or a corporate entity. All are members of SAIS and their state association, and most are members of NAIS.

NAIS collects information on independent schools in its *Data and Analysis for School Leadership (DASL)* benchmarking platform. As of the conclusion of the 2020-2021 school year, of the 1,680 NAIS member schools:

- 88% were coeducational
- 85% were day schools (meaning that 15% of schools were either completely boarding schools or had some boarding school component – the four classifications are day, day-boarding, boarding-day, boarding)
- 8% served students with learning differences

- 29% had a religious affiliation of any kind

- the mean enrollment was 461 students

- the mean day school tuition was $21,903

Most independent schools, regardless of grade levels served, are college preparatory and 99.4% of independent school graduates matriculate at a four-year college, while 92% earn at least a bachelor's college degree (SAIS, 2016). By contrast, according to the NCES (2020b), the public high school adjusted cohort graduation rate in 2018, the latest year reported, was 85% (in Georgia, 82%), and the attainment rate for a four-year college degree for all degree seekers was 62% (NCES, 2020a). Among all private schools, as reported by the NCES (2019), the graduation rate was 97.3%, and 61.7% of private school graduates matriculated at a four-year college.

Independent schools derive their operating revenue from tuition, charitable donations and fundraising activities, auxiliary enterprises such as camps, investments, and very occasionally public coffers such as funding available through Title I, II, and IV federal programs. An unusual recent example of significant public funding for independent schools was provided as part of the 2020 CARES Act which offered forgivable Paycheck Protection Program loans through the U.S. Small Business Administration to non-profit organizations such as independent schools. Other recent public funding for independent schools was also pandemic related such as the Employee Retention Tax Credit (ERTC) and the Emergency Assistance to Non-Public Schools (EANS) funding.

Historically, there are legal entanglement issues when public funds are directed to non-public schools. Supreme Court cases over the years represent a pendulum swinging from providing no funding to private schools to providing significant funding to private schools. One early case was *Lemon v Kurtzman (1971)* in which the Court found that the state could not pay

religious schools to provide education and that there was excessive government entanglement with religion. Another case was *Wisconsin v Yoder (1972)* in which the state established that it has an interest in the education of citizens up to eighth grade, but beyond that, the free exercise of religion outweighed the state's interest in compulsory school attendance. In *Mitchell v. Helms (2000)*, the Court upheld private school access to federal block grant funds. More recently, in *Espinoza v. Montana Department of Revenue (2020),* a tax credit program for private religious schools was found to be legal. The last two decisions referenced were authored by Justice Clarence Thomas and represent a pendulum swing to a more conservative movement of the Court, which is more favorable to the allocation of public funds for private education.

There are stark differences in the sources of funding for independent and public schools. In 2020, among southeastern independent schools, the school's average operating revenue consisted of 79% from net tuition and fees (gross tuition less discounts such as financial aid, faculty discounts, sibling discounts, etc.), 7% from fundraising activities, 8% from auxiliary enterprises, 4% from investments, and less than 2% from public aid (MISBO, 2020). As a public school example, for fiscal year 2017, the average Georgia public school system operating revenue was comprised of 34.4% from local sources, 57.1% from state allocation, and 8.5% from federal grants (GADOE, 2021). Some public systems derived additional revenue from other sources such as student fees, Special Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST) levies, and transfers from reserves.

Turning from revenues to how funds are allocated and expended, in *Chatham Association of Educators, Teacher Unit v. Board of Public Education for the City of Savannah and the County of Chatham* (1974), the Georgia Supreme Court established that state funds may only be spent by an organization authorized by the state, and the organization may not delegate its

authority to another group. The Chatham board of education adopted a resolution on August 15, 1972, which amended its budget to grant the local teachers' association the right to allocate $339,600 as increased economic benefits among the board's professional employees, i.e., to give bonuses. The funds had been allocated by the state and upon reconsideration, the resolution was found unconstitutional. The Court decided that the board, as constitutional officers of the state, could not delegate its appropriation duty. Chief Justice Mobley wrote the unanimous decision for the Georgia Supreme Court and stated that the local school board has no authority to delegate duties that the state has imposed on it.

While *Chatham* was substantially a labor dispute, it had another consequence: namely the court specifically finding a non-delegable duty. Superintendents, principals, and other school administrators lack autonomy to make funding allocation decisions (which include procurement and personnel), without board approval. As an example, the following are two policies from the Atlanta Public Schools Board Policy Manual (2021, emphasis added):

- It shall be the responsibility of the superintendent or his/her designee to determine the personnel needs of the school system and to make all personnel recommendations **with the consent of the board.**

- The superintendent, **with the approval of the board**, shall hire, evaluate and, if necessary, dismiss school system employees.

By contrast, the independent school head of school is authorized to "develop institutional programs, provide administrative and educational leadership, employ and discharge personnel, enroll and dismiss students, prepare the annual budget, and [has] the responsibility for the day-to-day operation of the school" (Wilson, 2008). Prior or subsequent approval or consent from the

board is not required. This concept was tested in Scenario 2, "the Chatham Scenario," presented

to the focus groups and discussed in Chapter 4.

History of Superintendents and Their Boards

Callahan (1975) characterized the relationship between the public school superintendent

and the board as fraught with tension that can be traced to a "uniquely American approach to

public and semi-public education of control of education at the local level by elected lay

officials" (p. 19). There are several watershed dates that mark the major periods in the

relationship between the public school board and the superintendent. Based on Callahan (1975),

the history of the relationship can be divided into five distinct time periods which are the colonial

period, the Horace Mann and his legacy era, the Draper and Cubberley period, post Brown, and

the modern era. As a basis for a rough proxy comparison, the percentage of currently operating

independent schools, which are members of NAIS, are listed in Table 3 according to their

foundation date relative to the given time-periods based on Callahan (DASL, 2021).

Table 3

Independent School Foundation Dates relative to Callahan Time Periods

Time period based on Callahan (1975)	Percentage of current NAIS member schools founded during time period
Colonial (ca. 1657-1840)	4.50%
Horace Mann & his legacy era (1841-1895)	12.52%
Draper and Cubberley (1895-1954)	29.77%
post Brown (1955-1979)	30.38%
modern era (1980's-present)	22.82%

The summary in Chapter 4 returns to this framework and notes the foundation time periods of

each of the participating schools. The foundation dates are relevant for the history of the public

school superintendent but may not be as relevant for independent schools due to a severe lack of historical context for the development of the independent school head.

One independent school professional commented when asked how to trace the historical relationship between independent school heads and boards that "there is no compendium or road map establishing that information" (C. Goodman, personal communication, April 2, 2021). The history of public school superintendents and their boards may therefore serve as a proxy, although not a perfect one, for the history of the relationship in independent schools between the head of school and the independent school board.

Other proxies for the history of the relationship between the independent school head and board may include that of the college president and their board or the executive director of a nonprofit association and their board. However, the history of these other relationships appears not to be chronicled or studied in the way that the public school superintendent and their board has been studied. Grissom and Anderson (2012) used the city manager and their relationship with an elected city council as a proxy for the superintendent – board relationship. Modern studies focus on the variety of relationships that currently exist between the head of school or CEO and the board, rather than trace the history of how these relationships might have developed (see Covey, 2006; Murray et al., 1992; Northouse, 2019; etc., which are described subsequently).

The first publicly maintained schools were established in the Massachusetts Bay Colony by the Massachusetts Law of 1642, which required parents to educate their children, and by the Old Deluder Satan Act of 1647, which required towns of a certain size to maintain schools and placed the responsibility for compliance of those schools in the hands of local officials. The Old Deluder Satan Act had two primary provisions that have lasting effect. The first provision established the primary funding model for public education based on local property taxation,

which is still the basic funding mechanism for public education today. The second provision established the framework for the justification for the common school, namely, to fight "against social threats and [for] educational salvation" (Stillwaggon, 2012).

The Old Deluder Satan Act was updated in 1789 to specify that all towns in Massachusetts were required to support public schools, regardless of size. In 1824, the law was amended to require that the oversight of town schools reside with a school committee, the precursor to the modern board. In his history of American education, Boers (2007) noted that American colonial education during this early period generally comprised of either reading and writing for the non-college bound student, grammar schools for the college-bound and leadership track students, and apprenticeships for those working towards specific trades. There were several names for these various schools including dame schools, petty schools, town schools, Sunday schools, pay schools, and people's colleges.

The first paragraph of the Old Deluder Satan Act identified Satan's efforts to prevent knowledge of the scriptures and to confuse readers' understanding of the scriptures using false Saints as the catalyst for educating children at public expense (Farrand, 1929). Subsequent American leaders articulated a shift from religious justifications for public funding of education to economic and political justifications. Stillwaggon (2012) chronicled these changes:

> From Thomas Jefferson's warning of democracy degrading into tyranny, to Horace Mann's economic arguments for the continued funding of the Common Schools and continuing through the images of nationalism and militarism employed in the shift in public school agenda in *A Nation at Risk*, the purposes of public education and the drive for its economic support have found an organizing framework in guarding the health of the society against an ever-present danger. (p. 353)

The post-colonial era of education was marked by the work of Common school reformers such as Horace Mann and the creation of state education agencies and the office of the superintendent.

In his work on tracing the rise and impact of the Common school on society, Kaestle (1983) described the reforms of the antebellum period. Most of the legislation of this time helped define the roles of the various municipalities (towns, cities, states) in overseeing public education. Kaestle (1983) remarked that the superintendency was controversial and local committees, the precursor to the formal board, maintained control of curriculum, hiring teachers, expenditures of funds, textbooks, and the length of school terms. Of note are the contributions of Horace Mann during this time.

Horace Mann served as the Massachusetts secretary of education beginning in 1837. Among other school innovations Mann is credited with, he was instrumental in the creation of the office of the superintendent, which initiated boards turning control of schools over to professionals (Callahan, 1975). In his *Annual Report* of 1843, Mann described the school systems he had visited in Europe and declared that the Prussian school system was the best and the English school system the worst (Callahan, 1975, p. 21). The key component for Prussian success for Mann was the organization of schools into districts overseen by what Mann would fashion into a superintendency.

In 1844, Mann orchestrated the election of educators to the public school committees. These new board members helped demonstrate that the direct oversight of the schools by lay members of the public was producing substandard students – as demonstrated by exams given to students in the spring of 1845. Callahan (1975) remarked that the committee believed the basic problem was that members of the school board were not paid for their work and were not professional educators. Mann proposed the creation of the role of superintendent to

watch over the schools; to know the exact condition of every one in all particulars; to

bring the lagging forward; to suffer no defects to become prescriptive, no abuses to be

indurated by time; to acquire and to impart such information as shall bring all our schools

to that degree of excellence which our citizens not only have a right to demand, but

without which they have no right, in justice to themselves and to their children, to be

satisfied. This should be his business, his whole business; and he should be adequately

paid. Although chosen annually, like our masters, his tenure of office, like theirs, would

be permanent, if he discharged the duties of his office acceptably; and if he did not,

another should be chosen in his stead. (Callahan, 1975, p. 23)

This effort initially failed. The committee members whom Mann had helped get elected were

voted out of office. However, the seeds were laid and came to fruition 6 years later when the first

superintendent of Boston schools was hired in 1851.

As populations continued to grow, the position of superintendent grew as well, but so too

did the number of lay citizens serving on school committees who were unwilling to relinquish

much of their duties to the superintendents (Callahan, 1975). The reckoning came in 1895 in the

Draper report and the Cleveland plan which were the culmination of two decades of debate and

struggle. In a speech given in 1890 at the annual meeting of school superintendents, William

Maxwell, superintendent of the Brooklyn public system, "charged that because lay officials were

operating the schools [as board members], public education was 'in a stage of semi-barbarism'"

(Callahan, 1975, p. 27). Maxwell urged his colleagues to fight against what he perceived as

ignorance and evil from the school committees.

In 1893, the National Education Association appointed a committee of 15 prominent

school administrators to study and make recommendations about several issues. Andrew Draper,

superintendent of schools in Cleveland, served as the chair of the group studying the organization of school systems. The 1895 Draper report asked a series of questions about the nature of school boards, upon whose authority they were charged, and what powers they should have. The Draper report criticized boards and claimed that boards "override and degrade a superintendent when they have the power to do so, until he becomes their mere factotum" (Callahan, 1975, p. 30). The Draper report embraced Draper's plan for his own Cleveland school district as the primary model for the organization of school districts. The Cleveland plan of 1892 gave "complete control over all educational matters to the superintendent of instruction" and the board of education had very limited powers (Callahan, 1975, p. 44). The lay boards were opposed to this notion.

William Bruce was a member of a school board and had established the *American School Board Journal*. In the April 1895 edition of the Journal, Bruce published a drawing on the cover depicting Draper and his retinue (the committee of 15) as the murderers of Julius Caesar while Marc Antony represented the school boards pining over the deceased Caesar (see Figure 2). The caption stated that the report

> proposes that the School Boards in cities be reduced to a 'bureau of clerks' and the Superintendents elevated to supreme power, to have authority to employ and dismiss teachers at will, adopt or drop textbooks at their pleasure, and in fact, become the 'Czars' over the American public school system." (Bruce, 1895, p. 1)

As described in Callahan (1975), Bruce believed that the superintendent should be the educational expert, but the board's role should include both legislative and executive control. The basic outcome was that public schools not only continued to be controlled by elected officials, but that control was strengthened.

Figure 2

American School Board Journal Cover, 1895

Twenty-one years after the Draper report of 1895, Ellwood Cubberley and Edward Elliott

published *State and County School Administration,* a textbook on public school administration.

The authors defined numerous characteristics of boards that are still in effect today: the size of boards was to be small (five to seven members); board members were to be elected at-large rather than representing a specific geographical part of a district (usually a ward); board members were to be successful businessmen and community leaders; and board members should serve a three-five year term. Cubberley and Elliott did not object or question the right of the board to control the public schools (Callahan, 1975, pp. 35-38). The authors believed that small size and composition by business leaders would encourage the board members to turn over the schools to the superintendents, the experts.

The debate between boards and superintendents continued as George Counts (1927) described bias in boards and advocated for proportional representation on boards. Charles Judd (1933) recommended that boards should be abolished. Jesse Newlon (1933) agreed with Counts and urged better training for superintendents and boards. The 1938 Strayer report published by the head of the department of educational administration at Teachers College, Columbia University, George Strayer, agreed with Cubberley's recommendations and stated unequivocally that in the relationship between the board and the superintendent "the board should be governed in its actions by the advice of the experts, but the final authority must rest with the lay board." (Callahan, 1975, p. 41). Strayer believed that schools belong to the people and should therefore be governed by individuals who represent the will of the people.

It is worth noting that during this time, a landmark case was decided by the U.S. Supreme Court in which the right of private schools to enroll students and provide education was unanimously upheld in *Pierce v. Society of Sisters*, 268 U.S. 510 (1925). The case concerned the Oregon Compulsory Education Act of 1922 that mandated school attendance in public school by most children between the ages of eight and sixteen years. The act would have effectively

abolished private schools, and *Pierce* established that educational choice was guaranteed under the Constitution. Writing the majority opinion in *Pierce*, Justice McReynolds stated, "the fundamental theory of liberty upon which all governments in this Union repose excludes any general power of the State to standardize its children by forcing them to accept instruction from public teachers only" (Page 268 U. S. 534). There were two Fourteenth Amendment due process arguments made in *Pierce*: first, that the state cannot deprive its citizens of liberty, i.e. parents' rights to choose not to send their children to public school, and second, that the state cannot deprive its citizens of property, i.e. the right to conduct schools, which were defined as property. Justice Kennedy has stated that although the case was argued under the Fourteenth Amendment, it could have been argued under the First Amendment (Troxel v. Granville, 2000).

There were two major recommendations from the 1938 Strayer report that were not adopted (Callahan, 1975). The first was that boards would grant teachers a direct voice in school governance. The second was that boards would actively engage with all segments of their communities, especially minorities. Callahan (1975) suggested that the results of these recommendations not being adopted had two direct consequences: the teacher strikes of the 1960s that resulted from a lack of teacher representation in the policy setting of boards and pervasive and systemic racism and bias in public schools that was caused by a lack of democratic voice for minorities.

Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka (1954) is a watershed moment in the history of civil rights and access to public education in the U.S. While it may be difficult to discern the effect of *Brown* in the relationship between public school superintendents and boards or between independent school heads and boards, which is the focus of this study, civil rights surely tested the resolve of boards and leaders either to maintain segregationist practices or to eliminate them.

The 1986 Institute for Educational Leadership report confirmed that much of public school board tension in the 1950s and 1960s was caused by ideology and concerns for diversity (p. 34). Public school governance was characterized by the struggle between teachers and boards of public systems with the superintendent either caught in the middle or merging with the board in the perceptions of teachers (p. 42).

In her work on the desegregation of southern private schools, Purdy (2018) described a shift in independent education in Atlanta away from segregationist admissions policies. In the spring of 1963, an Atlanta independent school, The Lovett School, denied admission to Dr. Martin Luther King's son and in the same year, another Atlanta independent school, Trinity School, admitted Andrew Young's children. In the fall of 1963, Dr. Vernon Broyles, the board chair of another Atlanta independent school, The Westminster Schools, suggested that the board begin reconsidering their admissions policies.

Several external factors contributed to Westminster's decision making process. The school received letters urging desegregation from parents such as Rabbi Jacob Rothschild, who was rabbi of the Temple that had been bombed in 1958. The Civil Rights Act of 1965 was passed. The IRS decided to suspend the tax-exempt status of private segregated schools. After several years of consideration, Dr. William Pressly, the President of Westminster, announced that the school would desegregate. Purdy (2018) noted that by intentionally choosing to use the term *desegregate*, which means to end a policy of racial segregation, rather than *integrate*, which means to mix people of different backgrounds, "the board . . .acknowledged that the school had been segregated by choice" (p. 91). Purdy (2018) noted that Westminster was the first nonsectarian institute in the south to announce an open admissions policy.

In 1963, NAIS began publishing reports to assist independent schools in the recruitment and retention of black students. In the 1966-67 school year, NAIS reported that 62% of its member schools enrolled students of color, although only 15% of schools in the southeast did, and 44% of NAIS independent schools in the southeast indicated that they had no plans to enroll any (Purdy, 2018). According to the Southern Education Foundation (n.d.), private school enrollment in the south increased approximately 43% from 1940-1950 as a reaction to the outlawing of segregation in professional and graduate schools. From 1950-1965, private school enrollment increased in the south approximately 130%. Westminster's open admission policy was an anomaly as the increased enrollment in the south was a response to impending public school desegregation and white flight from public schools into racially segregated private schools.

The 1983 National Commission on Excellence in Education report known as *A Nation at Risk* marked the beginning of the high stakes testing era which has characterized U.S. education for the past forty years. New research emerged in the 1980s which attempted to measure and understand the relationship between superintendents and their boards using qualitative methods. Tallerico (1989) conducted an exploratory study and gathered data through semi-structured interviews of superintendents and board members from six districts that were differentiated by size (small, medium, large), type of district (elementary, high school, unified), and type of community (rural, suburban, urban).

Tallerico (1989) noted that "although the functional relationship between school board and superintendent is a critical connection that stands at the apex of the organizational pyramid in education, little is known about the dynamics of that linkage" (p. 216). Her work described three behavioral inclinations for board members she called passive acquiescence, proactive

supportiveness, and restive vigilance (p. 218). The behavioral inclinations of superintendents were broadly defined along a continuum of more controlling to less controlling. Later studies such as Smoley (1999), Wright (2002), Eadie (2009), Thompson (2014), Ford and Ihrke (2016) followed Tallerico's (1989) interest in further articulating the dynamics of the relationship.

In an independent school, the head of school is the sole employee of the board and is assigned several duties. The head is authorized to "develop institutional programs, provide administrative and educational leadership, employ and discharge personnel, enroll and dismiss students, prepare the annual budget, and [has] the responsibility for the day-to-day operation of the school" (Wilson, 2008). Embedded into independent school accreditation standards are the concepts of separation of governance by the board in setting policies and operation of the school as determined by the head of school (ICAISA, 2021; SAIS, 2019). The principles of governance in independent school resemble Mann's (1845) ideas of the role of the superintendent and Draper's (1895) and Cubberley's (1916) views on the role of the board rather than Strayer's (1933).

Independent School Board Functions

Independent school boards are generally self-selecting and self-perpetuating, meaning that they choose their own members rather than allow an open election for board members by parents or other stakeholders. NAIS (2018a) reported that 79% of independent nonprofit school boards are elected through a board vote, a governance committee vote, or a corporation vote and only 13% rely on a direct parent vote to select board members. By contrast, 88% of public school boards are elected by the public in a direct election (NSBA, 2018).

The average public school board has seven members (NSBA, 2018). The number of public school board members is generally aligned with representational voting districts or

precincts (Weeks, n.d.). A 2016 state law in Georgia limits the size of a public school board to seven (O.C.G.A. § 20-2-52) unless the size of the board was larger than that before the law was enacted. For example, the Atlanta Public School system has nine board members, six of whom represent specific geographical districts and three of whom serve "at large." Gwinnett and Cobb counties' public school boards have five and seven board members, respectively, all of whom are elected from specific geographical districts.

The average size of an independent school board is 19 members, and the average board size among all nonprofits is 16 (NAIS, 2018a). The larger size of an independent or nonprofit board compared to a public school board may be related to the functions and skills desired in the members of the board, but there is very little research on the relationship between the size of a nonprofit or independent school board and its effectiveness (Sumpton & Wyman, n.d.).

With autonomy for selecting board members, independent schools seek out skills and viewpoints that represent the entire school community, rather than a faction or geographic designation. NAIS (2018a) described the top five factors in recruiting independent school board members: passion for the school's mission, desired skills (e.g., legal, fundraising, facilities), strategic vision, community connections, and race and ethnicity (p. 38). Appendix A contains the full list of factors noted in the 2018 NAIS survey on governance for board recruitment and the alignment of heads and board chairs regarding the significance of each characteristic.

Standards for independent school accreditation require that boards evaluate their own performance regularly and 88% of independent school boards formally evaluate their own performance once a year (ICAISA, 2021; NAIS, 2018a; SAIS, 2019). There is wide variety in the way independent school boards evaluate their performance. Some may use an instrument produced by an independent school association or accrediting body while others may use an

instrument produced by a nationally recognized group (such as Board Source). Others may create their own instrument that is aligned with their mission and values. The focus of the present study is on the misalignment of independent school boards and heads as noted by Mitchell (2019) as seen in the results of the governance evaluation tool created by Kavanagh and Robinson in 2016.

Independent school standards of accreditation and the NAIS Principles of Good Practice relative to boards and trustees focus on defining the role of the board and anticipating significant dilemmas boards may face (NAIS, 2007; SAIS, 2019). Contained in these documents are the concepts of separation of governance and operations, confidentiality, fiduciary responsibility, managing conflicts of interest, and recognizing that authority only exists corporately and not with individual board members. In 2010, the Georgia Department of Education responded to a 2008 study conducted by the Commission for School Board Excellence and produced the Standards for Effective Governance of Georgia School Systems (GADOE, 2010). Within the standards is a model code of ethics for local public school boards of education that encapsulates many of the same principles to which independent school boards hold themselves accountable (see Appendix B). Accreditation agencies such as Cognia (formerly AdvancED and formerly part of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools) also have standards of accreditation that hold public schools accountable to basic tenets of governance that are like those listed above.

Independent school board members who are also current parents in the school (48% in independent school boards, 29% in public school boards; NAIS, 2018a; NSBA; 2018) have at least one conflict of interest they must manage every year – voting to increase tuition. Public school board members who are property owners must also manage a potential conflict of interest in raising millage rates. This vote may constitute an ethical dilemma as the board member must

balance the needs of the school to seek additional revenue through a tuition increase and the desire on the part of the parent-consumer not to pay a higher price for their child's education. As noted by Orem and Wilson (2017), Mott (2014), and others, current parents as board members face other ethical choices, for example when dealing with a teacher and needing to set aside their "board member hat" in favor of their "parent hat."

Board members of either independent or public schools face dilemmas when they disagree with a decision of the board and how they choose to comport themselves outside of the board room. There is a significant difference in the expectations of independent school and public school board members who disagree with a decision. Independent school board members are advised to keep board deliberations confidential and that the "board speaks with one voice" (NAIS, 2007, p. 32). Because independent school board meetings are not open to the public, outside of the board room how an individual board member voted on an issue is not known. While the GADOE (2010) model code of ethics for public school board members advises that board members are to abide by all decisions of the board, since public school board meetings are generally open to the public, there is no parallel assumption of confidentiality, except for matters considered in executive session, nor is there a mandate to speak with one voice (Domain V, Numbers 7 and 8).

Development of the Constructs of Independent School Governance

The constructs of independent school governance used in this study are those measured by the SAIS Governance survey (Kavanagh & Robinson, 2016). The survey measures five broad topics of independent school governance: roles and responsibilities, structures and operations, culture, board-head partnership, and strategic mindset. Table 4 shows the individual items addressed by the survey within each broad category.

Table 4:

SAIS Governance Survey Topics

Topic	Items addressed
Roles and Responsibilities	Mission, vision, values, strategic priorities, evaluation of head, board performance review, budgeting process, personal giving, and donor cultivation.
Structure and Operations	Recruitment and appointment of board members, trustee orientation, meeting attendance, professional development, respect, diversity, bylaws review, and term limits.
Culture	Decision making, alignment, discussions, diversity, and support or decisions.
Board-Head Partnership	Support, success, and trust of the head, head's vision, and school information and developments.
Strategic Mindset	Mission alignment, allocation of time, long range planning, opportunities and challenges, strategic thinking and planning, and suspension of personal agendas.

The topics and items of the SAIS Governance Survey were created from a close examination of the work of Baker et al. (2015), of generally accepted concepts within the independent school industry as encapsulated in accreditation standards, and in the NAIS principles of good practice (2007).

The work of Baker et al. (2015) attempted to correlate independent school effectiveness to board practices. The authors used a mixed methods approach in which they measured board practices by merging the 2008 NAIS Board effectiveness survey and the writings of Chait et al. (1991) to create a quantitative survey. Baker et al. (2015) subsequently conducted semi-structured interviews with select independent school leaders and described the results as case studies. The quantitative survey created by Baker et al. (2015) provided the structure for the SAIS Governance Survey developed by Kavanagh and Robinson in 2016.

Twenty-one independent school accrediting associations are members of ICAISA and adhere to a set of model core standards which include a description of governance and fiscal

responsibilities of the board of an independent school (ICAISA, 2021). The precursor of ICAISA was the NAIS Commission on Accreditation which was convened in 2002 to address emerging national and state independent school accreditation issues, most notably the perceived threat to peer-driven accreditation. The Commission wrote the initial set of model core standards which are reflected in the SAIS Governance Survey (2016). In addition to the model core standards, the SAIS Governance Survey is derived from principles of good practice, especially those described for boards, board members, and heads of school as promulgated by NAIS (2007).

The concepts of governance in independent school accreditation standards and principles of good practice are themselves derived from the fiduciary responsibility of entities overseeing a charitable trust. Hopkins (2009) traced the fiduciary responsibility of nonprofit organizations to a concept in English common law in which legal entities can be treated differently than individual humans. These entities today are the modern corporations, associations, limited liability companies, estates, etc. (p. 9).

Fiduciary responsibility is described by the three duties expected of non-profit boards which are well-articulated by numerous organizations such as Board Source (formerly the National Center for Nonprofit Boards), state level centers for nonprofits, the American Society of Association Executives, NAIS, and state laws. These three duties are the duty of care, the duty of loyalty, and the duty of obedience.

The duty of care refers to the board's responsibility to care for the school's activities and operations in a manner that meets a legal threshold of what would generally be considered reasonable to a prudent person. To accomplish this, board members attend meetings regularly, maintain confidentiality, exercise independent judgment, steward the school's resources, engage

in proper board development, prepare for and regularly attend meetings, delegate authority, and oversee the head of school (Barlow, 2016; DeKuyper, 2010; Hopkins, 2009).

The duty of loyalty refers to an individual board member's obligation to act in the interest of the organization and to disclose and manage conflicts of interest that may arise. Boards accomplish this by having a robust statement on conflicts of interest that is reviewed regularly and that board members agree to abide by, disclosing conflicts of interest, and abstaining from conversations and votes in which they might have an opportunity for personal gain (Barlow, 2016; DeKuyper, 2010; Hopkins, 2009).

The duty of obedience requires the board to remain faithful to the purpose and mission of the school and make strategic decisions about the school's future that are consistent with and within the scope of the mission. This duty also requires the board to comply with federal, state, and local laws, and adhere to the organization's bylaws. The board can demonstrate their duty of obedience by the allocation of the school's resources to serve the mission of the school and by reviewing and filing required documents such as the IRS Form 990 (Barlow, 2016; DeKuyper, 2010; Hopkins, 2009).

Leadership Models

There are multiple leadership models available to organizations for adoption, including the servant leader model, the adaptive leader model, and the transformational leader model (Northouse, 2019). Embedded within these frameworks are various approaches to leadership which are described as behavioral, situational, skills, and trait approaches to leadership. Principles of leadership generally require that a board and an organization become introspective at least once a year and assess their performance towards key performance measures and their

comprehension and adherence to industry best practices (Grace et al., 2009; Mott, 2018; NAIS, 2007).

High functioning boards attend to their foundation by reviewing by-laws, board manuals, policies, and procedures on a regular basis and through self-assessment. According to Lakey (2010), the well-formed assessment will, "signal to the rest of the organization the importance of accountability; identify ways in which it could improve its operations; develop a shared understanding of the board's responsibilities; [and] improve communication among board members with the chief executive" (p.57). Lakey's final points are germane to the relationship between the board, the board chair, and the chief executive. *Shared understandings* of the role of the board and the role of the head of school are the equivalent to alignment to the constructs of governance which is the focus of this study.

Governance is a shared duty and absolute alignment towards a shared vision and effective role clarity helps maintain focus and leads to greater mission fulfillment (Eckert & Harris, 2019). Major conflict occurs within nonprofit organizations when there is a lack of clarity and understanding of roles and responsibilities. Organizations such as Board Source, NAIS, SAIS, and the American Society of Association Executives have suggested or created tools to define and measure the adherence to governance practices. For example, the Board Self-Assessment created by Board Source measures ten concepts of nonprofit governance across four domains of the people, the culture, the work, and the impact (Board Source, 2021).

Shared among these evaluation tools are the general concepts described above in the constructs of independent school governance: separation of governance and management activities, maintaining the confidentiality and trust of the board room, the relationship between the board and the head of school, maintaining a strategic mindset, and general board operations

50

(Baker et al., 2015; DeKuyper, 2010; Orem & Wilson, 2017; Williams & McGinnis, 2011). As described by Pearson and Pearson (2019), the perceptive leadership team is built on a backbone of trust and transparent information sharing (p. 81). The authors recounted management practice themes and anecdotes from Covey (2006), Lencioni (2005), and Scott (2017) in which distrust was shown to be the primary driver of dysfunction in teams.

Grissom and Anderson (2012) investigated the effects of the leadership characteristics of public school boards on superintendent turnover in California. The authors used a survey that considered "four aspects of school board functioning: working together, communicating, governing effectively, and maintaining good relations with the superintendent" (p. 1158). They found that these four items were highly correlated with each other and suggested that there was a latent principle, namely that a board that works well together also works well with the superintendent. Grissom and Anderson's model predicted a 37% decrease in the likelihood of superintendent turnover for each standard deviation increase in the measure of the latent principle (p. 1166). The rise of unexpected independent school head turnover was one of the catalysts for the current study.

According to Rowe (2021), 20% of new independent school heads of school depart their position within the first three years, a number Rowe claimed matches the rate of turnover for new principals in public schools, and a number similar to that found by Grissom and Anderson (2012) among public school superintendents, excluding retirements and position elimination or interim status. Referencing the 2020 Factors Affecting Head of School Tenure (FAHST) study, Rowe (2021) noted that, "the head may feel that the board expects the impossible, while the board thinks that the head is not meeting agreed-upon metrics of success" ("What the Data Say" section). NAIS (2018a) noted that 83% of heads of school considered their relationship with their

board chair extremely strong or very strong. This result was slightly lower than in the 2012 iteration of the same governance survey in which 86% of heads reported an extremely strong or very strong relationship with their board chair. Similarly, NAIS (2018a) noted that board chairs' perception of the relationship as extremely strong or very strong had decreased from 93% in 2012 to 89% in 2018.

Murray et al. (1992) conducted a mixed-methods study on the relationship between nonprofit boards and their executive leaders. Using grounded theory to let their "theoretical insights about boards grow out of the data collection process," five broad patterns of relationships emerged (p. 166). Murray et al. (1992) classified these five patterns as the CEO-dominated board, the chair-dominated board, the power-sharing or democratic board, the fragmented board in which competing factions among board members prevented efficiencies, and the powerless board in which the board was unclear about its role and its commitment to the organization's mission was tenuous. Building on Murray et al. (1992), Reid and Turbide (2014) conducted a longitudinal case study of four nonprofit organizations that were all in a crisis created by rapid growth that was inadequately planned for.

In the Reid and Turbide (2014) study, the crises of two organizations derived from excessive programming without sufficient revenue resources. Another organization derived its growth crisis from a building campaign in which management did not adequately plan for higher fixed operating costs. The last organization derived its crisis from an improved reputation that led to both increased programming and a new facility, neither of which were adequately funded. Reid and Turbide's (2014) study focused on the relationship between the executive leader and the board throughout the crises (p. 167).

The frameworks explored by Reid and Turbide (2014) included mission versus management, trust versus control, and internal versus external perspectives. In the first framework, the executive's perspective on the organization is through the lens of a professional practitioner who has knowledge and judgment about the mission of the organization. Board members may bring management skills, but do not have the same perspective on delivering the mission within the context of the organization that the executive does – hence a tension between mission and managerial orientation which may "influence a board's ability to assess risk for mission-oriented projects and decision making" (p. 164). In the second framework, trust is generally necessary for collaboration and cooperation, and when trust is high, there is little need for control, but excessive trust in the executive can lead to a disengaged board. Control exerted by a board regulates the actions of the executive to achieve organizational goals, and when trust is low, controls are more prevalent (p.166). In the final framework, internal governance refers to the board's role in monitoring and coaching executive leadership while external governance refers to resource dependency, advocacy, and managing networks (p.167).

In all four of the organizations studied by Reid and Turbide (2014), the relationship between the board and the executive changed at discernible points through the crisis. Prior to the crisis, what the authors labeled "before the storm," the boards were passive and highly trusting of the executive and staff. The strong positions of the organization caused the board to ignore fiscal monitoring. During the crisis, the boards reacted to the external threat by focusing on the managerial issues and attempting to control the activities that led to the crisis. During this period, one organization retained its executive, two terminated the employment of the executive, and in the fourth, the board's executive leadership committee resigned. In the final phase of the crisis,

"survival and rebuilding," the relationship between the board and the executive was one of negotiated balance in which trust and control were functioning reciprocally (p. 179).

Researching the nonprofit sector generally, Cornforth and Macmillan (2016) investigated the relationship between the board and its CEO through the lens of negotiated order theory. This theory emphasizes social change and relies on the construction and re-construction of order rather than on defined roles and responsibilities. The researchers found that the relationship between chair and CEO is highly dependent on context and "the boundary between what the chair and CEO do is subject to renegotiation and change as the relationship develops in the light of changing circumstances" (p. 965). *Context* refers to different types of organizations and missions. *Changing circumstances* refers to internal and external threats and opportunities that may change the dynamic between the board and CEO.

Hill and Jochim (2021) describe public-school superintendent success in the context of negotiated order theory but use the language of alliances and forging partnerships. The researchers noted a high number of superintendent resignations and votes of no confidence because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The authors studied politically charged situations and synthesized activities and traits that were common to those superintendents who successfully navigated the situations. These traits mirrored responses to the dilemmas articulated by Reid and Turbide (2014): building coalitions with both internal and external groups, establishing shared goals, and building on trust within the board's framework.

Historical Crises and Crisis Leadership

Within a public school context, Pepper et al. (2010) offered a definition that distinguished events in schools as crises rather than events that are challenging. The authors described three key characteristics that articulate whether an event should be categorized as a crisis (p. 6). The

first is that the event must threaten core values or foundational practices. The second criterion is that a crisis should be obvious although it may derive from unclear circumstances. The third and final characteristic of a crisis in a school is that it should require urgent decision-making even in the face of possessing limited information with which to make decisions. Pepper et al. (2010) presented case studies of leaders reacting to crises that were grouped by the origins of the crises: predictable or unpredictable and derived from internal or external sources.

As noted previously, Kane (1992) identified several categories of crises that independent schools face that have recurred throughout the last three decades and perhaps longer. She grouped these crises into three major categories: environmental influences, internal management issues, and governance issues which could be either exogenous or endogenous. Kane (1992) further refined each of these broad categories and noted that environmental issues include demographic shifts, recession, and competition from public schools. Internal management issues include overseeing facilities, faculty, and parents. Finally, governance issues include board commitment, board composition, board structure, and board-head relationship. Evans and Wilson (2021) used the term "proximate to pain" to categorize boards and heads during a crisis, specifically the COVID-19 pandemic.

Although Kane (1992) did not discuss truly exogenous variables that may lead to school crises, such as global health issues or large scale natural disasters, other authors have described the responses of leadership in these crises (see for example: Flaxman et al., 2020; Muffet-Willet & Kruse, 2009; Kidson et al., 2020; Petriglieri, 2020; Thomas, 2019; Pepper et al., 2010). Examples of events that are treated as exogenous variables in economic modeling include global health issues such as the current COVID-19 pandemic, the H1N1 avian flu, the 1918 Spanish flu, the U.S. Civil War, the World Wars, or natural disasters such as Hurricane Katrina or the

California wildfires, although economists may differ on whether natural disasters or war constitute exogenous variables (Tutterow, 2021). Kane (1992) also did not discuss other internal or governance issues that might arise from illicit behavior, family and child services issues, mental health concerns, or any number of additional situations that might be labeled a crisis.

The effects of crises are most keenly felt in independent school enrollments, which are the economic engine driving most independent schools through tuition dollars (Bassett & Mitchell, 2006). As a crisis decreases families' ability to pay tuition, it would follow that families might choose to withdraw their child or children from the school. Appendix C shows the enrollment change among three cohort groups: all NAIS member schools, NAIS member schools in the southeast, and NAIS member schools in Georgia leading up to and through the last two economic crises – the economic downturn in the housing market in 2008-09 and the recent global pandemic. The enrollment trends suggest that the effect on student count has been moderate, with NAIS schools even increasing student enrollment slightly in the 2009-10 school year and southeastern schools increasing enrollment in the 2020-21 school year. In all types of crises identified by Kane (1992) and others, the independent school response has broadly been an attempt to deliver on the educational mission of the school as close to pre-crisis as possible, presenting a sense of normalcy, or at least in a manner that justifies independent school revenues.

Petriglieri (2020) described the differences between characteristics of leadership when not in crisis and when in crisis. Comparing crisis and vision, he stated that vision moves and inspires people. Charismatic leaders have vision and, "the limitations of visionary leadership become painfully obvious in times of crisis, uncertainty, or radical change" (para. 2). He further explained that

crises always test visions, and most don't survive. Because when there's a fire in a

factory, a sudden drop in revenues, a natural disaster, we don't need a call to action. We

are already motivated to move, but we often flail. What we need is a type of holding, so

that we can move purposefully. (para. 3)

According to Petriglieri, *holding* is a term in psychology that describes a leader's behaviors and

actions during a crisis to contain a situation by offering solace, soothing distress, and reassuring

employees and to interpret events to help create meaning out of a confusing situation for the

community being served. *Vision* may be the differentiating characteristic that elevates someone

into a leadership position but *holding* is a skill that helps a leader manage and overcome a crisis.

COVID-19 Crisis

Flaxman et al. (2020) described four emerging themes among independent school heads

of school in their reaction to the COVID-19 pandemic. The first theme noted was that heads of

school gently, rather than abruptly, changed their leadership style and relied on greater levels of

empathy and focused on building relational trust. The second theme was that heads increased

their meeting and collaborating time with their leadership teams, conducting more frequent

check-ins and lengthier management meetings. While Flaxman et al. (2020) did not describe an

increase in meetings between the board and the head of school, it is relatively safe to assume that

these types of interactions also increased in the same or greater proportion to the administrative

leadership meetings. The third theme noted was that heads were projecting a sense of calm, like

what Petriglieri (2020) described as *holding,* but were in fact unnerved and panicked by the

situation. The fourth and final theme was that the significance, modality, and tone of

communications shifted to become not only the primary means of dispensing information but

also the manifestation of the leadership style of the head of school. Flaxman et al. (2020)

continued by describing the ways in which relationships between the head and stakeholders changed during the pandemic.

Flaxman et al. (2020) indicated that heads of school emphasized the pastoral dimension of headship and turned their attention to caring for their faculty, students, and parents ("Theme Four" section). Heads were challenged by the shifting modality from highly relational face-to-face interactions to virtual interactions through email, phone, and videoconference platforms. The public portion of their role as leaders was amplified as they were increasingly compelled to express calm in the face of the pandemic.

Lifto (2020) described the results of a survey of Minnesota public school superintendents administered in May 2020, which parallels the timing of the qualitative interviews conducted by Flaxman et al. (2020) of independent school heads of school. In the survey, Lifto (2020) found that the emerging traits of public school superintendents included a greater emphasis on communication through multiple channels; displaying empathy and a calm and positive outlook; balancing reality and optimism; remaining flexible; and being a source of strength and hope. In his study, Lifto (2020) found that 57% of the superintendents believed that their leadership role and relationship with their board had minimal or no change ("Effective Leadership" section). One of the questions addressed in this study was whether heads and executive board leaders detect a change in their relationship since the pandemic.

Lifto (2020) noted that only 20% of respondents rated their system as "highly prepared" for the pandemic citing previous teacher training, being a 1-to-1 student device school, and pre-existing digital course work as indicators of preparedness. Among those who felt their system was not highly prepared, reasons included a lack of technology infrastructure, wide disparities in access to technology among students (most keenly seen in minority populations), and lack of an

ability to connect with teachers and with parents. Based on criteria like that noted in Lifto (2020), independent schools were better prepared for virtual schooling during the pandemic.

Independent schools have increasingly become 1-to-1 student device schools, allowing for the continuation of instruction regardless of where it was delivered, at home or at school. During the 2016-17 school year, half reported that they had a program in which every student has a dedicated device and in 2020-21, 65% of independent schools reported having such a program (DASL, 2021). It should be noted that the majority of the remaining 35% of schools have a bring-your-own-device program, so that nearly all independent school instruction requires that students have their own device.

An odd example of public and nonpublic schools co-designing educational policy and working together emerged out of New South Wales during the pandemic. A handful of the non-governmental schools in New South Wales were able to pivot quickly to online learning and planned to close their schools. The 2,200 government schools in New South Wales feared pressure to do the same, although they were unprepared to support student learning in a virtual environment (Baker, 2020). The New South Wales minister of education implored the independent school leaders to keep their schools open for face-to-face instruction as their closure would put pressure on government schools to close, and they were unprepared to do deliver virtual education. According to Kidson et al. (2020) referencing the effects of COVID-19 on schools in Australia, "in the midst of a crisis, priority is rightly given to survival response. The recovery phase, however, invites evaluation of those aspects from pre-crisis life which might be retained, reformed, or irrevocably lost" (p.15). As a result of experiences during the pandemic, Australia formed a National Federal Reform Commission to consider issues of inequity of access to education.

Narrative comments from superintendents in the Lifto study (2020) indicated disparities in the emerging relationship between the public school board and the superintendent which mirrored the disparities in preparedness among systems. The following are quotes gathered by Lifto (2020) in his study *Leadership matters: Superintendents' response to COVID-19*:

1) "I think there's a greater level of trust from the board now."

2) "We have changed our board meeting structure, and we have seen a few additional challenges because of the long-term drought in personal interaction."

3) "It seems board members want to get into the weeds more now—not understanding that we are providing updates as we go and that they need to stay at the 30,000-foot level."

4) "I'm trying to stay ahead of the information feed as much as possible. Board members are all parents of students in our district, so 'back-channel' information makes its way to board members before I hear about it."

The superintendents' four comments reflect positive affirmation from their board, structural changes to how they interact with their board, over involvement from the board, and communications challenges.

The effect of the pandemic on heads and boards may have been different based on the strength or weakness of the prior relationship. Cynthia Mills (2021), the CEO of a nationally recognized consultancy specializing in non-profit association leadership and governance, and specifically the relationship between the two groups observed:

in organizations where the role clarification and being a strategic board was well-established and those boards continued to operate in that same way throughout the pandemic – those organizations are thriving and doing really well. The organizations

where there were difficulties and blurring of roles and who already liked to edge towards

the line of operational – many have used COVID as the excuse to become more

operational. And if there was a dynamic that was an issue between an exec and a board

chair, that's also usually worsened. (personal communication, April 12)

Mills stated that she spent considerable time during the late winter and early spring of 2021

coaching executive directors, a proxy for heads of schools, who were considering leaving the

profession entirely.

Within independent schools, prior strength of the relationship between the head and the

board and of the overall stability of the school may have contributed to successful navigation of

the pandemic. Flaxman et al. (2020) noted that "our interviews revealed that schools with strong

enrollment and endowments were more likely to see crisis and disruption as an opportunity to

innovate and improve their systems" ("Crisis Leadership in Context" section). Flaxman et al.

(2020) did not investigate if the opposite is true, namely that schools with weaker enrollments

and endowments may have seen added pressure and not been able to use the crisis as an

opportunity to improve systems, or by extension, the relationship between the head and the

board.

In April 2020, NAIS released the results of a pulse survey of independent school heads

about their relationship with their boards in the early months of the pandemic. The survey

addressed domains associated with governance and leadership in independent schools such as

support of the head, engaging in appropriate decision making, and establishing mutual goals with

the head. The domains surveyed are roughly equivalent to the five constructs measured in the

SAIS independent school governance survey (Kavanagh & Robinson, 2016). The NAIS

survey revealed a noticeable trend.

In the *Board/head Relationship Snapshot Report,* NAIS (2020) found that as a response to the crisis, boards were engaging in the day-to-day operations of the school, involving themselves in distance learning effectiveness, and drifting towards taking on more controlling roles. These trends reflect a shift in the ways in which the constructs of independent school governance are practiced in schools. The trends may also reflect a shift in the alignment of heads and executive board leaders in their understanding of the constructs of governance.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This was a qualitative, phenomenographic study in which 11 heads of school and nine executive board leaders representing 11 independent schools were interviewed to determine their alignment of understanding of the constructs of independent school governance. The constructs were articulated in a governance survey designed by SAIS in 2016 based on independent school norms of governance (Baker et al., 2015; DeKuyper, 2010; NAIS, 2007). The constructs are the separation of governance and management activities, maintaining the confidentiality and trust of the board room, the relationship between the board and the head of school, maintaining a strategic mindset, and general board operations.

The constructs of independent school governance were used as units of analysis to measure the agreement to the principles embedded within each one. The phenomenon that was studied was the alignment between heads of school and executive board leaders to their perceptions of the practical applications of the constructs during times of normalcy and during times of crisis. The constructs represent what Marton (1981) would refer to as a first-order perspective, and the perceptions the participants' have about the constructs are in which the constructs are a second-order perspective.

Mertens (2010) noted that qualitative studies, such as those using a phenomenographic methodology, reside within the constructivist paradigm. The ontological implications are that meaning is socially constructed and therefore "research questions cannot be definitively established before the study begins; rather they will evolve and change as the study progresses" (p. 20). Stake (2010) described the iterative and evolving nature of a qualitative study and suggested that the research question is subject to refinement as the context, methods, and participants are considered in connection to each other.

Research Question

This study addressed the following research question:

What are the different perceptions of heads of school and executive board leadership with

regard to their alignment with the constructs of independent school governance in times of

normalcy and in times of crisis in different independent school settings?

Descriptions of the Constructs of Independent School Governance

Kavanagh and Robinson (2016) articulated five constructs of independent school

governance based on the non-profit concepts of the duty of care, the duty of loyalty, and the

duty of obedience and independent school principles of good practice and accreditation

standards (Baker et al., 2015; NAIS, 2007; Orem & Wilson, 2017; SAIS 2016). Kavanagh and

Robinson (2016) then developed a quantitative survey to measure the constructs (see

Appendix D for the survey questions). Mitchell (2019, "Conclusion" section) analyzed the

results of the survey and determined that there are areas of misalignment between heads and

executive board leaders and suggested that a further area of research could be qualitative in

nature to understand the gaps his work exposed. The five constructs are briefly reviewed below.

Separation refers to the concept that there is a distinct difference between the activities of

the governance structure as represented by the board and the operational structure of the school

as represented by the head of school. While there are several areas of overlap in critical areas of

the school, alignment to the basic tenet of separation is the first construct.

The confidentiality of the board room is a central feature of non-profit and independent

school governance and is the second construct. As a general rule, publicly funded agencies have

a narrowly defined set of circumstances under which a meeting is not required to be open to the

public. Under the Georgia Open Meetings Act (2012), for example, there are nine exemptions

that allow a public agency to hold a closed meeting or session such as law enforcement investigations, deliberations about personnel issues, investment meetings concerning a public retirement system, meetings that contain information that is exempt from public inspection such as medical records (O.C.G.A. §50-14-1 et seq.). Unlike open meetings which are required for the governing body of most public agencies, subject to a few exceptions, the conversations and deliberations in an independent school board meeting are not open to the public (Orem & Wilson, 2017; Tecker, 2010).

The third construct is the relationship between the board and the head of school. The strength of this relationship is key to the fulfillment of the school's mission. According to Baker, et al. (2015), 90% of heads of school are ex-officio members of the board of their school and 20% have voting rights. The head of school is the only member of the board with operational authority as invested by the board. When this relationship is strong, the school has an opportunity to flourish and when the relationship is weak, the school struggles to flourish (DeKuyper, 2010).

In order to serve their role as keepers of the mission of the school, the board maintains a strategic mindset. Baker, et al. (2015) has shown that boards that "rate highly on strategic effectiveness contribute positively to institutional performance" (p. 8). The fourth construct in the survey is the adoption of a strategic mindset. This positioning differs from traditional strategic planning and recognizes that the pace of change does not favor lengthy time-bound plans and instead suggests the adoption of a nimbleness that commits to a shared vision for the school. According to DeKyuper (2010), timeframes should be shorter and adjustments to the plan more frequent (p. 75).

The fifth and final construct is general board operations and refers to a board member meeting operational commitments such as attendance at and preparation for board meetings, following its own policies, conducting regular evaluations of the head and of itself, and making the school a fundraising priority. The quantitative measurement of this construct in the SAIS survey (2016) lends itself to a nominal assessment (yes/no) rather than a scaled measure but it is nonetheless a *sine qua non* for the tasks of governance to occur. The general board operations construct contains more questions than any of the other constructs and may prove to be a more nuanced area of head of school and executive board leadership alignment than a nominal assessment could capture.

Research Design and Tradition

Patton (2015) noted that debates about the meaningfulness, rigor, significance, and relevance of different approaches to research are a common feature of university life. He continued by stating that among scholars, there is a hierarchy in which basic research (in the postpositivist worldview) is afforded the highest status, then applied research, followed by summative evaluation research which has little status, and finally formative and action research has almost no status. However, Patton (2015) remarked that "the status hierarchy is reversed in real-world settings" (p. 251). He noted that people put the greatest significance on formative research that can help solve problems quickly rather than basic research which they consider disconnected to every-day life.

Maxwell (2021) went further and argued that "qualitative methods and results are critical to external generalization, for which quantitative research provides few useful tools" (p. 111). Maxwell (2021) distinguished between the generalizability of qualitative research and the limited

transferability of quantitative research. He noted that generalization has historically and incorrectly been connected to causation.

Phenomenography was an appropriate qualitative approach in this study as this method seeks to understand and explain participant experiences (Larsson & Holmström, 2007; Richardson, 1999). The phenomenographic approach identifies the different qualitative ways people experience phenomena and values the variety of expressions used to conceptualize and convey their understanding of phenomena. Marton (1981) described phenomenography as a research technique for mapping social reality and understanding the different ways in which a group of people describe or construct their reality to align with their experiences.

The SAIS constructs of independent school governance were a useful starting point for this study and assumed that there are set rules or norms of governance that can be measured quantitatively. The phenomenographic approach seeks out rich descriptions from participants in which each person expresses their understanding and interpretation of the constructs of independent school governance through their unique setting and context. Participants create meaning that can be observed and categorized, what Giorgi (1999) described as the "architecture of variation" (p. 84). Marton (1981) noted that in phenomenography, there are a limited number of qualitatively different ways in which phenomena can be conceived and described and therefore noted that the sample size required to attain variation is finite.

Recent studies using phenomenography include Townsend (2018) and Stephens (2020). Townsend (2018) conducted a phenomenographic study in which he investigated the effects of executive coaching and a leadership training program on the experiences of newly appointed assistant principals. His research asked a single question which is common in phenomenographic studies, in which he sought to understand the lived experiences of newly appointed assistant

67

principals who had received executive coaching. Stephens (2020) used a phenomenographical case study approach in her research on personalized learning in K-12 education. While neither of these studies relate to independent school governance, they are recent examples of how phenomenography is used to investigate and describe rich experiences.

Another recent study that followed the phenomenographic tradition was conducted by NAIS into parent perceptions about independent school outcomes (NAIS, 2018b). This seminal study utilized the "jobs to be done" (JTBD) framework popularized by Bob Moesta and based on the work of Clayton Christensen (see Christensen et al., 2016). NAIS asked the question, when parents choose an independent school, what job are they asking schools to do? After a study that included over 100 interviews, the process produced four categories of description or metaphors for meaning (K. Vrooman, personal conversation, March 23, 2021).

The four categories identified by NAIS (2018b) are "help me help my child overcome obstacles," "help me fulfill my child's potential in a values-aligned community," "help me develop a well-rounded person who will impact the world," and "help me realize my plan for my talented child." Since the publication of the initial JTBD study, NAIS has replicated the process at least eight times to understand the motivation of boards when hiring heads, why donors choose independent school for their philanthropy, the desires of teachers to work in independent schools, and to further their understanding of parent motivations.

It is possible that there are other studies in an independent school context that have followed the phenomenographic tradition without the authors realizing it. While the 2018 NAIS study was not intentionally phenomenographic, the JTBD framework follows many of the steps and produces categories of description or metaphors of meaning which are a hallmark of phenomenography.

Interview Question Development

The formation of interview questions is an iterative process (Stake, 2010) that can benefit from refinement and testing. The interview questions were reviewed by a panel of experts gathered for that purpose and to suggest other questions and scenarios that may have been relevant. The panel consisted of heads of school, board chairs, board members, independent school governance experts, and several "naïve experts."

Wardle (2018) described a naïve expert as someone unfamiliar with the subject matter under consideration and with no preconceived notions. They may ask questions that help the creative process or that of a panel of experts is perhaps embarrassed to ask. In developing the interview questions for this study, a naïve expert was someone who was unfamiliar with independent school governance, but may be familiar with governance in other contexts, such as non-profit association management, and may provide a line of inquiry that experts may not notice.

As a further question refinement technique, I conducted two trial interviews with non-participants and adjusted the questions as necessary for flow and comprehension. Heads of school and executive board members who participated in the panel or in the trial interviews were eliminated from consideration as participants in the study. The interview protocol consisted of introductory material with each of the participants followed by sections representing each of the constructs of independent school governance (see Appendix E) and questions about crises faced by the school.

All data gathered including but not limited to interview notes from the SAIS survey managers, school data related to survey alignment or misalignment, field notes from

observations, demographic information of participants, recordings of interviews, and transcripts were kept in a secure, external hard drive that was password protected.

Context and Participants

Larsson and Holmstrom (2007) suggested that a sample size of 20 is enough to establish the different ways of understanding a given phenomenon (p. 56). Jorrín-Abellán (2019) in the Hopscotch model recommended that seven-twelve participants are sufficient to get a good understanding of the phenomenon under study. I worked with the two current managers (Burkeen, S. and Weems, C.) of the SAIS quantitative survey who have a deep understanding of the SAIS constructs and how they are viewed across member schools to help me identify participants. I employed purposeful sampling to include schools that had taken the survey within the last three years and maximum variation sampling to include an assortment of different school types. I applied exclusion criteria that excluded schools with which I personally consulted within the past eighteen months that otherwise matched the selection criteria (Patton, 2015).

Based on data for the 2020-2021 school year derived from NAIS DASL, current calculations for enrollment and tuition of schools within the southeast, and specifically members of SAIS, are listed in Table 5.

Table 5:

Enrollment and tuition quintiles of southeastern independent day schools

	Enrollment (student count)	Annual Tuition (K-12 average)
1st quintile	50-282	$8,942-$16,333
2nd quintile	283-474	$16,334-20,335
3rd quintile	475-723	$20,336-23,610
4th quintile	724-1061	$23,611-28,041
5th quintile	1062-2687	$28,042-46,428

Independent schools in the southeast serving both elementary and secondary grade levels comprise 67.5% of the total number of schools in the NAIS DASL data set. Elementary schools, which can be any permutation of grades pre-K or Kindergarten – grades 5, 6, 7, or 8, make up 26.1% of the total number. Finally, schools serving secondary grade levels only are 6.4% of the total.

Through the agency of the SAIS Governance Survey managers and through an iterative process, the purposeful and maximum variation sampling techniques and the exclusion criteria were applied. Approximately 100 schools have taken the governance survey since its inception. Within the last 3 years, approximately 60 schools have taken the survey. These remaining 60 schools were classified by student enrollment, tuition, and grade levels served and the exclusion criteria were applied. Twenty-four schools matched the sampling processes and were invited to participate (see Figure 3).

Figure 3

Participant Selection Diagram

Final group – eleven schools, twenty informants
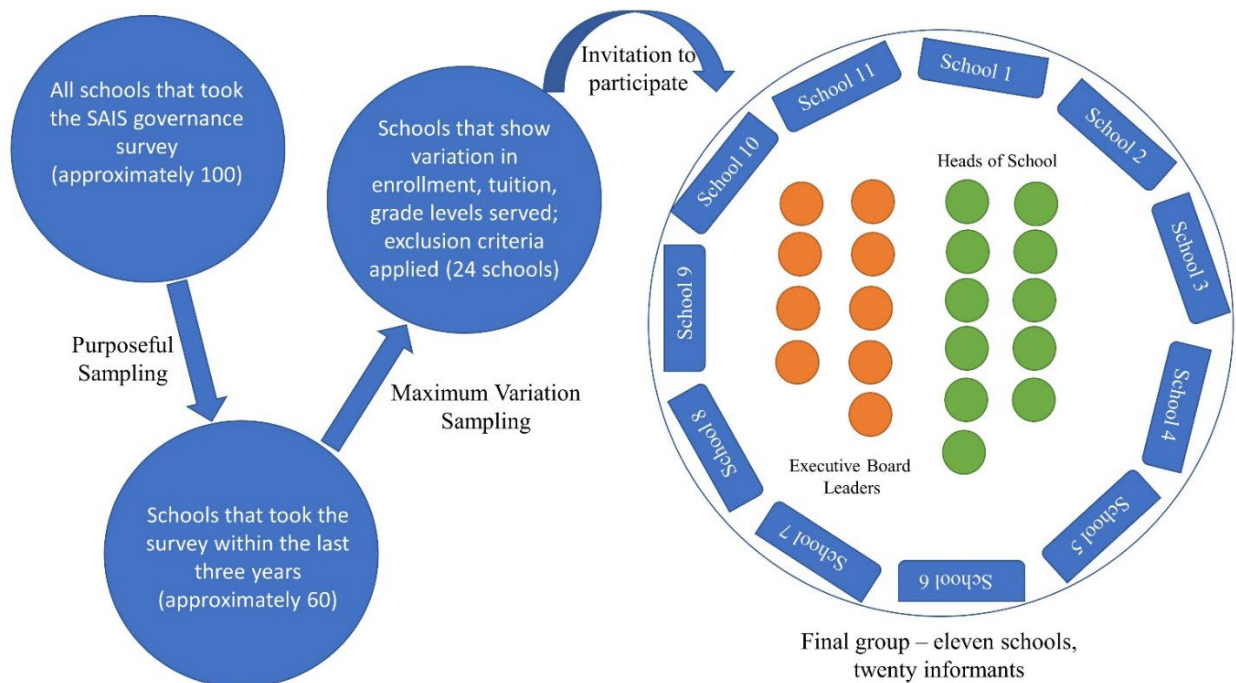
The 24 schools invited to participate in the study have an average enrollment during the 2021-22 school year of 715 students and a median enrollment of 664. The schools' tuitions average $18,188 with a median of $17,040. Fourteen of the invited schools serve both elementary and secondary (58.3%), eight serve elementary grades only (33.3%), and two serve secondary grades only (8.3%). Chapter 4 includes a description of the final group of 11 schools that participated in this study.

Entry, Reciprocity, and Establishing Trustworthiness

Mertens (2010) suggested that engaging with the subjects prior to the formal interview increases trust and relieves anxiety. After the potential schools were identified, the President of SAIS introduced me to the head of school via email. I subsequently sent an email inviting heads to participate in the study, eleven of whom did so. The heads of school communicated with their executive board leaders to encourage them to participate, nine of whom did.

Due to my own involvement in the independent school community and specifically my previous work with SAIS, it was inevitable that I would have a preexisting relationship with the heads of school who chose to participate in the study, and that proved to be true with 10 of the heads. Most of these relationships are casual and professional, but two of the relationships are somewhat more personal. To maintain researcher objectivity, a decision was made to interview the two with whom I have a deeper relationship but exclude their results from further analysis. Among the executive board leaders, I had occasion to meet four of them previously, but had established no significant relationship that would prevent their inclusion in the study.

I connected with the participants prior to the interview to establish a rapport through a simple email exchange, phone call, or other form of communication as a way of alleviating

initial concerns about participating in the study and gaining trust. I briefly outlined the ethical

considerations that I adhered to in this study (see Table 6).

Table 6

Researcher Ethical Considerations

Ethical Principle	Steps to ensure ethical principle
Anonymity	The researcher will inform the participants that their identity and that of their school will remain anonymous. Data will be securely stored in a password-protected drive; pseudonyms will be used to refer to the schools and to the participants from schools; the researcher will respect the wishes of the research participants; all possible steps will be taken to avoid errors during the research process.
Informed Consent	Participants will be informed in writing and verbally about the purpose and nature of the research project, the potential outcomes, and the steps of the process. The researcher will include a statement about vulnerable populations and will provide information so that participants can make an informed decision whether or not to participate. The statement will also note that participants can withdraw their consent at any time during the research process.
Honesty	The researcher will stress that honesty is key to establishing and maintaining the relationship between the researcher and the subjects and ensuring that results of the interviews will be reliable and useful.
Seeking appropriate approval	After this proposal is accepted and prior to data collection, the researcher will seek appropriate approval from the Kennesaw State University Institutional Review Board (IRB). The researcher has completed the appropriate Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative course in conducting

| | human research and will apply for IRB approval under the guidance of this dissertation committee. |
| Confidentiality | The researcher will ensure that the participants are aware that all of their responses are confidential and are not shared with other participants in the study in any way that would compromise their anonymity. |

Data Collection Process: Interview, Member Checking, and Focus Group

Each participant signed a consent form. The participant acknowledged their understanding of the nature of the research being conducted, the confidentiality of the process, their voluntary participation in the project, and their right to withdraw at any time. The form demonstrated the ethical and IRB compliant nature of the study.

In a pre-interview questionnaire, I gathered personal, professional, and historical data. In January and February 2022, I conducted a semi-structured interview with each of the participants separately. The interviews consisted of a series of open-ended questions and prompts designed to encourage the participant to describe their first and second order understanding of the constructs of independent school governance (Marton, 1981). Follow up questions to help the participant provide thicker responses were asked when necessary (see the Interview Protocol in Appendix E). All interview sessions were conducted and recorded using Zoom and lasted approximately 45 minutes. I used the transcription program otter.ai to produce a transcript of each of the interviews and, as this artificial intelligence is not perfect, I made necessary corrections manually.

After each interview, I engaged in two types of member checking. First, I provided a transcript to the individual participants for them to review. This kind of member checking

helps to ensure that the data being analyzed is accurate and bolsters a study's credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As themes began to emerge, I created codes and engaged in a second level of member checking by verifying the emerging theories and inferences with members of the independent school community who either assisted in creating the questions or are knowledgeable about independent school governance, such as the leaders of independent school associations, former and current school leaders, and naïve experts.

In addition to the individual interviews, I conducted focus groups with participants. The focus groups were grouped by role (heads together and executive board leaders together) and not by school as that could present a significant confidentiality and ethical dilemma. The focus group interviews occurred after all the individual interviews were complete and after initial analysis produced themes that could be discussed. I preserved the confidentiality of participants by giving them pseudonyms based on the color spectrum (Red, Orange, Yellow, Green, etc.) to mask their identities.

I reviewed the purpose of the study with the focus group participants, first presenting the constructs under consideration, then elements of the SAIS Governance survey, then three brief scenarios, and finally emerging themes expressed as metaphors. The first scenario demonstrated a potential violation of the constructs of governance by a board member. The second scenario, "the Chatham scenario," demonstrated a problem that likely needs to be resolved by the board and head working together. The third scenario demonstrated a potential violation of the constructs of governance by a head of school. The scenarios were designed to challenge the first and second order understanding of the constructs of independent school governance (Marton, 1981).

During the interviews, I observed the participants' behavior to gather nonverbal information. Patton (2015) stated that the primary purpose of observation is to "describe in depth and detail the setting that was observed, the activities that took place in that setting, the people who participated in those activities, and the meanings of what was observed from the perspectives of those observed" (p. 332). Mack et al. (2005) described an observation protocol that includes noting appearance, verbal behavior and interactions, physical behavior and gestures, personal space, human traffic, and people who stand out (p. 20). During the focus groups, I noted the interactions between participants in order to detect any further information.

Data Analysis

I used a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software program to assist with analysis and coding. Specifically, I used Dedoose (9.0.46) for coding of the interviews and the creation of a qualitative code book. The coding followed basic methodology found in grounded theory practice, namely the use of labels to describe what is happening in the data, how the data can be compared and sorted, and what meaning the participant has applied to the phenomenon (Creswell, 2014; Patton, 2015).

Following this incident, cluster, theme, and axial coding, the phenomenographic methodology asks the researcher to create metaphors to describe the lens through which participants create meaning (Larsson and Holmstrom, 2007). A final step in the data analysis process is to present a high-level description back to the participants in a focus group by role, heads and board leaders, not by school. The socially constructed meaning process is iterative, and this final part of data collection and analysis allowed for triangulation of the data trends and the confirmation of the metaphors of meaning.

As described in the Hopscotch Model created by Jorrín-Abellán (2019), Gonzalez (2010) advocated a six step data analysis process to which Sjöström and Dahlgren (2002) added a step just before the final outcomes. Khan (2014, p. 38-39) summarized the steps as follows:

1. Familiarization step: the transcripts will be read several times in order to become familiar with their contents. This step will correct any mistakes within the transcript.

2. Compilation step: The second step will require a more focused reading in order to deduce similarities and differences from the transcripts. The primary aim of this step is to compile the researcher's answers to certain questions that have been asked during interviews. Through this process, the researcher will identify the most valued elements in answers.

3. Condensation step: This process will select extracts that seem to be relevant and meaningful for this study. The main aim of this step is to sift through and omit the irrelevant, redundant or unnecessary components within the transcript and consequently decipher the central elements of the participants' answers.

4. Preliminary grouping step: the fourth step will focus on locating and classifying similar answers into the preliminary groups. This preliminary group will be reviewed again to check whether any other groups show the same meaning under different headings. Thus, the analysis will present an initial list of categories of descriptions.

5. Preliminary comparison of categories: this step will involve the revisions of the initial list of categories to bring forth a comparison among the preliminary listed categories. The main aim of this step is to set up boundaries among the categories. Before going through to the next step, the transcripts will be read again to check whether the

preliminary established categories represent the accurate experience of the participants.

6. Naming the categories: After confirming the categories, the next step will be to name the categories to emphasize their essence based on the groups' internal attributes and distinguish features between them.

7. Final outcome space: in the last step, the researcher hopes to discover the final outcome space based on their internal relationships and qualitatively different ways of understanding the particular phenomena. It will then represent the categories in a hierarchy.

These seven steps represent an organic method of approaching the data that allows for phrases, codes, and themes to emerge from the data as interpreted by the researcher.

Saldaña (2021) suggested a process he called cycle coding in which the first cycle is represented by steps 1-4 as listed above and second cycle is represented by steps 5-7. Within each cycle, Saldaña (2021) advocated for selecting a coding methodology in advance of actual coding. My coding methodology followed the interrelationship model described as "qualitative correlation that examines possible influences and affects within, between, and among categorized data" (p. 373). This basic analytic approach was appropriate as it reflected a goal of this study to examine the relationship between heads of school and executive board leaders.

As described by Saldaña (2021), grounded theory has a coding canon associated with it (p. 72). I employed elemental coding strategies such as structural coding, in vivo coding, and concept coding, and exploratory coding strategies such as holistic coding and hypothesis coding. Continuing beyond the seven steps listed above, Saldaña next described transitioning

from first to second cycle coding into pre-writing, theorizing, and "searching for buried treasure" (p. 359). I transitioned to second cycle coding through the use of memos, notes, and descriptions of the codes generated.

Trustworthiness Strategies and Reliability

Qualitative reliability refers to the stability of the data gathering and analysis process and the consistency in the approach by the researcher (Creswell, 2014). Several practices aid in establishing reliability, such as checking the accuracy of the transcripts, ensuring that there is not a drift in the definition of codes, cross-checking codes if there is more than one researcher, and thoroughly documenting procedures employed (Creswell, 2014; Yin, 2009).

Shenton (2004) stated that in positivist or quantitative research, the concepts of validity and reliability are examples of bedrock principles upon which trustworthiness in a study is formed, while in naturalistic or qualitative research, these concepts are not addressed in the same way (p. 63). Guba (1981) proposed four criteria that should be considered in establishing the trustworthiness of a qualitative study: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility refers to the researcher describing an accurate and true picture of the phenomenon being presented. This is similar to internal validity of a positivist researcher, namely establishing that the study accurately addresses the question(s) being asked. Shenton (2004) suggested 14 different methods a researcher can employ to "promote confidence that they have accurately recorded the phenomena under scrutiny" (p. 64). The 14 are as follows:

- the adoption of well-established research methods,
- the development of early familiarity with the culture of the participating organizations,

79

- random sampling of participants,

- triangulation,

- tactics to ensure honesty in participants,

- iterative questioning,

- negative case analysis,

- frequent debriefing sessions between the researcher and a steering group,

- peer scrutiny of the research project,

- the researcher's reflective commentary,

- background, qualifications, and experience of the researcher,

- member checks,

- thick description of the phenomena under scrutiny, and

- the examination of previous research findings.

Awareness and active use of all 14 of these methods promotes credibility in the findings of this study.

Shenton (2004) and Merriam (1998) likened transferability to the positivist concept of external validity. Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated that the researcher is only aware of the "sending context" of the phenomena under study and therefore cannot themselves make inferences about transferability. However, descriptions of the phenomena must be sufficient to allow the reader to decide whether the context being described can be applied to another setting. Shenton (2004, p. 70) detailed what the researcher should provide to give the reader rich descriptions of the context that include:

    a) the number of organizations taking part in the study and where they are based;

b) any restrictions in the type of people who contributed to the data;

c) the number of participants involved in the fieldwork;

d) the data collection methods that were employed;

e) the number and length of the data collection sessions;

f) the time period over with the data was collected.

These elements are included in the descriptions of the participants provided in Chapter 4 of this study.

Dependability refers to the ability of a study to be repeated by a future researcher. For the positivist researcher, dependability is closely related to reliability. Precise repeatability is problematic in qualitative research as observations are connected to an "ethnographic present" that is static (Florio-Ruane, 1991). Dependability may be achieved through overlapping methods such as focus groups and individual interviews and through thorough documentation of the process and steps followed (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Shenton (2004) detailed three levels of project design to be described: the strategic level that describes the overall research design and implementation, the operational detail of data gathering, and the reflective appraisal of the project (p. 72).

Confirmability refers to the concept that the findings of a study arise from the data and not from the predisposition of the researcher. In positivist research, confirmability is most closely associated with objectivity and mitigating the researcher's bias (Patton, 2015). Many of the strategies used to promote credibility also apply to confirmability, such as triangulation practices and member checks that help reduce the bias of the researcher and ensure that the results of the study reflect the experiences of the participants (Shenton, 2004). Other strategies that promote confirmability include using an audit trail to clearly demonstrate how

the study findings lead to conclusions, the researcher's admission of predispositions, and thick descriptions of the interviews conducted.

 Creswell (2014) described eight primary strategies to promote qualitative validity that overlap with the four primary concerns detailed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) and later by Shenton (2004). These eight strategies are triangulation, member checking, writing thick descriptions, clarifying researcher bias, presenting discrepant information, spending a prolonged time in the field, debriefing with a peer, and using an external auditor. I used all eight of these strategies in my data gathering and analysis process as methods to promote validity of the findings.

I employed triangulation by converging data used in the participant selection process with data gleaned from multiple perspectives of participants and when presenting case studies to the focus groups. I used member checking when providing the opportunity for individual participants to review the accuracy of their transcript and when discussing the themes with the focus groups. I provided rich, thick descriptions of the findings by writing memos contemporaneously with coding to remain grounded in the lived experiences of the participants. The amount of time spent in the field was limited to the amount of time needed to conduct each of the interviews, approximately forty-five minutes for each one and one additional focus group for each group. I debriefed with peers by discussing my findings with several independent school experts not involved in the project to invite interpretation beyond my own. Finally, the members of my dissertation committee served as external auditors to review the entire project.

Rands and Gansemer-Topf (2016) noted that the potential bias of the researcher is a known limitation in phenomenographical studies that can lead to questions of reliability.

Triangulation of conceptions of reality by means of separate observations and gathering subjects together in a focus group are methods to help overcome bias. Employing bracketing techniques is also a check on researcher bias. Bracketing lacks a uniform definition but is generally understood as separating and identifying the researcher's perceptions or experiences of the phenomenon being studied (Newman & Tufford, 2010, p. 83).

Bracketing mitigates negative effects of preconceptions that can taint the qualitative research process and thereby increases the rigor of the project (Newman & Tufford, 2010). Bracketing also can help insulate and protect the researcher "from the cumulative effects of what might be emotionally challenging materials," which may arise due to the close relationship between the researcher and the research study and research participants (p. 81). As noted in the first chapter, I have served independent education for nearly thirty years in a variety of roles. I implemented several strategies including bracketing and memo-writing as a check on my own biases and to increase the reliability of the findings.

I checked the accuracy of the transcripts by employing the computer assisted tool otter.ai, which created an initial transcript and has tools to review and correct the transcript before exporting it for use in coding software. To ensure that there was not a drift in the definition and application of the codes, I had the definitions of the codes prominently displayed as I was coding subsequent passages and I used the Dedoose (9.0.46) coding tool to gather coded passages so that I could compare them to each other. I documented the steps in my procedures so that others may follow at a later date and attempt to replicate my process and perhaps my findings.

Limitations, Internal and External Generalizability

The participant group in this study was limited to those independent schools which have taken the SAIS governance survey. While every attempt was made to include as many different types of independent schools in the study as possible, it was impractical to include the full spectrum of different types of independent schools. Conducting this qualitative study was time and resource intensive as interviews, observations, focus groups, and analyzing and coding what was said and what was not said are laborious activities.

Quantitative researchers commonly employ statistical techniques to describe the degree to which a sample in a study is representative of a larger population, isolate dependent and independent variable effects, and make predictions about their data. Patton (2015) noted that qualitative methods are not weaker than quantitative approaches, yet they are perceived to be in the public because "statistics are seductive – so precise, so clear" (p. 656). Numbers and statistics are perceived to convey precision even when the data provided is unreliable and meaningless.

Qualitative researchers generally engage with much smaller sample sizes than quantitative researchers. One potential perception of a small sample in a qualitative study is that the findings may not be generalizable to a larger population. Over the course of his career, Joseph Maxwell has been in the forefront of arguing that qualitative methods are appropriate to demonstrate causation and generalization, terms used regularly, and rarely questioned, in quantitative studies (see for example, Maxwell 2004a, 2004b, 2012, 2021).

Maxwell (2021) noted that the history of the "paradigm wars" of the 1980's between quantitative and qualitative researchers was rooted in the concept of generalizability and causation. Generalization is intrinsically connected to causation and has typically been the

realm of positivist researchers who understood causation as the "observed relationship between variables" (p. 112). Lincoln and Guba (1985) equated the term transferability of findings in a qualitative study to generalization but made the distinction that the responsibility is on the reader or user of a study to transfer and potentially apply the results from one context to another. Creswell (2014), following Lincoln and Guba (1985), stated that the results of a qualitative phenomenographical study are not intended to be generalizable to the larger community in which the study is conducted (p. 201). However, according to Maxwell (2021), Patton (2015), and others, there is a growing body of research to suggest that naturalistic studies do provide results that are generalizable.

Gobo (2008) and Yin (2018), for example, argued that generalization and causation are not solely the realm of quantitative researchers. They described differences between statistical generalization, typically the domain of quantitative research, and analytic generalization, typically the domain of qualitative research. Maxwell (2012) went further and noted that "the positivist *theory* of causation ignores an alternative understanding of causation," which can be known as a generative or realist approach (p. 655).

Maxwell (2021) made a distinction between internal and external generalizations in qualitative research, a topic that may be particularly germane to my current study. Internal generalization refers to generalization within a defined group, setting, and context and external generalization refers to generalization to other groups, settings, and populations. Maxwell stated that internal generalizations can be achieved by following sound techniques and processes that encourage trustworthiness and through employing sampling protocols, not the random sampling generally associated with quantitative research, that allow a narrow population to be described thoroughly (p. 111). External generalizations are still subject to the

concept of transferability that Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed that Maxwell (2021) called reader generalization, but perhaps future researchers will discover appropriate methods to bridge the external generalization gap in qualitative research.

As noted above, this study does not include representation of the total array of different school types that exist and may therefore not be generalizable to the entire sphere of experiences within the non-public school landscape. However, if I have demonstrated trustworthiness through the methods employed and the rich descriptions provided and if my participants are described thoroughly and accurately, then perhaps my results will be internally generalizable to similar contexts. For now, external generalization will only be possible if the reader of this study determines that the findings are applicable and transferable to another context.

Chapter 4: Analysis

The goal of the iterative process of examining and organizing qualitative data and codes is to allow the data to lead to themes that are the researcher's constructions and interpretations (Saldaña, 2021). Subsequently theming the data through a phenomenological or phenomenographic approach invites the researcher to address two prompts: what something is as a manifest representation of understanding and what something means as a latent representation of understanding. The questions asked in this study were of two natures: epistemological in asking how participants understand the constructs of governance (a manifest understanding of the constructs) and ontological in asking how they feel about the constructs, especially when the constructs might be violated (a latent understanding of the constructs).

Thematic coding is the merger of manifest-content and latent-content coding (Boyatzis, 1998). Manifest-content analysis considers the "visible or apparent content of something" and latent-content analysis considers the "underlying [experiences] of the phenomenon under observation" (p.16). Linda Nelson, the executive director of the North Carolina Association of Independent Schools described the difference between what is seen (the manifest) and what is unseen (the latent) using the image of an iceberg in which a portion is above the water (L. Nelson, personal communication, March 10, 2022). The portion that is above the water represents the manifest, and the larger portion below the water represents the latent.

The analysis in this chapter describes the dominant themes that emerged which are presented considering both their manifest and latent modes of expression among heads of school and executive board leaders. Descriptions of the participants and the profiles of the independent schools they are associated with are also presented. The analysis concludes with two considerations of alignment: alignment between heads of school and executive board leaders

with the constructs of independent school governance in normal times and then to the constructs relative to moments of crisis and great concern within the school community.

The analysis presented follows a phenomenographic approach when describing themes that emerged from both heads of school and executive board leaders, and a brief modified case study approach when attempting to consider the matched pair of heads and board leaders within a single school, treating each as their own case. Patton (2015) noted that "description forms the bedrock of all qualitative reporting" and providing thick, rich descriptions of settings and participants allows the reader a deeper understanding and connection to the phenomenon under investigation (p. 534).

Preserving the confidentiality of participants is paramount. The excerpts and direct quotations presented below as exemplars were selected because they are representative of the majority sentiment that they express, however, they are intentionally not presented with descriptors so that the individual's identity will remain anonymous. The modified case study approach presented also does not include descriptions of individual schools, participants, or of the matched pairs, which would otherwise be expected to present a thick, rich description in a case study.

Summary of Participants

The 11 participating schools represent a wide array of school types based on enrollment, tuition, and grade levels served. The participating schools have an average enrollment of 654 and a median enrollment of 636. The average nominal tuition is $14,938 which is influenced by the low tuitions of several rural schools. When a consumer cost of living conversion is applied to equate to Atlanta prices, the average adjusted tuition is $16,887. Six of the schools serve both

elementary and secondary grades (54.5%), four of the schools serve elementary grade levels

(36.3%), and one school serves secondary grade levels only (9.1%).

The schools' foundation dates were gathered and are expressed in Table 7 relative to the

time periods described in Chapter 2. SAIS schools have been added to the table for greater

comparison. The oldest school in the participant group was founded in the early twentieth

century and the youngest was founded within the last two decades.

Table 7

*Participating School and Independent School Foundation Dates*

Time period based on Callahan (1975)	Percentage of current NAIS member schools founded during time period	Percentage of current SAIS member schools founded during time period	Percentage of participating schools founded during time period
Colonial (ca. 1657-1840)	4.50%	1.05%	-
Horace Mann era (1841-1895)	12.52%	6.32%	-
Draper and Cubberley (1895-1954)	29.77%	23.68%	18.2%
post Brown (1955-1979)	30.38%	43.16%	54.5%
modern era (1980's-present)	22.82%	25.79%	27.3%

The SAIS Governance Survey managers helped create a measure of understanding of the

constructs of governance that applied the basic principles described by Mitchell (2019) more

broadly to boards and heads as demonstrated by their responses on the SAIS Governance Survey.

A *score of understanding* of the constructs of governance was calculated for each of the boards

and heads that have taken the survey since its inception. The scores of understanding were

converted to z-scores as a simple methodology to allow for the application of labels to describe

the scores more easily along the normal curve. The values within one standard deviation,

representing 68% of the group, were subdivided into three bands. The labels applied to the data

were: Extremely Below Average, Below Average, Negative Average, Average, Positive Average, Above Average, Extremely Above Average (see Figure 4).

Figure 4

Distribution of Scores of Understanding
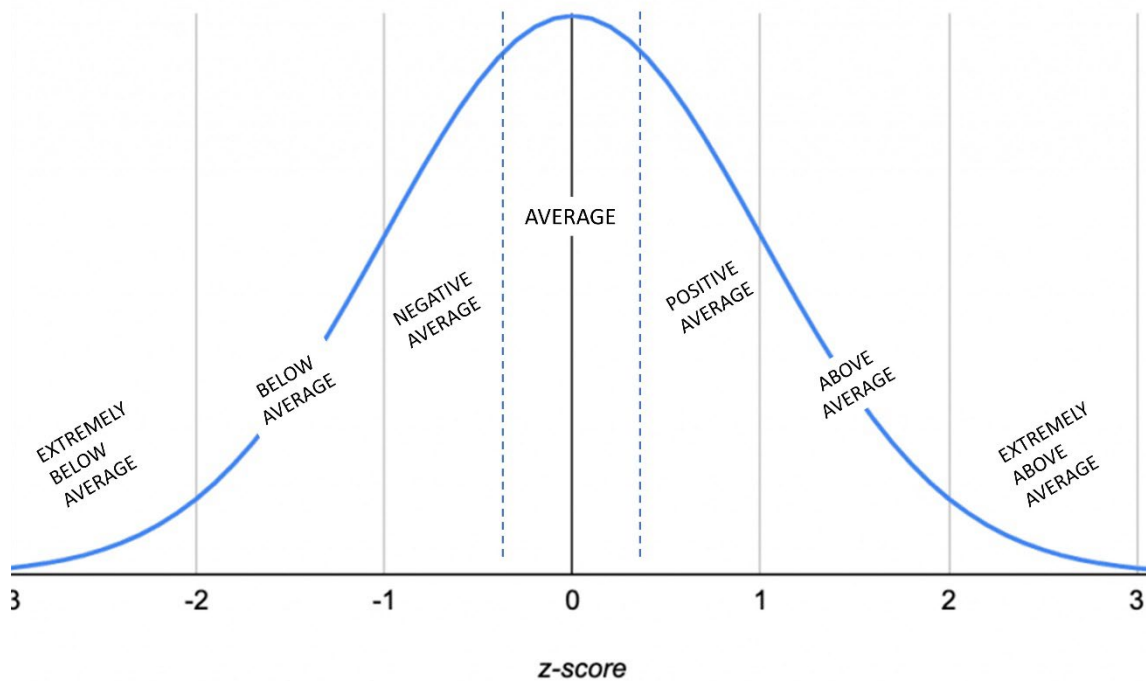
A second score was calculated that compared the head's score of understanding of the constructs of governance to their corresponding board's score of understanding to establish an alignment score. A positive alignment exists when the score of understanding of the head of school is greater than the score of understanding of the board, and a negative alignment exists when the head's score is lower than the board's score. The same descriptors were used to name the labels of alignment as were used to name the labels of understanding of the constructs of governance.

While Mitchell (2019) only considered heads and boards separately, the methodology used in this step compared a specific head to their board. Because there is only one head of

school per school and there are several board members at each school (the average was 11.4 board members per survey), individual school head data has never been reported to preserve confidentiality. In approximately 40% of the surveys in the complete SAIS dataset, the head of school did not take the survey, meaning that for those schools there is no basis for comparison of the alignment between the head and the board. Within the participant group, the incidence of the head not taking the survey 45.5%. Within this study's participant group, 9.1% exhibited an extremely below average alignment, 18.2% exhibited a below average alignment, 9.1% exhibited a negative average alignment, 18.2% exhibited a positive alignment, and, as stated, 45.5% have no basis for comparison because the head of school did not participate in the survey.

Within the 45.5% of schools with no basis for comparison, all boards exhibited an average score of understanding of the constructs. Since the characteristics of the schools in this study are relatively close to being normally distributed with respect to their enrollment, tuition, grade levels served, and foundation date, one could predict that the board and head alignment scores are also normally distributed. While this might be a logical conclusion to draw, in the absence of a true score, the qualitative analysis of the interviews could not reliably include the alignment measure as an independent variable.

The gender, age band, and length of service of the individual participants in the study are described in Table 8. When comparing the characteristics within a school of the matched pairs, six of the nine heads and their executive board members are within the same age band, and where they are not in the same age band, two heads are older than their board members and one head is younger than their board member. The average difference in the length of time serving as head or as an executive board member is 1.2 years and the median is 0 years meaning the head of school and executive board leader have been serving the same length of time.

91

Table 8:

Participant Demographics

	Total	Executive Board Leader	Head of School
Female	25%	33%	18%
Male	75%	66%	81%
36-45 years old	20%	22%	18%
46-55 years old	55%	56%	55%
56 or older years old	25%	22%	27%
Median Length of Service	7 years	7 years	7 years

Constructs and Themes

The phenomenon under study was the ways in which heads and executive board leaders perceive their alignment to the constructs of independent school governance. Phenomenography is aimed at "a descriptive recording of immediate subjective experience as reported" and lends itself to overlapping metaphors of meaning (Patton, 2015. p. 574). Multiple perceptions might be held simultaneously or discretely by one or more of the heads or board leaders.

The perceptions of reality that are discovered among research participants are called the categories of description, or metaphors of meaning (Marton, 1981). The metaphors convey the perceptions of reality held, in this study, by heads of school and executive board leaders about the constructs of independent school governance. Four categories, or themes, were identified and are expressed as metaphors that arose from the language used by the participants, and in one case, a direct quote, or "in vivo" theme that emerged. The four themes are *the head as student and teacher of the board, crucible moments, low hanging fruit,* and *"the easy way out leads right back in."*

The concepts within the four themes were found to be operating simultaneously within the board and head dynamic. A graphical representation might be several ingredients in a blender

represented in Figure 5. The blender swirls, chops, and mixes the ingredients together. The product is blended into a single new form. Similarly, the themes interact with each other within the framework of the board and head dynamic. At times, one may be in the foreground more than others, but they are all experienced at the same time.

Figure 5

Visual Representation of Themes in a Blender
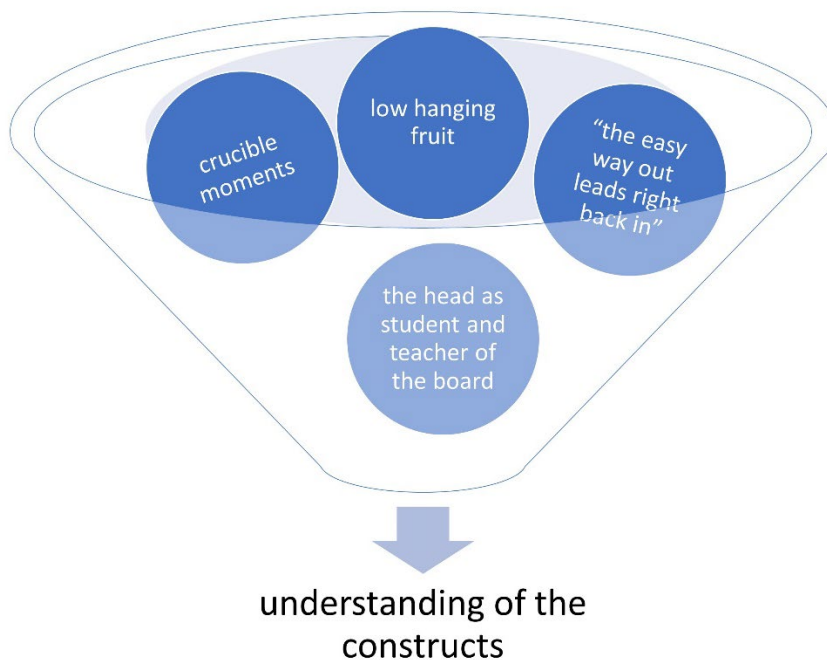
Manifest Understanding of Constructs of Independent School Governance

At a manifest level, the constructs of independent school governance proved to be understood in a similar fashion between the heads of school and the executive board leaders. For each of the constructs, the first interview question asked the participant to describe their understanding of the principle under discussion. Participants repeatedly used similar language to describe the constructs.

Separation

The first construct discussed was the separation of the roles in independent schools of the head and the board. The question posed was, "how do you feel the roles of independent school heads and executive board leaders differ?" Responses from board members included phrases such as "we are not there to run the school" and "we're not there to hire teachers" and "we hire [the head] to run the school." These are echoed by heads of school who used phrases such as "the head of school manages the day-to-day operations" and "my role is operational and theirs is missional and fiduciary." Heads and board members used the same or very similar words and phrases to describe their respective roles.

The language used by heads and board members in the interviews describing separation is the same language used in the NAIS Principles of Good Practice and accreditation standards such as SAIS Standard 2.10 which states that the school "has an organizational structure that includes separate entities that carry out the distinct functions of governance and day-to-day management" (SAIS, 2021, "Standard 2" Section). One head succinctly noted that his board chair believed that "if a parent calls me, it's gonna be a short conversation, because that's your job" and a board member noted that "we need to trust the experts."

In two cases, board members and heads of school presented an inversion of the construct in which the head's involvement in the strategic vision of the school was articulated and suggests one of the latent themes presented below ("the head as student and teacher of the board"). As one participant noted:

Independent School heads live and breathe not only the day-to-day operations of school, and people who execute upon that, but also are thinking about the school five, ten and fifteen years out, and knowing that it's their job to set the vision and chart the path for the

school, versus board members who may have one three-year term or two three-year terms that may see some of that, but aren't on the ground as deeply nor should they be and are oftentimes parents, so have a perspective that is different, just by nature, than the head. There are two inversions represented in this quote.

The first inversion is that the head is involved more deeply with strategic visioning for the school than the constructs of governance would usually predict. The second inversion is that the board members are transient rather than the head of school. Literature on independent school heads routinely reports on the decreasing tenure of the head of school (see for example the 2020 Factors Affecting Head of School Turnover study commissioned by NAIS). This quote suggests that it is board members who are transient with terms that are often shorter than the tenure of a head of school.

Confidentiality

The second construct discussed was the confidentiality of the board room. The initial question posed was "what are some things the head and board should keep confidential?" There were four categories of responses from heads and board members. Several said that everything in the board room should be kept confidential, represented by comments such as "well, my knee-jerk reaction is everything we talk about" and "anything that happens in board discussion." When pressed to be specific, boards and heads said that matters pertaining to finances (financial aid, tuition setting, land acquisition), student issues (discipline, grades, and health), and human resources issues (accusation about faculty members, HR issues that might be PR issues) should be kept confidential.

The language of the interviews again matched the NAIS Principles of Good Practice, especially those regarding the board as a whole and individual trustees, both of which reference

keeping board deliberations confidential (NAIS, 2008). The description for SAIS Standard 2.5 states that "a governance best practice is [to] allow for open and confidential conversations [to] speak as one voice outside of meetings" (SAIS, 2021, "Standard 2" Section). These phrases were prevalent in the interviews with both heads and board members.

Subsequent questions asked participants to describe times that the confidentiality of the board room was violated and especially the consequences of violations. The responses led to the latent descriptions captured in the themes of "the easy way out leads right back in" and the crucible moments. One board member remarked that "there's a lot of things that I think a head shouldn't even tell the board." This implies that the confidentiality of the board room does not mean that all things are shared with all members of the board.

Board-Head Relationship

The third construct discussed was the board-head relationship. The initial question asked both board members and the head of school to describe what a healthy relationship looks like, and a subsequent question asked how trust is demonstrated by the board for the head and by the head for the board. Both board members and heads described a healthy relationship as one built on open responsive communication expressed by comments such as "comfortable text messages back and forth, calls, regular meetings, transparency both ways" and "your call is going to be picked up, whenever you make it." Other characteristics expressed by both the head and board members included mutual trust in which both the head and board members have a voice and have empathy for each other.

The violation of the constructs of separation and confidentiality can lead to diminished trust and can strain the relationship between the head and executive board leaders. The responses to these questions, especially the subsequent analysis of trust being compromised, led to latent

descriptions noted below, especially as captured in the theme of crucible moments and low

hanging fruit, which are grounded in the trust versus control continuum and negotiated order

theory (Cornforth & Macmillan, 2016; Reid &Turbide, 2014).

Strategic Mindset

The fourth construct discussed was the strategic mindset of the board. Two prompts were

posed to participants: describe the last professional development activity the board engaged in

and do you think your board meetings are particularly strategic. Universally, boards and heads

described their last professional development activity as that of an external consultant speaking

to the board on topics of governance, strategic thinking, or DEI initiatives. These professional

development activities took the form of a retreat, conference attendance, or a guest at a regularly

scheduled meeting who was an association executive, a former head of school, or a consultant.

Board members perceived that board meetings were strategic in nature more frequently

than heads of school, but both groups indicated that meetings are more strategic than in previous

years, especially last school year. The interviews were conducted in January and February 2022

and the previous years referenced would have been at the height of the responses to COVID-19,

which may have led to more operational meetings during the last school year. Several board

members indicated that strategic conversations arose naturally from the head's report. Several

heads noted that they have worked with the executive board leadership to implement the use of

generative questions in board meetings.

Chait et al. (2011) described three modes or types of operations for nonprofit boards to

aid in defining board effectiveness. The first is the fiduciary mode in which the board is

concerned with the stewardship of tangible assets. The second is the strategic mode in which the

board creates a strategic plan and a strategic partnership with the organization's leader. The third

mode is the generative in which the board provides a critical source of leadership for the organization by providing high level feedback that can inform the fiduciary and strategic modes. According to Chait et al. (2011), the generative mode is the least practiced among boards. Figure 6 below is a reproduction of Chait's governance triangle which shows all three modes working together simultaneously.

Figure 6

The Governance Triangle from Chait et al. (2010)
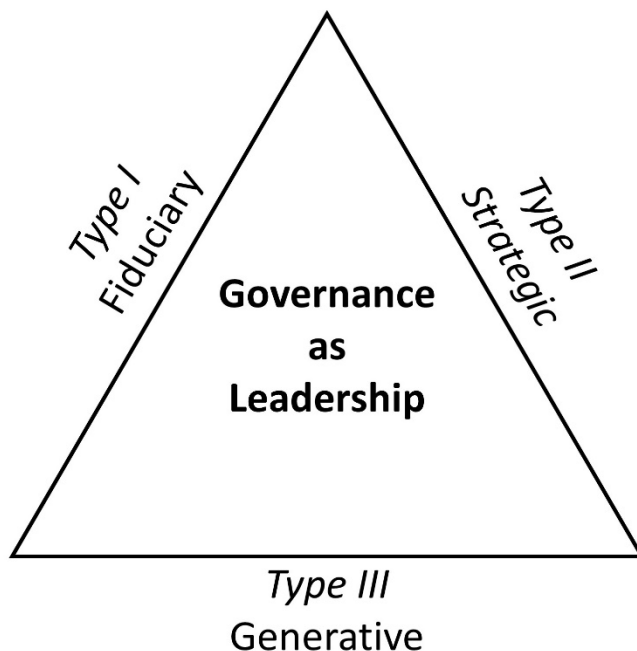
The participants' responses to questions about the strategic mindset of the board are represented in the latent themes below of low hanging fruit and the head as student and leader of the board.

Board Mindset

The fifth construct discussed was the board mindset. Participants were asked to describe their expectations for board members and expressed similar themes of engagement and participation and support of the mission. One participant described expectations as, "general

energy around moving this school forward." There was a noticeable difference in the order in which descriptions of expectations were presented.

Board members' initial descriptions of expectations focused on tangible expectations such as attending meetings, serving on committees, and making financial contributions. Collectively, these expectations are Type I or the fiduciary mode of governance as described by Chait et al. (2011). Board members secondarily expressed expectations such as support of the head and support of the mission of school.

By contrast, heads' initial descriptions of expectations focused on support for the mission and positive support for the school throughout the community and serving as an ambassador for the school, or Type II or strategic modes of governance as described by Chait et al. (2011). As an example, heads commented, "even if they don't agree with this or that, they've got to be great advocates. They need to be interested and present" and "unwavering support and cheerleading for the school." Heads secondarily described the expectations in terms of the tangible aspects of attendance, committee service, and contributions. The differences in the order of the expectations might imply an area of misalignment of values between the heads and executive board members in this study.

Subsequent questions asked participants to describe what would happen if the expectations were not met. The responses are reflected in latent understanding of the constructs, especially as captured in the themes of "the easy way out leads right back in" and the crucible moments.

Latent Understanding of Constructs of Independent School Governance

The questions in the interviews followed a tripartite pattern. The initial question checked the participant's manifest understanding of the construct of independent school governance. The

second question asked the participant to describe a time when the construct was not adhered to. The third question asked the participant to describe the consequences and emotional responses that might occur if a construct were violated. Several participants indicated that they could not recall a time when a particular construct was violated, so they were asked to posit and describe what they thought might happen if the construct were violated.

The responses to the secondary and tertiary set of questions led to deeper understanding of the phenomenon under study. The ways in which the beliefs about the constructs are understood comprise what Marton (1981) would refer to as a second-order perspective and are articulated by the four metaphors described below.

Head as student and teacher of the board

Echoed several times by both heads and executive board leaders was the inverted concept of the transient nature of board members and the role the head, as both a potentially longer fixture in the school and as an expert in the running of schools. The relationship is represented by comments from heads such as: "every two years, I have to get used to a whole new leadership style to work for" and from a board member, "I think that's one of the things that's tough for schools and boards . . . that the head has to keep adjusting to a new board chair." The term of a board chair is typically one or two years. The average head tenure is approximately seven years, meaning the head will experience three different board chairs.

The head adapts to the board and learns where and how to exert influence. As one head noted, "you can either survive and not make waves or if you're going to be pushing the edge, you better make sure your board is informed, not surprised, supportive and well positioned." This comment also denotes a fear of missteps which was common among heads when discussing their relationship with their board. The head is also a teacher of the board and of the community. As a

head noted "every time you react to the community, you're teaching them how you're going to lead." Heads expressed that they were cautious with their actions.

A manifest understanding of the construct of separation as discussed above suggests that the head leads the operations of the school, and the board leads the strategy of the school. Examples from board members and heads about the lines of separation being blurred focused on boards engaging in activities reserved for the head. However, among several boards and heads, there were inversions of this construct in which the head crossed into governance, and specifically strategic planning, seen in this comment from a board member, "it's [the head's] job to set the vision and chart the path for the school that way, versus board members who may have one three year term or two three year terms." Said another board member, "sometimes I think [the head] feels that the direction some board members would like the school to go is not going to work out well for the school in the long run." Still another board member was more explicit and said, "I think we have to challenge the head of the school to think longer term." The inversion of this construct demonstrates the head's role as teacher and leader of the board.

During the focus group sessions, heads of school agreed that learning what the board needs and leading them to conclusions are skills critical to help the head react effectively to the board. Board members also felt that the metaphor of the head as student and teacher of the board was applicable. One board member commented that although he had never considered the head to be a teacher of the board, upon reflection, he was able to validate this insight.

Crucible moments (a.k.a trust versus control continuum)

Boards and heads expressed that during moments that test the school, what were referred to as *crucible moments*, the relationship of the board and the head had an opportunity to be strengthened. A participant said, "you have to kind of manage it, [i.e., the crucible moment], be

101

ahead of it, and work with a wide variety of people to figure out every possible scenario to land the plane, when it's on fire." During the focus group sessions, a board member commented that the crucible moments carry with them a great deal of risk saying, "when handled correctly, the board and head relationship strengthens, but there is a risk of injury in these moments." This board member also noted that avoiding risk is detrimental to long-term sustainable leadership.

The original coding from the interviews that led to the theme of crucible moments included *board as counselor, feedback before big decisions*, and "*trust and verify.*" The code of board as counselor was derived almost exclusively from heads of school while the code of feedback before big decisions was derived from board members. These two concepts express different points of view about the same action taken during crucible moments, namely that the board and the head engage in a conversation. The code of "trust and verify" emerged exclusively from board members and reflects the concept of the trust versus control continuum described by Reid and Turbide (2014). Heads described the concept of building trust with board by seeking board input on decisions.

Heads of school used phrases such as "lean on them for advice" and "using them as a sounding board" which describe the code of board as a counselor. A board member noted, "the head feels like that he or she can use the board as a sounding board, you know, for new ideas, you know, without feeling like you're taking a big risk of losing trust" which also articulates the code of feedback before big decisions.

Reid and Turbide (2014) explored frameworks of the relationship between non-profit boards and CEOs in moments of crisis. In the trust versus control framework they developed, the authors found that when trust is high, there is little need for control, but excessive trust can lead to a disengaged board. A board exerts control to regulate the actions of the executive to achieve

organizational goals. When trust is low, controls are more prevalent (p.166). The trust versus control framework is like the code of "trust and verify" that was detected among board members during the interviews in this study.

Board members expressed the concept of "trust and verify" with statements like "I'm going to give him all of the length of the rope that I can to allow him to execute and do his job" and "we're paying other people to be experts, like we pay our pediatricians and . . . not that we don't advocate for our kids, [but we] factcheck." Another board member described the continuum this way:

> If you default to trust someone, then that person has to either default to responsibility or they fail with your trust. So if they default to responsibility, they gain more trust, and then they take on more responsibility, and they begin to step in and fulfill that role. But if they begin to fail, then you have to tighten up a little bit and then you get a second chance at some point, but you have to tighten that relationship up.

The concept expressed in the phrase "tighten up" is what Reid and Turbide (2014) described in their work on the trust versus control continuum.

Participants described COVID as a crucible moment and reflected that the school and the board were tested through the pandemic. Participants described high levels of communication with other schools in their state and region to help determine appropriate responses to the pandemic. Nearly all participants indicated their school had a successful response to COVID by keeping the school functioning and continuing the educational imperative of the mission of the school.

When asked to detail crises the school faced other than COVID, participants described struggles with mask mandates, DEI initiatives, cultural changes represented in symbols and

traditions of the school, student and teacher actions outside of the code of conduct of the school that were also sometimes illegal, and death of students and faculty members. Boards and heads were not fully aligned on what constituted a crisis, but they did agree on how to work through it. As a participant said, "you need to have set the table for candid collaborative discussions in order to lean on those same types of discussions under the pressure of these incredible crises." The ways in which the board and the head navigated issues and crises was predicated on trust.

Boards and heads differed in their conceptualization about what kinds of issues at the school rose to the level of crisis. Pepper et al. (2010) described four loci for crises: internal-predictable, external-predictable, internal-unpredictable, and external-unpredictable. Figure 7 below suggests that board members consider internal and predictable issues to rise to the level of crisis more than heads do, and heads consider external and unpredictable issues to rise to the level of crisis more than boards do.

Figure 7

Board and Head Perception of the Locus of Crises
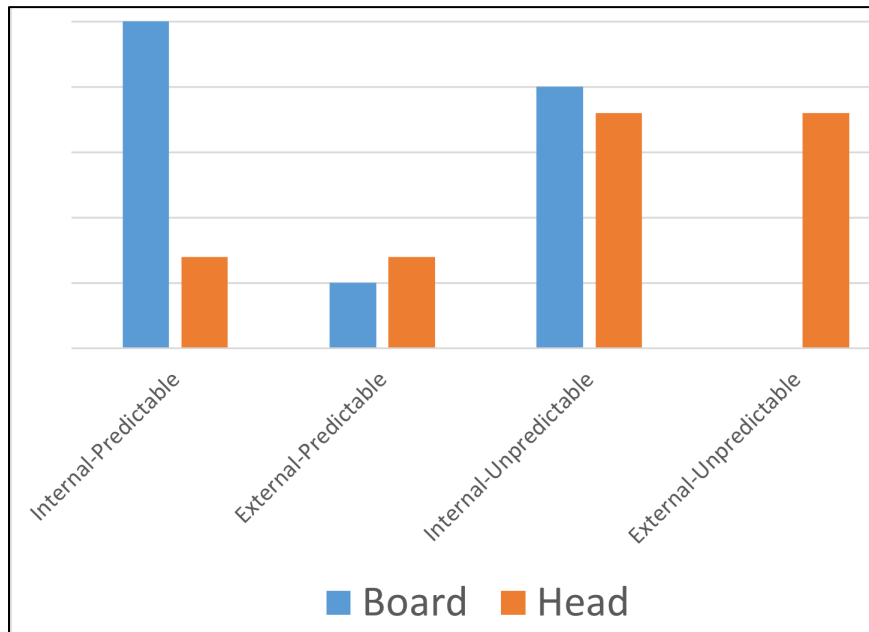
This slide was shown to an informal focus group of leaders from the non-profit association industry. One leader commented that the difference might imply that the operational leader (the head of school) possesses greater insight into the environment surrounding the school while board members have a limited view of the school, possibly as dominated by the lens of parents if their children are students in the school (N. Stephenson, personal conversation, 3/23/2022).

Low hanging fruit (negotiated order theory)

Different from crucible moments described above, the theme of low hanging fruit refers to, as one head said, "an awareness of all of the levers that are involved." DeLuca (1992) described the skill required to pull the levers as political savvy and noted that relational leadership and leading by influence are elements of political savvy. Evans and Wilson (2021) reviewed the polarity of authority and influence and suggested that heads and board leaders should develop and train the latent skill of influence as a method of moving the board forward.

Another head described this theme as "a delicate game" of negotiating a push and pull relationship with both individuals and with the board as a whole. One head described the relationship of the constructs of governance and the latent skills that are required for negotiation as follows:

> I tend to be more collaborative. I tend to want feedback. I tend to want to share with the board. And I listen to some of these [listserv] threads with people saying, "here's the bylaws." Well, I don't think that's leadership in the 21st century, and I don't think it's going to be a relationship with the board in the 21st century, to point to your bylaws and tell them that you are daily operations, and they're not. That may be the rule, but like, I don't think it's gonna get you very far.

This head's description of the relationship between the head of school and the board reflects the concept of negotiated order theory and leading by influence.

Reid and Turbide (2014) described negotiated order theory as building coalitions with internal and external groups, establishing shared goals, and building on trust within the board's framework. Cornforth and Macmillan (2016) described the relationship as highly dependent on context, relying more on the construction and re-construction of order rather than on defined roles and responsibilities.

The metaphor of low hanging fruit implies that heads are not only aware of their political surroundings but are also searching for opportunities to build coalitions and relationships with members of their board. Heads work to establish the order that they desire not in crucible moments, but in moments when the outcome is easier to predict. Examples from both boards and heads included several references to incidents for which the consequences were dire (termination or expulsion), but mostly incontrovertible, in which the head sought counsel from the board leader when the answer was already known.

The second scenario presented to the focus groups tested the concept of negotiated order theory and the theme of low hanging fruit. The scenario was based on the *Chatham (1974)* law case described in Chapter 2 and presented facts that were similar to those the public school board faced in that case. The focus groups were asked to imagine that the head had managed the approved budget in such a way that unexpected additional funds were available. The head wanted to give bonuses to the faculty and staff. Absent a pre-existing policy on how these funds should be handled, the scenario asked what should the role of the board be in determining how the funds should be spent?

The board member focus group was divided in their response, recognizing that the scenario presented could be resolved by an operational (head's) decision, yet wanting to work, as one board member said, "hand in glove," with the head of school for a resolution. The heads of school were unanimous and quick to say that they would ask the board to make the decision and as one head noted, "I think they're always going to want to make a feel good decision." Coming out of the pandemic response, it is likely a popular decision to award bonuses to teachers.

Although nothing in the scenario suggested when excess revenues might occur, it is possible that the focus group participants believed that it is a current scenario and a reaction to the pandemic. The last several years have severely strained teachers in independent and public schools. An added pressure is inflation which the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (February 2022) indicated is currently 7.9% for the trailing 12 months. As an example, the state of Georgia has a current budget surplus and recently voted to provide bonuses to teachers (Salzer, 2022). The decision to provide a bonus may be an easy decision and may present a board an opportunity for the feel good decision mentioned by the head of school.

"The easy way out leads right back in"

This "in vivo" theme was a quote from a participant when discussing an issue that the board and the head faced in which they could have made an easy decision to appease several stakeholders of the school but chose not to do so realizing that the temporary solution would return later as a problem. The participant was quoting one of the eleven laws created by Senge (1990) to help guide companies, schools, and non-profits to become learning organizations through systems thinking (see Appendix F for the laws).

Heads of school described instances in which the board seemed to make decisions or act in a way that was expedient rather than wise and were taking an easy way out. For example, one

head said, "we are becoming surprised or alarmed at the frequency with which people will go to the board about the most mundane things, because they don't like the answer." Another head of school succinctly noted when asked about how decisions like this from the board made them feel by saying it caused frustration. The head continued and expressed that the board holds the head accountable for doing his or her job but does not hold itself accountable for doing their job. Heads also noted instances when board members had specific agendas and pushed these priorities rather than moving through an agreed process in which consensus could be built. One board member noted that these past board members "caused various stresses on the head" and on the relationship with the board.

Often, board members have a dual role as both a parent and a board member. "Wearing a parent hat" or "wearing a board hat" is a common refrain in independent school governance materials (for example, Mott, 2014, 2018; DeKuyper, 2010). Board members referenced using their position on the board to advocate directly for a family or even for their own child, expressing remorse and self-awareness that they should not be doing so, "I know it's inappropriate, but . . ." A head of school said, "We complain about parents wanting instant results, wanting to be involved, you know, wanting kind of an a la carte service; I think our board members are as guilty of that as anybody else." One board member acknowledged the dual role and said, "being a current parent bedevils the decision making process." Acting as a parent and not as a board member can lead to decisions that are expedient but not necessarily in the best long term interest of the school.

Heads are not immune from making suspect decisions that are expedient. A board member commented about head's decisions that, "[we] feel better about holding somebody's feet to the fire to do what the bylaws say. It's just that there always seem to be a lot of extraneous

issues to keep that from now happening." One head expressed appreciation for the process the board followed in refraining from overruling a decision that they suspected might not be right saying, "they don't overturn [a decision] . . .they can talk to me and ask me to change my decision, but they don't overturn bad decisions." Through collaboration and open conversation, better outcomes for the school can be achieved.

Alignment of Understanding of Constructs and Themes Across Schools

Eleven schools participated in the qualitative interviews, but there were only nine matched pairs of heads and executive board leaders, therefore the alignment within each school could only be examined across nine cases. The alignment within each school was assessed using two methods that arose from the study.

The first assessment consisted of a holistic reading of the matched pairs of interview transcripts and the assignment of a measure of alignment to the school. One of four descriptors was applied to each school: "Aligned," "Mostly Aligned," "Somewhat Aligned," "Misaligned" based on a sense of shared understanding of the constructs between the participants.

The second measure of alignment was conducted by creating questions to address the themes that emerged. For the theme of head as student and teacher of the board, the question posed was to what degree would the board or head consider the head a student and a teacher of the board? For the theme of crucible moments, the question asked was how likely would the board and head be to analyze a crucible moment together to come to a shared understanding or how likely is the board or head to make the same mistake twice? For the theme of low hanging fruit, the question was how much political savvy do the board and the head possess? Finally for the theme of the easy way out leads right back in, the question posed was how likely is the board

or the head to make expedient or rash decisions? The precise framing of the questions intentionally lends itself to being answered on a standard Likert scale.

The first method led to three schools rated as Aligned, three schools rated Mostly Aligned, one school rated Somewhat Aligned, and two schools rated Misaligned. The second method closely confirmed the holistic method, with the only disagreement being a distinction between the Somewhat Aligned and the Misaligned schools. To continue to preserve the confidentiality of the schools and the participants, characteristics of the schools in each of the categories are presented together in a modified and brief case study format. Since only one school rated Somewhat Aligned, the characteristics of that school have been merged with both the Mostly Aligned schools and the Misaligned schools.

Schools rated as aligned exhibited a high degree of shared understanding of the constructs of governance and a strong adherence to the themes. The board leader is a strong supporter of the head and leads the board through positive examples and through actively disciplining board members when needed. The head is a leader of the board and is considered an expert. The board accepts the head's leadership willingly and gratefully. Both the head and the executive board leader possess a good deal of political savvy and the head regularly consults the board inviting them into deliberations about issues and giving them voice. The head uses the board as a shield sparingly, but effectively.

Schools that are mostly or somewhat aligned may be overcoming recent governance issues in which a board member was driven by personal agenda or disagreed strongly with the rest of the board and has recently left the board. The head has a more narrowly defined understanding of the constructs of governance than the board leader. The school may be facing a crucible moment in which the head and the board are not fully aligned but have built up a strong

foundation of trust in the past that will help them come to a resolution. The head recognizes the expertise of the board, and the board recognizes the expertise of the head. Either the head or the board leader possesses a much greater degree of political savvy than the other and exercises it regularly: the head may exercise it to maximize standing and deepen a network of support, and the board leader may exercise it to leverage networks at the school to gain insight into daily operations. The head and board leader do not recognize that there is some misalignment.

In schools that are somewhat aligned or misaligned, the head and the board leader are frustrated by board behavior: the head believes that action should be taken by the board leader and the board leader is not equipped or willing to take action to discipline board members. The constructs of governance are understood the same way by both the head and the board leader, but the practical application does not match what the other expects. The board leader may be more of a cheerleader when the head needs a coach, and the head may think of themselves as a governance partner when the board wants an academic leader. The head may feel that the board is a "supercharged PTA" rather than a strategic body, and the board may feel that the head should take a stronger role in setting the vision for the school. The head thinks that the board does not treat them as an expert and the board leader believes that they are an expert, and the head does not agree. Both the head and the board leader agree that missteps lead to anxiety but are incapable or unwilling to modify their behavior. While not statistically valid because of the small sample size, the schools that are somewhat aligned or misaligned were all founded in the modern era.

These characterizations are necessarily broad to preserve the confidentiality of the schools and the participants. There are, however, discernible qualities that distinguish the three categories of alignment.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Observations, and Implications

The research question of this study was *what are the different perceptions of heads of school and executive board leaders with regard to their alignment to the constructs of independent school governance in times of normalcy and in times of crisis in different independent school settings*. The study was narrowly focused on the phenomenon of alignment and not the leadership responses to crises that schools might face which are addressed in numerous other sources.

The literature review considered studies that focused on different types of crises and leadership responses (see for example Kane, 1992; Pepper et al., 2010; Flaxman et al., 2020; Lifto, 2020; Evans and Wilson, 2021). Leadership theories such as the trust versus control continuum and negotiated order theory were also considered in the literature review (Cornforth & Macmillan, 2016; Reid &Turbide, 2014). The literature review also investigated the relationship between public school superintendents and their elected or appointed boards as a proxy for the relationship between independent school heads of school and executive board leaders (for example, Callahan, 1975; Kaestle, 1983).

Context of Findings

This study explored the alignment to constructs of independent school governance as they are experienced by executive board leaders and heads of school. Through structured interviews and subsequent focus groups, participants described their manifest and latent understanding of the constructs, provided examples of violations and adherence to the constructs, and described the effect that violations or adherence had on the relationship with the other. Four major themes emerged that were the head as student and teacher of the board, low hanging fruit, crucible moments, and "the easy way out leads right back in."

The 11 participating schools represented different enrollment categories, grade levels served, and tuition levels. The schools also represented different scores of understanding of the constructs of independent school governance and different scores of alignment between the head of school and the board. All interviews and focus groups were conducted via Zoom which allowed for both greater access and greater levels of anonymity and confidentiality but may not have allowed for a meta-analysis of the participants themselves or a nuanced understanding that might be possible through participant observations or interactions between participants when they are in the same physical location.

Limitations of Findings

As initially described above in Chapter 3, there are perceived limitations to the generalizability of findings in a qualitative study. Maxwell (2021) noted that generalization is intrinsically connected to causation and has typically been the realm of positivist researchers who understood causation as the "observed relationship between variables" (p. 112). Lincoln and Guba (1985) used the term *transferability of the findings* and claimed that the responsibility is on the reader of a study to transfer the results from one context to another.

Creswell (2014) echoed Lincoln and Guba (1985) and stated that the results of a qualitative study are not intended to be generalizable to the larger community in which the study is conducted (p. 201). There is a growing body of research to suggest that naturalistic studies do provide results that are generalizable (Maxwell, 2021; Patton, 2015). There may be future research to be conducted by methodologists to determine if the positivist margin of error has an equivalent naturalist margin of generalizability. When presented with the findings in the focus group, a participant noted that there was something in the interview experience that was reflected in all four of the metaphors.

This study was conducted with independent schools, a group that represents approximately one percent of all schools in the country (Wang, 2019). The primary findings, simply, are that constructs of governance are very likely to be understood differently from one school type to another at a manifest level; constructs of governance may be understood similarly within a single school at a manifest level; there may be a high degree of alignment of understanding of constructs of governance within a school at a latent level. While crisis may change the ways in which constructs of governance are understood, heads of school and board leaders shift their understanding in tandem with each other and may create new shared understandings that are highly dependent on context.

Observations and Implications of Findings

Several key observations of this study are expressed below and attempt to synthesize the alignments of heads of school and boards that are significant for success.

- When a board loses trust in the head, they exert more control by creating additional policies and procedures. When a head loses trust in a board, they reduce the flow of information as their mechanism to exert control.

- Boards are perceived as crossing a line when engaging in operations, but heads are not perceived as crossing a line when engaging in governance.

- Unwavering support and cheerleading for the mission of the school from both the board and the head is a *sine qua non* for developing a trusting relationship.

In a conference presentation, Evans and Wilson (2021) used the idea that *the system is designed to produce the results you are getting* as a springboard to understand head turnover in independent schools.

According to Evans and Wilson (2021), the SAIS Heads Search Database shows that twenty-five percent of heads serve terms of three years or less. A California study of public school superintendents found that 45% exited within three years (Grissom and Anderson, 2012). Evans and Wilson (2021) added that heads of school regularly externalize the source of problems as "crazy" parents or trustees or difficult faculty or students, instead of pointing to themselves as the source of the problem; in their own words, they suggested "maybe it's that you suck." Citing Harvard Business School professor Robert Kagan, Evans and Wilson (2021) urged the independent school community to change how they think about the locus of the problem so that the industry can come up with better solutions to align heads and boards.

This study emanated from the quantitative Kavanagh and Robinson Independent School Governance Survey (2016) and the analysis conducted by Mitchell (2019) that described possible misalignment between heads and board leaders. The current qualitative study might imply that the SAIS governance survey, and perhaps accreditation standards and the NAIS principles of good practice to which the survey is aligned, examine the manifest understandings of the constructs of governance and overlook the latent. To use the language of Evans and Wilson (2021), maybe it's that the principles of good practice suck.

The themes described in this study could be used to develop survey or interview questions or new models of accreditation standards that examine the latent understandings of the constructs of governance. The example presented in Table 9 mirrors the questions created to assess the participating schools' adherence to the four themes and may serve as the initial framework to create a new model.

Table 9

Possible Quantitative Measures of the Themes

Theme	Question
Head as student and teacher of the board	To what degree would the board or head consider the head a student and a teacher of the board?
Crucible moments	How likely would the board and head be to analyze a crucible moment together to come to a shared understanding or how likely is the board or head to make the same mistake twice?
Low hanging fruit	How much political savvy do board members and the head possess?
"The easy way out leads right back in"	How likely is the board to make expedient or rash decisions?

While only a single question is displayed in the table above, there could be a series of questions created that describe different elements of each theme. A possible starting point may be the sub themes and individual codes that were discovered in the analysis phase of this project.

Recommendations for Future Studies

The research question addressed in this study broadly examined the concept of alignment between independent school heads of school and executive board leaders and perhaps established a framework for additional qualitative research design into this topic. There are several permutations and dimensions that may be worthy of future study along lines of inquiry such as the length of time the head and executive board leader have served together, the length of time in their roles, first-time heads and first-time executive board leaders.

Another future study could pursue the implications of gendered understandings of manifest and latent constructs of governance. One female head of school in the study casually mentioned that she had served with both male and female board chairs. When asked, the head was able to articulate several differences. The gender match or mismatch between the head of

school and executive board leadership within the alignment framework could have implications that would help female heads of school, who are underrepresented as independent school leaders, successfully attain and navigate headship.

Independent school enrollments are currently strong, likely as a lingering effect of the COVID-19 pandemic (Kavanagh et al., 2021). The interviews for this study were conducted in January and February, which are times of great potential during the independent school admissions cycle. Independent schools track inquiries and applications that arrive for the following year, and in January there was an increase in applications over previous years (MISBO Admissions Pulse Survey, 2022). It is possible that stable and higher enrollments could be a confounding variable that may not fully be accounted for in this study. A future line of study could replicate the questions at different times of the year and among schools in which there are significant enrollment issues.

If a new quantitative instrument is developed to measure the alignment to the themes described in this study, that may allow for a quantitative investigation of the effect on alignment of variables described above such as the tenure of heads and executive board leaders at each school, gender dynamics, a new head following a long term head, and enrollment trends. Elements of board structure could also be investigated to understand what impact, if any, they have on the alignment to constructs of governance. The work of Baker et al. (2015) attempted to measure the correlation between governance structures and institutional outcomes. The scope of their study limited institutional outcomes to what they termed strategic effectiveness. Baker et al. (2015) admitted that "the issue of how to assess effectiveness remained elusive and relatively undefined" and perhaps using a refined score of alignment could serve as an independent variable to assess effectiveness.

Another study may be a longitudinal case study examining several boards as a whole and their relationship to the head of the school. Boards are dynamic and their influence with each other is sometimes only visible through extended observation. As suggested by Evans and Wilson (2021), there may be systematic misalignment in the design of independent school boards and the preparation of heads of school. Board members are experts in areas such as finance and fundraising and can bring enormous social and reputational capital with them to their board service. Heads are generally academic leaders and are usually not well versed in the areas of expertise of board members. Evans and Wilson (2021) recommended that heads should endeavor to become aligned with the things that are important to board members. A longitudinal study may initiate studies into the history of independent school heads and boards in the same tradition as Callahan (1975) who studied the history of the relationship between public school superintendents and their board.

Related to the possible future alignment studies suggested above, another study could consider the effects of accreditation standards on school reform movements in both independent schools and in public schools. At the time of the publication of this study, Cognia, the largest primary and secondary school accrediting agency in the world, reversed a decision made in a peer review process to sanction the Cobb County school board (Cobb County Schools, 2020). Subsequently, the Georgia senate passed a bill (SB 498) that would remove governance considerations from accreditation. This bill did not pass the Georgia house and was not signed into law. A future study could examine the historical effects of accreditation standards on the alignment of heads or superintendents and their boards and the involvement of accreditation in ultimately achieving the the aims of Horace Mann and others who advocated for greater authority of professional educators rather than the ascendency of lay boards.

A Final Metaphor

There are several metaphors that exist to describe the relationship between the head of school and the board including a comparing it to a marriage (Mott, 2014). Other metaphors have been developed based on the work of Collins (2001) and that of Chait et al. (2005), notably that of Macdonald (2018) who described the relationship as that of riders on a bus who must work together to ensure that the bus is safe and effective for each other. I add the following extended metaphor to try to capture the nuances of alignment between independent school heads and executive board leaders.

> *The board - head relationship is like tuning a guitar. There are several ways to tune a guitar based on the skills of the tuner, the state of the instrument, and the availability of resources like technical tuning devices. If you are skilled, listen closely and one string will tell you how to tune the next so you can match and align the notes. If the instrument is in good working order, use a harmonic method to create a tone whose wavelengths you can feel and almost see when the notes come into tune. Finally, you can rely on an external electronic device to measure the tonality of each of the individual strings to bring them into tune. A guitar can be out of tune bi-directionally: one string can be higher or lower in pitch than the next one, but when all strings are in tune, the relationship is in tune, and music can be created.*

This metaphor derives from comments from one of the participants in this study who described being able to succeed through a difficult moment because the board chair kept "tuning them." It was an odd phrase and might have meant that the board chair kept them informed (as in, in tune with the information), but I prefer to think the phrase raises these questions in the guitar tuning

metaphor: does the board leader tune the head or does the head tune the board leader? Do they tune each other in order to make music?

The head of school and the executive board leader are in tune with each other when they are aligned in their understanding of the manifest and latent constructs of governance. It takes sustained effort to remain in tune with each other. When the alignment is in tune, the foundation for serving the future of the students in the school is laid and the mission of the school can be achieved.

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NAIS 2018 Governance Study: Factors in board recruitment (p. 38)

FACTORS CONSIDERED IN BOARD RECRUITMENT

In general, both heads and board chairs reported that the top factors considered when recruiting board members were passion for the school's mission and desired skills. While there were similarities in their responses, there were some misalignments, in particular around socio-economic status, gender, and occupation.

What importance does the board assign to the following items when recruiting board members?

(Very Important and Extremely Important)

Factor	Heads	Board Chairs
Passion for the school's mission	93%	96%
Desired skills	84%	84%
Strategic vision	71%	77%
Community connections	61%	52%
Race and ethnicity	48%	39%
Occupation	34%	18%
Ability to fundraise	37%	35%
Gender	32%	24%
Socio-economic status	28%	15%
Parent status	19%	20%
Alumni status	23%	20%
Geography	15%	13%

● Heads   ● Board Chairs
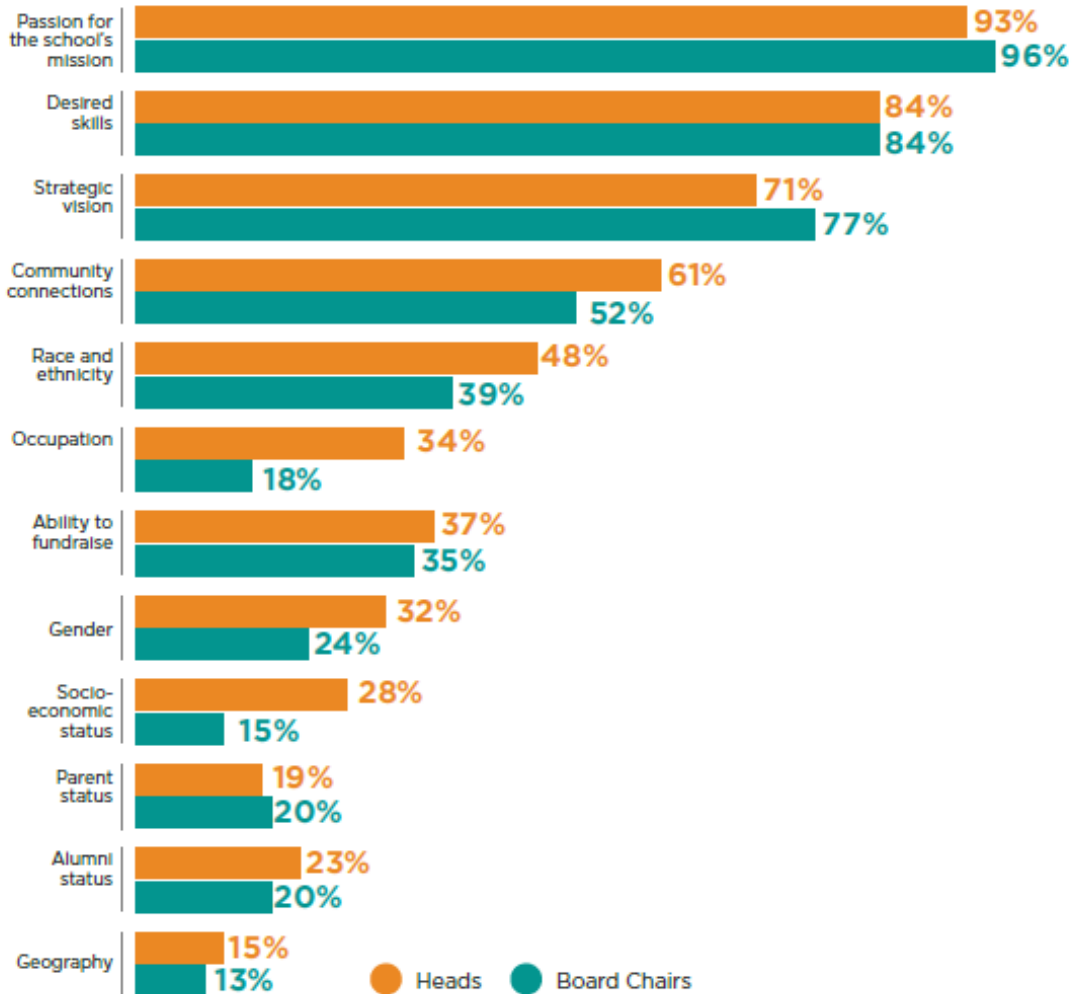
GA Department of Education Local Board of Education Model Code of Ethics

The [Name] County Board of Education desires to operate in the most ethical and conscientious manner possible and to that end the board adopts this Code of Ethics and each member of the board agrees that he or she will:

Domain I: Governance Structure

Recognize that the authority of the board rests only with the board as a whole and not with individual board members and act accordingly. Support the delegation of authority for the day-to-day administration of the school system to the local superintendent and act accordingly. Honor the chain of command and refer problems or complaints consistent with the chain of command. Recognize that the local superintendent should serve as secretary, ex-officio to the board and should be present at all meetings of the board except when his or her contract, salary or performance is under consideration. Not undermine the authority of the local superintendent or intrude into responsibilities that properly belong to the local superintendent or school administration, including such functions as hiring, transferring or dismissing employees. Use reasonable efforts to keep the local superintendent informed of concerns or specific recommendations that any member of the board may bring to the board.

Domain II: Strategic Planning

Reflect through actions that his or her first and foremost concern is for the educational welfare of children attending schools within the school system. Participate in all planning activities to develop the vision and goals of the board and the school system. Work with the board and the local superintendent to ensure prudent and accountable uses of the resources of the school system. Render all decisions based on available facts and his or her independent judgment

and refuse to surrender his or her judgment to individuals or special interest groups. Uphold and enforce all applicable laws, all rules and regulations of the State Board of Education and the board and all court orders pertaining to the school system.

Domain III: Board and Community Relations

Seek regular and systemic communications among the board and students, staff and the community. Communicate to the board and the local superintendent expressions of public reaction to board policies and school programs.

Domain IV: Policy Development

Work with other board members to establish effective policies for the school system. Make decisions on policy matters only after full discussion at publicly held board meetings. Periodically review and evaluate the effectiveness of policies on school system programs and performance.

Domain V: Board Meetings

Attend and participate in regularly scheduled and called board meetings. Be informed and prepared to discuss issues to be considered on the board agenda. Work with other board members in a spirit of harmony and cooperation in spite of differences of opinion that may arise during the discussion and resolution of issues at board meetings. Vote for a closed executive session of the board only when applicable law or board policy requires consideration of a matter in executive session. Maintain the confidentiality of all discussions and other matters pertaining to the board and the school system, during executive session of the board. Make decisions in accordance with the interests of the school system as a whole and not any particular segment thereof. A local board of education shall not adopt or follow any code of ethics which prevents the members of such board from discussing freely the policies and actions of such board outside of a board

meeting. This shall not apply to any matter or matters discussed in executive session or which are exempt from disclosure under Code Section 50-18-72. Abide by all decisions of the board.

Domain VI: Personnel

Consider the employment of personnel only after receiving and considering the recommendation of the local superintendent. Support the employment of persons best qualified to serve as employees of the school system and insist on regular and impartial evaluations of school system staff. Comply with all applicable laws, rules, regulations, and all board policies regarding employment of family members.

Domain VII: Financial Governance

Refrain from using the position of board member for personal or partisan gain or to benefit any person or entity over the interest the school system.

Conduct as Board Member

Devote sufficient time, thought and study to the performance of the duties and responsibilities of a member of the board. Become informed about current educational issues by individual study and through participation in programs providing needed education and training. Communicate in a respectful professional manner with and about fellow board members. Take no private action that will compromise the board or school system administration. Participate in all required training programs developed for board members by the board or the State Board of Education. File annually with the local superintendent and with the State Board of Education a written statement certifying that he or she is in compliance with this Code of Ethics. Conflicts of Interest Announce potential conflicts of interest before board action is taken. Comply with the conflicts of interest policy of the board, all applicable laws and Appendix B of the Standards document. Upon a motion supported by a two-thirds (2/3) vote, the board may choose to conduct

a hearing concerning a possible violation of this Code of Ethics by a member of the board. The board member accused of violating this Code of Ethics will have thirty (30) days notice prior to a hearing on the matter. The accused board member may bring witnesses on his or her behalf to the hearing, and the board may elect to call witnesses to inquire into the matter. If found by a vote of two-thirds of all the members of the board that the accused board member has violated this Code of Ethics, the board shall determine an appropriate sanction. A board member subject to sanction may, within thirty (30) days of such sanction vote, appeal such decision to the State Board of Education in accordance with the rules and regulations of the State Board of Education. A record of the decision of the board to sanction a board member for a violation of this Code of Ethics shall be placed in the permanent minutes of the board.

Independent School Enrollments During a Crisis

Total School Enrollment: Total Enrollment: Boys and Girls (School and Students - Enrollment)									
All NAIS Member Schools	**2007-2008**	**2008-2009**	**2009-2010**	**2010-2011**		**2017-2018**	**2018-2019**	**2019-2020**	**2020-2021**
Mean	494	487	492	487		469	472	470	469
75th Percentile	653	650	652	644		609	612	619	626
50th Percentile (Median)	390	382	386	384		367	365	358	353
25th Percentile	238	229	233	232		210	211	210	205
Number of Schools with Data Entered	1,161	1,248	1,179	1,150		1,267	1,264	1,300	1,253
MEAN % CHANGE		-1.4%	1.0%	-1.0%			0.6%	-0.4%	-0.2%
Region- Southeast, NAIS members	**2007-2008**	**2008-2009**	**2009-2010**	**2010-2011**		**2017-2018**	**2018-2019**	**2019-2020**	**2020-2021**
Mean	690	679	672	663		664	663	651	663
75th Percentile	913	905	903	924		914	924	883	915
50th Percentile (Median)	588	589	547	531		520	531	514	529
25th Percentile	385	355	353	312		322	312	310	316
Number of Schools with Data Entered	173	183	171	181		186	181	183	171
MEAN % CHANGE		-1.6%	-1.0%	-1.3%			-0.2%	-1.8%	1.8%
State - Georgia, NAIS members*	**2007-2008**	**2008-2009**	**2009-2010**	**2010-2011**		**2017-2018**	**2018-2019**	**2019-2020**	**2020-2021**
Mean	739	738	721	719		750	746	739	734
75th Percentile	951	994	983	983		1,085	1,089	1,090	1,094
50th Percentile (Median)	588	589	547	529		602	591	556	547
25th Percentile	335	335	320	333		266	287	270	268
Number of Schools with Data Entered	35	35	35	35		32	32	32	32
MEAN % CHANGE		-0.1%	-2.3%	-0.3%			-0.5%	-0.9%	-0.6%

Georgia dataset limited to schools whose data is available all four comparison years.

Source: DASL, 2021

2016 SAIS Governance Survey Questions

This survey measures the constructs of governance. Note that except for the demographic questions, all other items are presented to the respondent in random order.

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS

- Role on the board: Head of School, Board Chair, Executive Committee Member, Board Member.

- Length of Service on the board

- Do you have any children currently enrolled at the school?

- Have any of your children graduated from the school?

- Are you an alumnus/a of the school?

- What is your gender?

- What is your highest level of education?

- What is your race?

- What is your employment status?

- What is your occupation / job title?

- What technology did you use to complete this survey?

CONSTRUCT QUESTIONS

Respondents are instructed to assess their level of agreement with each of the following statements on a Likert scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Several of the questions are intentionally reverse coded as noted by the tag "negative prompt" as a means of establishing validity and reliability of the instrument.

Separation

1. The board does not hear appeals from families dissatisfied by the head of school's decision.

2. The board sets only the salary of the head of school.

3. Offers of admissions and financial aid / scholarship decisions are made without board input.

4. The board provides an open forum for parents and others to address grievances. (negative prompt)

5. The board approves candidates for employment. (negative prompt)

6. The board spends more time in putting out fires than in planning for the future. (negative prompt)

Confidentiality

1. Board members maintain confidentiality of all board discussions.

2. Board members support board decisions, even when there is disagreement.

3. Board members encourage each other to express opinions and be heard at board and committee meetings.

4. Board members fully and positively participate in discussions.

5. Outside of the board room, the board speaks with one voice.

6. Board members share conversations with their spouse/partner after board meetings are over. (negative prompt)

Board-Head Relationship

1. The board gives the head adequate personal support and guidance.

2. The board feels responsible for the success of the head.

3. The board regularly asks what it can do to help the head.

4. The board trusts the judgement of the head of school.

5. The board asks at least once a year that the head of school articulate his/her vision for the school's future and strategies to realize that vision.

6. The board has communicated the kinds of information and level of detail it requires from the head of school on the latest developments at the school.

Strategic Mindset

1. The board spends more than half of its meeting time being proactive, discussing issues of importance to the school's long-range future.

2. The board discusses events and trends in the larger environment that may present specific opportunities for the school.

3. The board engages in formal and regular strategic thinking and planning.

4. Board meetings regularly include professional development for board members.

5. The members of the board suspend personal motivation.

6. Board meeting presentations and discussions consistently reference the school's mission statement.

Board Mindset

1. Nomination and appointment of board members follow clearly established procedures using known criteria.

2. Newly elected board members receive adequate orientation to their role and what is expected of them.

3. Board meetings are well attended, with near full turnout at each meeting.

4. Each board member has meaningful work to do and is thanked for it.

5. The board follows its policy that defines term limits for board members.

6. Board members follow through on things they say they are going to do.

7. The board regularly reviews and evaluates the performance of the Head of School.

8. The board regularly reviews its own performance and the performance of individual members.

9. Board members support the development needs of the school by making the school a personal giving priority during years of service on the board.

10. Board members support the development needs of the school by soliciting prospective donors on behalf of the school and participating in the ongoing cultivation of donors.

Appendix E: The Interview Protocol

Demographic questions for a head of school – responses gathered prior to the interview:

- How long have you been head at this school?

- What is the highest level of education you have attained?

- What is your age, gender, ethnicity?

Demographic and background questions for an executive board leader – responses gathered prior to the interview:

- How long have you been on the board?

- What is your role on the board (chair, member of executive committee, regular member, etc.)?

- What are your relationships to the school (parent, past parent, external, alumni, etc.)?

- What is your profession?

- What is the highest level of education you have attained?

- What is your age, gender, ethnicity?

Opening statement and questions.

I welcomed the informant and thanked him or her for their time. Next, I reviewed aspects of the project that are required to meet IRB compliance including describing the nature of the project, describing how confidentiality will be maintained, reviewing ethical considerations, establishing informed consent, reviewing the steps of the project, and assuring the informant of his or her right to withdraw from the research project at any time. I then asked a background question such as:

- *Describe your professional journey to become the head of this school.*

- *Describe your journey to get onto this board?*

Questions about the constructs of independent school governance:

Separation

Posed to head of school and the executive board leader. *Can you talk a little bit about how you feel the roles of independent school heads and executive board leaders differ? Do you think that those lines get blurred sometimes? How so?*

Follow up questions: *Describe a time when you think the lines were blurred. What was the result of the situation? How did it affect various stakeholders? How did it make you feel? How did it affect the relationship between the head and the executive board leadership?*

Confidentiality

Posed to head of school and executive board leader. *How does confidentiality play into the head and executive board leadership relationship? Without naming specific people or events, can you describe a time when there was a particularly confidential conversation at a board meeting?*

Follow up questions: *If the confidentiality of the board room was compromised, what was the result? How might it have affected the relationship between the head and the executive board leadership?*

Board-Head Relationship

Posed to head of school. *Describe what a healthy, supportive, and functional head and executive board leader relationship looks like to you. Describe a time when the board was particularly helpful to you.*

Follow up questions*: How does the executive board leadership show you that it trusts your decisions and values your judgments? Has there ever been a time where that trust was shaken? How did it go?*

Posed to executive board leader. *Describe what a healthy, supportive, and functional head and executive board leader relationship looks like to you. Describe a time when the head was particularly helpful to you.*

Follow up questions: *How does the head show you that he or she trusts your decisions and values your judgment? Has there ever been a time where that trust was shaken? How did it go?*

Strategic Mindset

Posed to head of school and executive board leader. *Describe the most recent board professional development activity?*

Follow up questions: *Why did you engage in this activity? What did you get out of engaging in this activity? Think back to the latest board meeting – describe some of the conversations you had at the last board meeting that were strategic in nature. Describe how you steer the strategic development of the school through board activities.*

Board Mindset

Posed to the head of school. *What does it mean to be the head at the school? What are the expectations you have for board members? What are the expectations the board has for the you?*

Follow up questions: *What would you expect to be done if someone fails to meet expectations of serving on the board? What did you learn from the last evaluation the board did of you?*

Posed to the executive board leader. *What does it mean to be an executive board leader at the school? What are the expectations you have for board members? What are the expectations you have for the head?*

Follow up questions: *What would you expect to be done if someone fails to meet expectations of serving on the board? What did you learn from the last evaluation you did of the board?*

Crisis questions

Posed to head of school and executive board leader. *What are the results of your response to the pandemic, an external and unpredictable crisis? What would you do differently? Describe your relationship with the board / executive board leadership before the pandemic. What have you noticed, if anything, that is different in the relationship over the last 12 months? What is an example of an internal crisis the school has faced recently and what was the result? What would you have done differently? How did that crisis affect the relationship between the head and the executive board leadership?*

Focus Group Questions and Topics

In the focus groups, conducted after the interviews and analysis were substantially completed, I presented the themes that emerged as well as scenarios or exhibit questions, each of which contained points of tension and potential challenges to informants' understanding of the constructs of independent school governance. These question types represent what Marton

(1981) called the conceptual and the experiential and encourage the participants to describe the meaning they create out of the phenomenon.

Scenarios (exhibit questions) posed to the focus group comprised of the heads of school and executive board leaders.

- *A friend approaches an executive board leader and lets them know that a teacher has been unfairly grading tests, applying different standards to different students. This friend asks the executive board leader to do something about it. How do you think the executive board leader should respond?*

- *("The Chatham Scenario") Towards the end of the school year, the head of school has managed the approved budget in such a way that there is an unanticipated surplus and an opportunity to offer bonuses to faculty and staff. What do you think the board's role should be in making this decision?*

- *The committee on trustees is considering a candidate for board service who scored high in desired skills, strategic vision, community connections. The board chair believes this person's skills are a perfect match for the board. The head indicates that throughout the pandemic, the candidate has been a challenge for her child's teachers and the school's administration. What do you think the board should do?*

Appendix F: The Eleven Laws of the Fifth Discipline (Senge, 1990)

1. Today's problems come from yesterday's "solutions."

2. The harder you push, the harder the system pushes back.

3. Behavior grows better before it grows worse.

4. The easy way out usually leads back in.

5. The cure can be worse than the disease.

6. Faster is slower.

7. Cause and effect are not closely related in time and space.

8. Small changes can produce big results, but the areas of highest leverage are often the least obvious.

9. You can have your cake and eat it too, but not all at once.

10. Dividing an elephant in half does not produce two small elephants.

11. There is no blame.