

Dissertation in Practice

Elementary School Choice Through the Pandemic: Lessons Learned from Families'

Perspectives on Well-Being in School

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Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
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Acknowledgments

"When I was 5 years old, my mother always told me that happiness was the key to life. When I went to school, they asked me what I wanted to be when I grew up. I wrote down 'happy'. They told me I didn't understand the assignment, and I told them they didn't understand life."

- John Lennon.

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**Elementary School Choice Through the Pandemic: Lessons Learned from Families'
Perspectives on Well-Being in School**

Section One: Introduction to Dissertation

Background

Well-being is a complex topic which often is interpreted in a wide variety of ways. Well-being includes positive emotions and moods, satisfaction with life, and positive functioning with the judgment of life positivity and feeling good (CDC, 2021). For the purposes of this dissertation, well-being is defined as a sense of health and vitality that arises from a person's thoughts, emotions, actions, and experiences (Davis, 2022). While well-being has multiple aspects, this research will focus on physical, social, emotional, and psychological well-being, in addition to engaging activity and work (CDC, 2021). Investigating well-being also applies to the impact that school has upon the well-being of its members (students, teachers, administration, and the interacting community). The well-being conceptual model developed by Allardt in 1989 was adapted by researchers Kony and Rimpela (2002) to create the School Well-Being Model. The concept of school well-being is divided into four categories; school conditions (having), school relationships (loving), means for self-fulfillment (being), and health (Konu & Rimpela, 2002). School conditions (having) consist of the physical environment and the makeup of the school conditions, such as curriculum, school size, and conditions in which students will learn (classroom layout, meals provided, services within school such as counseling). The social relationships (loving) refers to the relationships and dynamics in and out of school between peers, family, teachers, and the school climate for the student. Means for self-fulfillment in school (being) is when students are offered opportunities for learning and engagement of skills

about the students interests and pace of learning. Respect for the students' work from their peers, teachers, and family is also an essential element of this category and this is balanced with time for leisure, activities, and connection with nature. The final category of health is the lack of illness and disease, both physically and mentally (Konu & Rimpela, 2002).

Administrators and teachers often place well-being in the top of the priorities for how the school operates and relates to students (NCSSLE, 2021). This dissertation research will look at families' perception on the role that school impacts in their child's well-being. What do the families want from our schools for their children to flourish in their education and beyond? Burns et al. (2022) identify well-being by positive and negative affect, life satisfaction, morale, resilience and social support. When reporting the highest level of well-being that is defined as flourishing status (Burns et al., 2022). Flourishing in life is to have reached the highest level of well-being. Much like well-being there is no one definition or decided scale of flourishing. In his research, Keyes (2002) defines flourishing as "a state where people experience positive emotions, positive psychological functioning and positive social functioning, most of the time". On the scale from languishing to flourishing developed by Keyes (2002), ultimately one would rather be operating at a flourishing level most of the time. Flourishing occurs where functioning within the four categories of well-being is happening positively for our students throughout their time in school and reaching beyond (Keyes, 2002).

Within a unique setting of a rural, nature-based, private elementary school, the question of what the purpose of school is for is at the foundation of the school operates. There is a strong relationship between school environment and student well-being (Lombardi et al., 2019). The school climate has a strong influence on the wellbeing of the students (Gage, et al., 2016; Lombardi, et al., 2019). Feelings about school life have a significant impact on student's

well-being, which drives the considerations about the school climate being an important aspect of the impact on well-being (Gage et al., 2016 in Lombardi et al., 2019). School climate includes feeling safe at school, feeling connected to school, and having peer support which are all protective of mental and emotional wellbeing. In addition, connectedness to teachers is an additional factor of emotional well-being. Establishing quality connections to peers who have a powerful role in providing support for one another, also leads to well-being in school. (Lester & Cross, 2015).

The goal of this phenomenological study is to consider the families' (parents/guardians) perspective and experiences about their children's school. What kind of an impact do they perceive, as well as what that impact is on their child's well-being. Creswell (2007) noted "a phenomenological study describes the meaning for several individuals of their shared experiences of a concept or a phenomenon" (p.57). The outcome of a phenomenological study, from the viewpoint of what the families' experience is to produce the meaning of the phenomena. The families will be identifying their perspective on how well-being fits into school. Additionally, families will share their experiences with a school that they chose for their children. This school, in particular, is philosophically founded in well-being. The families speak to their experiences and perspective of what impact this school and its philosophy has had on their child's well-being. There are many aspects of a private education model which could also influence their child's well-being such as: what the goals are for the school and the stakeholders (admin, teachers, families, community, and children); what are the desired outcomes in terms of well-being; and ultimately to look at school structure which supports the climate within the school. The goal of this research was to look together at the families' lived experience and their perspective on how well-being is promoted through school climate.

With the pressure to achieve and a constant race for endless measured success, our schools can become places where well-being (and ultimately flourishing) is one of the last aspects examined in school administration and family members (Abeles, 2016). Administration, teachers, and children often find the days to be stressful and anxiety provoking as they strive to reach academic goals and demands (Abeles, 2016). Administration must balance competing priorities and provide instructional leadership through developing, implementing, and evaluating district and school systems and policies, as well as, the physical safety of the building and students (NCSSLE, 2022 and Vancco, 2022). By examining the attitudes, environmental set-up, structure of the day, and expectations of our students, we are able to determine how effective a school's culture and climate is upon well-being (Lombardi et al., 2019 and Elfrink et al., 2017). Schools have the ability to examine, evaluate, and pivot their policies with a foundation of well-being and hope for flourishing for all as a result (Kundson, J. & Cantor, P, 2020).

In the year 2020, the world experienced the beginning of a worldwide pandemic, COVID-19. During mid-March of 2020, the world, through infrastructure, business, and all social avenues, seemingly came to a halt. With a strict reaction to a world-wide health crisis schools were amongst the many organizations whose doors were forced shut. As COVID-19 wreaked havoc across the country, schools and education became a focus of attention (Gouédard & Pont, 2020). As educators and families faced the struggle of learning during COVID, they also contemplated what models of school worked best for children (Eggleston & Fields, 2021). Many families and school personnel began to question what it really meant to go to school, why we have school, and what format, methodology, and function of school is best for a family's individual student's needs (NEMHTTC, 2020 and Vegas & Winthrop, 2020).

At the same time administrators all over the country asked themselves, can we as leaders ever truly be fully prepared for the unknown, to face and have a plan for the unknown will rely on the strong and positive structures in place, less than a plan to know how to deal with the unknown. There is not a secret leadership formula that will empower school administrators to align all approaches and produce successful leadership practice and innovation (Hill et al., 2010, Hynes, 2020, and Verhejin et al., 2020). Leaders can be proactive to prevent disaster through change and chaos with our practices and approach. As the worldwide pandemic threatened calamity to global organizations, leaders had to pivot, reflect, and innovate their practices and policies on what felt like a less than twenty-four hour turn around (Hynes, 2020). Organizations had to make swift and sizable scale changes through the unknown factors that each faced as a result of the pandemic. For the educational world, attention shifted to not only a change in organizational structure, but also a question of organizational purpose, value, and conduct (Hynes, 2020 and Hall-Mills et al., 2022). These pressures felt insurmountable at times, though in true educator fashion, practitioners attempted to rise from the rumble, scrutiny, and pressure and do what was best for the children with grace, humor, and talent. Within each organization leaders arise and are developed and the practices that they hold on to, adapt, and drive the success (Scharmer, 2018 and Brown, 2018).

Statement of Inquiry

As the pandemic drove a focus on education, many families had to choose alternative education models for their child. Families suddenly had a pressing need to evaluate the best schooling situation for their child (Gouëdard & Pont, 2020, Eggleston & Fields, 2021, Hynes, 2020, Hill et al., 2020, Hall-Mills, 2020). In education there are pendulum swings of focus and

often an evaluation about how children are educated and why the particular methods are being used (Weisberg, 2014 and Hess, 2022). This study focused on how families made their decisions in regard to the education of their children, and well-being as an aspect of that decision as well as how they experienced their school choice and what impact do they see on their child's well-being. Through looking at the experiences of families who made the choice for alternative education models, this study examined the family's desires in education, what pieces of school philosophy they feel impact their child's well-being needs, and what aspects of well-being they feel should belong in the school's climate.

Introduction to Focus of Practice

Given the opportunity to explore and better understand the families' perspective on what they feel the purpose of school is, as well as the significant impact of school experiences on their child's well-being, allows for a deeper expansion of educators' knowledge in designing effective schools. This will impact the school environment, the curriculum, and the greater school structure. Based on their experiences and their students' experiences families have a unique vantage point of the impact of well-being. Gaining this insight, schools can examine ways how the specifics of well-being and the impact upon well-being can align with the family's educational perspectives of their child in our schools.

One of the strongest elements of this study was the researchers willingness to understand each unique family perspective and to reframe the school culture and climate from within the school and the desire to adapt to this perspective. Ultimately, what aspects of the families' perspectives led them to choose and continue to have their children educated at this type of school. The pandemic offered both schools and families the opportunity to rethink the purpose of

school and ultimately the families' desire for the children from the institute of education (Weisberg, 2014 and Hess, 2022). With a look specifically into families' mindset on the impact of well-being and flourishing for their children in schools, educators can use this to look at the future of school relationships and take these perspectives into account. According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2022), "mental health is a state of well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realize their abilities, learn and work well, and contribute to their community". Flourishing and well-being in schools can only be accomplished through a deep investigation of school structure and culture. "Ultimately, students with positive mental health are able to more effectively build relationships, make decisions, and work together. These positive effects not only support the individual student, but also their larger community as they enter adulthood" (Stride, 2022). Families have chosen this school setting for various reasons and being able to investigate what brought them to this choice, as well as how it connects to their child's well-being in school should impact future educators and administrators as they look at school structure and policy.

Families and schools that make well-being a priority emphasize strong relationships, positive communication, risk-taking, self-confidence, and management of physical health and emotions. This can seem like a daunting task, but with a systematic plan that emphasizes what we already do, families and schools can work together in an ongoing and seamless manner.(Parr, 2014)

Having families both engaged in schools and schools and families on the same page regarding student well-being leads to an increase of skill and flourishing, a genuine priority for most families and schools (Parr, 2014 and 2021).

Potential contributions to practice and scholarship

This dissertation will add to the current scholarship by contributing knowledge of family perspective, input, influence, and desires which impact the students thus the school every day. The home to school relationship is vital to student success (Lopez et al., 2021). The focus on student wellness was heightened upon schools reopening after the Covid-19 closures, as the discovery of need for social emotional and mental health wellness became paramount to academics (Garland et al., 2022 and Ni, 2021). This study integrated families' perspectives of what aspects of well-being should be included in schools in terms of their curriculum, structure, and philosophy and what well-being impacts this school has had on their child. The hope would be that this can be extended to other elementary schools. The school's philosophy in this study began with a purposeful focus around individual well-being through the approach of education. In learning from the research, the school will consider the family's perspective and experiences and integrate into future changes an implementation of school philosophy and policy. By defining well-being for families and looking at the unique perspective of the role that school plays in their child's well-being, as well as their view as to why this school has had an impact on well-being, this study will impact both professional practitioners and the future of education and research alike. Deeper exploration into families' perspective can use this to improve schools' mission, philosophy, and approach with families as the key stakeholder. There is hope that this work will impact the greater educational community through a deeper understanding of families' perspective can only enhance the school's ability to strengthen well-being, care, and flourishing for students.

Problem of Practice

Private schools have a competitive and fiscal business need to understand, attract, and incorporate families' needs into their organization. Families hold a unique perspective about what is best for their children; therefore school choice and design is a critical consideration in the school they will select for their child. The importance of families' roles as stakeholders must be acknowledged by this school. This organization has a conscious philosophy about the incorporation of well-being into student's experiences, the school curriculum, and structure; however, this school has not taken the opportunity to hold the conversations and gain the perspective of the families in their school, until this research study.

Purpose of the Study

This research looked at the phenomenological experiences of families who have chosen to send their students to a private nature-based elementary school which is designed around the individual student's right to flourish in schools. The purpose of this research will be looking at the specificity of a family's perspectives of their child's well-being and ways in which their child's well-being is impacted by the school. The intent is to contribute to both scholarship through the families' perspective and practice through an examination of school philosophy and policy in which all schools can relate and investigate how to promote student well-being, flourishing, and care as a foundation to school philosophy. According to Cherkowski and Walker (2013) looking at school improvement and change as a positive action allows for intentional focus on well-being and flourishing as a result for students and school personnel. "The authors suggest that a focus on the human capabilities, capacities, and potentials of the school organization—attending to the human flourishing—can be an important component of

developing sustainable learning communities within which students and their teachers thrive” (Cherkowski & Walker, 2013).

Research Questions:

Main Question:

From the families' perspective, is well-being a priority in school and if so what aspects of well-being should be prioritized?

Sub Questions:

What elements of the school's mission and philosophy promote well-being and what are the impacts?

When choosing this school for your child were aspects of well-being part of that decision for your family and child?

What do you want in terms of school priorities for well-being outcomes and/or benefits for your child?

Design of Research Study

Setting

This research was a phenomenological study based on the private, nature-based, outdoor education, elementary school, settled on the seacoast of New England, and is uniquely designed around children's individual flourishing and well-being. This school is novel, as it is only in its third year and currently going through its accreditation candidacy process with New England

Association of Schools and Colleges. This setting is unique in its philosophy and policies because the education modalities, methodologies, and culture and climate are built around innovation to care, well-being, and flourishing in schools. This particular setting was chosen because the organization was built around the concept of well-being. The question arose, is the organization doing the job that it set out to do? The reason for the researcher to conduct this study within this setting is so that by asking the questions and reflecting, observing, interviewing, and investigating the structure of school it will impact not only this setting and also further educational settings to look at flourishing and well-being within their school philosophy and policies.

Participants

This rural, nature-based, outdoor education private school has a teaching team of four teachers, twenty students and their families, and two administrators. Sixteen families, and the administration were involved and have significant interest in the creation and investment in the school design and how the results of this study will be implemented in the future. The data was collected through interviews, artifacts/document review, and a focus group all arranged with specific intent and questions (see Appendix A and B).

Data Collection Tools-Methodology:

This study used semi-structured interviews, some with single parent members and some with a parent team (two members), as the primary data collection tool. Phenomenology seeks to describe what all participants have in common as they experience a particular phenomenon, creating a blended description of the experience for all the individuals (Creswell et al., 2007). A phenomenological approach to interviewing focuses on the lived experiences of participants and

the reflective meaning they make of that experience, with the goal of understanding the realistic perspective of the participant's experience from their subjective point of view (Seidman, 2019).

Phenomenological studies rely primarily on interviews for data collection to describe participants' lived experience of a phenomenon and the meaning that they take away from those experiences (Seidman, 2019) by analyzing data for significant statements. The texts were coded and grouped by the researcher into broader themes that provided the foundation for interpretation (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

Due to the conversational nature of semi-structured interviews and the focus groups, not all questions were asked of the participants as stated in the protocol (see Appendix A and B); however, all topics were covered during the interview and focus groups. Further, questions not previously stated were asked due to the open-ended nature of the interview and focus group. Each interview and focus group was recorded and transcribed and lasted between 60 and 90 minutes.

1. Interviews: The researcher asked these general questions of families regarding well-being: Why did they choose this school? What do they feel the purpose of school is? What are the school's influence and impact upon aspects of well-being and flourishing? What is the role of school in creating and impacting flourishing and well-being in their students? These interviews were recorded and transcribed.

2. Focus Group: The researcher asked similar questions to all groups of families and the researcher kept meeting minutes, also transcribed.

3. School Artifacts: These elements were found in specific documentation of philosophy, mission, principles, and policies. (see Appendix E and F)

The purpose of using three data collection methods was to provide triangulation of data. Triangulation refers to the use of multiple methods or data sources in qualitative research to develop a comprehensive understanding of phenomena (Patton, 1999). Triangulation also has been viewed as a qualitative research strategy to test validity through the convergence of information from different sources. The three methods of collection of data allowed for the researcher to get a full view of flourishing, well-being, and care are integrated into the education.

Data Analysis:

Data collected was analyzed through a multi coding system to look for themes in the data. Through established themes and by reading the data looking for codes and themes, a thorough analysis of the data provided findings and future implications to apply to practice. Analysis and assessment of the data was used to create cohesive documentation and research findings. Using Saldana (2021) the research data was thoroughly coded with In-Vivo and Values coding and themes developed for analysis.

Data Collection and Analysis Process

Table 1:

Data Collection and Analysis Process

<p>Organize Data Collections:</p>	<p>Take the handwritten notes, videos, and transcripts from the interviews performed and make sure those are in order.</p> <p>Organize meeting minutes, transcripts, and notes from focus group sessions and observations.</p>
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	<p>Collected artifacts that represent school design.</p>
<p>Categorize:</p>	<p>Use deductive coding to apply to data collected by starting with codes and using 3 passes of coding to apply to the transcripts of responses to the interviews and written notes, artifacts as well as responses and meeting minutes from the focus group.</p> <p>First layer of deductive codes: Caring, relationships, love, empathy, academics, outdoors, well-being, and flourishing</p>
<p>Coding Process:</p>	<p>Created a code book from looking at literature reviews, keywords, and mind maps for dissertation to decipher which codes to begin with</p> <p>Applied codes to text</p> <p>Examined the excerpts pulled out of the data by code</p> <p>1st cycle: In Vivo and Values Coding</p> <p>2nd Cycle: Focused Coding</p> <p>3rd Cycle: At-A-Glance organization of coding</p>
<p>Develop Themes:</p>	<p>When the codes were analyzed themes were - patterns in the responses and connections from one response to the other and overall, from all the data.</p> <p>Use the themes to organize the excerpts and apply themes to interpret the results</p> <p>Use Code Mapping-Saldana (2021)</p>

Interpret Results:	<p>Looked at themes produced, interpreted whether the results are similar or different to those found or concluded in the past research literature</p> <p>Considered novel insights when looking through the data</p>
Draw Conclusions:	<p>Applied the results of the coding, formed of themes, and then interpretations to look at overall results; connected to the literature through scholarship conclusions and connected to researchers' thoughts of how the results will influence both the workplace and dissertation.</p>
Timeline:	<p>Data organization: Compiled over 1 month</p> <p>Categorize: 3 hours to create codes in review of literature and maps 6 hours to pass through data with codes</p> <p>Develop Themes: 2 hours to organize excerpts 5 hours to apply codes to create themes</p> <p>Interpret Results: 2 weeks to look at results and interpret connections and novel findings</p> <p>Write Conclusions: 1 month to write conclusion for impact of results on scholarship and practitioner work</p>

The creation of the data analysis plan started with the first step of organization of the data that was collected. This included organizing the data collected through the interviews, focus groups, and the multiple artifacts from the school. Additionally, the researcher took handwritten notes, videos, and transcripts from the interviews, focus groups, and artifact collections

performed and assured those were in order and complete of the data collected during the above processes. The second step in the data analysis was the use of deductive coding applied to data collected by starting with codes and using three passes of coding, applying it to the videos, transcripts, and written notes, as well as responses from the interviews, focus groups, and artifacts/ document review. The researcher used the literature reviews, keywords, and mind maps for this dissertation as a lens for the coding process to decipher and deduce which codes to apply to the text. Using the conceptual frameworks there were the deductive codes: caring, relationships, love, empathy, academics, outdoors, well-being, and flourishing. In the final stage of the coding process was to examine the excerpts pulled out of the data by code.

Once the coding process was concluded, themes were developed through In-Vivo and Values coding (Saldana, 2021). By analyzing the codes, looking for themes; patterns in the responses and connections from one response to the other and overall, from all the data, then the use of the themes helps organize the excerpts and apply themes to interpret the results.

The final stage of data analysis was to interpret the results and draw conclusions. By examining the themes that were produced, it allowed the researcher to interpret whether the results are similar or different to those found in prior research and if novel insights were noted. The researcher applied the results of the coding, forming of themes, and then interpretations to look at overall results connected to the research studies. In the final stage the researcher drew conclusions and connected to thoughts of how the results will influence both scholarship and practice.

It was imperative to the researcher that the data collection and analysis were generated from the authentic experiences conveyed through the interviews, focus groups, and document

analysis and communications. Qualitatively the researcher was able to create interview questions and a stakeholder group of families to help determine how to receive, review, and consolidate the data. In order to collect quality qualitative data the researcher communicated openly with families, asked similar questions, allowed for participants to fully express themselves. Being able to communicate openly with families was important. Through the creation of stakeholder open communications in the focus group the participants felt empowered to share their experiences and interpretations of those experiences. This information will be invaluable to the school leadership and team to create vision plans and changes in the future. The researcher felt this expanded the data received and demonstrated what the families are looking for in the organization.

Another goal for the researcher was to gather the data and have a clear process for the participants so that they understand the greater purpose of the work. Participants understood that their work in this research study provided school leadership with critical information about the organization. The goal for the researcher was to have it be clear to the participants how the information will be used, what roles they can and will play, and how as a leader of the organization will become an advocate for both the organization and the members of the school.

Assumptions and Delimitations

The limitations to this study come from the fact that often the families being interviewed regarding the workings of the school may have answered with worry about the confidentiality to their responses, the ties to the research and this school included. What was not specifically looked at was the length of time that family has been associated with the school, however this too could have an impact. Many of the community aspects could also be politically charged

which may or may not become evident in the stakeholder data. Additional assumptions are that there will be a large disparity in the data collected from the variety in socio economic status from both the stakeholders' feeling of impact and ability to influence well-being in the students through the schools.

Key Terms

Flourishing: Flourishing is when people experience positive emotions, positive psychological functioning, and positive social functioning. Flourishing is a state of being within an optimal range of human functioning. It is a descriptor and measure of positive mental health and overall life well-being and includes multiple components of thriving. Characterized by abundant growth and success at life's goals, mission and passions.

Children's Well-Being: Promoting well-being involves understanding and addressing child, youth, and caregiver functioning in physical, behavioral, social, and cognitive areas. Well-being in its simplest terms is the quality of life, how we perceive ourselves to be coping with situations and how well our lives are going. Feelings of well-being are fundamental to the overall health of an individual, enabling them to successfully overcome difficulties and achieve what they want out of life. Past experiences, attitudes and outlook can all impact well-being. The health and well-being of children is associated with numerous outcomes on their physical, mental, social, and economic development.

Well-Being outcomes and benefits: outcome refers to specific and measurable short-term effects produced by a service, event, environment, or circumstance. A benefit is the measurable improvement resulting from an outcome (Edmonds, 2021). Well-being is a positive outcome that

is meaningful for people and for many sectors of society, because it tells us that people perceive that their lives are going well (CDC, 2021).

Well-Being impact: impact can adopt a more comprehensive viewpoint, looking to broader and long-term effects. Impact, however, can be quantitative, qualitative, subjective, and based on people's feelings or experiences (Lenning & Pace, 1982).

School Culture: School culture can be defined as the guiding beliefs and values evident in the way a school operates. School culture can be used to encompass all the attitudes, expected behaviors and values that impact how the school operates. A school's culture is made up of the traditions, routines, expectations, and interactions that take place.

Classroom Climate: Classroom Climate is the classroom environment, the social climate, the emotional and the physical aspects of the classroom. It is the idea that teachers influence student growth and behavior. Classroom climate refers to the prevailing mood, attitudes, standards, and tone that the members of the school feel when they are in the classroom. A negative classroom climate can feel hostile, chaotic, and out of control. A positive classroom climate feels safe, respectful, welcoming, and supportive of student learning.

Significance of the Inquiry

Scholarship

There are multitudes of research on the need to focus on well-being in schools, one in which has only grown in the spotlight exponentially since the pandemic and its impact on education (Hess, 2002 and Stride, 2022). The focus on what education is for and what learning is really about came rapidly into headlines and homes, when suddenly the practice of education in a

building became a forbidden task (Baker, 2022). What the attention did was draw new inquiry into what we have children learn, what structures are necessary to be learning, and what school should look like in the future. The aspect that is not present in the research is family perspective; what do they feel is the purpose of school, what do they want for the child in school and learning, and most importantly how does that fit into today's school design and then the future of what school could/ will look like.

Practice

This research will impact and encourage schools to look at their foundational models for structure of mission, philosophy, curriculum, climate, and culture built at school. With a focus on partnership and understanding of family's desires for their children we as educators can work each day for flourishing and thriving of all that enter our schools.

Summary of the Inquiry

Having the chance to deeply look into what the stakeholders' perspectives are upon school designed around well-being and one in which we hope brings educational foundation as student's "dream-keepers" to fruition. We have a calling into the field of education to make a difference and if making a difference was easy, then everyone would be doing it. We are honored to be co-raising the children in our schools with their families. To embrace this honor is to understand the dreams of the family and the children and to partner to ensure that our school design becomes a place of fulfilling the dreams and desires. When families are asked, heard, and listened to for what the purpose of education is and how their child is impacted, thriving and flourishing abounds.

Section Two: Practitioner Setting for the Study (Organizational Analysis)

Introduction

When the world stopped turning in March of 2020, as the pandemic swept the nation, schools and businesses alike were put to a halt. A small nature-based early learning center, which was established in 1978, had never experienced a “problem turned into possibility” like this one in all its forty-two years. The well-known school for families and children ages birth through Pre-Kindergarten had long dreamed of the expansion to elementary school practice with the same philosophy and educational modalities that they foresaw as a whole-child education and an emphasis on school designed around individual needs. Turning lemons into lemonade and a very quick turn around, the early learning center expanded and started a private elementary school on the seacoast of New Hampshire in September of 2020. What followed and continues today is an intent to be purposeful in how the school is structured, the partnerships with families and community, and a constant awareness of the need to be conscious regarding giving the students and their families the best education can offer.

History of the Organization

“A dream is a wish your heart makes” (Woods, 1950). For years the dream was alive in the hearts and dreams of the administration to find an avenue and method of creating a school that would continue the belief in nature-based education for elementary ages. The desire for a school that centers around children’s well-being was a dream that came to rapid reality as the pandemic hit in spring of 2020. Being purposeful under a time crunch and cognizant of the many stakeholders, philosophy, mission, and guiding principles that are so valued to the foundation of the school is crucial. Born in the summer of 2020 is the private elementary school, which is

uniquely designed around children's individual thriving and well-being. With the image of a one room schoolhouse effect, the school is a multi-grade Kindergarten through fifth grade school-house. The education is brought to the students through team teaching; a teacher with decades of elementary school teaching experience, a speech and language pathologist, who dared to dream of how her prior profession and teaching could coincide with each other, also with multiple decades of experience, and a social studies and science teacher, whom after years of education in upper elementary years, pined for the ability to give kids more outdoor learning and hands on experiences. This trio creates a team like none other to complement each other's strengths. The families enrolled sought after an environment that would accept each child for who they were to allow education to fit into their child's design. A tall and mighty order, but a dream unfolding into what is hoped to be a magic recipe for flourishing students who love to learn and share that passion in their many years of education and beyond.

Organization Analysis

Introduction

The researcher of this study is a co-director of the lower school and principal of the elementary school within the organization. Prior to helping launch the elementary school within the organization, the researcher was a teacher, then assistant teacher, and finally a director of the lower school. Within the setting, the researcher experienced first-hand the dominant structures that allowed for creative ideas and innovative practices. This experience was a motivating force for the researcher to continue the practices and expand and help create a continuance of elementary school organization founded on a progressive model of education. This new aspect of the organization was conceived as an innovative provider of 21st century, outdoor, nature based

elementary education to the community. For forty-five years the lower school has been recognized as a leader of innovative and progressive educational culture and practices and the elementary school hopes that the cultural awareness will encourage their recognition as well. Below the administration structures, there is an administrative assistant, and 4 teachers in the elementary school and 32 teachers in the lower school.

The researcher approaches this organizational analysis as one of the administrators of the organization. In the elementary school's third year, the researcher has been the sole principal for the school. The researcher has been with the organization for twenty-two years and in an administrative role for 15 years, and therefore recognizes that she approaches this analysis not as a neutral observer, but rather as an individual deeply invested in the organization, in what it stands for, in the community it serves, and in its mission and philosophy to serve students and families well.

This analysis was an opportunity to investigate the starting place for assumptions, role and its impact, and curiosities that are carried into work every day throughout the organization. Knowing the assumptions and lenses that can be checked will inform questions, curiosities, and actions for the ways that are continued to lead the organization. Bolman and Deal (2017), give structure to leadership to analyze their organizations using the four frameworks model to lenses to this organization. "A frame is a mental model-a set of ideas and assumptions that you carry in your head to help you understand and negotiate a particular 'territory'" (Bolman & Deal, 2017, p.45). Leadership can use the power of multi-frame thinking and the four-frame theory to adapt thinking and reflection to be a more informed organizational member. Leadership uses the curiosities that each frame invites to think about and applies each within their organization. A

leader then can reflect upon how these frames influence and enlighten change and innovation as a leader. This process could potentially allow the work as an organization and leader to become an intervener for what can stay and what can go throughout the organization's structure and culture.

Emerging questions and Epistemological Assumptions

The researcher started the organizational analysis with the need to think of the questions and considerations that will entice and influence the stakeholders and members to participate and be motivated to support the process. The goal of an analysis in the organization was to make a difference, to see what is working and what is not, and to establish ideas and methods for what ways the organization can innovate, and the leadership's role taken in each. By asking the following questions and considering the Epistemological Assumptions that are behind the questions the researcher can think about why their questions are helpful to ask through each frame's lens.

Structural: What are the roles here and what do the role definitions tell us about our organization? What are the policies and rules and who reviews and establishes changes? How are those articulated to the members? How are the systems for evaluation and growth measured and to what degree are they equitable across the organization? Do the rules and policies of the organization work for and allow for influence from the individuals and clients? (Bolman & Deal, 2017)

Human Resource: How does our organization meet the needs of the stakeholders and how can the organization anticipate changes in those needs? How do the organization establish the multiple social relationships within the organization? In what ways do the organization

assimilate new members of the organization? How can the organization both encourage and provide the training and development of skills in our people for the success of the individual and organization? (Bolman & Deal, 2017)

Political: What are the power and control systems at play in the organization? Is there allowance for delegation? From both the internal and external forces who might be in competition with the organization and/ or each other and what might be done to see that change those? Where do the conflicts arise throughout the organization? What methods could change to lessen the conflict and see what is behind them to be proactive instead of reactive? (Bolman & Deal, 2017)

Symbolic: What values do the organization hold here? How do those influence our stakeholders? What are the traditions, rituals and ceremonies that support our culture, and which are ones that the organization can re-think to better align with our mission, values, and culture? (Bolman & Deal, 2017)

Each of these questions the researcher needed to evaluate the epistemological assumptions, in how the knowledge will be known to the researcher. The above questions need to be looked at through a constructivist approach, so that the researcher can establish the close relationships of trust, openness and honesty and be able to get the true lived experiences. As stated above with this process comes the assumptions and bias as a leader and member of the organization and thus establishing a stakeholder group or multiple to evaluate and construct the knowledge with me is vital to a proper organization analysis.

This Organization: A Calling to Lead and Innovate

The organization carries the philosophy of educating the whole child in a nature based, outdoor learning environment and with the methodology of supporting the mental, emotional, physical, and academic health and well-being of each child and their family. The organization has the honor of co-raising the children with their families and it is one in which is not taken lightly. The school's campus is set on a 26-acre farm filled with gardens, animals, woods with nature trails and a ropes course, a river, pond, and enchanting indoor and outdoor classrooms for each grade level. The school has just over 125 students each day and has a faculty of 35 teachers, interns and staff. The researcher began her work as a teacher in 1998. She has since grown and changed roles to school administrator in 2005. With the aspiration to lead the teachers, families and children through establishing a culture that celebrates each other's strengths and enhances the organization through an organizational structure that motivates and inspires success individually and a whole team. Each day it is the leader's hope to be leading with the goal of well-being for all that interact in and with our school.

A Walk Through the Four Frames

Using the opportunity to analyze the organization with the four- frame model from Bolman and Deal (2017) one can see the aspects of each frame within the school, both the positive and negative, as well as the aspects that are seemingly necessary and inevitable given the field of work. As a researcher and practitioner, it was chosen to start with the two frames that the school aligns in the strongest. Both the Human Resource and Symbolic Frames in Bolman and Deal's (2017) model are heavily influential throughout. The Human Resource frame is like sitting in a family. At the end of the school session, as graduates move on, there were many tears

as the organization said the “goodbyes” to children and families that have been part of the school and thus a family for many, many years. The team of teachers supports and celebrates each other like a family. Often it is the team of teachers who are the first people that are contacted with the good and not so good news of each other’s lives. This is family. The Symbolic Frame is equated to a carnival, temple, and theater, according to Bolman and Deal (2017). Educators have deep meaning to their practices and can cheer people on from their first time going pee on the potty to earning a college degree. Both the Human Resource and the Symbolic Frame have organizational ethics and leadership contributions that align with this school. The caring and love of the Human Resource frame, which Bolman and Deal (2017) define, is the essence of what the organization does for our work, but is also the essence of how the organization is as an organization; are the organization meeting the needs of our people? A leader can only take care of others as well as the leaders take care of themselves. This philosophy applies from care as a leader of the teachers, which passes down to the children and families. For the Symbolic frame holds true the organizational ethic of faith and the leadership contribution of significance (Bolman & Deal, 2017). The past years the organization spent studying the culture that they have between us as teacher, interns, and staff. The ethic of faith goes hand in hand with trust, one has to have faith in each other and faith that the employee means enough to the organization to be wanted and part of the culture that is built and sustained. The significance too is the meaning that the organization holds as an organization to the larger culture. What significance does one have in our work each day, through our methods, our culture, our meaning in the lives of children and families? As a leader they want to empower and inspire others and all that interact with the organization. The central concept of relationships from the Human Resource frame and culture and heroes from the Symbolic frame align to the mission of the school. (Bolman and Deal, 2017). As an organization

and leader, it is felt that the school simply cannot exist without the foundation of the work being based on the relationships which are built within. Both scholarly and practitioner focus on the culture that is built in our schools and this stems from a passion that all children, teachers, and others that are involved with schools should be given the opportunity to be educated where the positive culture is thriving and built off the well-being of each member. The Structural and Political frames are important to have a lens into as well to analyze the organization. The Structural frame can be seen as a machine, a place where rules, roles, and policy are core. The leaders can be seen as the master of the ship and control of the social architecture according to Bolman and Deal (2017). In a school there are many rules and policies. The driving force behind these are safety, compliance, and regulation to make it “black and white” what is expected and what is required of the members of the organization. The Political frame goes hand-in-hand with the Structural, as schools all function under power; who makes the overarching rules and policies for schools in this country and the reliance of policy to mediate conflict in the organization. Along with the power aspect, educators hold the fierce driving power of justice and advocacy for what is right in education, for children and families in this country and beyond (Bolman and Deal, 2017). As a researcher, looking to situate leadership and the organization in these multiple frames it also needs to apply the assumptions which life experience brings upon each frame and in turn the influence each frame has on being an effective or ineffective leader.

Innovation: Dissecting the condition and qualities of organizational innovation

Scharmer (2018) prompts leaders to respond to turbulence with resilience and flexibility and thus create new ways of operating. *Theory U* (2018) suggests that leaders must attend when facing disruptions in their organizations. “I attend [this way], therefore it emerges [that way].

Why? Because energy follows attention. Wherever you put your attention as a leader, as an innovator, as a change maker, or as a parent, that is where the energy of the system around you will go-including your own energy” (Scharmer, 2018, p.40). How will a leader be able to implement this in their practice? What ideas of learning will help to promote innovation? Scharmer (2018) suggests that leaders must have an open mind, open heart, and open will. Leading with curiosity, compassion, and courage. Bolman and Deal (2017) encourage leaders to put themselves into each frame and look deeply at each frames value and purpose to the organization and the leadership role that one must take in each frame, just as Scharmer (2018) pleads with leaders to listen to their own intentions, to partners and to what a leader is being called to do. Scharmer (2018) asks what critical questions need to be explored, what support to the structure is needed, what resources, and how a leader can create a roadmap. Using Scharmer’s (2018) Theory U principles for leadership creates the roadmap to innovation and change for success at all levels of change and organization functioning. Starting with co-initiating by stopping and listening to others and what is being called for one to lead, moving to co-sensing to observe and listen with an open mind to suspend habits of judgment and open heart to empathize and look through another’s perspective starts the process of perspective taking to value the team and individuals who strengthen the organization. The third aspect of having an open will to let go of the old and let come the new starts with presencing to allow the inner knowing to emerge. As the openness to seeing the new arrives a leader can shift to co-creating and co evolving through exploring the future by doing and then taking in the changes and innovation of the new ecosystem as a holistic approach says Scharmer (2018).

Linda Hill (2014) speaks to the leaders and urges them to become social architects.

“Individuals in innovative organizations learn how to inquire, learn how to actively listen, but

guess what? They also learn how to advocate from their point of view. They understand that innovation rarely happens unless you have both diversity and conflict” (Hill, 2014, 06:18).

Hill(2014) continues with unleashing the power and talents of many and then in turn harnessing them into useful work. Hill (2014) studied Vineet Nayar, recognizing his language to “unleash the power of many by loosening the stronghold of a few, and increase the quality and speed of innovation that is happening everyday” (Hill, 2014, 15:36). Bob Marshak (2017) additionally emphasized the need of leadership to perform social construction; the foundations being teams and team building, as well as positive views of the people within. Torres (2013) also stated that leaders understand that having a diverse network of thinking opens the thinking to the many perspectives around you. Additionally, Torres (2013) reflects on the need to be open and adaptable to the changes that are inevitable in organizations. “So what makes a great leader in the 21st century? I’ve met many, and they stand out. They are women and men who are preparing themselves not only for the comfortable predictability of yesterday but also for the realities of today and all of those unknown possibilities of tomorrow” (Torres, 2013, 08:38).

Yeung and Ulrich (2019) suggest as a leader consider innovating their organization that they must start with their assumptions on how their company operates and consider one of three models; the hierarchy model, the systems models, and capabilities model. The hierarchy model falls under the more traditional model where leaders emphasize knowledge, power, and control through roles and rules. Yeung and Ulrich (2019) speaks to the fact that there is much talk about how to rid organizations of this model, yet most still fall within this model. The Systems model as Yeung and Ulrich (2019) describe moves a step away from the hierarchical to where a leader focuses on alignment of strategy, structure, people, rewards, and processes. The con of this model is that it can be a slow response to external disruptions and often does not yet have fully

engaged people within their organizations. The third model from which leaders should evaluate their organization's status is the Capabilities Model. According to Yeung and Ulrich (2019) this model is fitting when leadership feels that the organization's effectiveness stems from its identity; what is it known for as a reputation and what it is good at doing. The fundamental aspect of this model is the creation of a unique identity that affects all the stakeholders (Yeung & Ulrich, 2019).

The final evaluation of organizational innovation theory comes from Alissa Mariello (2007) through the *Five Stages of Successful Innovation*. In moving through the stages leaders can progress their organization from idea to implementation. "Serendipity is not a strategy, yet that's the extent of most companies' innovation planning" (Mariello, 2017. p.1). A leader can evaluate what stage they are in for innovative thinking and adapt and implement this process throughout their organization. Starting with the generation stage to fuel new ideas from both the pressure to compete and the freedom to explore (Mariello, 2017). Here a leader can start with the why. Utilizing stakeholder groups and leadership teams as think tanks can be a way to prodigy creativity and thinking outside the box in a wide variety. The second stage of Advocacy and Screening allows for weighing the pros and cons of the ideas, being careful to make sure those that give ideas are given clear feedback as to why and why not ideas move on through this stage. At this stage honesty and effective communication systems need to be in place. Third is the Experimentation stage to test the sustainability of the ideas in the particular organization, at a particular time and within a particular environment. At this stage it is also important to not just toss ideas out if they do not work within the above particulars as they may just be a catalyst for future innovations, Mariello (2017) reminds the reader. Flowing into the last two stages comes the Commercialization stage, bringing in the stakeholders in particular the customers to make

sure it actually is a benefit and use for them, as well as costs and benefits to the organization for producing the innovation. During the commercialization stage a leader can utilize the Appreciative Inquiry Model from Copperridor (2012); for discovery, dream, design, and deployment. Asking the right questions at this stage and using the model as a resource, allows for an organization to move positively and with a strategic focus and innovation and change to be positively focused. Lastly Mariello (2017) moves a leader to the Diffusion and Implementation stage, where the organization's acceptance company wide happens and structures, maintenance and resources are set up to ensure innovation can occur. Use of the Logic Model Template and Theory of Change models and working from right to left through asking these questions as an organization gives additional view into organizations cultural acceptance, through a balance of inputs, outputs, outcomes and resources and activity analysis.

Organizations often are so rooted in the past that they may not be able to look through their daily functions, processes, and culture to see the need for innovation. "Being an innovative leader is giving people space to do the hard work of innovative problem solving" (Hill, 2014). To be an innovative leader one must let go of egos, archaic systems and structures, and put into place the processes, stages and types of innovative spaces and teams to unlock innovation and creativity. With an innovative leader at the helm of an organization thriving will be felt, seen, and produced throughout.

Organizational Assumptions

In every avenue of life, the leadership and its members bring with it their life experiences, which is a good and bad thing, and with that comes our assumptions. Asking oneself how it is known for the organization to be, what is the culture here at the organization,

and how does the organization meet the needs of the individual, are important starting points as the researcher thinks about where the assumptions come from and where those assumptions hold influence within the organization. In taking the time given to analyze these aspects it will help leadership to continue to grow both as a scholar and practitioner. Each of the four- frames of Bolman and Deal's (2017) model hold assumptions that the researcher brings into the work in both arenas. The ways in which the organization as a team and the researcher plans, makes decisions, evaluates and sets goals, communicates and holds meetings, approaches conflict, reorganizes and motivates, all carry patterns and assumptions that the organization functions within. Some of the methods and ways of functioning the organization do not even know how or why they are there, and some the organization have no ideas how to change and innovate, while others are the building blocks to all that is successful in our organization. At this school the leadership tries to promote participation, make planning an open process and communicate in open and involved methods. The organization allows for sharing of feelings and has processes for helping individuals and teams grow and improve. When conflict arises, the organization falls back on the relationships the organization has built and our value of respect to work through the issues and move forward. The organization also holds a strong expectation for growth and self-actualization. With all these seemingly positives the research also must look at the assumptions; assume that people want to be pushed to grow, also assume that because of the relationships built that the organization will be able to get through conflict and at times do not have the follow up after to make sure the solution and process is moving forward in a direction that supports all the individuals. It is also a challenge to maintain the balance between human needs and formal roles. In the care-taking role that the organization is in, where do the professional and informal lines cross, merge, and conflict? For the Symbolic frame, the school

and the leadership as professionals rely on team building. The organization has many events throughout each year for bonding experiences, learning about each other, and putting themselves in new positions that will grow stronger together. The last year the organization spent discussing and creating values, mission, and meaning for their work and developed team and individual methods for showing and giving appreciation. Having and forming rituals that the team can rely on and look forward to time and time again has the employees feeling motivated, telling stories of the past and looking forward to new ways to bond and grow together. The organization also has apparel that all the employees wear and look forward to getting as new items are unveiled. Assumptions in this frame are carried out in the methods in which the organization integrates new teachers and people to their culture. Do the ways in which the organization assimilate the new members work for all or is the organization carrying traditions and rituals that do not fit for the members anymore? The third frame being structural where the researcher carries many assumptions into the lens on this frame. When the researcher first applied to the doctorate program, the researcher mentioned to the head of recruitment for the EdD program that they were looking forward to knowing how to lead, having policies and procedures that would help with boundaries for employees and make leading more straightforward. Looking back the researcher now laughs just thinking of the naivety. The researcher still carries with her that rules, roles, and structure create an environment where everyone knows what to-do. The missing link is does anyone want to participate in an organization guided through this frame. Additionally, the motivation and evaluation processes being driven with rewards/punishment and financial are often temporarily rewarding, but not often sustaining in motivation. The fourth frame of politics too carries assumptions; the researcher assumes often that power is looked at negatively, when the leadership can often use the power of their influential role and “boots on the ground” position

to influence decisions and processes. The researcher has also seen many occasions where competition eats up any sense of comradery that the organization and leaders may have been attempting and that use of manipulation and coercion again may have temporary compliance or appear to have been effective, though in the long run it leads to behind the back behaviors, communications, and more team dismantling (Bolman and Deal, 2017).

Brene Brown's work *Dare to Lead* (2018) challenges leaders to rid themselves of shame and guilt in an effort to build a stronger, more productive community. The essence of Brown's (2018) work is brave leadership and courageous cultures; if I didn't need and want to do my own focused dissertation work, I could pull from every page of her work how to as a leader be brave and push through the hard work to make changes. In *Dare to Lead* (2018) Brown emphasizes the need for teams to learn to be vulnerable together. "Psychological safety-team members feeling safe to take risks and be vulnerable in front of each other" (Brown, 2018, p.36). In our schools the stakeholders must form a foundation of safety from within; emotional, mental, and physical safety for all as the basis of the school's culture. With people as the focus of leadership, once the members are feeling safe the development of the individual can blossom. Leaders are called by Brown to take the "responsibility for finding the potential in people and processes" and "the courage to develop that potential" (Brown, 2018). As an innovative leader focusing on the culture that is built within the schools we lead, we must start with the people and must find the potential in each, celebrate their strengths and develop the successes. Schramer (2018) also dares leaders to let go of the baggage that holds one back from change. "Crossing the threshold means being willing to let go. To let go of old patterns, assumptions, and even our old 'ego self'" (Schramer, 2018, p.60). To make sense of organizational development, and thus innovation, it starts with a deep investigation into culture. Marshak (2017) points to Kurt Lewin's Change

Theory for leaders to look at the interrelated values which proposes that individuals and groups of individuals are influenced by restraining forces, or obstacles that counter driving forces aimed at keeping the status quo, and driving forces, or positive forces for change that push in the direction that causes change to happen. In order to break down and innovate the culture of any organization and start by exploring within the school's own culture, leadership needs to look at the internal and external forces that are always at play in the context of organization, community and culture.

Currently the positive internal forces are that the school has is they have much access to resources and training to help teachers feel supported, additionally they have spent the last year in a "self study" of our culture, which administration led the team to look at what their values are and where they show appreciation for each other, individuals, the children, and beyond in the community. The researcher as a leader strives to be a leader that continually evaluates the strengths of the teachers and the roles those play in the organization. The negative associations that are internal are the fact that the school was started and run by the researcher's family and as the first generation retire, change, innovation, and new styles of leadership are all very hard for them to let go of and accept. The school also has much higher attendance and waitlist numbers, which is a great problem to have, but also has to be balanced with the burnout and stress impact. Along with the internal forces upon the organization, there are external positives of the greater community relationships that have been established and continue to be strengthened being a school within the community for the last 40 years. Externally educators are facing a huge teacher crisis and change in work ethic with the employees that we do have; COVID-19 certainly plays a role in both of these factors, however society and the greater cultural impact does as well. Investigating further into the Community contest the school has a very supportive set of internal

factors; the community within the school is seen as a big family of support for each other, respect, trust and support are the core values that are held internally, and that trust in the community to get through the changes, big and small as a team is huge. As the school internally brings in new teachers and members to their community they need to also strive to include each one and have an open mind and heart to the value they will bring to the community. Externally within the community context they have a growing change and innovation in how the community views and feels about school; reshaping the view point and gathering the perspective of what a school should look like and what is the purpose of education today. Being a private school they also have the battle and play in people's baggage and thoughts on the difference between public and private education and the ethic and value to the affordability and access to educational types. Lastly, the school explores the Cultural context; the values, rituals and traditions that we hold and have as working forces upon us. Internally the school thrives on events that bring the community together, they purposefully build meeting and planning time for teams to strengthen both the bond and communication inter team and with admin. Leadership tries to make a pointed effort to be visible in every classroom each day for more than just a pass through. These all become very evident as important aspects of the culture throughout the last year as some pieces had to flex with covid restrictions and it was heard over and over how valued those were to the stakeholders in the school. Externally the school is viewed and known for as the nature school, has been a growing and a valued part of the greater education community for 40 years, and finds that one of our strengths is sharing to and through the community the cultural values they have in nature based/ outdoor education and all that bring to the culture and community. Externally the school faces the negative force of being a strong, matriarchal, female driven business. Though

times are always changing, there is still a tradition and bias that can be found as a woman trying to lead a large organization and have value and impact on the community.

Assumptions are not always a negative, though they can leave organizations and people stuck and not moving forward in innovative ways if the organization holds onto patterns that they may not even realize are in place or have not taken the time to evaluate whether or not the frame, systems, processes, and environment produced by those is working not only for the individuals, but the organization as well. Brene Brown (2019) reminds leaders through innovation and organization analysis; “A brave leader is someone who says I see you. I hear you. I don’t have all the answers, but I’m going to keep listening and asking questions” (p.88), “We desperately need more leaders who are committed to courageous, wholehearted leadership and who are self-aware enough to lead from their hearts, rather than unevolved leaders who lead from hurt and fear” (p.135), and “Write a new ending for yourself, for the people you’re meant to serve and support, and for your culture” (p. 204).

The Role and Impact

To be the illustrious leader’s daughter is to take on many hats and stereotypes that are passed down with judgment. The family has owned and operated the school for almost 45 years, which the researcher directs currently. As the researcher moved into an administrative position 15 years ago, many from within either flat out ignored the role and/ or felt the researcher was just given the position without any experience or background. The researcher too struggled with how and where to find the power. Living in the shadow of her mother, whom by the way she is honored to have been mentored by and feel so fortunate that she is her daughter and was able to learn from her, it was a tough hole to climb out of and prove who she independently wanted to be

as a leader. The researcher dealt with ageism, in teachers being older than her, not giving her the time of day and dealt with newer teachers being peers and suddenly having to have her as their “boss”. The researcher also dealt with the reality that she saw many things that the mother did amazingly well; brought people together and had extreme loyalty and longevity of employees, but also saw her get walked all over as she was a people pleaser that wanted to take care of everyone. As the researcher established what the role was, she had a dance of interaction with teachers as well as her mother. As time went on there was now a staff full of teachers that have only known the researcher in an administrator role. The researcher recognized that she also was fortunate that the mother has reached retirement age and slowly over the last five years took less and less of a role, but also allowed for her to have the time to learn the rope of the operation from her while she was still there.

The legacy that her mother wanted to leave was adding on a private elementary school, which the organization has done now and have a blossoming curriculum, waitlist of families trying to get in, and have established itself further in the community as a premier education establishment that does what is right for children and education each step of the way. Being the Principal of this school, the researcher has led with innovation, made many mistakes and had many celebrations. The researcher can only imagine that having the next generation take over your business is a dream come true, but also takes a strong person to watch innovation and ideas happen, as processes change, and structures are established that may not be in the same way as you would have done.

Given the role and the impacts that the researcher has on the organization there is obviously bias carried that the researcher needs to evaluate and hold in awareness to be able to

gather the most accurate data. The researcher also needed to remember that the teachers and various stakeholders may fear that the data and information given will be reflected in their role in the organization. Her hope is that through the past year of work on culture, values, and appreciation that she has shown that honesty, tough conversations, and learning and growing together is how the organization will all grow and flourish, but she can only imagine that some would be tenuous in their sharing. The researcher also recognizes that she also can be defensive. She works hard and does the best to make good decisions and think through processes before acting but knows she can get defensive of the years of hard work and the family's dreams and that too can cloud what she hears and accepts as feedback. Lastly, of course, she is her mother's daughter. She too can be a people pleaser and look to make sure that everyone is happy, which can conflict with the fairness of the decisions and the role in holding clear boundaries of professionalism with all in the organization.

In gathering data and analyzing the feedback to give way to innovative change for the organization the researcher has found a group of stakeholders that can both understand the position and role, and at the same time remain neutral to the overall organization mission, goals, and growth needs for change. It is important for her to conduct the leadership methods in an effective manner as a catalyst for change through support and empowerment and to act as an inspiration for others. The researcher felt she could do the former all the while using analysis and design, as well as advocacy and coalition building to create balance to the thinking and actions.

Conclusion of Organizational Analysis

The prospect to be a leader and the ability to conduct an organizational analysis can be a turning point in the organization's direction and longevity. Use of the Bolman and Deal (2017)

frameworks permits the opening of doors to innovation, collective buy-in, motivation, and viewpoints of all members to feel heard and understood. Having the chance to think through the why and align it with the innovative how of the organization can establish a lens of change and growth. Taking the opening to invite an analysis of leadership, the role, the assumptions, and look forward to innovative futures. Being a leader is not an easy position and is one that often takes vulnerability, bravery, and courage to do the hard work and trust in a future that cannot always be seen right away. The belief is that with a strong team and core foundation of relationships, communication, and trust an organization can go through any change and come up stronger and more successful. Well, it may not formally be a type of therapy through this the researcher could foresee how the analysis of her organization was very therapeutic to the organization and a leader in entirety.

Leadership Analysis

Leadership in this community is structured in a collaborative, team approach. Relationships and empowerment of the people are the core. Leadership begins with the owner and director who is supported by the Co-Director and Principal. Additionally the community is supported with an Administrative assistant. The elementary school collaborates with the elementary curriculum and assessment coordinator/ Lead teacher, the 3 supporting elementary school teachers. The lower school within the community has 30 teachers; 10 lead teachers and 20 assistant teachers. The elementary school is in process of becoming a non-profit and forming a board to support the school, though at the time of this study there is only a volunteer Parent Teacher Organization (PTO), which contributes to fundraising and event planning. The organization that serves as the context for the study has enjoyed relatively stable leadership, with

the founding Administration and two of the four teachers have been in place since the start of the school. The values of the leadership are reflected in the organization's four aspirational values:

1) People first - People, people, people understand the person comes first in our decisions and actions.

2) Collaboration - Teamwork is paramount. Each person has contributing qualities

3) Respect - We thrive in environments that respect individuals, culture, and community .

We want all members to thrive and our culture and climate to reflect respect in all aspects.

4) We build the future - Each day we are honored to co-raise the students with their families. Our work goes well beyond into the future having impact for years to come and countless touchpoints on others.

The leadership at the school featured in this study consist of the building principal who is also the researcher of this study. These administrative teams meet weekly to discuss students, curriculum, events, and community. This full team coordinates with the administrative team to plan change initiatives and progress monitor change efforts.

Innovative, Transformative, and Appreciative Leadership

The philosophies in which the leadership embraces are innovative, transformative and appreciative leadership practices. One can scour a bookstore and not find a single manual with the answers "how to be a leader in x many steps". Within the Appreciative Intelligence Scale the leadership finds a connection as they thrive from order, systems and rules and routines (Whitaker, Thatchenkery, & Godwin, 2020). In order to combat this natural thinking and tendency the leadership relies on leadership together. To be innovative the organization must work collaboratively and create a foundation that the (or any) organization can stand on of

respect, trust, faith and admiration for individual talents, relationship building, and reflection on how and why the organization is led and is doing what they do. "Innovation! You can't mandate it, so you have to create an environment in which it can emerge, unfold" (Scott, 2004 p.76).

Listening to what the teachers and administrative support staff have to say about culture/climate and what leadership can do as an innovative leader to help facilitate a positive change and also immediately empower members through authentic communication. Appreciative leadership philosophy means working as a team and building a community with all the members, including and treating everyone with respect, creating equal experiences and opportunities for all the adults, and building a foundation that leaves everyone wanting to grow and learn to be successful. Thatchenkery & Metzker (2006) state that we must use Appreciative Leadership "Appreciative Intelligence is the ability to perceive the positive inherent generative potential within the present. Put in a simple way, Appreciative Intelligence is the ability to see the mighty oak in the acorn... It is the capacity to see a strong trunk and countless leaves as emerging from the nut as time unfolds. It is the ability to see a breakthrough product, top talent, or valuable solution of the future that is currently hidden in the present situation" (p.5-6). Leadership must take teachers seriously and be consistent with the rules, expectations and transparent with the communications. This organization starts with communication, frequent team meetings and appreciation for what each individual member contributes. Leadership does this through making the teachers feel heard and understood by the leadership and that when those were in place it gave them a sense of value and drive to work hard and invest themselves every day. When leadership is able to give the confidence in individual work and support for success everyone could see a culture and climate that all wanted to be part of and all wanted to devote themselves to.

In today's challenging world of education during and through a pandemic, leadership is challenged with how to set up the organization and look deeply into the environments that are set up within. Michael Hynes (2020) challenges us; "It is our collective responsibility to foster engaging and meaningful environments" (p. 2). The organization must, as innovative leaders, look at the methods and places that the organization is engaging not only our students, but also the adults as well. If the organization thinks about the values that the organization holds for all within our organization, the leaders must start with the core values. Changing the focus to create an emotional atmosphere and physical environment of warmth, comfort, and safety, as well as demonstrating trust to adults and children alike will allow for respect, creativity, risk taking all with a pursuit of success (Hynes, 2020). Leadership will be the one guiding and giving direction to the organization culture from the expectations that the organization creates within the environment in terms of relationships and acceptance of all members. Thatchenkery & Metzker (2006) ask "What if more schools and families worked to reveal the best in their members" (p. 50)? By asking this question it is a call to innovative leaders to investigate appreciation and its importance in their work. The research findings which came from the Rosenthal experiments with rats, worms and "bloomers" are fascinating and tell of the environments the leaders create through their attention, feedback, communication, and tasks given to challenge. By giving appreciation (and not), along with its attributes there was a huge impact on both teachers and students (Thatchenkery & Metzker, 2006). Verheijen et al., (2020) speaks to the Pygmalion-effect as well as a daily leadership practice in that our outlook determines what we see. As innovative leaders in environments, the respect, trust, and atmosphere of acceptance will be key to investigating and infusing success into our organization's impact on both teachers and students and organizations (Thatchenkery & Metzker, 2006).

Relationships and empowering every member must be at the heart of a thriving organization. Being an innovative leader, one must look purposefully at building our relationships as the foundation to our functioning. Whitney (2019) states “at its best a thriving school is a community where everyone learns, grows, and has opportunities to discover their interests and strengths. It is a center of learning that brings out the best in everyone: students, parents, teachers, staff, and visitors” (p. 96). In building a thriving community with innovative leadership, the relationships you build will naturally bring about the members feeling that they too can lead and are a valued, critical member to the organization functioning. “Fundamentally, they are comfortable sharing power. Despite all the talk about empowerment, many leaders are too afraid to give up the control it implies” (Hill, et al., 2010, p. 637). The sharing and growing of leaders within are key to individuals being allowed their unique talents, the balance of relationship building to create stronger teams and allowing for all to be leaders in their own way for the success of the organization.

Innovation, transformative and appreciative leadership practices are lived through the organization each day and are continued to be reviewed and revamped. The relationships and empowerment through communication and appreciation and reflection all contribute to the organization's adaptation and growth with all members and as a whole.

Implications for Research in the Practitioner Setting

By looking at the specifics of family perceptions and perspective of school and the impact on well-being, one will be offered as leaders of the organization an opportunity to change and reflect the findings within the school. The research will impact the school through the conscientious efforts to examine school design around well-being and care. Curriculum and

environmental aspects of the school that individualize learning and the building blocks to flourishing in school become paramount will be influenced by the findings. Additionally, the awareness of family's viewpoint on what they want for their child and the factors that are within the school can become the connections for the families to rationalize their choice in this school design for their child as well as see that there is an effort create a culture and climate based off their desire for the child and a right to each child's ability to thrive in school, and life. The implications of the research will be important for the policy and procedures in the school, whereas they shall reflect the creation of culture and climate within our walls that holds school designed around each student's well-being, care, and ability to thrive through what is created.

The researcher also will produce a journal article from the implications of the researcher to influence and impact future school design ventures to see and use their own client and families to gain the unique lens into what they want for their child through their time in school, as well as how those characteristics and values can then be built, observed, challenges, and innovated into school design, curriculum standards, policy, and procedures within their own climate and culture that these create.

Summary of Practitioner Setting

Diving into the foundation of any organization can come from a positive viewpoint, though can also be stressful and revealing at times in ways that are often swept out of view. Through the willingness of both the researcher and the school setting allowing the intimate vantage of relationships, leadership, and structural contributions to the culture, the setting can continue to be on the leading forefront of innovative school design and change. When an organization has been in business for over 40 years change can be both hard and necessary for

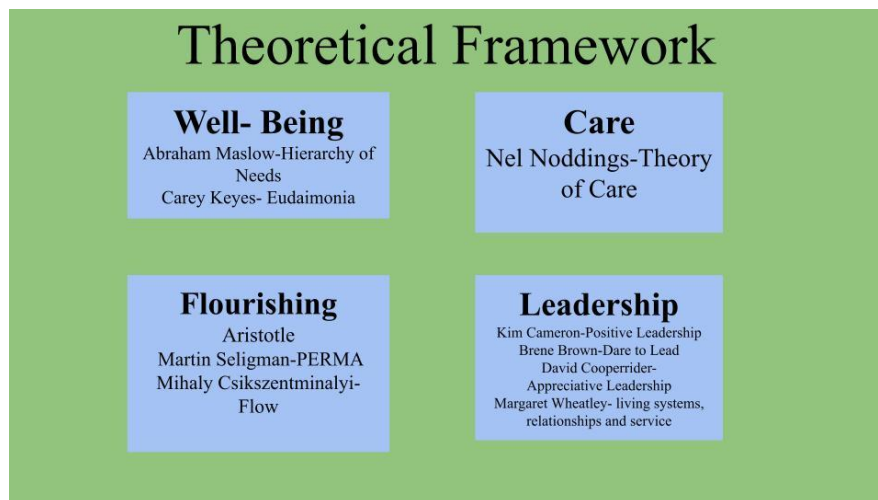
positive results and involvement. Through the careful guidance and expertise of leadership, and the dedicated team members of teachers and families' the results of the research will be far reaching and have great impact on the thriving and flourishing within the school for all. The expansion of the elementary school to the lower school which has been successful for decades, allows for new opportunity and vision to help continue to grow the organization. As the school moves forward with leadership ideas and school design around well-being, the families' and community will be a continued important voice into why this business and school model are so vital to children and the education field.

Section Three: Scholarly Review for the Study (Literature Review)

Theoretical Framework: Literature Review

Figure 1:

Researcher's Theoretical Framework (Miner, 2022)



With the pressure to achieve and a constant race for endless measured success, our schools can become places where well-being and ultimately flourishing is one of the last aspects examined. Researchers wonder and explore whether there is a need for a trade off between well-being and academic achievement (O'Shaughnessy, 2015). Ling et al. (2022) aimed their study at investigating student well-being and the trade-off of well-being and academic achievement during the (COVID-19) pandemic. Ling et al. (2022) found that the six dimensions of student well-being significantly related to their academic achievement. Most studies found a positive "trade-off" existing between well-being and achievement (Clarke, 2020). However, the majority of these studies only measured a single dimension of student well-being and its relationship with academic outcomes within a single subject (Ling et al., 2022). Ling et al.

(2022) investigates the multiple dimensions of student well-being with three different school subjects. The investigation on the multi-dimensions of student well-being, this study used the “trade-off” of well-being-achievement in one model. A current way of thinking in education pits achievement goals against the goals of well-being, this study finds that the relationship between student well-being and achievement is compatible, but not straightforward (Ling et al., 2022). As procedure and policy recommendations are made, there should be an avoidance of “all or nothing” thinking, which can lure policy makers into false dichotomies (Clarke, 2020, p. 623). Children, teachers, and the administration spend the days within the school walls, but often find the days to be stressful and anxiety provoking. The United States is ranked thirty-ninth in child well-being based on the flourishing index (Guzman, 2020). “Flourishing, however conceived, would, at the very least, require doing or being well in the following five broad domains of human life: (i) happiness and life satisfaction; (ii) health, both mental and physical; (iii) meaning and purpose; (iv) character and virtue; and (v) close social relationships” (VanderWeele, 2017). Flourishing implies feeling satisfied with life and having the ability to live to the fullest. “Human well-being or flourishing, however, consists in a much broader range of states and outcomes, certainly including mental and physical health, but also encompassing happiness and life satisfaction, meaning and purpose, character and virtue, and close social relationships” (VanderWeele, 2017).

Families can offer school personnel an outside perspective and have much at stake when they send their children off to participate in educational institutes. Looking through the family’s lens at what they want for their child in terms of well-being and thriving will be a unique addition to the research. Business Wire (2022) through Learn4Life looked to understand what families want from education through surveyed research. “It’s clear that the pandemic

substantially shifted parents' views on education, making them more assertive about their own decision-making power in their children's school" (Business Wire, 2022, p.1). Finding 89% of families say it is important to structure schools to serve individual students and understand that not all students learn in the same way (Business Wire, 2022). "Elected officials and educators need to recognize and support the role parents play in the education of their children and the changes they want to improve student outcomes" (Business Wire, 2022, p.2). Parents around the world agree they hope their children will be confident, empathetic, kind, happy, responsible, independent, honest and compassionate (Miller, 2018).

Through the culture and climate of the classrooms; the attitudes, environmental set-up, structure of the day, and expectations from inside and outside the schools; administration and teachers have the ability to examine, evaluate, and change their schools with a foundation of well-being and have flourishing as a result of what families desire for the purpose of schooling for their children.

Schools can be designed institutions, but today many schools are designed by default, with the structure and environment resting on a long-lasting history and purpose of schools, without a reflection on reform for the well-being of all within their schools. The evaluation for why and question of purpose of school can often be seen in the headlines of educational literature. Gunawarden et al. (2020) looked at the preconditions to flourishing through the structural necessities for achieving well-being in schools. The author's proposal is that before flourishing can be supported in teaching and learning that there are preconditions to flourishing that must exist in all schools, where all children have an equal chance of building capabilities to flourish (Gunawarden et al., 2020). This study uses the lens of Aristotle's Eudaimonia to examine structures and policies that must be in place to allow for flourishing in students. The

preconditions of flourishing are the utilization of well-being policies, well-being initiatives, and the well-being programs and staff training involved all prior to implementing well-being programs to allow for flourishing (Gunawarden et al., 2020). The where, when, and how the programs are being used have huge disparity in schools and this creates a lack of ability to support student flourishing (Gunawarden et al., 2020). What school is like is taken for granted, and the connectedness of young people to school, and of school design to purpose, is often missing (McLaughlin, 2015).

Leadership: Culture of Abundance

Strategies that are Key for High Performing, Flourishing Cultures

Martin Seligman (2012) explains that for organizations to create an atmosphere where the members are flourishing there are five key strategies to reach a state of high performance. Leaders must think and use P.E.R.M.A. (Positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishments) daily in their methods and business relationships. A culture of abundance is formed through relationships built on a foundation of positive communications. Starting with Positive emotions, thinking about the language and communications throughout the organization is paramount. The employees must have engagement through investment and value in their work, and that engagement in their work must be built from the relationships that are being consciously formed and utilized to build upon strengths. When employees can connect to the meaning of their work through feeling that they are part of something bigger than themselves it creates a lasting and positive effect in the culture as a whole. Lastly, Seligman (2012) speaks that flourishing is created when accomplishment is celebrated. A person's self-discipline is far more important than their IQ (Seligman, 2012). When leadership can take into account these five

strategies starting with the ways they treat, engage, and celebrate their employees, and how they speak and give meaning to the work they are doing, a culture of abundance is born. Individuals and relationships flourish. The Center for Positive Organizations (2009) agrees as they concentrate on strategies for leading positively: enabling positive climate, relationships, communication, and meaning. Throughout the process of creating a culture of abundance, vitality and learning are the keys to high performing, flourishing cultures. Elfrink et al. (2017) study's purpose is to report on both the process and the impact of two primary schools in the Netherlands enacting the Positive Education Programme (PEP). The intent of the PEP was to support children's well-being and to create a positive school climate. Within the program there were both practical strategies and activity-based resources which teachers reported as essential to being able to implement the PEP. The evaluation of the program had lots of positive feedback with staff and parents feeling positive about the core components, values workshop, life rules workshop, well-being and engagement workshop, and parental meeting. The strong training methodology seemed to have an impact on clear and consistent implementation of the program. The students were also involved in looking at their own evaluation of well-being and problem behavior within the school. Overall authors report that their findings in the study were encouraging and provide starting evidence of the positive impact a program such as PEP can have on a school and that it is key to have practical and hands-on activities for teachers to be able to implement the program (Elfrink et al., 2017).

Well- Being and Flourishing

Spreitzer et al. (2005) describes thriving and flourishing as an individual's experience with vitality and learning at work and the connections made to the social implications on positive

growth. Gasser et al. (2013) study explored students' awareness and feelings of positive student-teacher relationships when the classroom is emotionally supportive. The study looked at how students perceived teacher care and justice in students both with and without the risk of academic failure. The authors evaluated teacher observed emotional support to predict change in the student's recognition of teacher care and justice. The study was conducted with 1,200 5th graders through their move to 6th grade. This study shows that in the year prior to the study, students believe that in classrooms with low-quality teacher-student interactions, teacher care has decreased. What was also interesting was that the study showed that in classrooms where there was high emotional support from teachers it seemed to protect the students with high academic disengagement from developing negative feelings of teacher justice. What this study suggested overall is that with teachers' emotional support it becomes a protection of sorts for students in feeling high teacher care and justice, whether the student is high or low achieving (Gasser et al., 2013).

To flourish at work leaders must remember that it is the humans that make up our business and their experience at work will be the deciding factor in our success.

Having identified human beings as the greatest virtue of business, it is left to describe the part that this virtue can and should play in business practice. What must business leaders do to enable their charges to come more fully into beings as persons in communion able to know and love? In a word, what are the business ethics of human beings? (Sandelands, 2015 p.7)

In *Flow*, Csikszentmihalyi (1990) investigates "optimal experience" that can be known as flourishing. It is about finding a place where people can experience deep enjoyment, creativity,

and total involvement in life. Csikszentmihalyi(1990) states that we can control this and not just leave it to chance by taking specific strategies and applying them to otherwise mundane tasks. His interview found over and over that high performance came when there was high challenge, clear goals, a focus on energy and attention , continuous feedback, and loss of being self conscious about their performance. All of these strategies are ones in which leaders must look at their workplace and their employees and find the ability to practice and grow these daily. Strahan née Brown et al. (2018) study investigates the key aspect that the psychological environment in school is a powerful characteristic of teacher well-being and educational outcomes of the students. This study examined teachers' collective-efficacy (CE) and well-being. The study conducted a survey of teachers of their CE, as well as teacher interviews of the relationship between CE and leadership practices within their school experiences. There were four concluding themes to the data which attributed to teacher well-being and motivation: communication, learning, supporting roles and stress management. The overall key factor of this study was that it is of critical importance that professional relationships be focused on when looking at recruitment, retention and well-being in teachers (Strahan née Brown et al., 2018).

When leadership can imagine and project a flourishing culture it can become a culture of abundance. Inman's (2019) dissertation looked at specific behaviors that foster caring teacher-student relationships which motivate students to learn. The purpose of Inman's (2019) research was to look at teacher behaviors that either encouraged the positive student relationships or behaviors of the teacher that interrupted those relationships, which she classified as teacher bullying. Eleven teachers from central Illinois were interviewed and observed within their schools using the Nel Noddings' (2003) care theory. As the teachers' behaviors that were seen as caring in regard to the teacher-student relationships increased the students were more engaged

and misbehavior decreased. Out of Inman's (2019) research emerged three specific areas to create a climate which fosters positive teacher-student relationships: the first area is the establishment of a positive school atmosphere through cohesive interpersonal relationships between teachers, students, administration and parents, the second area is an agreement being developed of behavioral norms for teachers that focuses on student needs and wants as well as avoid aggressive discipline, the third area is to identify and support/educate staff whom are using unacceptable techniques and allow for the development of better classroom management systems (Inman, 2019).

Cooperrider (1999) describes positive energy as a powerful agent that will guide and determine the actions and aligns this thought process with the Helios effect; even plants grow in the direction of sunlight. Humans, just like plants, will be attracted to sunlight; positivity, connection, energy, and a culture of abundance that allows for flourishing individuals and teams. When a leader can remember that no matter what the product they are producing, the root of it all is the human beings within knowing they are valued, appreciated, and encouraged to grow. As Simon Sinek (2011) states, "a community is a group of people who agree to grow together."

Literature Review of Meeting Families' Aspirations for their Children

Children Learn What They Live

If a child lives with criticism, he learns to condemn.

If a child lives with hostility, he learns to fight.

If a child lives with ridicule, he learns to be shy.

If a child lives with shame, he learns to feel guilty.

If a child lives with tolerance, he learns to be patient.

If a child lives with encouragement, he learns confidence.

If a child lives with praise, he learns to appreciate.

If a child lives with fairness, he learns justice.

If a child lives with security, he learns to have faith.

If a child lives with approval, he learns to like himself.

If a child lives with acceptance and friendship, he learns to find love in the world. (Nolte, 1955)

Educators realize that what surrounds children, from attitudes to habits, children often mimic and persevere. There is often research, talk, and methods discussed regarding the partnerships with families from home to school and building relationships that lead to student's success. It is also common to find research on the school environment and its impact on well-being (Tapia-Fonllem, et al., 2020). The missing link in the research is often the families' aspirations for the child in and through the school. In taking a deeper look into how schools might meet their families' desires and aspirations, families can provide insight into both personalized approaches to education and what their children will need in the future. Robson et al. (2019) studied the perspective of 155 parents/carer and 285 practitioners in England of children's well-being. The study used online surveys to look at children under 8 years old which is under-researched. Many of the results agreed that high levels of laughter, fun, feeling good about one self, feeling listened to, good family relationships, time and space to play, and ability to express thoughts and feelings all contribute significantly to children's perception of well-being. Familiar relationships relied heavily on love and practitioners relied on children being listened to. In summary the study concluded that it is obvious that the adults' points of view are considered and have a high impact in terms of importance, however we must find a way to understand children's perspectives as well (Robson et al., 2019).

Tapia-Fonllem et al. (2020) study investigates where well-being, caring, relationships, school-design and environmental considerations, safety, and the balance of knowledge and

academics all fit into both families' wishes and school design. In creating the school culture and climate, it takes all the members to collaborate and to feel supported by the elements within the school. Tapia-Fonllem, et al. (2020) note that the school environment is made up of the relationships that occur with all the members of the school formed by the structural, personal, and functional factors that make up the school. The physical, academic, and social structures create the environment in which well-being blooms.

In order to promote subjective well-being, schools must facilitate the optimal development of people by accepting that all students possess different strengths, recognize its students' abilities, and offer school environments that imply positivity in aspects concerning the physical, social, and didactic spheres of school life.

(Tapia-Fonllem, et al., 2020)

When well-being is a foundational focus of the school environment, research shows that students benefit from the lifelong advantages of well-being. Newland et al.(2019) studied children 8 to 13 years of age from the midwestern United States in both interviews and mapping exercises. The goal was to explore children's feelings of school relationships and the impacts those relationships had in ways that supported or undermined emotional well-being. This study created a seasonal metaphor for children's experiences with emotional well-being. The children's emotional experiences with teachers and peers were also represented with seasonal themes. Children expressed complex emotions regarding their relationships with peers and teachers. Newland et al (2019) study indicated a series of ways to improve school relationship and climate. The ways in which teachers provide feedback, teacher and peer behavior and ability to feel listened to and allowance to express emotions in the classroom all were factors in the experiences children had in their classrooms (Newland et al., 2019).

Ed Diner (2011) found that happiness is the root of well-being and that with happiness comes longer lives, fewer illnesses, longer relationships, and produces more creativity, ambition, desire to help others, and the list of positive outcomes goes on. When well-being is important in schools intrinsic motivation, academic achievement, school satisfaction, decreases in problem behaviors, and flourishing are all enhanced (Buecker et al., 2018). If you feel better, you learn better. "The most important reason to care about well-being is that we, as leaders, have been trusted with the world's most valuable resources: children" (Buecker et al., 2018). Graham et al. (2016) study is rooted in Australia and its implications going internationally focuses on the growing intent of social policy to look at the well-being of children and young people within the world of education. The study speaks to the challenge to define and promote and improve well-being when it is not clearly defined, and methods seem sporadic. When looking deeper to find concepts and practices surrounding well-being in schools, Graham et al. (2016) conducted a mixed method study in policy, teacher and student perspectives and recognition theory. Findings pointed heavily to the key role relationships play and particularly aligned Honneth's modes of recognition for well-being in schools (as cited in Graham et al., 2016). Axel Honneth draws a distinction between three types of recognition: love, respect, and social esteem. Honneth includes that a sense of belonging to a community and thus extended to the school and classroom is key for a sense of well-being in school and the relationships within the schools (Graham et al., 2016).

Families want their schools to promote well-being. Millennial parents are starting to recognize that it is not enough to be book smart anymore; it is well-being that is going to take the children into the future that they desire for them (Morrison, 2021). Buecker et al. (2018) remind educators and leaders that schools are not just places where students acquire academic skills, but places where connections happen, where students experience community and culture, where they

develop their personality and social selves, and all of these influence student's subjective well-being. Families want their children to feel valued and belong, both crucial parts of well-being and our environments (physical and subjective) are what will allow for these within our schools. An emphasis on strong relationships, positive communication, risk-taking, self-confidence, and ability to manage physical and mental health all create well-being as a priority in both schools and families (Parr, 2014). Parr (2014) asks what does well-being look like in our schools, homes, and community, and how can schools and families work together to promote well-being? Educators and families alike want their children to experience positive mental health and well-being. Research by Hen & Goroshit (2016) indicates two factors; one that teacher's social emotional competence is crucial in creating positive learning environments and two that research on teachers' social emotional abilities is limited. Hen & Goroshit (2016) hypothesize that a teacher's self-efficacy beliefs leads to empathy among teachers and teachers' emotional abilities in the classroom. When a teacher believes that they can self-regulate their emotions in the classroom, empathy being given and received is dramatically increased. The teacher will show empathy towards their peers and their students with an increase dependent upon their self-efficacy. Prosocial behaviors and positive emotions in young adults also indicated self-efficacy increases. Both belief in teaching abilities and emotional intelligence were shown to have positive correlation in displaying empathy in the classroom and through the teacher's relationships (Hen & Goroshit, 2016).

Carney & Parr (2014) define that positive mental health allows a person to feel, think, and act in a manner that allows for enjoyment of life and ability to cope with challenges. They feel that having resilience, commitment to an active lifestyle, and the experience of flourishing bring about positive mental health and well-being. (Carney & Parr, 2014). Lopez et al. (2021)

examines student's social well-being at school and the joint contributions of the individual, school, and family.

These findings call for integrated policies and practices to foster students' sense of belonging, feeling integrated, and contribution to their schools, with a focus on school level interventions to improve social well-being in schools through positive and engaging school climates that foster students' sense of agency. (Lopez et al., 2021)

The climate and culture created for students allows for well-being to be born from within.

Through the policies, procedures, and environmental set-up, students' well-being is supported and allows for flourishing in schools.

Parents want their children to learn in schools that are creative, flexible, and have a global outlook (Morrison, 2021). When looking for a "good school," Families often do not even know where to start and have to consider their own values in what the school provides and how their child will fit into that design. Benbow (2012) interviewed Joseph Murphy at Vanderbilt's College and suggests that parents look for three things in schools; a place where every student is known, cared for, and respected, where they are a member of a "family," a place where their student is challenged and supported, and a place where the teachers and leaders think and hold themselves responsible for achieving the first two. Taxer et al. (2018) looks at the results from two studies of teacher-student relationships. The basis of this study results from the impact of teaching being an emotionally exhausting profession and looking for tools that can protect teachers from becoming emotionally overextended. The first Taxer et al. (2018) study looked solely at the teacher's perceptions of the teacher-student relationships and the resulting indirect effect of emotional exhaustion. The second Taxer et al. (2018) study engaged students'

assessments of teacher-student relationships. The results of these two students clearly indicated that by increasing the amount of enjoyment and decreasing the amount of anger through high quality teacher-student relationships it protects the teachers from emotional exhaustion (Taxer et al., 2018).

Lopez et al. (2021) theorize that a positive school climate includes fair and known rules, high expectations of teachers and students, positive relationships, and fair norms and treatment. Schools become places where academic achievement is hand in hand with social development. Brill et al. (2017) add that creating a culture of wellness starts with parents engaged in making both student and school wellness a priority. Schools too need to inform families about wellness and how they can support attitudes, behaviors, and the environment at both home and school. Carney and Parr (2014) add that the classroom community can support social-emotional learning through daily practices which identify and manage emotions, creation of goals, communicating, caring for each other, initiation and sustain of relationships, and demonstrating respect for self and others. Where academics, grades, and test scores were prior list toping attributes of schools, they are now replaced with desires for students to learn and be supported to respect, care, and think about their own and other's actions and impact.

In thinking about how to best balance and support the academic obligation of schooling and supporting well-being we have to start with looking at the re-writing about how knowledge is delivered. Wexler (2019) states that elementary education may have their structure all wrong by concentrating on math and literacy so heavily. Altun's(2013) study was conducted on 178 student teachers in their 4th year of University through the education program obtaining their Bachelor's in Education. Through a questionnaire and 15 randomly selected interviewees the research looked for the effects of a pre-formed classroom culture on their professional

development. The student teachers carried out their own teaching practices into a pre-created classroom climate with already established communication, routines, management systems, and authority in which the student teachers felt they had extraordinarily little integration into these aspects. This study indicated that student teachers need to be given more flexibility, time and freedom in the classroom in order to establish and display their own abilities in creating classroom culture and teaching skills to the students in that area, which would ultimately increase their professional development. The findings conclude that classroom culture and climate is as important for student learning as it is for teaching. What was indicated is that University teaching programs should evaluate the timing and length of pre-service teachers being in the classrooms, as well as more opportunities to practice teaching skills as an established teacher would throughout the entire year in the classroom. In addition, creation of communication and shared visions between the Universities and the school settings would allow for expansion of these teaching practices. Overall, the importance of preservice teachers experiencing the creation of classroom culture has a high impact on their professional development and thus into their future teaching careers (Altun, 2013).

When we think about human nature, the experiences and culture around us shape us, and if we build knowledge and learning in schools based on the student's prior knowledge and experiences, the learning should come at an easier and more natural pace. "Like Velcro, knowledge sticks best to other related knowledge" (Wexler, 2019, p.5). Though Wexler (2019) cautions that the better educated families have a wider variety of experiences and array of exposures to knowledge at younger ages, which can cause disparity in knowledge and make classroom culture and academics more of a challenge. Wexler (2019) coined "the Matthew effect," where the snowballing of the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer, in education

the earlier we start to build children's knowledge the more chance of narrowing this gap. When American teachers interviewed by Wexler (2019) were able to change to a content focused curriculum where critical thinking and learning was foundational they found student's flourishing. While the Center for Education Policy Analysis looked at how parents research and choose schools (Greatschools, 2013), and found that 52% look up school's academic standing and reputation, they also quoted a D.C. parent who states, "choosing a school based on just data is like dating based on just medical records" (Greatschools, 2013, p. 12). Families need to know what it feels like to be in the school, what atmosphere and relationships are cared for, as well as how their child will be treated as an individual.

Parents who are looking for an excellent school for their children should key in on these features: respect and concern for students; a culture of mutual support among students; and challenging academic and personal goals. An educational atmosphere with these ingredients fosters success. (Benbow, 2012, p.2)

Thinking into the future, we know that school's main purpose is the delivery of knowledge, but what that knowledge encompasses is a wider perspective and families are beginning to see this.

Academic achievement will always be one of the key foundations for education, but it'll be measured in a more holistic way, for example alongside academic results, experiences helping students to explore, grow and think critically are already vital and that's only going to increase. (Ecoff in Morrison, 2021, p. 4)

Care

The idea of caring is becoming more of a focus to our student's learning. It is argued that it is sliding into first place in priorities and coming into light at a crashing rate with all eyes on

schools through the pandemic. Social and Emotional learning is being thought of as the “missing piece” of education in many cases. Where it is integrated, healthy, harmonious classrooms are born (Richardson, 2021). Newland et al. (2019) looked at children’s well-being in the United States. Students ages 8 -12 participated in both an interview and a mapping activity to illustrate and describe aspects and influences on their well-being in their lives. The study looked at the fundamental nature of well-being from a child’s perspective and the role and ways in which school life influenced their well-being. The research indicated that school did indeed have an impact on children’s well-being in terms of safety, positive environments, teachers attitudes and affect and supporting curriculum and rules. The second indication was that the relationships within their school were important to their well-being, including peers, teachers and administration. The third conclusion is children view the school setting as one with two parts of academic and social and the importance of supportive academics, unstructured social time and timing and support for when those two aspects are combined. The results of the study showed that school life, environment, culture, and relationships were all vital aspects of children’s well being from their perspective and understanding of well-being (Newlan et al., 2019).

Where classrooms are concentrating on social and emotional subjects and learning students and teachers are recognizing they are valid and welcome and thus their emotional well-being is important at school. As teachers are checking in with students, they too can lean into these strategies which become part of the classroom culture, giving students the tools to communicate their feelings and needs, which of course creates positive culture and positive social and subjective well-being (Richardson, 2021). Goroshit & Hen (2016) discussed the important factor of teacher’s social emotional competencies playing a significant role in increasing the social emotional learning within the school. Empathic teachers displayed more

positive communication with their students, increased encouragement to form their own empathetic relationships, and also showed success in motivating their students. Goroshit & Hen (2016) interviewed 543 teachers from central Israel to look at both teacher self-efficacy and emotional self-efficacy and its impact on teacher empathy. The resulting data showed that both had an impact, however teacher self-efficacy was greater. What this study revealed was the indication that increase in social emotional learning and self-efficacy will have a positive impact on the school and the relationships within. These findings will link to both teacher performance and well-being of the teachers, this in turn have an impact on students, admin, and the school (Goroshit & Hen, 2016).

Families can begin to see the impact of these tools and skills being taught in school and “parents increasingly value soft skills and personal attitudes above proficiency in academic subjects” (Morrison, 2021, p.1). A focus on student well-being should partner with family well-being as well. This creates a core pillar for teachers to support a child’s well-being, but also reflect and address their own wellness; recognizing the inherent strengths of the parent and supporting their personal development, motivation, and self-actualization, also come to play in the school to family partnership (Liu & Helo-Villegas, 2020). “While it is true that we live in a society where competition is important, education reformers sometimes forget that success depends on cooperation and teamwork as much as it depends on ambition, perhaps even more so” (Benbow, 2012, p.2). Hasim et al.’s (2019) research investigates empathy being explored as an important skill for students to acquire and use within the classroom. Empathy was looked at on two occasions: using empathy in project-based learning through a design thinking approach and promoting empathy as a classroom culture. Empathy is defined in this study as an act of understanding and thinking and feeling for other people. There was indication of using empathy

related skills such as communication, observation, decision making and positive relationships with their peers as an integral part of their learning process. The increase of empathy being used as a direct teaching approach through the design thinking creates a positive classroom culture and positive teacher-student relationships. The more that teamwork and positive collaboration were used in the classroom and as an engagement technique the more the positive culture increased in the classroom on a whole. Empathy increased both students and teachers' understanding and perceptions of people with different backgrounds, cultures, language and or race than theirs. Empathy also allowed for insight into emotions, expectations and fears and produced more creative and functional outcomes for projects. Hasim et al. (2019) found that empathy is a vital skill and the culture created by the increase of use of empathy in the classroom both embraces individual students and positive relationships with peers and with the teachers. Students' support for one another stems from the relationships built within the walls of school, the culture and climate of caring must run deeply and be infused in every aspect of the school design, starting with authentic relationships between all the members of the school community at every level.

Relationships have at the heart of each a sense of belonging to and with each other. Bronfenbrenner (1998) includes both family and schools as microsystems that offer a sense of belonging. This belonging happens through the formation of relationships which help to develop skills to relate, understand, and interact in a social world (Lopez et al., 2021). Social well-being is defined as "individuals' perception of the quality of their relationships with other people, their neighbors, and their communities" (Lopez et al., 2021, p 2) which is the foundation of relationships. Schools must start with the teaching of how to have relationships with others, which includes getting along with others, care, respect, and building understanding of others.

Teaching emotional regulation helps students to get along with peers and teachers, learn what prosocial behaviors are and how they are exhibited, and adjust to changing situations around them (Furlong, Gilman, and Huebner, 2014). By teaching these tools and allowing for relationships to be foundational to the curriculum and school climate design teaches children, their families, and the school community to prioritize well-being. In Greatschools (2013) report they state that 76% answered “good teachers” as the top criterion in evaluating schools. We do not have good teachers without strong relationships. Dr. Ecoff (as cited in Morrisson, 2021) theorizes that it is not enough to be book smart that children need to work in teams, from different cultures, and develop resilience and creativity to see the “art of possible”. All of these skills come through relationships and education in the skills it takes to form, keep, and allow the process of relationships in schools to happen. As we look inside schools for relationships at the heart, we also need to encourage families to network and find support in each other for their own well-being (Liu & Helo-Villegas, 2020). Poulou (2016) examined the relationships at 92 public schools in central Greece through completing multiple emotional intelligence scales in 238, 5-6 year old students, along with 170 students being interviewed in regard to teachers support, this study looked to evaluate teacher-student relationships. This study examined two factors which relate to teacher-student relationships: emotional intelligence, and social emotional learning. Poulou (2016) looked at the alignment and agreement of teacher perceptions versus student perceptions of the teacher-student relationship. The results of the analysis of the scales and interviews indicated that social emotional learning and the teacher’s beliefs in its implementation in the classroom created positive teacher-student relationships. Poulou's (2016) study also indicated that there was not an agreement between teachers and students regarding their teacher-student relationships, however the agreement between them did not indicate that these

relationships were not important, more so that teachers and students evaluated the presence of teacher support differently (Poulou, 2016).

Teaching the perspective taking that comes through relationships is vital through problem solving and networking. Allowing students to see that there is more than one way to solve a problem through project-based learning and opening the avenues for networking with peers and mentors all build upon relationships skills that will lead to academic and life successes (Barile, 2020). Relationships are the start of the culture of wellness that we look forward to at school innovation to how we will adapt and infuse this into our practices. Cellitti & Wright (2019) created a study which is a springboard off of the Framework for K-12 Science Education (NRC, 2012) which states that “children are natural born investigators” (p.54). This study indicates that when teachers are encouraged to cultivate classroom cultures that have students’ ideas, knowledge and abilities as a top priority, along with teaching methods that encourage students to question and create solutions through science and engineering techniques for solutions to problems current to their culture and community, the classroom culture expands to peer collaboration and relationship building skills. What they found is that even if and when student’s lack the knowledge or understanding by posing questions their curiosity is encouraged and they consider a broad range of thinking, questioning, and solutions. The research looked at 52 free and readily available science lessons and found that there was a lack of support for these science standards of asking questions and defining problems. What this indicated is that this practice is overlooked and often lessons rely on teacher questions and teacher driven problems. Overall, the article looked at a teacher making minor adjustments to their methods, increasing student access to curiosity within and in turn increasing positive classroom climate (Cellitti, J., & Wright, C, 2019).

Student well-being has been a focus of much research in the past decade; however, it is in the limelight as the world grapples with education and its role of wellness in schools after the pandemic (Hynes, 2020). The school designed around care, knowledge building, relationships, and the environmental attributes of the climate that is resulted from our actions and design play a crucial role in schools moving forward (Noddings, 2010). Considering the families' aspirations for their child and how they see well-being in education brings about a new piece of the latest research and direction of education and school design.

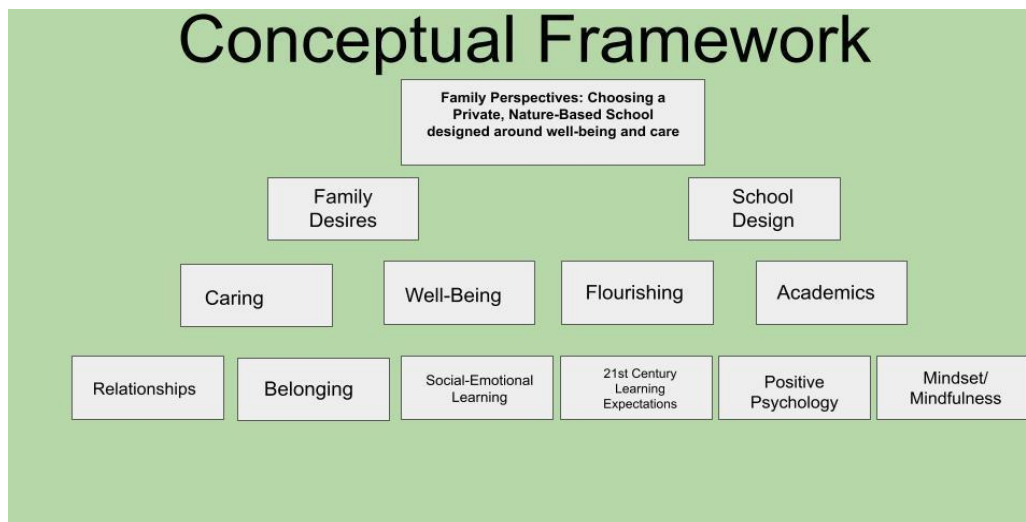
Conceptual Framework

This doctoral study and dissertation was focused on the perspective of families' choice in a school that is designed around positive school culture, care, and with a foundation of children's well-being and flourishing. Smith et al.(2020) study collected data from 2,033 teachers from 112 elementary schools in southern and midwestern United States to demonstrate the relationship between principal influence and four aspects of organizational climate: institutional vulnerability, collegial leadership, achievement press and professional teacher behavior. The impact of the study showed that the principal has a strong influence on school climate and that a positive climate is critical for the well-functioning of schools. The climate of the school has many influences on job attitudes, citizenship behaviors, ethics, safety, innovations, individual team performance and trust. The challenge that principals have is to promote effective teaching and student learning in an ever changing diversity of school environments. In conclusion it is the principal that is charged with the responsibility to make school environmental changes, provide instructional vision and uphold structures for student success (Smith et al., 2020).

By looking at the unique perspective of families' as to the role that schools play in their children's well-being, schools can have a different lens. Families' view as to why this school's design and aspect of the school that has an impact on their student's well-being, will influence both professional practitioners and the future of education and research alike, as they adapt and reflect into the future methods, curriculum and environment.

Figure 2

Researcher's Conceptual Framework (Miner, 2022)



The conceptual framework allowed the researcher to draw conclusions prior to the research being conducted, map out the variables that may be used in the study and the interplay between them. The researcher used the conceptual framework to code the data collected. Choosing the main aspects of the conceptual framework these became the starting deductive codes for the initial reading and coding of the data, to then develop themes. The researcher's understanding that the school has aspects of the conceptual framework; caring, well-being, flourishing, and academics, as a balance to their foundation and philosophy of operating, and that all of this may or may not differ from family desires for their child in school. The researcher also

understood that the interplay between the second level of the conceptual framework may or may not produce impact and influence through the aspects of school design and family desires in relationships formed in school, a sense of belonging, social-emotional learning, 21st century learning expectations, and positive psychology and mindset/ mindfulness and the ways in which each of these aspects impact and influence student well-being, as seen in the families' perspective and lived experiences at the school.

Gaps in literature related to focus of practice

The gaps in the literature stem from taking the families' perspective of what role schools play in their child's well-being. This too holds the families' perspective of how well-being fits into school design, curriculum, climate, policy, and procedure. While much research has been done on a balance of academics and aspects of well-being, there is not as much completed from the families' perspective. An interesting viewpoint would be how families believe this should be balanced in schools, and what that balance might look like or might families' desire as a balance for their child. Schools often have to listen and adapt to different stakeholders' desires and policy implementation, however it is not common practice to use families' perspective.

The families also enter into a sort of "blind" trust in the relationship between home and sending their children off to school. The literature speaks to the importance of the relationships with families and in their involvement in schools; however, a deeper look is warranted to be researched and published regarding families' trust in the system that the schools' philosophy and curriculum design, schedule, setting, and environment take into account what is best for children in terms of well-being. Research can and should go into more depth as to what aspects of the school day the family feels could change, adapt, and be enhanced with reflection and innovation.

Literature could be expanded in looking at the changes that have happened in the focus upon schools since the COVID-19 pandemic. Looking at the focus of well-being in school, upon students, and what adaptations were made would be one aspect. An additional aspect could be researched and enhanced with understanding what characteristics of well-being need to be supported in schools, what or how those aspects have had influence on different members of the schools, students, teachers, and families, and finally what aspects of the school structure has changed

The literature also lacked findings and research on what families desire and their perspective on when and how to balance the academic and well-being needs in schools. Leaning the question of what gets set aside, compensated, or removed from current methods and structures to allow for well-being. The research and literature is plenty on the importance and the shift in school leadership and teaching for a need to focus on well-being and aspects of well-being being prioritized in schools; however lacks the specifics of what families's feel should be accommodated through this shift.

The literature gap also exists in a specific investigation into organizational and leadership changes within school post pandemic and how those changes and innovations have impact and influence to the members.

As families look through their own independent lens at schools today, educators and the leaders in schools have much to learn about aspirations and desires of families. Schools can take those perspectives and see how those influence the students, as well as can be built into practices which are the core of school design.

Summary of Scholarly Review

As education and families partner and come through the pandemic and take an intentional look at what school is for, there became a focus on a balance between academics and well-being. How schools and families could align to make sure that school had children, teachers, families, and Administration's well-being in mind quickly seemed to prioritize over academic achievement. Right behind that though became the panic that students were falling behind, teachers not being prepared, and the school's feeling that they were failing to meet previous set benchmarks for students and the schools. Schools are being trusted to do what is best for its students and schools ultimate products are a balanced student that contributes positively to society. Schools must take into account positive organization attributes and functioning, combined with appreciative leadership traits. Using these concepts schools can be led and have the central purpose being designed around care, well-being, and flourishing within their community.

Families' aspirations for their children encompass the aspects of well-being, flourishing, and thriving in schools. By combining both the families' desires and taking a deeper investigation into the culture and climate which makes up the environment in our schools the impact upon well-being becomes evident. Dissection of what positive mental health looks like in schools, highlights that educational organizations are beginning to prioritize the skills which incorporate well-being attributes in their students.

The relationships created by each and every stakeholder and student in schools are the foundation of well-being, positive organizations, flourishing, and mental and physical health.

Relationships matter at every level and in each aspect of how our schools function and their basis for their philosophies and operating standards.

Ultimately as families realize the place in which schools hold value to well-being and these align or not in their own families' perspective, this opens doors for families making the choice in where, when, and how their children are educated into the future.

Children learn what they live. The culture and climate which is built around children through home, school, and community infuse the humans that are turned out. School as an organization has a big job to do, to turn out a product of a human that makes a positive impact on others and has a core of positive well-being. As the education world makes its way through the pandemic, the focus on student well-being has come to the forefront, even though there has been research for decades about the positive impact of focusing on well-being in our students and teachers upon the education that is the "end product". What draws families to choose schools through school design and balance of academic and social needs, comes into play as families closely examine what they want for their children from school. Allowing for a change in the lens to ensure that students well-being, families well-being, and our teacher and leaders all create thriving and flourishing in our schools is a big change and innovation in what school is for. Happiness in all those that enter and interact with our schools can only have one result and that is for a positive impact and influence on the happiness and well-being of society as a whole.

Section 4: Contribution to Research

Introduction to the Contribution to Research

This qualitative phenomenological study was designed to explore the lived experiences of elementary school families who chose to have their child attend a nature based school; created around care and flourishing and the perspectives they have on well-being in schools; its impact and benefits to their students, as well as the priority it should have in school. The study is framed around the following research questions: From the families' perspective, does well-being belong as a priority in school and if so what aspects of well-being should be prioritized? What elements of the school's mission and philosophy promote well-being and what are the impacts? When choosing this school for your child were there aspects of well-being part of that decision for your family and child? What do you want in terms of school priorities for well-being outcomes and/or benefits for your child?

A large body of research has been conducted in well-being to understand, measure, and predict the conditions under which well-being occurs and the methods schools and teachers can employ to increase well-being in students (Newland et al. 2019, 2022; Ni, 2022; Smith, 2020; Strahan née Brown, 2018; Stride, 2022; Tapia-Fonllem, et al., 2020; Taxer, et al., 2018; VanderWeele, T.J., 2017; Weisberg, A. , 2014; Wexler, N., n.d.). Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic there was not the same focus and literature of research as to well-being however in schools and thus there has now been a shift to focus on the negative impacts since the pandemic upon student well-being. Many studies have explored the attributes which characterize and contribute to well-being; with the COVID pandemic have these conditions been explored stemming from deep concern for our students within schools. Families made choices in school modalities for their children for many reasons and well-being of their students could have been a

large part of their choice. However, a gap in current research exists with regard to the perceptions of families in regards to their desires for their child related to well-being in schools and how our schools impact our students from the families perspective.

Results/Findings of the Research Study

This phenomenological analysis investigated the perspectives of families of elementary school students regarding the impact and outcomes of well-being in school. Each participant shared their lived experiences as it pertains to their individual family and student and reflected upon this in individual semi-structured interviews, the conversation and discussion that was led through the focus group, and the researchers analysis of school artifacts which connected to both the interviews and the focus group. The questions that were asked of each participant are listed in Appendices A and B.

Participants & Setting

The sixteen family participants (13 attending the focus group and three family interviews) in this study represent the families within the same private school organization, which is now in its third year in operation. The schools are co-located on the same physical campus as an early learning center, serving birth through Pre-Kindergarten students, which has operated for over 40 years, in a rural New England, seacoast town, with a total population of 240 students, the elementary school serves 20 students in grades K-4. As a private school, admission is based on an interview and admissions system that has resulted in some matriculation from the lower school and some from outside public inquiry to create diversity in the student population.

The participants represent a range of experience with private school education, length of involvement with the organization, as well as a diversity in their family make-up. The

participants do however lack economic diversity as all their families all are paying private school tuition and have the financial ability to afford tuition and made that choice in choosing the school. The participants include five male and eight female family members for the focus group and three maternal figures and one paternal figure for the semi-structured interviews.

Table 3

Table of Participants in Study (Miner, 2023)

Code: F=Focus Group I= Interview	Demographic	FamilyDynamic
F1	Mother present at Focus Group session. Mother is a business professional	Mother and Father married and two children daughter 7 and son 10
F2	Father present at Focus Group. Father is an educator of high school students	Mother and Father married and two children daughter 2 and son 10
F3	Mother present at Focus Group. Mother is an accountant for business setting	Homosexual couple, partnered and one child, daughter 7
F4	Father present at Focus Group. Father is an educator of University students	Mother and Father married and one child, son 6

F5	Mother present at Focus Group. Mother is a business professional	Mother and Father married and two children son 10 and daughter 14
F6	Mother present at Focus Group. Mother is an business professional	Mother and Father married and three children, daughter 1, daughter 4 and daughter 6
F7	Father present at Focus Group. Father is an emergency worker personnel	Mother and Father married and three children, daughter 1, daughter 4 and daughter 6
F8	Father present at Focus Group. Father is an public service professional	Mother and Father married and three children, daughter 5, daughter 8 and son 9
F9	Mother present at Focus Group. Mother is an stay at home parent	Mother and Father married and two children daughter 4 and son 7
F10	Father present at Focus Group. Father is an military officer	Mother and Father married and two children daughter 4 and son 7
F11	Mother present at Focus Group. Father is an educator of high school students	Mother and Father married and one child daughter 7

F12	Both Mother and Father present, both professors at local University, Mother originates from India, Father 1st generation American	Mother and Father married and two children daughter 4 and daughter 6
F13	Mother present at Focus Group. Mother is an educator of elementary school students	Mother and Father married and three children, daughter 6 months, daughter 8 and son 9
I1	Both Mother and Father present, both professors at local University, Mother originates from India, Father 1st generation American	Mother and Father married and two children daughter 4 and daughter 6
I2	Mother present at interview. Mother is a professional branding coach and business mentor	Mother and father married and two children son 1 and daughter 9
I3	Mother present at interview. Mother is a college professor	Mother and Father married and two children daughter 2 and son 10

Values Coding

Values Coding (Saldana, 2021) applies codes consisting of three elements, value, attitude, and belief to examine a participant’s perspectives or worldviews. In coding the data collected

through the interviews, focus group, and school artifacts the research found the following elements and aspects related to the participants' (the families) perspective of values, attitudes, and beliefs regarding well-being through their statements.

Figure 3

Families' Perspective of Well-Being in Schools (Miner, 2022)

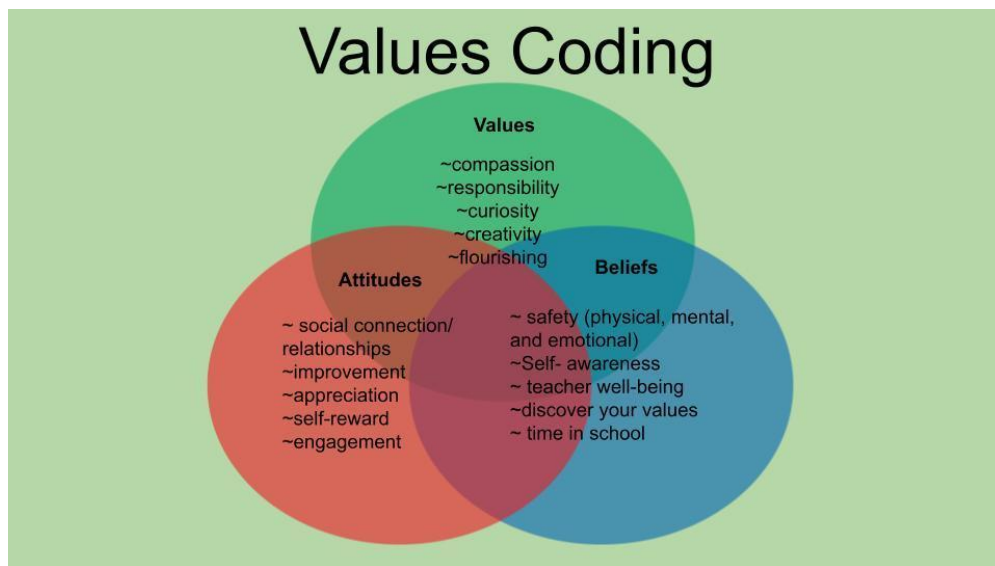


Figure 3: Families' Perspective of Well-Being in Schools (Miner, 2022)

Values

The families reported throughout the focus group and interview process that they value that school will be a place where responsibility and compassion in/ for self and others will be taught, modeled, and grown in their experiences at school. This was mentioned as a value of compassion for others and self in focus group members two, three, six, eleven, and twelve, and all three interviews. The families of multiple focus group members; one, two, seven, and ten, and also interview member two value that the school is a place where both curiosity and creativity are the foundations of learning. Lastly, families of eight out of the thirteen participants in the focus group and all three interviews value that school is a place that embodies and appreciates

flourishing to the point that methods and school is designed around student well-being and flourishing.

Attitudes

Eight out of the thirteen participants in the focus group and all three interviews carry the attitude regarding well-being that social connections and the relationships which surround their child will influence and impact their students greatly. The families of multiple focus group members; two, three, six, eleven, and twelve, and also all three interview members held strongly that the development of relationships and understanding how they work and our role in relationships leads to individual and school well-being. Additionally, families of focus group members; one, three, nine, and thirteen, and also interview members one and three hold the attitude that improvement, appreciation, and self reward allow for awareness and insight of self and others. Gaining the ability to reflect on your own improvements, and value your own rewards gives way to being able to appreciate and see that, then give back to others through appreciation was an attitude that focus group members two and four and interview members one and three shared with the researcher. Lastly, families bring the attitude that it is the students, teachers, administration, and families that must actively engage to create well-being. Each member of both the focus group and the individual interviews felt that all the factors must partner and align through engagement with each other and through investment in well-being education.

Beliefs

The families of focus group members two, three, six, seven, eleven, and twelve and all three interview members hold a set of beliefs for how well-being looks and is enacted in schools, starting with safety (emotional, physical and mental). Families of ten out of the thirteen

participants in the focus group and all three interviews shared the belief that self awareness and teacher well-being is the key to well-being in their students. Discovery about who you are, how you relate, and what leads to personal well-being and flourishing drive the climate in school for all was a relatable belief and aspect for the focus group members one, five, and ten and interview members two and three. Additionally, families of five out of the thirteen participants in the focus group and all three interviews feel strongly that the teachers must practice, understand, and value their own well-being. Furthermore they feel the administration must monitor and support teacher well-being in school(all participants). All of these beliefs lead from and into the fact that students spend a majority of their childhood in school. Their days are spent at school and this is the primary place where students develop their sense of self and sense and ability to relate to others was important and mentioned by the families of seven out of the thirteen participants in the focus group and all three interviews.

Figure 4

In-Vivo and Values Coding of Recurring Themes (Miner, 2023)

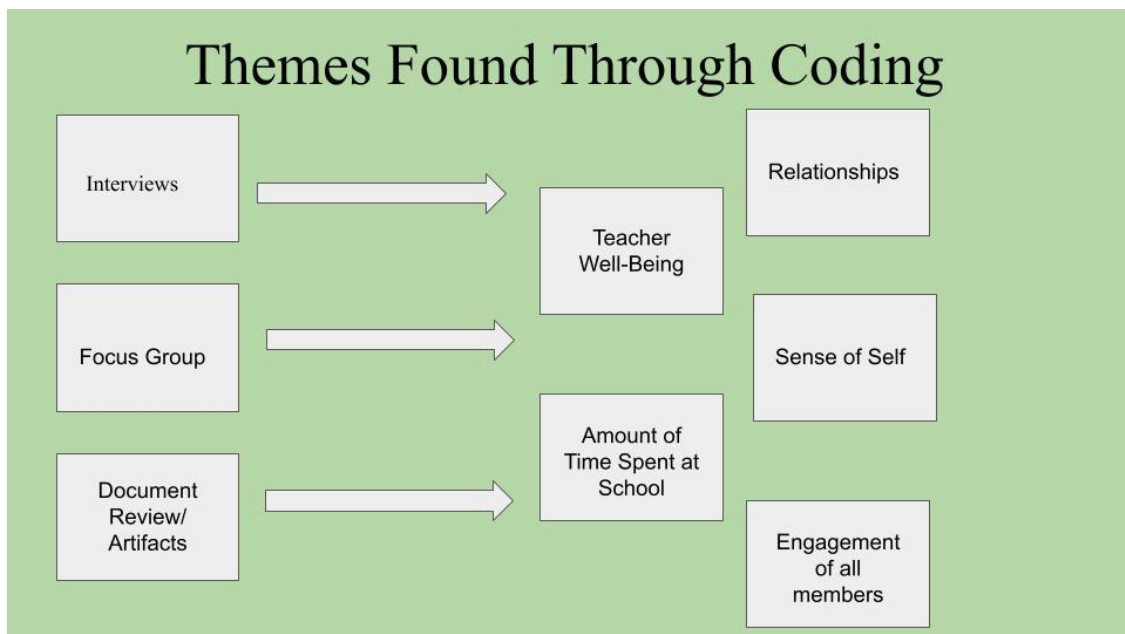
In-Vivo and Values Coding Lead to Recurring Themes				
Relationships	Time Spent in School	Teacher Well-Being	Sense of Self	Engagement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Social connections ● Teacher relationships ● Socially equipped ● Peer relationships ● Everyone matters ● Kindness ● Reciprocity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Time at school versus anywhere else ● Safe place ● Modeling ● Climate and culture ● Philosophy connections ● Nature ● Human capital 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● genuine, happy teachers ● Heartbeat of community ● Dictate student wellness ● Social emotional learning ● Teachers education/ connection to families 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Whole child ● Individual needs ● Inner voice-how students see themselves ● Happy ● How to be well ● Child centered ● uniqueness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Multi-age advantage for curriculum and needs ● Curiosity ● Natural world ● Lack of time wasted on testing tasks ● Family community ● Whole child learning-multisensory

Recurring Themes

After completing first-cycle In Vivo Coding and Values Coding of the interviews of each participant, as well as the transcript and notes from the Focus Group, and school artifacts the researcher looked for recurring themes with regard to families' perspective of well-being in school across all the data sources (Saldaña, 2021). The researcher employed focused coding to complete second-cycle coding of each data source (Saldaña, 2021) and then identified the recurring themes of the data, determining that themes would be considered recurring if the majority of the participants identified them in their responses (Smith et al., 2009). Figure 2 illustrates the five recurring themes found in the participants' responses and data collection: 1) Relationships, 2) Time Spent in School, 3) Sense of Self, 4) Teacher Well-Being and Education, and 5) Engagement.

Figure 5

Theme Found Through Coding (Miner, 2023)



Theme 1: Relationships

The relationships continued to be the heart of the responses from families. Relationships between peers, relationships student to teachers, student to administration, teachers and administration to families, and the impact and influence those relationships carry and have in the future. Recognition by the families that it is important for the student that relationships be at the core of schools function and additionally be at the center of how the school is functioning.

When interviewing the families and asking for the perspective of what should be school priorities, families of focus group members two, five, six, eight and interview members one and three answered "social connections", interview participant member three stated "peer and adult interactions out in the world", and participant one from the interviews noted "giving opportunity, practice, and education to be socially equipped to function in the wider community." Through the development and existence of relationships in schools the students are able to practice and obtain life skills and families found this essential when asked the role that schools play in their student's well-being. "Learning to communicate" was a vital aspect for focus group members two, three, six, eleven, and twelve, as well as all three interviews, "perspective taking of others, differences, and the ability to notice each other as individuals" was an additional aspect for interview two, and interview member one stated "we want our student to notice and be part of an inclusive community". Schools are often the main location, time, and chance for the students to be in experiences of relationships outside of their immediate family. Humans' need for other humans is built upon relationships and the methods upon which they are built. Schools can provide the environment, and open student's minds and provide skills for how to be and receive others (all participants). Families were also asked when looking at well-being, benefits, and outcomes, what their desires and hopes were to see from their student's experiences in school. "I want her to

know, and the others, that all of her is welcome here, that every emotion is acceptable, the best and most challenging moments, will be supported by those around her” came out passionately from interview member two. The recognition that school is a place where we can discover ourselves, be accepted, understood, and that these aspects of ourselves will matter and influence our relationships is a large part of human relationships, well-being, and flourishing was recognized by families of five out of the thirteen participants in the focus group and all three interviews. Interview member two felt that the discovery and use of “Reciprocity is born between all the members of your school. Reciprocity is discovered and can be seen as a value here”. When the families see and value the group's agreement to treat and expect that all members will have the same rights and have the same treatment, this quality can be developed and engaged in by all (all participants).

The school holds its Guiding Principles (Appendix E) centered in its' operations. The first two principles encompass the value of relationships to the school. “1. Create a holistic experience centered on *well-being*: provide an education that respects the dynamic and mutually supporting relationship between intellectual, emotional, physical, social, aesthetic/ creative, and spiritual qualities of every person. 2. Relationships are the heart of our school: *authentic and meaningful relationships* will be built on respect, belonging, social equity, cooperation, understanding, trust, empathy, and care”. Authentic and meaningful relationships can only occur when agree, participate, and value the experience and process of forming and sustaining relationships.

Families noted the large weight that teacher/ student relationships carry on their child's well-being. Interview member one stated “teachers dictate well-being in their students,” and interview member three adds “teachers and students form bonds and relationships which teach

them how to be well with and toward each other". This responsibility and role of the teacher does not go unnoticed to the researcher as an administrator. Additionally, one family of interview two mentioned the importance of school being emotionally safe for the student and that for their student "knowing that the teachers would have her back, to work through challenges and celebrations equally is highly valued to our child and family and makes this school special". The teacher and student relational attributes also must extend to the Administrative relationships between the students and admin and admin and teachers was mentioned by families of five out of the thirteen participants in the focus group and all three interviews, all of which affect the well-being of the members. The families state that "the Administration is the heartbeat of the community" says interview member three, and that interview member two feels "the administration is the model for the spirit of the community, the admins energy feeds to the sponges (teachers and students)", while interview member one adds "administration exudes the love and confidence that the students and teachers are respected and valued by showing the students that each relationship matters". Ultimately, the Administration's model is the engine behind the machine. Lastly one family connected the school's Code of Conduct (Appendix F). "Be Safe, Be Responsible, Be Respectful, and Be Kind are the rules my student talks about and you are the bucks stops here for that. The students know that your boundaries are fair, and that ultimately you will keep them safe; emotionally and physically, through these rules".

A family member from interview two, summarized relationships and their value and importance "I want my child to know that everyone in the circle matters, no matter what the circle is, we all have value, and we are all human". Wouldn't it be nice to have this concept embodied by each member and think of the influencing and impact the mindset would have upon many others well-being.

Theme 2: Time Spent in School

To influence and impact well-being, time will hold a strong grip on the experiences students have. Families of five out of the thirteen participants in the focus group and all three interviews overwhelmingly spoke to the large role that school has upon their child's well being in connection and because of the amount of time that the student spends in school compared to time spent almost anywhere else in their young lives. "Our child is with you and at school for much more of her time than she is with us at home, school will overwhelmingly have a huge impact upon who she is and how she feels about herself" states interview member one. School lends itself to the main environment of social interaction for children and thus given this the way in which it operates becomes very influential to the outcomes and benefits upon everyone within the school. Family member from interview three state that school is and should be "a place where my child looks forward to going to", "a place to assert independence from their family" was interview one's description, and interview two member added "a place where aspirations and achievement can demonstrate how my child sees themselves as successful or not". The climate that is created within the school becomes essential and is carried in the schools Guiding Principles (Appendix E) "Engage in deliberate efforts to create a *positive school climate*: build a cooperative, collaborative, and respectful community. Students are challenged to make the world better through actions and learning what is important with purpose. Within our strong community, each child, teacher, and family are treated as an individual. There will be deliberate growth, reflection, and continuous intention for improvement".

With a positive climate created one can work to assure safety; emotionally and physically for the members. Family from interview one states "school needs to be a safe place; they are with you 190 days and eight hours a day, and this dictates so much of how they feel about the bigger

world”, and interview member three adds “when school is a safe place for my child to express himself, he can relate to others and grow through that experience”. Emotional and physical safety for people in space becomes essential for the mind and body to be able to be open to and able to learn and grow was shared by families of five out of the thirteen participants in the focus group and all three interviews.

Last, given the time and ample opportunity to be with others, school builds a starting place for children to understand their role in the world. One family from focus group member 1 stated “the important role of school in teaching and modeling human capital”. Human capital consists of the knowledge, skills, and health that people invest in and accumulate throughout their lives, enabling them to realize their potential as productive members of society (World Development Report, 2019). Through the time spent at school students have the majority of their waking hours inside and under the influence of the school and influence and impact of the community and development of self that happens there.

Theme 3: Sense of Self

Families want their child to be honored, and seen for who they are, all the while developing a sense of self in school; through better understanding of who they are, what they enjoy, how they learn, and how they associate with others. Interview member two stated “I want my child to know that all of you is welcome here”. When asking families about what should be the priorities in schools, the focus group member 1 answered, “the development of the whole child, not just academics”. Families want there to be an understanding that “every child is unique” adds interview member two. When choosing the school for their child and family, families of six out of the thirteen participants in the focus group and all three interviews felt that taking the time to make sure that the mission aligns with their desires for their child is valued

was a large aspect of their school choice. The school's mission is “To respect, honor, and educate students and families for who they are and the strengths they already possess. We will spend the days growing and gaining new strengths and skills through the love of the world around us, as a community. We will do so through an environment that empowers students to learn, discover, and continue to be all of our best selves”.

In order to gain a sense of self the environment must support the student. Families look for and appreciate the school as the school is “child centered” mentioned interview member one, and interview member two stated “see the child’s individual needs to build the day, curriculum, and structure on”. The school environment is flexible and holds true to the student drive curriculum, where students are challenged through self discovery to grow and learn. The guiding principles also state “Students own their *learning with agency*: creating self-directed and intrinsically motivated students. Learning will happen through activities that are meaningful and relevant to learners. Children learn decision-making, responsibility, and leadership skills by exercising a voice in the classroom. Students will acquire skills sets and mind sets needed for an innovative world”. When given and allowed agency a sense of self is developed and grown in the students.

Overwhelmingly, when families were asked how they want their child to be in school and what benefits and outcomes they desire from school the same answer is given over and over; “happy” by families of seven out of the thirteen participants in the focus group and all three interviews and “I want my child to be well- adjusted; able to handle what life gives you, I can’t and we cannot shelter our children and I want them to experience hardship along the way that they can learn and grow from” was stated by interview member one. Even though the two appear to be opposites, they are actually symbiotic to each other, as life is not always easy, to create

happiness, we often have to figure out being well-adjusted in order to get through all the experiences that life brings.

Because of the time spent in school, and the careful choice in school mission and values, families are trusting that as they leave their child at school no harm will be done and that the other side of school will develop a child's well-being, to lead to flourishing.

What is said and happens at school becomes how my child sees themselves, it becomes their inner voice. So often we as families can try to build our child up and remind them of how special they are, but we have found that the social world, influences, and especially our child's teachers become their inner voice" was powerfully felt by interview member two.

The power of the relationships, words, feelings, and experiences given to our students allow for endless and open opportunities to develop a sense of self in our schools.

Theme 4: Teacher Well-Being and Education

A consistent answer from families of six out of the thirteen participants in the focus group and all three interviews was a deep desire, concern for, insight into how the teachers are within the school; their well-being and their education, understanding, and preparation for teaching and guiding student well-being. Families want to see "genuinely happy teachers" stated interview member two, with "the understanding that their job is very stressful, holds a lot of pressure, and power, and also they need to be happy to be at school, be teaching children, and get the opportunity to educate young minds and hearts" adds interview member three. One of the positive aspects of enrolling your child in private education is that as a family they have the choice to leave or stay at a school. One family from interview three noted with passion "if a

teacher refuses to work on themselves and be well themselves that is not a reason or allowance for students to suffer, we get to choose to have our child stay and be influenced by teachers who are well". Another family from interview two noted that "wanting and desiring the school and teachers to be happy, healthy models for their child and family was an important aspect of choosing this school, and this is why I work so hard, so that I can afford for my child to get to be around great teachers, a great school, and learn from teachers who put well-being first". Families of interview three additionally feel "it is the Administration's job to be constantly checking in on the well-being of their teachers, asking how are you doing, in multiple ways, and supporting their well-being in my aspects".

The teachers need also to be educated and prepared to handle what comes with well-being as the foundation to curriculum and environment. Families from all three interviews want to know that the teachers have been educated and can educate them on social emotional learning. "Social emotional learning has to be less about the gimmick, the feelings thermometer, the sticker charts, and more about genuine interaction, coping, building of skills, and putting those skills to use as a learning tool" feels interview member three. Families want emotional intelligence to be taught, modeled, understood, and communicated back to them. "We want to have communication, shared vocabulary, so we can be consistent with the language at home, that builds the universal social emotional skills" stated interview member one. Another family from interview two wants "to make sure teachers understand it's ok to be sad, not everyone is expected to only show the good emotions. We want to make sure that teachers are educated to accept all these emotions, they know how to deal with them, and they know how to build skills and growth in emotional intelligence".

The families want to be partnered with and want to engage with teachers who are well themselves, as they understand and see what a large influence and impact they have upon their child and family. The school's guiding principles also state; "*Partnerships with families* will drive the intentions of learning: In a supportive manner, families will be celebrated as diverse. A family is a child's first teacher, and we will honor families and communicate as such while supporting your growth as a parent". The families recognize that this comes from open communication with and from the school. "We want to be told about what and how our children are learning" notes interview members one, "we want to know how we can support and follow-up at home" adds the family member from interview three, and finally interview member from two stated "we want to know what ways we can support the teachers to extend learning, support their methods, and open communication for our students to see we are all working together for everyone's success and well-being".

Theme 5: Engagement

School is a place where the whole child should and can be engaged. Engagement is a central aspect to how the school operates. Guiding principles include; "Learning will occur through experience: *active engagement* between each learner and the complex world around us. Education is growth, discovery, wonder, sustained by interest, curiosity, creativity, and with purpose". As well as "The environment will be *empowering*: the classrooms both indoors and outdoors will be responsive and purposeful to engage learners". Families chose this school as family members from the first interview strongly felt "that the more their child was engaged, the more they were learning with purpose and intent that would last in their mind". Another family from interview three felt that this school in comparison to others they had experienced "would not allow for so much time to be wasted, each day in the other school was spent with curriculum

that was wasted and time that was wasted in testing, routines, and schedules that lacked engagement of the students". Additionally interview member three feels that given that "this school is multi aged Kindergarten through fourth grade there is an ability for each child to go up or down in levels by subject, interests, and needs throughout the day and year. This leads to a better engagement of my child as they can get what they need and that can be fit to how he is and what he needs, as he feels comfort and support, he is engaged more in his learning, with his peers, and school".

The unique venue and modality of education at the nature based school was felt to also lead to important aspects of well-being and engaged learning. Curiosity is felt, by families of eight out of the thirteen participants in the focus group and all three interviews, to lead to engaged learning and the natural world, being outdoors, and exposed to many aspects of the world around them, engages the student to want to learn. School's guiding principles include having the student's engaged as naturalists at heart. "When learning becomes about asking questions, wanting to know more, discover more, and figure out how to get answers and explore, students feel listened to and heard. This develops an engaged learner" states the second interview member.

Having families involved and educated, creates an engaged community. With the students and family engaged, teachers and administration are engaged in perpetuating the positive climate and learning; all vital aspects of well-being in schools. Families from the first interview stated "an engaged community surrounding our children feels to us like a huge part of their well-being, especially as it relates to school". One of the questions asked in the interviews was what questions or conversations do you have with your child after school and do you see connections from the questions to well-being? Families of members four, five, eight, nine, and ten in the

focus group and all three interviews ask their child many questions that are routine such as how their day was and what they may have learned that day, and also many of their questions touch base intricately to well-being in their student and the community. “We ask her what is something that she is proud of today and what is something that was tricky for her” states the interview two member, “As a family we list our gratitude for what the day has brought and what we have been given opportunity to be part of for the day” adds the first interview member, interview member three adds “I ask him what ways he was kind, and what was he was proactive in making other people's day go better”, the interview member three additionally states “we ask about how the day went good and bad and for them to think about what role they took in the relationships with others throughout the day”. These intriguing questions all relate to well-being, self awareness, and emotional intelligence. As the community engages together the well-being of students from a holistic approach leads its way to developing flourishing students.

Summary of Results and Findings

In this study, the participants were asked to describe their experiences as families and from the family perspective on well-being in schools. They were asked to think about their own family and whether well-being should be a priority in school and where they saw it fitting in school, as well as how school relates to, influences and impacts their student's and family's well-being. All participants were families with students enrolled in a private, nature-based elementary school located on the seacoast of New England. All participants were the parental figures of the students and notably have the family income and ability to support their student in private education. Additionally the participants all have college education, and careers which relate to the education of others. This aspect was not planned or used to sift through the data, however was noted by the researcher in the in depth answers given by the families. Five themes

emerged from the semi-structured interviews, the focus groups, and the examination of school artifacts. 1) Relationships, 2) Time Spent in School, 3) Sense of Self, 4) Teacher Well-Being and Education, and 5) Engagement.

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of families who have chosen the private school for their elementary school aged student and better understand and gain insight into their perspective of well-being in school. Conclusions from this study note the importance of schools creating an environment where students feel safe and are able to develop trusting relationships with teachers and administration, and students gain both education and growth in their emotional intelligence, as well as an engaged educational modality. The value families carry in the teachers well-being holding huge influence and impact upon the student's own well-being was also noted. This gives way to the students and families understanding and seeing that the teachers are responsive to the individual students and their learning needs to support the whole child flourishing. Finally, the importance of family connections and engagement to what is happening at school and how they can be supportive of and a resource of support for the teachers and school, all leading to positive student well-being outcomes and benefits.

The final section of this dissertation will compare the findings of this study with existing research, and literature, draw overall conclusions and suggest recommendations for future research and practice.

Target Journal and Rationale

This researcher plans to submit to two target journals in the elementary education field. The target journals for the contribution to scholarship are both the *Elementary School Journal* and *Planning and Changing: An Education Leadership and Policy Journal*. *The*

Elementary School Journal (ESJ) has served researchers, teacher educators, and practitioners in elementary and middle school education for over one hundred years. ESJ publishes peer-reviewed articles dealing with both education theory and research and their implications for teaching practice. In addition, ESJ presents articles that relate the latest research in child development, cognitive psychology, and sociology to school learning and teaching (Silverman, 2021). *Planning and Changing* provides a forum for the presentation of issues and studies that inform current educational policy and practice. As such, the journal serves as a critical, intellectual resource for educational leaders, practitioners, and policy makers. Peer-reviewed articles include formal research studies using quantitative and/or qualitative methodologies, as well as reflective, theoretical pieces focused on significant aspects of education and schooling relevant to the administrator, community, or the larger public good. Published since 1970, *Planning and Changing* is a well-respected journal in the field of educational leadership and policy studies (Planning and changing journal, 2021).

The research proposed in this study is applied research that could be useful for both school leaders and teachers in understanding the conditions that support well-being in school from a families perspective. Administration and teachers could potentially use the findings and implications to create and support policies with a positive impact on the students, teachers, administration and families in their context. This article will be submitted following successful defense of the dissertation in the spring of 2023 through the ESJ's Editorial managers site online and Illinois State University, Managing Editor, *Planning and Changing* online.

Journal Submission-Ready Article Outline of Proposed Contents

Articles submitted for the *Elementary School Journal* and *Planning and Changing: An Education Leadership and Policy Journal* must be less than 28 single spaced pages in length and accompanied by an abstract of 150 words or less. The contents of the full article submission will include:

1. Purpose
2. Research Foundations (Literature Review)
3. Research design & methodology
4. Findings
5. Originality
6. Research limitations
7. Practical implications
8. Suggestions for future research

Journal Ready Article Title: Elementary School Choice Through the Pandemic: Lessons Learned from Families' Perspectives on Well-Being in School

Section Five: Contribution to Practice

Analysis & Discussion

The results of the study have multiple contributions to practice; being able to influence and impact the students, teachers, families, and the administration in schools. At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic families were drawn to choosing different school modalities for various reasons, many of which surrounds the well-being of their child. The researcher looked to use the findings surrounding the well-being focus to be able to apply further to practice in elementary education. Using the theoretical framework, the research questions, and the themes produced from the coding of the data collected; the finding will enlighten contributions to practice.

Well-Being

This study was designed and conducted around the theory of well-being and how it belongs in schools, where it fits, and what impact it has upon student's well-being; all from the families' perspective. Individuals' well-being seemingly has a domino effect on the well-being of others around them and the well-being as a whole community and organization.

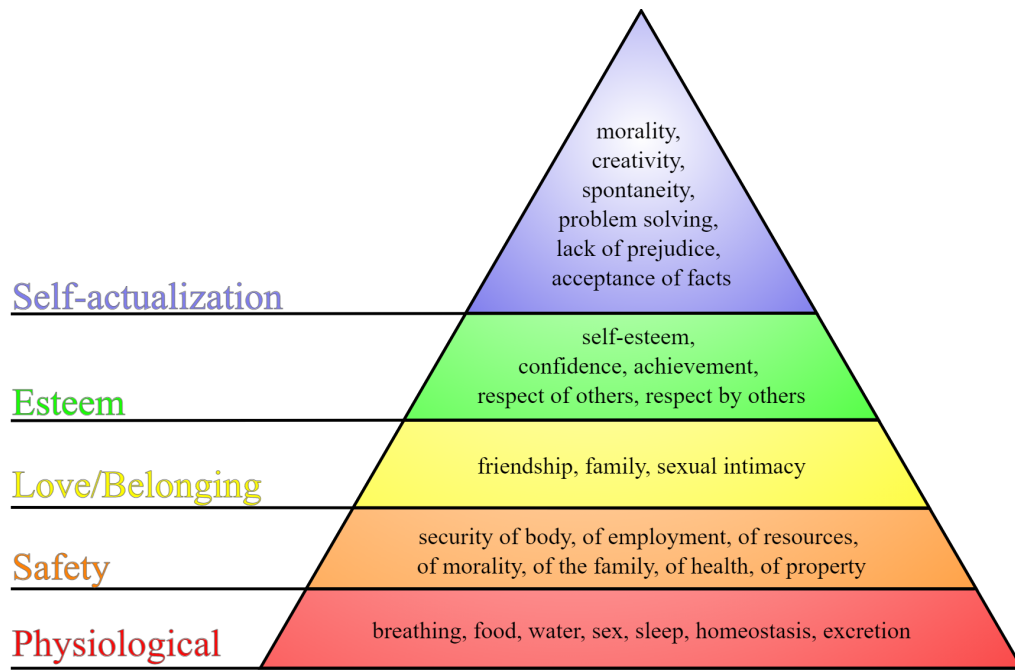
Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs is a theory (McLeod, 2023) of motivation which states that five categories of human needs dictate an individual's behavior. Those needs are physiological needs, safety needs, love and belonging needs, esteem needs, and self-actualization needs (see Figure 1). This dissertation used this theory to apply to well-being in students and the school as a whole. The theory applies to well-being in that well-being consists and exists when all the categories are recognized and supported. Maslow's hierarchy of needs consists of human needs that allow an individual to feel fulfilled, which is a leading aspect of well-being (McLeod,

2023). While the theory is often applied to the workplace as a means to determine how to more effectively motivate employees and to make sure their needs are met, this dissertation applied this theory to students and how schools can support and meet their needs (Mcleod, 2023).

Figure 6

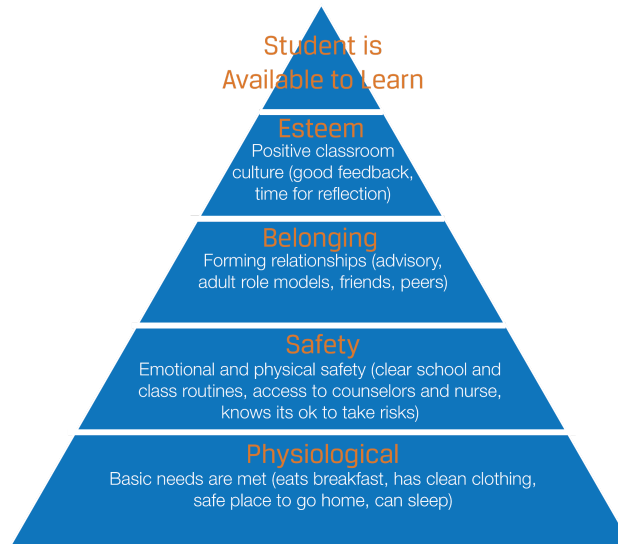
Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Finkelstein, 2006)



Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory creates a model for how and why students are motivated to learn. Starting at the foundational, bottom layer of the hierarchy, if these needs are not met, students cannot reach the next level. Each level, once met, allows students the ability and motivation to learn. Each student can move up in the hierarchy with the proper support.

Figure 7

Maslow's Hierarchy in relation to student application (Creighton, Positive Tomorrows, 2019)



Maslow's Hierarchy in relation to student application (Positive Tomorrows, 2019)

Through the coding of the data the results revealed the families' recognition and desire for the school to be intricately involved and the significant impact the school has upon their student's well-being. Each level of the hierarchy reflects students, family, and school to be able to reach the top level of the hierarchy that leads to positive well-being.

As a practitioner, in schools, our understanding and support of students, families, and teachers in their physiological and safety needs, sense of belonging, and self esteem is valued and wanted by the families. What may have seemed as though an invasion into private details at the foundational level of needs; families desire for us to get to know them as a family and understand their unique needs, desires, and supports for their child. Communication and relationship building between the family and school are crucial as they co-raising the child together; school and home.

The relationships formed between students, from student to teacher and administrations, the relationship of school to family, and the relationship between teachers to administration all were seen to have impact and influence upon the student's well-being, by the families interviews and part of the focus group. As practitioners making the relationships both a priority and foundation to the structure of the school; through communication, understanding, and genuine connection all becomes key to our practices.

Lastly, through our recognition of individual students; what they enjoy, how they learn, what they want to learn, and understanding that who they are both belongs and is accepted through the culture and climate created in our schools. All of these aspects and levels of needs in our students, must be met in order for the student to be able to fully access their learning and needs of learning.

Initially as a researcher it was thought that academics would have been a much higher priority for families in their feelings of purpose of school and in importance to their student's achievement and successes in school. This was not the case in this study, alternatively families prioritized aspects of their child's well-being and ability to be honor for themselves and learn to relate in a community. What this demonstrated to the researcher, as a practitioner we need to ensure families that their child will be seen as an individual and whole child learning will be core to our practices.

Flourishing

Flourishing is feeling good about a life in which you are functioning well. Being the top level of well-being is considered flourishing. Flourishing can at times be synonymous with thriving, it is a state of emotional, psychological and social well-being that is more than the absence of disease or illness. Flourishing is a continuing process and the steps are unique for

each individual. The ultimate goal as a practitioner and for families is that their students/children are flourishing in life. The data collections revealed that the families do not wish their child to lack a life where hard experiences are void, rather to learn how to deal and gain skills to help them through the harder experiences of life. Families recognize the importance of these experiences and both need and want to have the school partnership in education and communication for the students and families on skills and language used when learning and gaining social emotional growth and tools.

Families also noted the importance of having a teacher who was well and flourishing. A flourishing educator was defined as when teachers feel a sense of joy, play, laughter, and fun at work; when they are encouraged and supported to take risks in their teaching; and when they see they are making a difference in the lives of their students, school, and community (Cherkowski & Walker, 2014 & 2018). De Ruyter(2020) describes flourishing as an aim of education as the (continuing) development of human capacities that make possible that children (as future adults) are able to engage in worthwhile relationships and to pursue worthwhile activities (de Ruyter, 2020) that are meaningful to them. Flourishing as an ideal aim of education has implications for the education and upbringing of children. Teachers and parents need and want to know what constitutes a flourishing life, what contributes to it and what does not, and they are expected to act in a way that enables children to lead a flourishing life (in the future). Most theories on flourishing link back to Aristotle's theory about eudaimonia.

Aristotle's theory of Eudaimonia is the condition of human flourishing or of living well. Eudaimonia does not consist of a state of mind or a feeling of pleasure or contentment, as "happiness" implies. For Aristotle, eudaimonia is the highest human good. According to Aristotle, every living or human-made thing, including its parts, has a unique or characteristic

function or activity that distinguishes it from all other things. The recognition of this in our students and teachers is what will achieve eudaimonia in our individuals within the school. Finding the skills and characteristics in which they possess and what conditions we can align in order for these to be put to best practice, learning and growth. When this occurs in our schools then the individual is able to function well. Eudaimonia consists of the good performance of human beings, and human virtue or excellence is that combination of traits or qualities that enables humans to perform that function well.

The application of flourishing to our schools from this study comes from our practitioners' understanding, education, and ability to teach our students what it means to live one's life well.

Care

According to Noddings (2003), teachers appear as caretakers in the educational process, and they have the responsibility to care for students and make students learn to care. Not only that, they need to provide caring role models; engage students in dialogue; and practice caring and attribute the best motivation. "Caring involves stepping out of one's own personal frame of reference into the other's" (Noddings, 2003, p. 24). Care needs to be infused into our daily practice of education. When care is not viewed as education, it is common to rely upon personal child rearing experiences to shape caring practices, conversations around care can become emotionally charged because the way we care for children is laden with personal stories and cultural beliefs.

"Caring is largely reactive and responsive. Perhaps it is even better characterized as receptive" (Noddings, 2003, p.19). The families interviewed and that participated in the focus group enlightened the researcher that as a practitioner, we need to understand the culture of our

families in our school and care. The trust and engagement that is needed between school and family to best provide care and education to our students is essential. Many of the conflicts and/or misunderstandings from family to school come from a misalignment of care. "If we can understand how complex and intricate, indeed how subjective caring is, we shall perhaps be better equipped to meet the conflicts and pains it sometimes induces" (Noddings, 2003, p. 12). Within schools we must demonstrate care of our students, families, and each other in our actions, approaches, and teachings. One of the largest gains in caring is the ability to start to see, understand, recognize, and then support others and the place of life they are in. "When we see the other's reality as a possibility for us, we must act to eliminate the intolerable, to reduce the pain, to fill the need, to actualize the dream" (Noddings, 2003, p. 14). Noddings believes that the teacher should model and support a community of care (Noddings, 2010). Noddings (2003, 2010) believes that the core of school education is to teach students to care. The aim is to cultivate capable, caring and loving people who are worthy of love. This is true too of a human who exhibits well-being, flourishing, and eudaimonia.

Leadership

Through the research and application of positive and appreciative leadership theories; the well-being of our members is paramount to our leadership practices. If the practitioner forgets that each member of the organization is an individual human and lacks the ability to support this, the organization will not flourish and the members will not be able to achieve or understand positive well-being.

Both Margaret Wheatley (2005) and Brene Brown's (2019) leadership theories speak to the fact that no organization can succeed without understanding of the living system of the organization and the people within. "Daring leaders work to make sure people can be themselves

and feel a sense of belonging” (Brown, 2019, p.84). Leadership must understand that it entails care of the people in our actions and practices. Much of the application of leadership theories in this study applies in the implications and application of the study’s findings to produce change and review of the school’s organization’s systems. “In organizations, real power and energy is generated through relationships. The patterns of relationships and the capacities to form them are more important than tasks, functions, roles, and positions” (Wheatley, 2006, p.14). The heart of the organization is the relationships that are formed and through the relationships the empathy that human beings are giving to and given from each other to produce quality work. “Empathy has no script. There is no right way or wrong way to do it. It's simply listening, holding space, withholding judgment, emotionally connecting, and communicating that incredibly healing message of “you're not alone ””(Brown, 2019, p.129). This of course applies as leaders in any organization however also came across strongly in the data collection; families want their students to be in positive relationships, where their individual characteristics are honored, empathized, and supported, and families too want these relational aspects from the school in regard to their family as a whole.

Leadership principles of positive and appreciative leadership traits and practices can be examined and applied; as leaders look to the climate and culture that is created within their school to ultimately encourage positive well-being and flourishing for all.

Conclusion of Analysis and Discussion

Well-Being, flourishing, care, and leadership all contribute strongly to the data collected, and themes produced during the coding process. The implications of the themes upon practitioners produce strong connections for practices, policies, and aspects of our school environment that must exist from the families’ perspective in order to support positive

well-being and flourishing in our students. Practitioners must examine the climate and culture that is created within the school to support individuals, relationships, and education of what it means to be well and what skills are needed in life to be successful and contributing members of a community.

Implications

The purpose of this study was to examine the lived experiences of families within a nature based elementary school organization with regards to the impact of and influence of the school design and school itself has upon their student's well-being. The findings of this study suggest that a school must build a climate and culture that supports individual learning, well-being, and flourishing. That there is a significant impact of the teacher's individual well-being upon the students well-being, and that it is both the teachers and administrators role to ensure that the well-being of the adults is evaluated and supported in order for the most positive effects on the students to be possible. The findings also indicated that the relationships with the families are vital to student well-being. The families desire a strong relationship with the school, they look for resources and support in social-emotional learning, and look for continual communications and education about how and what they can be doing at home to support and build skills in regards to the well-being aspects being discovered within the school environment.. Of the five themes that emerged from participant interviews and focus groups, all of them related to well-being aspects and impact upon students regarding well-being conditions. The five themes that were discussed by all of the participants were 1) Relationships, 2) Time Spent in School, 3) Sense of Self, 4) Teacher Well-Being and Education, and 5) Engagement. The findings of this research support those conclusions in the setting of a private elementary school and the significant impact and influence families preserve school to have upon student's well-being, as

well as the vital importance of teaching and supporting well-being aspects in school and through relationships with families at home.

For classroom teachers, the findings of this study suggest that many of the conditions that support positive well-being in their students are connected to the practices they put into place, the environment they set-up, and their own personal well-being and education surrounding aspects of well-being. All of this begins with the teachers staying connected to their ultimate purpose and reason for becoming teachers in the first place, rooting their work in the desire to support children in their journey and meet their needs as learners. An alignment of their teaching philosophy with the schools guiding principles to promote relationships, engage students, teach the whole child with engaged practices, and holistic experiences centered on well-being. Teachers must seek out ways to cultivate and exercise their creativity in the classroom, bringing their own life experience and unique teaching and well-being into their planning of student experiences and outcomes in their class. Teachers need to ensure that given the length of time that they are in school each day and the amount of dedication and purpose it takes to teach, they must cultivate a positive climate and culture for themselves, the students and families, holding fast to the belief that whether they are in their first year or their twentieth year of their teaching career, they are capable of improving their practices to meet the changing needs of their school and their students. Teachers also need to make sure that they are educated in how to teach and support social, emotional learning and well-being aspects. When teachers are properly prepared and trained, they can feel that they have tools and resources, and promote and educate their students with the same. Finally, teachers need to recognize and take care of their own well-being. Evaluating and working on self through reflection upon what their own life stressors, circumstances, and supports/ resources will have a significant impact on their own satisfaction

with life and the influence and impact their well-being has upon the students. Together, these individual characteristics will help teachers to be engaged, purposeful, and impactful teachers in their work throughout their career.

These results also inform teachers about the importance and value of the relationships that they form within the school community with families. In forming healthy, authentic relationships the teachers can have open, transparent communications, relationships of trust, and support that allow for growth and opportunity. Understanding that these relationships are all encompassing of the community formed at school; teachers to students, teachers to families, and teachers to administration. The relationships which are formed, demonstrate and model for students through actions and words.

For school administrators, the findings of this study suggest that they can build an innovative school culture and climate which supports well-being at the foundational level. The organizational structures, policies and practices they support, and the leadership characteristics and actions they exhibit. Recognition of the value of supporting student, family, and teacher well-being will allow for a flourishing school. Looking at the school environment to assure positive climate and culture, investment in teacher education and well-being for the teachers, and integrating family relationships regarding well-being into the admissions and orientation process, daily practices, and through communications and even focus groups to discuss families perspectives on changes, curriculum ideas, education for families, etc. School leaders must integrate themselves into the daily practices and put themselves into the shoes of teachers, family members, and students to better understand their perspectives and have a heartbeat into the well-being of all members. While exhausting and time-intensive, the integration into these

avenues allows school leaders to better identify the individual characteristics that emerged in this study as factors which support well-being in students, families, and teachers.

School leaders can sustain an innovative culture in their school by designing organizational structures and practices that give teachers frequent opportunities to build organizational trust, granting them autonomy and creative freedom within the bounds of the organizational values, modeling a growth mindset and being open to trying new things, and connecting teachers with the resources and external partnerships that expand their experience beyond the walls of the school. School leaders can also explicitly work on developing the a focus identified as themes in this study: staying connected to their own purpose for becoming a school leader; exercising trust and support for their staff, granting them autonomy and creative freedom in their work, and modeling the openness to try new things.

Organizational leaders can also support teachers and families in developing a culture of well-being by giving focus to professional development of social and emotional learning, curriculum focus to well-being skills and characteristics, and time spent in partnering with families to allow for all members to feel they understand and share in their perspective of support and skills. Rather than focusing on academics; benchmarks, assessments, and goals, organizational leaders can support and partner with families and teachers to exercise creative freedom with their own teaching practices, programs, and developing policies which integrate well-being and authentic relationships, modeling the practice of trying new things and taking risks in pursuit of growth, change, and positive well-being. The findings of this research suggest that these actions and practices support a flourishing and well-being in the students and teachers. Taking the families' perspective on how and why well-being belongs in school and encompassing and reflecting on the practices, policies, and structures which influence the

student's well-being, allows for all members to thrive. Leaders and teachers are empowered to be innovative and give their best creative selves to meet the well-being needs of their schools and their students.

Study Limitations

This study's purpose was to examine the families' lived experiences of the influence and impact of well-being on their students in elementary school in a private, nature based school in New England. The researcher identified the participants by asking the families who attended the school to volunteer to participate in a focus group regarding well-being practices in the school and gave an open invitation to participate in semi-structured interviews regarding their student and the influence and impact the school has had on their student and family's well-being. Data was gathered and analyzed through a phenomenological analysis methodology, so the findings are limited to the experiences of these specific participants (Smith et al., 2009). Though the sixteen participants represent a variety of family structures, demographics, and personal background, their current status is within one private school organization which is one limitation of the study. Another limitation of the study is that they were selected to participate based on their subjective identification by the researcher in hope of gathering different perceptions and experiences, by engaging families with various lengths of time associated with the school and different genders and ages of students.

Finally, the researcher who gathered and analyzed the data is a co-founder of the organization and is the principal of the school in the study. Her positionality could have had an impact on the responses and participation of the participants, all of which have children who are student's at the school she administers.

Suggestions for Future Research

Future research into families' perspective of well-being in their students in relationship to schools could include interviews with families from other school organizations in traditional-model district schools, and families of students in middle and high schools. Further research could also include perceptions and experiences of teachers, administration, and/ or other stakeholders in schools. Should similar studies in different contexts yield similar findings, these implications could be more generalizable than the research findings of this study.

Practitioner Contribution

The purpose of this research is to inform leaders of a private elementary school about the lived experiences of the families as it pertains to their perspective of well-being in schools. Additionally to expand the knowledge to other leaders to be able to reflect and investigate their own practices, policies, and structures for well-being in students and gathering of families' perspectives on the role that school plays in their student's lives. A better understanding and building of relationships with families around the desires and perspectives of well-being in schools allows for an understanding of the conditions that support well-being by teachers and leaders in an innovative school culture and climate, which will empower the school leader to act to cultivate those conditions within their organization. Teachers themselves frequently lack the education to specifically educate, integrate, and support well-being needs and to be able to shape the conditions in which they work. The literature research of this study demonstrates that families desire for the student to be seen and heard as individuals, that families want their students to be happy and develop positive well-being, and that there are many conditions in which schools can develop and enhance well-being through their practices, policies, and structures. Additionally the literature research of this study demonstrates and supports that

relationships are the foundation of organizational success and well-being aspects to develop. Therefore, an effective contribution to practice is one which reaches both the leaders and teachers of school organizations and families to best understand how schools influence and impact their student's lives and ways in which all members can contribute positively to student well-being.

Plan for Dissemination

The findings of this study will be compiled into a journal article and presentation, which will be presented to both the families and the teachers within the organization. The presentations would look to educate and engage teachers and families in well-being practices within school, educate to the influence and impact school has upon well-being, and also outline and suggest practice for home, school, and the classroom to support well-being in all members. To take the work further, the findings of the study will be compiled into a presentation which will be presented at NAEYC (National Association for the Education of Young Children) annual conference to share these results of this study with other school leaders and teachers through expanded channels. The researcher hopes to be able to have a positive impact on school leaders and teachers throughout the country by contributing to the conditions which support student well-being and families' perspectives of well-being in their work.

Section 6: Practitioner Reflection

Summary of the inquiry

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of families enrolled in a private elementary school, and the factors, if any, that influence/ impact the school has upon their child's well-being. The researcher was interested in identifying the families perspective on the conditions which may have allowed the students, through school related factors, to have an impact upon well-being and flourishing. Additionally, the researcher was interested in families' perspective on .

Research has been conducted with regard to schools' impact on well-being (Clarke, 2020, Gundawarden et al., 2020, Ling et al., 2022, McLaughlin, 2015, O'Shaughnessy,2015), yet there was a need to understand families' experiences and perspectives in the elementary setting, especially in the years following and in the COVID pandemic. By giving families the opportunity to share stories of this phenomenon in the private elementary school, the researcher was able to capture how families feel and have experienced schools' impact and influence upon their student's well-being. This study is significant because gaining the perspective of families allows for school personnel to reflect upon practices, policies, and classroom and school structures which families find to have influence upon their child's well-being. Additionally by incorporating families into the school and asking for their perspective the relationships are formed between home and school which opens communication and support. This research will add to the scholarship surrounding supporting students' well-being in school and beyond by prioritizing well-being education and social emotional skills in school and the importance of focusing and being aware of teacher well-being, and also while explicitly teaching and training

teachers in well-being aspects, the practices which contribute and impact well-being, and how to support student well-being in a school setting.

The findings from this study indicate that there are specific conditions families feel which schools will positively impact student's well-being. Five themes that emerged from the transcripts are relationships, time spent in school, sense of self, teacher well-being and education, and engagement. It is only when students feel that adults care for them and develop authentic relationships within the school, that the school personnel realize the significant amount of time students spend in school and the opportunity this provides for education and support of student well-being, and that students feel that the school culture and climate allows for all of their individual self to be accepted and developed in the school structure. Additionally, the findings indicate the administration and the teachers must realize the importance of recognition and reflection of their own well-being and the direct impact that the teacher's well-being can have upon their students. Lastly, these themes stressed the impact for engaged learning and community that responds to the students and families needs, that students will be actively engaged in studies that they are interested in, and that the community will be engaged in school setting to tie in the families to education.

Personal learning, shifts, and transformations to work related to focus of practice

The focus of practice of this research was to understand the conditions which impact and influence student well-being in school. The findings suggest that for these participants, there were 5 themes which were connected to the structure of the school and classroom, the education and support given to teachers, and the culture and the climate within the school. As a school principal, the researcher is directly or indirectly responsible for all of these conditions.

The work of being an elementary school principal is demanding; it involves a long list of a wide variety of tasks. Throughout every day the researcher faces a myriad of tasks and must prioritize my time wisely, evaluating and ranking the importance and demands of each one. In deciding and being involved with this innovative design and implementation of this school design; it takes heart and soul every day. All the while it takes personal reflection and awareness of the growing pains, being open to feedback, and having the ability to plan and move forward through change. Leadership is a position to be valued by those lucky to hold the title, but also one not to be taken for granted, as they must constantly be aware of how their decisions and actions create impact and influence.

This dissertation in practice was a powerful experience in understanding the lived experiences of families in the organization where the researcher works. It helped her to listen carefully, reflect deeply, and consider how our schools design, practices, and policies support student, teacher, and family well-being in my school. As the researcher designs future professional development experiences, she feels that she must start with the foundation of support and allow her teachers to reflect on their own personal well-being. There was additional growth as the researcher reflected and invested in how, when, where, and why she spends her time in the school; making observations, creating genuine relationships, mentoring teachers, supporting families, and creating a culture and climate for students where flourishing is seen. What was interesting to the researcher as well was that families did not hold academic achievement as a top priority in sending or having their children in our school. Previously, the researcher had the perception that families wanted top academic skills and wanted “proof” of learning and skills that apply to future learning in their communications and documentation given school to home. The findings of this research suggest that, with regard to supporting

well-being in their child, families wish for the school to be filled with those experiences which connect humans with each other, help the students better understand themselves, and increase and educate the student to connect with the world beyond our school have the greatest impact upon student well-being.

The experience of conducting this research also reminded the researcher of how much families value and depend on the community that they have at the school. While the ultimate purpose as educators is to support and prepare students well for the world, what keeps practitioners going through the years and difficult seasons is the support, camaraderie, and love of this community of the families, educators, and stakeholders who value the role of this school in the turn of innovative education practices.

Personal learning, shifts, and transformations for researcher as an educational leader

The researcher's goal as a school leader is to cultivate a flourishing school culture and climate, beginning with the well-being of the students, teachers, and families. "Daring leaders work to make sure people can be themselves and feel a sense of belonging" (Brown, 2019, p.23). The learning shifts and transformations through applying positive organizational aspects and theories learned through SNHU's doctoral programs have allowed for the researcher as an educational leader to incorporate conditions supporting an innovative culture into the school such as organizational trust, culture of growth, and teamwork, are components of a teacher and organizational well-being. The researcher strives to create and sustain an environment in which all students, families, and teachers are known, understood, and valued, and where students can flourish so that they are open to learn how to learn and grow and be prepared for the next steps in their journey.

The researcher believes that this can only occur when we as educational leaders create and sustain a flourishing culture and climate in which the educators are appreciated, supported, and valued by their leaders and by each other, where they are given opportunity and encouraged in their own learning and growth, and where they too can reflect and grow their own positive well-being. “It turns out that trust is in fact earned in the smallest of moments. It is earned not through heroic deeds, or even highly visible actions, but through paying attention, listening, and gestures of genuine care and connection”(Brown, 2019, p. 112). Creating a culture of community at school that includes students, families, and teachers, supporting and educating teachers who want to grow and reflect on their practices, having a growth mindset as an educational leader, and a desire for working everyday on and towards the positive impact on well-being in this school, all are significant contributions that her leadership actions and values will hold.

Having a growth mindset to reflect upon the researcher's own practice is critical; by modeling a constant desire to improve in her own work, by trying new things, taking risks, and building relationships with students, families, and teachers which are authentic and genuine and supportive, and by inspiring a shared vision that drives all of our work, she can be a transformational leader who builds a flourishing organizational culture. Through creating the structures, practices, and policies that keep well-being at a foundation to my work, she can create and sustain a culture in which the students, families, and teachers flourish, and in that all members can be empowered to be their best personal and professional selves for the students/ children the school serves and co-raise.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol and Questions

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

Phenomenological interviews serve two purposes: they explore a phenomenon so as to develop a deeper and richer understanding, and provide an opportunity for both the interviewer and the interviewee to co-construct the meaning of an experience (van Manen, 2016). As this is a semi-structured interview, the questions included in this protocol may not all be asked as stated, but all topics within these questions will be covered.

Say to the Interviewee: “The purpose of this interview is to explore your family’s experiences as they relate to your child and the impact of the school upon their well-being. Specifically, I want to explore your perception of well-being and where it belongs in school philosophy, schedule, and curriculum. Additionally this interview will explore your family perspective on well-being outcomes you desire for your child from school, as well as any well-being benefits your child may have experienced or that you wish for them to experience. As a reminder the definitions of these keywords were sent to you prior, though I have also printed them here for reminders as we talk.”

I will begin the interview by establishing each family’s background in the context to their time with the school experiences:

- Years enrolled in the school:
- Current age of child (ren):

<p>Interview questions with corresponding research questions and topics:</p>		
<p>Interview Questions</p>	<p>Corresponding Research Question</p>	<p>Concept/Topic</p>
<p>How many years have you been involved in the school community? What grade is your student in? Is this your first experience with private education for your student?</p>	<p>Background</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • Background experiences
<p>What do you feel should be the top 3-5 priorities in schools for their students?</p>	<p>1</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • Definition of and approach to student achievement
<p>With well-being in mind, what role does the school play in your child's well-being?</p>	<p>1</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • Variables encountered, tensions created, and actions taken to address them
<p>Should well-being be taught in school?</p>		
<p>Should school's investment in well-being connect with your family/home well-being? and how?</p>		

What do you see as the Administration's role and impact on your child's well-being?	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • Role, purpose, responsibilities
What do you see as the teacher's role and impact on your child's well-being?	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Essential • Values, beliefs
In looking at the school's philosophy, where do you see the connections to student well-being present or absent?	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Essential •
How can we support your child or family in well-being?		
What specific questions do you ask your child about school? Do these connect with well-being?	2A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Essential • Alignment with others' values, beliefs
Is there an educational history which led to your decision for your student to attend this school?	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Essential • Impact of variables on actions
Did your student's well-being play a role in this decision to attend this school?	3A, 3B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Essential • Influences on perceptions, response
Did your family's well-being play a role in this decision to attend this school?		

<p>Did your child have input into this decision to attend this school?</p>		
<p>Looking at the definition of well-being, benefits, and outcomes, what are the desired outcomes for your child that you hope to see from their experience at school?</p>	<p>4</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Essential ● Nature of tension
<p>Looking at the definition of well-being, benefits, and outcomes, what are the desired benefits for your child that you hope to see from their experience at school?</p>		
<p>What are your dreams for your child?</p>		
<p>Have you seen short term change outcomes in well-being for your child since attending this school?</p>		
<p>What are your hopes for long term benefits in well-being for your child as they continue and graduate from this school?</p>		

Appendix B: Focus Group Starting Discussion Questions

- 1. What aspects of well-being are a priority/hold an important role in your family life?**
 - a. How can you see those priorities fitting into your child(ren)'s school day?**

- 2. What would you like to see as well-being outcomes (definition on following page) for your child as they go through this school and leave for future schooling?**

- 3. What have you seen or do you feel will be the impacts upon your child's well-being given this school choice?**

- 4. What ways can Terramor do to improve their well-being concepts in the school structure and/ or what ways can we improve the well-being focus and education for your student?**

Appendix C: Permission for Study

School Authorization to Conduct Research


AUTHORIZATION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

Date: November 1, 2022

Dear Southern New Hampshire University Institutional Review Board:

The purpose of this letter is to inform you that I, Johanna Booth- Miner/owner give permission to conduct the research titled **What is School For? Families' Perspective on Well-Being in School** at Greater Community Terramor Academy. We have agreed to the following study procedures; phenomenological research and/or data collected through the interviews, focus groups, and artifact review for the research to be released for the research.

Sincerely,



Greater Community Terramor Academy

Johanna Booth-Miner

Owner/ Director

Appendix D: Consent Form

Letter of Consent for School Family Participation in Study

Dear Families,

As the school Principal, and a doctoral student at Southern New Hampshire University, I am excited to invite you to participate in my final requirement for the Doctor of Educational Leadership program. This season of leading in this unique setting, where I live and work in the same community and have known many of my students for years, provides an opportunity to share our story through the exploration of meaning.

Details of the Study

The purpose of this study is to co-construct a narrative that describes the meanings families of students attach to our small school in partnership with me, the teacher and researcher of this study.

The research methodology used for this study is phenomenology. Phenomenology is a qualitative research method that is designed to convey participant's perspectives on their experiences.

Phenomenology will permit me, the researcher, to piece together participants' point of view to create unique experiences of the family's perspective of well-being, its place in school and the specific impact this school has had on their student's well-being.

Unlike other research methods where a problem is identified, and possible solutions offered, phenomenology does not attempt to identify and offer solutions to a problem, but through interviews and focus groups, this research attempts to illuminate what families envision and

experience from this schools focus on well-being. Each participant will schedule a time to be interviewed and/ or participate in the focus group.

To collect as much detail as possible and provide a relaxed setting, interviews will be voice recorded. This will allow me, the researcher, to review the interviews multiple times. Participants will also be permitted to review their interviews.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality will be maintained throughout the study and following the completion of this work. The school, our setting, and participants have all been given pseudonyms to protect the identities of all involved. There will be no identifiable information within this study. During the project all data will be stored in a locked file, all digital materials are safeguarded with password protection. Following the completion of the project, all data, including voice recordings, will be destroyed within two years of the end of this study.

Risks

The risk of participating in this study is minimal. You are in control of the content you choose to share and will have access to all data collected pertaining to your interview and participation in the focus group. As we all work to create themes of meaning, some of the content may include past difficult situations. Yet, even in those, the goal is to bring out what is good and of value, in keeping with the phenomenological method. Your participation is voluntary.

You are free to withdraw from the project at any point. Use of this Study The information collected in this study will be used for dissertation purposes as part of the final requirements for my doctoral program through Southern New Hampshire University.

Upon completion, I am happy to provide you with a copy of this dissertation.

Supervisor Information

This project is overseen by my committee chair, Dr. Michael Moriarty, mmoriarty@snhu.edu or co-chair members, Dr. Marc Branco at mbranco@snhu.edu and Dr. Bernadette Weltsek at bweltsek@snhu.edu

If you grant consent and agree to participate in this research project as outlined above, please sign below.

Name:

Date:

Appendix E: School Guiding Principles

Guiding Principles

1. Create a holistic experience centered on *well-being*: provide an education that respects the dynamic and mutually supporting relationship between intellectual, emotional, physical, social, aesthetic/ creative, and spiritual qualities of every person
2. Relationships are the heart of our school: *authentic and meaningful relationships* will be built on respect, belonging, social equity, cooperation, understanding, trust, empathy, and care
3. Learning will occur through experience: *active engagement* between each learner and the complex world around us. Education is growth, discovery, wonder, sustained by interest, curiosity, creativity, and with purpose.
4. We emphasize *meaning more than information*: knowledge is not static, but fluid, requiring dialogue, a questioning and inquisitive attitude, an openness to new experiences. Knowledge is a relationship between people, community, and the natural world.
5. The environment will be *empowering*: the classrooms both indoors and outdoors will be responsive and purposeful to engage learners
6. *Naturalists at heart*: through understanding nature, we understand ourselves. Therefore, the learning environment extends into the natural world and into the greater community, and children spend as much time outside as possible. Children who have a relationship with nature will take care of it.

7. Students own their ***learning with agency***: creating self-directed and intrinsically motivated students. Learning will happen through activities that are meaningful and relevant to learners. Children learn decision-making, responsibility, and leadership skills by exercising a voice in the classroom. Students will acquire skills sets and mind sets needed for an innovative world.

8. Purposeful assessment will drive instruction and affect learning: there will be a balance to meaningful assessment that is student driven and capabilities / strengths based. Assessment will use a foundation of ***capabilities and possibilities*** model. Human potential will be known to all teachers, students, families, and Administration.

9. ***Partnerships with families*** will drive the intentions of learning: In a supportive manner, families will be celebrated as diverse. A family is a child's first teacher, and we will honor families and communicate as such while supporting your growth as a parent.


10. Engage in deliberate efforts to create a ***positive school climate***: build a cooperative, collaborative, and respectful community. Students are challenged to make the world better through actions and learning what is important with purpose. Within our strong community, each child, teacher, and family are treated as an individual. There will be deliberate growth, reflection, and continuous intention for improvement.

Appendix F: School Document Review

Mission:

To respect, honor, and educate students and families for who they are and the strengths they already possess while growing and gaining new strengths and skills through the love of the world around them as a community. We will do so through an environment that empowers them to learn, discover and continue to be all of our best selves.

School Handbook Link

 [Parent-Student Handbook 2021-2022 Terramor.pdf](#)

Code of Conduct

“Be Safe, Be Responsible, Be Respectful, and Be Kind

Appendix G: Description of Research Article Submission Venues

- [Elementary School Journal](#)

The Elementary School Journal has served researchers, teacher educators, and practitioners in the elementary and middle school education for over one hundred years. ESJ publishes peer-reviewed articles dealing with both education theory and research and their implications for teaching practice. In addition, ESJ presents articles that relate the latest research in child development, cognitive psychology, and sociology to school learning and teaching.

- [Planning and Changing: An Education Leadership and Policy Journal](#)

Planning and Changing provides a forum for the presentation of issues and studies that inform current educational policy and practice. As such, the journal serves as a critical, intellectual resource for educational leaders, practitioners, and policy makers. Peer-reviewed articles include formal research studies using quantitative and/or qualitative methodologies, as well as reflective, theoretical pieces focused on significant aspects of education and schooling relevant to the administrator, community, or the larger public good. Published since 1970, Planning and Changing is a well-respected journal in the field of educational leadership and policy studies. The journal welcomes submissions from both new and well-seasoned scholars.