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ELEMENTARY SCHOOL LEADERSHIP, CLIMATE, AND RESILIENCE
DURING COVID-19
A COMPARATIVE CASE STUDY OF TWO INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

A Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of
Graduate School of Leadership & Change
Antioch University

In partial fulfillment for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

by

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October 2023

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This dissertation, by Nora C. Malone, has
been approved by the committee members signed below
who recommend that it be accepted by the faculty of the
Graduate School of Leadership & Change
Antioch University
in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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ABSTRACT

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL LEADERSHIP, CLIMATE AND RESILIENCE DURING COVID-19 A COMPARATIVE CASE STUDY OF TWO INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

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The recent worldwide pandemic impacted educational systems on a global scale, forcing school leaders to reimagine educational structures as they faced the ongoing wounding of the unprecedented, shared trauma wrought by COVID-19. Mandated U.S. school closures in March of 2020 forced an immediate transition to distance learning and presented unforeseen academic and social challenges for students, educators, parents, and school leaders. As school campuses re-opened over the next year, the pandemic continued to present hardships. School leaders were tasked with developing systems to follow appropriate health and safety measures, develop systems to accommodate stakeholders' individual health circumstances, and communicate school policies regularly to those affected by them while still prioritizing the needs of students and their academic progress. Using comparative case-study methodology, this study explored the relationship between school leadership, school climate and organizational resilience in response to the ongoing wounding of COVID-19 from its onset in March of 2020 to the declared end of the pandemic in May of 2023, at two small independent elementary schools. This study illuminated the experiences of the schools' leaders and provided actionable and transferable guidelines for educational leaders facing organizational trauma or crisis. The five key findings support practical implications for school leaders striving to support organizational resilience. They include: the importance of positive school climate, enhanced communication, adaptive capacity, organizational structure and embracing change. The study concludes with implications for future research. This dissertation is available in open access at AURA (<https://aura.antioch.edu/>) and OhioLINK ETD Center (<https://etd.ohiolink.edu/>).

Keywords: board of trustees, comparative case study, crisis, head of school, independent school, leadership, organizational resilience, organizational trauma, school climate

Dedicated to my sons:
Patrick Malone and Timothy Malone
With deep admiration for your resilience. You inspire me.

Acknowledgements

I am deeply grateful to the members of my dissertation committee. To Dr. Laurien Alexandre, committee chairperson, thank you for your wisdom, sense of humor, expert writing eye and for modeling such extraordinary educational leadership. Participation in Antioch's PhDLC program was one of the outstanding educational experiences of my career. To Dr. Elizabeth Holloway, thank you for sharing your deep knowledge of comparative case study and for knowing exactly when to push me into theory and when to nudge me with practical next steps—sticky notes still adorn every wall in my office! To Dr. Shana Hormann, thank you for sharing your expertise and understanding of organizational trauma, crisis, and resilience. I am grateful for your kindness and generous responses to my many questions.

To Ilise and Lauren, the extraordinary women who, during the pandemic, served as heads of Hollywood Schoolhouse and Westerly School of Long Beach, thank you for welcoming me so warmly into your school communities and for your candor in sharing your stories of leading your schools throughout the pandemic. To the administrative and volunteer leaders at Hollywood Schoolhouse and Westerly who participated in this study, I am privileged and grateful to have had the chance to talk with you and learn from you.

To my C-15 study buddies, Dr. Paula Lowe, Dr. Kelly Meehan, Dr. Sara Frost—you three brave women inspired me with your passion, curiosity, and tenacity—Thank you for hanging in there with your support and friendship!

To Barbara, thank you for listening to me daily—your unwavering patience and support meant the world to me. To Ilene, thank you for your friendship, support and understanding of this work. To Annie, thank you for your constant encouragement and editing of Chapter I.

To my family—Pat and Tim, this dissertation is dedicated to you. I am so proud of the men you have become. Thank you for inspiring me through your own accomplishments. To Jessie, my daughter in law, your belief that I would finish this project was sometimes greater than my own, thank you—I knew I won the lottery when you joined our family. And to Bruce, thank you for years of caretaking that kept me focused on this research and writing.

Lastly, I am grateful to my grandchildren, Kai, James, Meadow, and Asher. Spending time with you while I was working on this dissertation was a gift beyond anything I could have hoped for. Your love and energy kept me going when I was struggling and helped me complete this study. My greatest joy is to be part of your lives as you grow and find your places in the world. Work hard, follow your dreams and always remember that I love you with all my heart!

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CHAPTER I: OVERVIEW

Education is not a preparation for life; education is life itself.

—John Dewey (*The Later Works of John Dewey, Vol. 16*)

Introduction

Fostering school environments where students can flourish is the enormously complex responsibility embraced by campus leaders. Heading a school is akin to executing an intricate gymnastics balance beam routine where meeting stakeholders' compelling and often competing needs challenge a leader's equilibrium and strength daily. No matter how talented the gymnast/leader may be, answering to multiple "coaches," simultaneously navigating the expectations of parents and faculty all while maintaining the necessary laser focus on students' learning present an intricate series of ongoing and often challenging demands. Sometimes the balance beam seems infinitely long and dangerously narrow. And there is no guarantee that the dismount will be voluntary or graceful. Yet, countless passionate educators embrace the requisite challenges and agree that an effective education etches indelible internal lessons and positive habits of mind in students. They share Mandela's (2003) conviction that "education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world" (para. 13).

Effective schools require effective leadership. Rutter et al. (1979) found that effective school leaders directly affect school climate which in turn influences teacher engagement and student achievement. The National School Climate Center (NSCC, 2007) defines school climate as "the quality and character of school life" (para. 3). According to the NSCC (2007), a school's climate is determined by the school experience of students, parents, and school personnel. School climate reflects "norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures. ... A sustainable, positive school climate fosters youth

development and learning necessary for a productive, contributory, and satisfying life in a democratic society” (para. 3). There are countless additional factors at play at every school site that directly impact a school’s day-to-day operations, student experience, and the school’s overall effectiveness. Among the deeply influential factors at every school is the inevitability of eventually facing crisis or trauma.

This study explored school leadership in the context of the three years’ duration of the COVID-19 pandemic that began in the early spring of 2020 and continued through the spring of 2023. Facing the ongoing wounding of this trauma forced schools to implement a reimagined educational structure while presenting unprecedented challenges to school leaders, teachers, parents, and students. The stress of leading during the pandemic tested both the flexibility and the resilience of educational leaders and their school communities.

The goal of this study was to illuminate the experience of school leaders navigating the pandemic in the hope that these experiences would provide transferable insights to school leaders facing future traumas or crises. This multiple comparative case study examined two small independent schools and investigated ways in which school leaders navigated the years of the COVID-19 trauma in terms of their leadership styles, decision-making processes, relationships to stakeholders and the impact of those factors on the schools’ climates and post-pandemic resilience.

COVID-19

Developing a deep, multi-faceted understanding of COVID-19’s long-term effects on students, teachers, administrators, and school staff will require historical distance that only years will bring. However, even in the short term, the significance of its impact on students’ social and academic learning and on the professionals responsible for educating them is becoming evident.

When writing about the immediate effects of COVID-19 on student learning, Middleton (2020) states, “With the switch to online instruction ... student learning was significantly impacted by stress, anxiety, illness, being forced to learn in a vastly different method ... and the increased potential to fall behind” (p. 1). With the responsibility for student well-being falling squarely on the shoulders of school leaders, the stress of redesigning educational models, quieting and comforting fearful school stakeholders and forcing notoriously slow-moving educational communities to embrace change at break-level speeds, presented school heads with previously unimagined dilemmas of leadership.

When, in March 2020, school building closures forced the abrupt halt of onsite instruction on most campuses across the nation, school leaders and teachers turned immediately to technology as the basis for home schooling. The challenges of this precipitous turn were felt by every constituency. Many educators were lacking the professional expertise to transition their in-person curricula to effective on-line learning. Teachers and administrators reeled from the unexpected demands placed on them to redesign their teaching strategies and curricular content. Students suffered from the disruption of personal connections and often from the lack of access to necessary materials, computers, and the internet. Disparities across different communities became more apparent. Working parents were suddenly expected to arrange their lives to be at home with their children to oversee their day-to-day schooling even with the stress of working or finding or holding a job as the unemployment rate climbed due to the economic ravaging brought on by the pandemic’s assault.

Despite ongoing traumatic wounding, the educational community continued to adapt in its efforts to serve K-12 students. Schools struggled to improve their ability to deliver quality distance learning opportunities to students and developed flexible models of teaching that

accommodated on-line learning, in-person learning, and multiple hybrid models with varying degrees of success.

The pandemic highlighted the difficulties of educating students through distance learning, and it also unearthed countless challenges for reopening schools to in-person learning during the 2020-2021 school year. Teachers and other school personnel were mixed in their willingness to return to their campuses. It is estimated that one in four K-12 teachers nationwide were members of vulnerable populations and had higher than normal risk factors for severe COVID-19 illness. When those teachers were added to educators who lived with or cared for someone at high risk for COVID-19 infection, the percentage of potentially highly vulnerable educators rose to 50.1%. (AARP, n.d.).

In their analysis of K-12 schools reopening and the impact on teachers, Lambert et al. (2020) urged caution in reopening schools:

While all professionals have a moral obligation to do right and act for others' benefit, that does not mean they should accept this risk without effective infection control. Teachers are justified to fear infection as they risk their lives in the classroom. There are limits. ... Transparency and scientific rigor should characterize the process for deciding between what is reasonable and unreasonable. To date neither school districts nor other decision makers have provided that in their push to reopen. (p. 4)

Researchers across the country continued to study the impact of the pandemic on student achievement and educator health and morale. In terms of student achievement, a Brookings Institute study by Kuhfeld et al. (2020), compared student learning gains in reading and math in Fall 2019 to Fall 2020. The researchers discovered surprisingly good news in terms of reading achievement finding the gains in Grades 3–8 were similar in both years:

While the reason for the stability of these achievement results cannot be easily pinned down, explanations are that students read more on their own, and parents are better equipped to support learning in reading compared to other subjects that require more formal instruction. (Kuhfield et al., 2020, para. 12)

The math results were less than encouraging however and showed a 5%–10% decrease in math achievement scores from Fall 2019 when compared with Fall 2020. The disappointing results spurred the researchers to recommend that schools investigate their own site-based results and make plans to remediate students in math once schools re-opened for on-site learning. In the study's conclusion, researchers readily acknowledged the study was limited by its small sample size of ten schools and the small number of grade levels studied (3–8). They invited further research into the impact that the pandemic will have on student learning overall.

As to the effect of COVID-19 on educators' health and morale, early research conducted by the EdWeek Research Center (2020) indicated a decline in teacher morale and predicted a hike in the likelihood of increased faculty resignations for the 2021-2022 school year. According to the EdWeek Research Center (2020), in August of 2020, teacher morale was declining with 31% of teachers and administrators reporting that teacher morale is “much lower than it was prior to the pandemic” (para. 5). The survey results further show that 32% of teachers reported that they were likely to leave their jobs that year although they would have been unlikely to do so before the pandemic (EdWeek Research Center, 2020).

There is a need for future academic research into the lasting effects of COVID-19 on educators, students, and school operations to gain a more complete understanding of the pandemic's impact on K-12 education. During the third year of the pandemic, school leaders focused on regrouping, reorganizing their communities, rebuilding their learning modalities,

redesigning curricula to support student achievement and closing the gaping holes blasted open by the COVID-19 trauma.

COVID-19 has been an accelerator forcing an increased reliance on technology, testing limits of teacher and student creativity, and pushing social change at an unprecedented speed. This study built an understanding of how leaders were challenged, how their thinking, planning, and decision making were impacted by COVID-19 and how school stakeholders were affected. The findings of this study support current and future educational leaders in creating resilient schools able to resume their work of educating students despite the disruptive effects of COVID-19 and any potentially devastating future trauma.

The Purpose of the Study

This multiple comparative case study examined the leadership styles and decision-making of two heads of independent schools during the three years of the pandemic (Spring 2020–Spring 2023). The intention behind the study was to understand how school leaders approached the mandated closing of their school sites, transitioned to on-line learning, and how they prepared for the reopening, and the physical return to school for students and teachers. What did the heads provide in terms of support for teachers and parents who were directly responsible for the learning and well-being of students? How did the school's stakeholders perceive the actions and decisions of their head of school? In what ways was the process of decision-making transparent? In interviewing the school leaders, faculty members, board members as well as parents, the purpose of the study was to understand what the school leaders were thinking, what leadership behaviors they exhibited and how stakeholders perceived and responded to their leadership.

Uncovering shared complexities of the relationship between leadership styles, decision making, and the impact of those decisions on school stakeholders illuminated factors that contribute to organizational resilience in the face of crises and trauma, current and future. At some time, all schools will again experience crisis or trauma and, depending on the circumstances, the disruption to normal operations may impact the school permanently. The response of a school's educational leaders may determine whether the institution survives.

Although writing specifically about university leaders, Vivian and Hormann's (2012) conclusions seem applicable to K-12 leaders as well:

Leaders play an essential role in ... healing from organizational trauma. A leader's approach will often set the tone for how others perceive what has happened and how they respond. Leaders can identify and name the existence of trauma...they can behave in ways that contain the impacts and ensure a baseline of safety and stability. Leaders can help others to normalize what they are experiencing, a process that enables all involved to listen and collectively name and make sense of what has occurred. Leaders and leadership teams identify and engage in priority actions. (p. 7)

This study probed the experiences of two school heads who led their institutions through the COVID-19 crisis. It provided a unique lens that illuminated transferable actions for school leaders to take when confronted with organizational trauma.

Types of K-12 Schools

This study focused on independent private schools, one type of K-12 school in the United States. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2020), in the fall of 2020, 90% or 50.7 million, of the nation's K-12 students were enrolled in public schools while 10% of students or 5.7 million, attended private elementary and secondary schools:

Public schools are funded by federal, state, and local governmental sources and a public education is available to all students in grades K-12. Public schools must follow federal and state standards that dictate policies for operation as well as curricular and other expectations. Charter Schools, a subset of public schools, are governed by a legislative contract with the state or local school district that dictates the school's educational philosophy and mission. (p. 2)

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2020), private schools are generally supported by private funds. Sources of revenue may include tuition, grants, and fundraising, almost always secured from private sources. Over two-thirds of private schools belong to educational associations that bring groups of schools together that share similar priorities.

The majority of private schools (68%) have a religious affiliation and derive their mission and vision based on these belief systems. Other private schools are secular. Some are incorporated as for-profit organizations and others as non-profits. In for-profit schools, the head of school works for the owners who treat the organization as a money-making enterprise. For-profit private schools are often criticized for holding conflicting values of producing a profit while also under the obligation to ensure that student welfare is at the center of the organization's mission. Levy (2019), a private school educator who has taught in both the for-profit and non-profit sector, describes the conflict this way:

What I have felt, having worked in both traditional not-for-profit schools and for-profit schools, is that they can't be combined. Educating kids is fundamentally about having inclusive, diverse, caring communities. And while the profit motive can do many things,

and do many things well, it is not compatible with inclusive, caring communities.

(para. 11)

In addition to parochial, religiously affiliated schools and for-profit private schools, there exists a third category of privately supported elementary and secondary schools. These are known as independent schools. Per Internal Revenue Service regulations, they are incorporated as 501(c)(3) non-profit organizations. As such they are tax exempt and can engage in fundraising activities. (National Association of Independent Schools [NAIS], 2021). The subjects chosen for this study were schools of this type because of the decision-making responsibility the organizational structure of independent schools allows their educational leaders.

The NAIS is a non-profit membership association serving as an organizational umbrella for 1,615 independent schools whose total enrollments exceed 700,000 Kindergarten-12th grade U.S. students (NAIS, 2021). NAIS sets high standards for its member schools through requiring that each school subscribes to the NAIS Principles of Good Practice, which define ethical, moral, and legal standards for independent school operations (NAIS, 2021). The organization advocates for independent schools through collaborating closely with state accrediting organizations as well as communicating regularly with federal state and local educational agencies. NAIS also conducts and publishes research, organizes conferences and offers other professional development opportunities to independent school educators. In addition, NAIS publishes books, articles online and in print dealing with issues of interest for their members and takes an active role in raising awareness about independent schools across the nation. NAIS (2021) describes independent schools in the following way on its website:

Independent schools are non-profit private schools that are independent in philosophy: A unique mission drives each one. They are also independent in the way they are managed

and financed: each is governed by an independent board of trustees, and each is primarily supported through tuition payments and charitable contributions. They are accountable to their communities and are accredited by state-approved accrediting bodies. (para. 2)

Independent schools range in size from under 100 students to enrolling well over 700 or more. For example, Harvard-Westlake School (n.d.) in Los Angeles, one of the largest independent secondary schools in NAIS, has an enrollment of 1,593 7-12th grade students.

Whether small or large in terms of total enrollment, NAIS sites two of the reasons that parents choose to enroll their children in independent schools include a low student to teacher ratio 13:1 and small class size. NAIS (2021) reports the median class size as 15.

Among the challenges NAIS schools have been actively addressing in recent years is the imperative to develop inclusive, diverse student and adult communities. NAIS and State accrediting associations require that schools promote a non-discrimination policy per federal and state laws and openly address the need for their schools to improve ethnic, racial, and socio-economic diversity. They make the imperative clear in the preamble to the NAIS principles of good practice for equity and justice:

NAIS schools value the representation and full engagement of individuals within our communities whose differences include—but are not limited to—age, ethnicity, family makeup, gender identity and expression, learning ability, physical ability, race, religion, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status. NAIS welcomes and celebrates the diversity of our member schools. We expect member schools to create and sustain diverse, inclusive, equitable, and just communities that are safe and welcoming for all. We recognize that to do so requires commitment, reflection, deliberate planning and action, and ongoing accountability. (NAIS, 2023, para. 2)

One pathway towards creating more diverse, inclusive, and equitable independent school communities requires offering need-based tuition assistance programs. In addition, schools are encouraged to increase the racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity of their leadership, faculty, and staff through their hiring processes. The success of these initiatives varies and there remains a need for improvement. Therefore, diversity initiatives remain at the forefront of strategic goals for many schools. According to NAIS research, currently 30.9% of independent school students are children of color. In terms of the teaching staff, 68% of independent schoolteachers are women and 32% are men. Nineteen percent of independent schoolteachers are people of color and 22.6% of independent school administrators are people of color. Gender equity in independent school leadership remains a challenge as women hold only 12% of the senior level administrative positions. The statistics for school heads are dismal as well with only 8.1% of school heads reporting as people of color and only 33% are women (NAIS, 2019).

In addition to the wide-ranging sizes and types of independent schools, they are equally distinct in their financial positions. The average independent school tuition comes in at a hefty average cost of \$25,900 per year for day schools and \$59,764 for boarding schools. According to NAIS (2021), 21.7% of independent school students receive financial aid from their schools with the average award being \$14,935.

Because independent schools are tax exempt, most have active development initiatives that help fund the costs of educating their students and financing strategic initiatives. The amount of money raised varies enormously depending on the school's mission and culture, school type, and other individual demographics. Independent schools raise money to cover operational costs, to enhance their curricular offerings, to support diversity initiatives through offering financial assistance to students, to improve compensation levels for their employees and to improve their

campuses. Vehicles for raising money at independent schools mirror those of other charitable organizations, there are direct asks, fundraising events that promote community building and raise funds simultaneously and special campaigns focused on one particular capital or endowment project. Independent school endowments range from \$0.00 to \$868M at Phillips Andover Academy in Massachusetts (Successful Student, n.d.).

One of the most obvious characteristics of independent schools is how different they can be from one another. State organizations grant terms of accreditation based on a school's adherence to ethical legal and moral practices, alignment with its stated mission, and its projected financial sustainability.

Among the consequences of independent school structure, and one of the characteristics that made independent school leaders relevant subjects for this study, is the power of self-determination. Because each school is governed by its own board of trustees and committed to a unique mission developed by and for each school, heads of independent schools shoulder enormous responsibility for a school's financial viability and also have the extraordinary opportunities for developing a mission-aligned vision and building a school community. During crisis or trauma, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, independent school leaders carry even more responsibility. Their individual leadership styles and strategies make a huge impact on stakeholders. In public schools which are tied to system-wide bureaucracies and to public funding sources, responsibility is more layered and site principals are often subject to top-down decisions from outside their immediate communities. In independent schools, the heads of school bear the brunt of the school's success or failure.

Leaders of Independent Schools

The independent school's head is the sole employee of its governing board and is responsible for implementing school policies adopted by the board. The independent school leader is generally called the "head of school" although some older schools still use the titles of headmaster or headmistress. Whatever the title, ideally the independent school's primary leader nurtures a productive partnership with the board and collaborates with trustees in developing the vision, mission, and strategic goals for the school. The head is also the most visible face of the school and serves as its educational and cultural leader. The head is responsible for hiring and firing all school employees, for managing the school's admissions policies and enrollment, for fundraising, and for overseeing the school's day-to-day operations. This makes heading an independent school more akin to serving as the CEO of a non-governmental, non-profit corporation than serving as a public-school principal who is essentially an administrator in a multi-layered system. Public school site leaders usually carry the title of "principal" and are not responsible for building enrollment to fund their school's operations. In contrast to that expectation, independent school heads are responsible for developing and marketing the school's value proposition. Successful independent school heads relish the freedom and responsibility of entrepreneurship that is required of them.

There is a lack of research on independent schools generally that creates a gap in our understanding of effective independent school leadership during a trauma. While one can assume that there are significant areas of commonality between all types of schools and almost universal agreement on the high-level of impact a school's leaders have on each school site, its size, structure, independence and so forth influences a school's resilience.

As is explored in Chapter II, many scholars consider the importance of the school leaders' role and style in creating a positive school climate:

Principals have the power, authority, and position to influence school improvement through the development of a climate of integrity and respect. Principals of effective schools focus on attaining high academic achievement and increase teacher retention by providing superior staff development. These principals foster a safe, cohesive, positive, caring, and supportive school climate while developing feelings of trust, open communications, collegiality and promoting effective feedback. (Velasco et al., 2012, p. 331)

Research Design

The research framing this dissertation was a multiple comparative case study of the leadership of the heads of school and the leadership teams in two independent schools in the Los Angeles area from spring of 2020 to spring of 2023 during the COVID-19 pandemic. Case Study is a methodology commonly employed by researchers interested in educational institutions, programs, and leadership (Yazan, 2015, p. 134). With the mercurial nature of the COVID-19 health crisis and school heads' responses to it at the core of this research, it was important to employ qualitative methodology that allowed for some flexibility in the study design. Merriam, Stake, and Yin are looked to as the pioneers in educational case study (Creswell et al., 2007) and their collective instruction, informed by more recent discussions of case study by Simons (2009) and Bartlett and Vavrus (2017), formed the boundaries of the research.

The research is nestled under the broad umbrella of a multiple comparative case study, or, per Stake (1995), an instrumental multiple case study which he defines as “research on a case to

gain understanding of something else. In conducting an instrumental case study, the researcher will seek greater understanding of a phenomenon of interest” (p. 171).

Merriam, Stake, and Yin (as cited in Yazan, 2015) share the view that case studies must be carefully designed at the outset and each case must consist of a stand-alone bounded system. This multiple case study included separate investigations of two independent elementary schools. Merriam (1988) states that “each case in a cross-case analysis is first treated as a comprehensive case in and of itself” (p. 154). This is the mandate to treat each case as its own bounded system. Data were gathered through interviews, observations, and document reviews and then analyzed for common themes. The cases were viewed through the lens of extant literature that examines the relationship of school leadership, organizational trauma, and school resilience.

The bounded case studies are compared for commonalities and differences in terms of the leaders’ roles and styles and how those factors impacted the schools’ resilience through the pandemic. Evidence of transferability to other schools and school leaders was sought and the lessons learned offer insight to future school leaders suddenly facing the stress of organizational trauma.

Positionality

I am a retired head of an independent elementary school in the Los Angeles metropolitan area that serves children in grades TK-6. My abiding passion to better understand best practices in school leadership grew as my professional responsibilities expanded throughout my 40-year career. I have held positions as a classroom teacher, an admissions director, an assistant head of school and for 21 years, as a head of school. As a seasoned practitioner, I believe that schools only thrive when school leaders devote their energy to building a shared vision, stakeholder commitment and a deep sense of loyalty to the school community fueled by a positive school

climate. Over time I also developed a healthy respect for the fragility of the work and internalized the understanding that building a positive school climate requires daily focus and is a factor in a school's organizational resilience. I learned through experience that strong school communities tend to pull together in difficult times.

As fate would have it, the COVID-19 pandemic emerged in 2020 during my final spring as head of school. Educators were faced with an immediate crisis. Ordinary educational expectations and practices were abruptly interrupted, and disorientation and fear permeated school communities. Independent schools were forced to reevaluate their business models to accommodate the unexpected financial crises that plagued many of their families.

I was deeply interested in better understanding the leadership thinking, planning, and decision-making employed by independent school leaders as they navigated the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects. This multiple comparative case study sheds light on how independent school leaders at two schools led their stakeholders through the three years of ongoing wounding precipitated by the pandemic and provides reporting on the organizational resilience that fortified their schools.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter critically examines the scholarship related to the connections between leadership style, organizational climate, and organizational resilience in the face of a crisis specifically in the context of K-12 schools. In particular, the chapter focuses on school leadership, school climate and school resilience in the aftermath of a trauma. Given the period in which this research was conducted, the chapter also examines some of the emerging literature that investigates the effects on schools' re-openings in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020-2023.

The chapter's first section explores the research related to the influence school leaders exert in creating the organizational climate of their schools and the profound impact that climate has on a school's effectiveness. In addition to the examination of the scholarship, practitioner literature is also incorporated. The second section examines three leadership styles often employed by school leaders and the impact that leaders' styles, choices, and actions have on their school's effectiveness. The third section reviews scholarship that explores the relationship between leadership styles and organizational resilience in highly mission-driven organizations when these organizations are confronted with a crisis or trauma. The fourth section reviews the recent literature examining the effects of the COVID-19 crisis on schools. Scholars have begun looking at some of its effects on organizational functioning and climate. The chapter ends with a concluding summary of the core elements of the four sections, threading them together to identify the context for this study.

School Climate and Leadership Styles

Today both scholars and practitioners acknowledge the importance of a positive school climate in fostering healthy schools able to serve their stakeholders effectively. In their comprehensive literature review of school climate research, Thapa et al. (2013) credit early 20th century educators Perry (1908) and Dewey (1916) with observing that the environment of any school significantly impacts the learning of its students. The authors establish the growing amount of empirical research into school climate in the later 20th century mirrored the increased scholarly interest in organizational functioning generally. Today, educational scholars continue to probe the multiple dimensions of school climate, seeking to learn even more about how a positive school climate is developed and how it impacts student experience and the overall effectiveness of the school.

What Is School Climate?

There are many dimensions to school climate. There is no single seminal study nor is there a single agreed-upon definition of what school climate is and how it is structured. Definitions of school climate do share descriptors that project consistent attention to the feelings stakeholders experience at a particular school. However, containing all the elements that contribute to school climate within a concise definition continues to provide challenges for researchers, practitioners, and school stakeholders alike. Consequently, research studies of school climate have been conducted from a variety of vantage points and this section reviews the field and positions this study within the most relevant school climate research as it pertains to K-12 environments.

Researchers often investigate school climate in relation to specific educational goals or consequences at a school site and define school climate by factors that contribute to specific

outcomes. In their meta-review of school climate research, Thapa et al. (2013) identified five dimensions of school climate: (a) safety (e.g., rules and norms, physical safety, social-emotional safety); (b) relationships (e.g., respect for diversity; school connectedness/engagement, social support, leadership, and students' race/ethnicity and their perceptions of school climate); (c) teaching and learning (e.g., social emotional, ethical and civic learning; service learning; support for academic learning; support for professional relationships and teachers' and students' perceptions of school climate); (d) institutional environment (e.g., physical surrounding, resources, supplies); and (e) the school improvement process (p. 358).

When taken as a whole, the five dimensions of school climate chosen by Thapa et al. (2013) provide insight into the school site experiences of students, administrators, faculty, staff, and parents. While the power and influence of each dimension is weighted according to the characteristics of various school communities, every school campus is impacted to a greater or lesser degree by all of them. Therefore, all five dimensions of school climate are relevant to this study of the relationship between school climate, school leadership and school resilience in the face of crisis and trauma. Depending on the crisis or trauma descending on a school, differing dimensions of school climate may come to the fore as being most critical at that time.

Prior to Thapa et al.'s (2013) compilation of school climate literature, Peterson and Skiba (2001) expanded scholarly understanding of school climate research. Although, over two decades old, their study of the relationship between school climate and school violence, provides a lasting general definition that supports the conclusions of Thapa et al.'s meta review and reinforces the findings that the dimensions of school climate are of enormous importance to stakeholder experience:

School climate might be defined as the feelings that students and staff have about the school environment over a period of time. These feelings may have to do with how comfortable each individual feels in the environment and whether the individual feels the environment is supportive of learning (or teaching). Climate may also address other positive or negative feelings regarding the school environment. (Peterson & Skiba, 2001, p. 155)

A small sample of the research questions that have been explored in articles about school climate illustrates the breadth of topics that touch on school climate, exposes the complexities of studying the topic at all, and the necessity of defining school climate in relation to specific research questions. The wide breadth of topics that researchers have placed under the umbrella of school climate over the past two decades focus on leadership styles (Allen et al., 2015; Devos & Bouckennooghe, 2009; Leithwood & Montgomery, 1982; Pepper & Hamilton Thomas, 2002; Srivastava & Dhar, 2016) and stakeholder experiences (Butterworth & Weinstein, 1996; Dinham et al., 1995; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2014). Regardless of the lenses through which scholars observe school climate, all assert that school climate is a key factor in a school's success.

Significant wisdom is found not only in the scholarly work, but in practitioner experience as well. The NSCC (2007), a national non-profit organization dedicated to improving school climate in Grades K-12, uses the following characteristics to describe school climate:

[School climate is] the quality and character of school life. School climate is based on patterns of students,' parents' and school personnel's experience of school life; it also reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures. ... Positive School climate is fostered through a shared vision of respect and engagement across the educational system. Emphasis is also placed

on the collective of safety and care for the school's physical environment. (National School Climate Center, 2007, paras. 1–2)

The NSCC expands its definition of school climate by providing the following list of qualities that a positive school climate includes:

- Norms, values, and expectations that support people feeling socially, emotionally, and physically safe.
- People are engaged and respected.
- Students, families, and educators work together to develop and contribute to a shared school vision.
- Educators model and nurture attitudes that emphasize the benefits and satisfaction gained from learning.
- Each person contributes to the operations of the school and the care of the physical environment. (NSCC, 2007, para. 4)

As is evidenced by the definitions of school climate outlined here, there are multiple contributing factors to a positive school climate, to creating a school environment where children feel emotionally and physically safe and are encouraged to learn, explore, and grow. Overall, there is consensus among researchers and practitioners that a positive school climate is ideal to maximize student learning and a school's effectiveness. The National Institute of Justice (2018), the research, development, and evaluation agency of the U.S. Department of Justice, affirms that “it is abundantly clear that a positive and communal school climate leads to beneficial outcomes for all members of the school community” (p. 21). Busch et al. (2009) argue the importance of school climate and describe school climate as “the heart and soul of the school and the essence of the school that draws teachers and students to love it and to want to be part of it” (p. 3).

Summary

The challenges facing every school site are different and so research emphasizes on a variety of school climate dimensions are to be encouraged and expected. Choosing which aspects of school climate are the most important to study, to value, to measure is a question that researchers and practitioners answer in many ways depending on interests and circumstances. For this study, the most relevant school climate research investigates the influential role of a school's leaders in creating school climate. There is a great deal of school climate research that is focused on developing a shared understanding of how school leaders may exhibit relevant and effective school leadership styles to support the school's mission and strategic goals. The power educational leaders wield in fostering and sustaining school climate has been well documented over many years.

In this first section of this review where the relevance to school leaders, leadership styles and their influence on school climate, is at the center, three areas identified in Thapa et al.'s (2013) meta-review of school climate literature stand out. They are the focus on (1) relationships (in particular connectedness/engagement by stakeholders and leadership), (2) teaching and learning, (in particular the social-emotional experiences of students at school, and (3) the institutional environment (which is influenced not only by available resources, but also by leadership styles), are exceptionally relevant in gaining an understanding of the role school leaders play in creating school climate.

School Leadership Styles in Relationship to School Climate

There is substantial agreement among scholars and practitioners that improving school climate requires intentional effort by the school's leaders and by the principal or head of school, as they are charged with setting the tone for their individual school communities. For example,

the National Institute of Justice (2018) report emphasizes the site leader's role in stemming school violence, which is at crisis proportions in the United States:

At the heart of this effort lies the principal who has direct influence over school-level conditions. If principals engage teachers in decision- making processes and encourage faculty innovation and collaboration, they can create a professional culture of trust and support which, in turn can increase teachers' satisfaction and commitment. These positive attributes ripple out to the students who then display greater academic and behavioral success. Thus, principals are integral to the school climate improvement process. (p. 17)

Research findings supporting school leaders' relevance in creating school climate dates back decades. For example, Bossert et al. (1982) reinforced the fact of school leaders' influence on school climate finding that "principals' usual behaviors [meaning those socialized behaviors stakeholders learn to expect] create links between the characteristics of the school's organizational and learning climate. These links to school climate are the mechanisms through which principals profoundly affect students and learning" (p. 35).

The advantages of creating a positive school climate span time and culture. It is interesting to note as well that both international and domestic studies have borne out the same facts emphasizing the importance of school leaders in creating school climate. The research dates back decades. For example, Rutter et al. (1979) studied 12 London schools in the city's low-income areas and found that a school's leader influences the community through setting the expectations for teachers and students at a school. Rutter et al. suggested that an effective educational leader directly affects school climate, teachers' effectiveness and student achievement and lowered delinquency rates.

Dinham et al. (1995) conducted a comparative case study of three Australian schools. In describing an effective school by measuring levels of student, faculty, and parent satisfaction, the authors emphasize the role of the principal:

Parents and teachers shared a common belief that it was a good school. The principal had a strong influence in setting the general tone or ‘climate’ of the school and had a marked hands-on open door positive attitude being at the centre of much that was happening within and concerning the school. (p. 41)

In a far more recent study of school leaders’ impact on their school’s climate, Price (2012) states:

Research finds that the attitudes of principals and teachers create an atmosphere for learning, often referred to as school climate that influences school effectiveness.

Research shows that atmospheres of trust, shared vision, and openness create positive school climate conditions. There is good theoretical reason to suspect that interpersonal relationships between principals and their teachers influence school professionals’ attitudes that define the broader school climate. (p. 39)

Overall, there is agreement between academics and practitioners that school leaders have enormous impact on school climate and that a positive school climate is of immense importance in fostering school effectiveness. This leads to an interest in seeking to better understand what leadership traits or characteristics a principal or school head can engage that will best serve to improve a school no matter the circumstances of a particular site. The underlying assumption is that with effective leadership all schools can improve, can bolster their effectiveness, and improve school climate despite the varied challenges they face. Pepper and Hamilton Thomas (2002) note, “Many times, teachers and administration fail to recognize that an administrator’s

leadership style greatly affects the climate and can create a learning environment that is negative and counter-productive” (p. 155). Understanding the consistent relevance of school leaders’ impact on campus climates is integral to the proposed investigation that will seek to illuminate how leadership decisions and behavior have affected campus responses to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Leadership Styles

Like school climate, effective dominant leadership styles have been explored from a variety of vantage points with varying methods used in the research. Scholars and practitioners agree that most leaders develop a hybrid of leadership styles with one set of leadership characteristics tending to be the dominant style. “Research has shown that *pure* [emphasis in original] leadership styles are almost never encountered in practice. Usually, the leader has elements of two, or even three, styles with the dominance of one...*the dominant leadership style* [emphasis in original]” (Pinkas & Bulic, 2017, p. 5).

There are several leadership styles which researchers have shown can influence the creation of a positive school climate and it is evident that the leadership traits shared by these dominant leadership styles impact the leader’s ability to foster a positive school climate and an effective school community. Noted in the literature, among the leadership styles that portend the greatest likelihood of creating a positive school site climate are transformational, authentic, and servant leadership. A discussion of the dominant traits of each of these three styles follows. It is relevant to note here that these three styles share leadership traits including transparent communication, building trust with followers, listening to others, articulating clear goals and being a role model for stakeholders.

Authentic Leadership

The *Leadership Quarterly* devoted an entire issue to authentic leadership in 2005. In their introductory article, Avolio and Gardner (2005) explore the origins and definition of authentic leadership and illustrate their discussion with references to the characteristics shared by authentic leaders (pp. 319–322). In addition, the authors differentiate authentic leadership from several other forms of positive leadership while acknowledging that there are many facets it shares with transformational and servant leadership. Highlighted distinctions between these leadership styles include the authors' observation that authentic leaders need not be charismatic (an important characteristic of transformational leadership). Authentic leadership includes a deep commitment to values as does servant leadership, however. according to Avolio and Gardner, the two leadership constructs are differentiated in part by a lack of empirical research conducted into servant leadership. Unlike authentic leadership theory, research into servant leadership is primarily atheoretical with little evidence that it is based in the academic roots of positive psychology and organizational psychology as is authentic leadership research (Avolio & Gardner, 2005, p. 331).

Avolio and Gardner (2005) describe authentic leadership as requiring heightened levels of self- awareness and use that concept as a baseline for describing authentic leadership development. According to the authors, four elements of self- regulation are especially relevant to authentic leaders including “values, cognitions regarding identity, emotions and motives/goals” (Avolio & Gardner, 2005, p. 325). Authentic leaders are described as “leading by example as they demonstrate transparent decision making, confidence, optimism, hope and resilience and consistency between their words and deeds” (Avolio & Gardner, 2005, p. 326).

A number of scholars argue that authentic leaders foster a heightened self-awareness within their followers too. Notes Avolio and Gardner (2005):

Followers develop greater clarity about their values, identity, and emotions and, in turn, move towards internalized regulatory processes, balanced information processing, transparent relations with the leader and associates, and authentic behavior. ... They come to know and accept themselves and self-regulate their behavior to achieve goals that are, in part, derived from and congruent with those of the leader. Hence, we expect an authentic relationship between the leader and followers to emerge which is characterized by open and positive exchanges as they pursue shared and complementary goals that reflect deeply held and overlapping values. (pp. 326–327)

Avolio and Gardner (2005) credit Henderson and Hoy (1983) with early research introducing concepts of authentic leadership into educational research. In their 1983 groundbreaking research, Henderson and Hoy found that authentic leaders embraced and modeled the following behaviors, which are critical for school climate:

1. Acceptance of personal and organizational responsibility for actions, outcomes, and mistakes.
2. The non-manipulation of others.
3. The salience of the self over role requirements, which we interpret to mean core values having precedent over demands in the leadership context: for example, a willingness to take a stand for doing the right thing (p. 66).

Evans (1996) extends the notions of the fundamental requirements for authentic leadership that remain relevant today. He notes, “Authentic leaders build their practice outward from their core commitments rather than inward from a management text” (Evans, 1996, p. 193).

Evans (1996) goes on to report that, in addition to an unflappable commitment to acting from a set of deeply held core values, accepting responsibility, building trustful relationships, and acting in the best interests of constituents are all baseline requirements for authentic leadership (pp. 194–195). While these traits of authentic leadership may be advantageous to leaders in any organization, in schools, where adults are modeling for students with every action and decision they make, authentic leadership seems especially relevant.

Further evidence of the salience of authentic leadership in schools was documented by Sopko and LaRocco (2018) in their case study of a small primary school. They found that the principal's authentic leadership style was effective in supporting the school's positive climate. The authors found the sense of collaboration among the faculty and staff, and mutual trust within the community, fostered student engagement and success. In evaluating the leader/follower relationships at the school, the authors conclude, "Authentic leaders facilitate a sense of belonging to the organization, advance followers' identification with the organization's mission and values" (p. 65). The case study also illuminated high levels of trust attached to authentic leadership and found that the school's principal nurtured trust through the attributes of being trustworthy herself and displaying the attributes of benevolence, honesty, openness, reliability, and competence (Sopko & LaRocco, 2018, p. 65).

Also commenting on a principal's authentic leadership, Srivastava and Dhar (2016) concluded that when that style is present, "teachers have more confidence to make a difference in their students' learning" (p. 334). The hallmarks of authentic leadership included transparency and operating from a set of core values upon which a positive school climate can be built. Summing up the results of their study, Srivastava and Dhar (2016) conclude that "if the principal is authentic in his or her leadership and stays true to self and others, he or she may lead the

whole educational system effectively” (p. 334). The findings of this article highlight that the capacity for building trust with followers, for being seen as an authentic leader who displays consistency between what is said and the actions that ensue, and as a leader who has a strong value centered approach, enhances the likelihood that the leader will be successful in building a positive school climate (Srivastava & Dhar, 2016, p. 337).

The research discussed above provides evidence of the positive impact school leaders whose dominant leadership style is classified as authentic, can bring to their school sites. At a very basic level, authentic leaders are well positioned to lead a school community and be seen as positive and productive role models who, when tasked with creating a positive school climate, are likely to succeed in enhancing the community stakeholders’ satisfaction and the consequent effectiveness of the school for children. These findings are relevant to the study as we review additional leadership styles that are conducive to leading schools through crises and emerging with resilient school communities. Starting from well-defined core values and a baseline of authenticity is critical to each of them but displaying authentic leadership as a dominant style is one path to a school leader’s success but not the only one.

Transformational Leadership

Being seen as a transformational leader is another effective style that serves a school leader in building positive school climate and successfully implementing change.

Transformational leadership requires the leader to inspire followers, to embrace a shared vision of positive change, and to strive to meet goals beyond those originally thought to be achievable.

Bass and Riggio’s (2005) important work on this theme describe transformational leaders in the following way:

Transformational leaders are those who stimulate and inspire followers to both achieve extraordinary outcomes and, in the process, develop their own leadership capacity.

Transformational leaders help followers grow and develop into leaders by responding to individual followers' needs by empowering them and by aligning the objectives and goals of the individual followers, the leader, the group, and the larger organization. More evidence has accumulated to demonstrate that transformational leadership can move followers to exceed expected performance. (p. 4)

Transformational leadership occurs only when the school leader articulates a vision, when stakeholders are committed to the community, and when all are inspired to do the hard work to lead and implement the changes required to realize the shared vision. "In addition to the formulation of a vision," state Rowold and Heinitz (2007), "strong emotional ties between the leader and the led are necessary in order to change followers' belief systems and attitudes. In addition, if the leader is a trustworthy model and represents a code of conduct, transformation occurs more easily" (p. 123).

To extend the discussion of the value of transformational leadership for a school community, when a school leader articulates a shared vision and empowers teachers and students to believe that it can be achieved and focuses resources on providing the support necessary to achieve the idealized vision, which are all hallmarks of transformational leadership, the results will be positive changes in student and community outcomes. The resulting positive school climate will enable the leader and stakeholders to reach organizational goals, school leaders "set the atmosphere of a campus establishing various norms for the behavior that staff members follow, [and that] leadership is a key component in the development and sustainment of school climate" (Allen et al., 2015, p. 4).

The salience of transformational leadership to school climate success was also explored by Moolenaar et al. (2010) in research on the relationships between transformational leadership and an innovative climate that may emerge in schools. The findings indicated that transformational leadership by the school principal was positively associated with schools' innovative climates. "Transformational leadership focuses on the capacity building for the purpose of organizational change. Transformational leaders aim to motivate followers...the more closely connected [principals] were to their teachers, the more willing teachers were to invest in change and the creation of new knowledge and practices" (Moolenaar et al., 2010, pp. 645–646).

Sağnak et al. (2015) took the examination of the relationship between transformational leadership and an innovative school climate a step further by studying the impact of psychological empowerment resulting from the leadership style of transformational leaders on staff and innovative climate in schools. The researchers concluded that there was a significant positive relationship, "Transformational leaders empower their employees in order to let them perform independently from supervision and control. Employees feel empowered in the environment created by transformational leaders" (Sağnak et al., 2015, p. 156).

The relevance of transformational leadership was also found important when school climate was viewed through a narrower lens of the ethical climate prevalent within a school community in 50 elementary schools in Nigde, Turkey (Sağnak et al., 2015). The results of this work confirmed that elementary schools placed 'caring' communities at the forefront of defining an 'ethical' climate and determined that transformational leadership was a reliable predictor of a positive ethical organizational climate (Sağnak, 2010, p. 1147).

To conclude, these studies demonstrate that the impact of transformational leadership on school climate is important in opening the path for a school community to achieve its goals.

Although the impact on student academic and social achievement, arguably the priority for any school, may be an indirect one from principal to student, it is the impact that transformational leadership can have on teachers and staff who directly influence and inspire students every day that is important. Given the purpose of the proposed study, the value of this style, anchored by visioning and stakeholder commitment, to foster innovation and encourage stakeholder motivation can't be understated when one imagines leading a school through crisis.

Servant Leadership

A third leadership style that appears frequently in the literature about school climate is servant leadership. Smith et al. (2004) compared the two styles suggesting that transformational leaders inspire followers to reach for a shared vision and provide them with the encouragement and resources to reach their potential while serving as role models for followers. When compared to servant leaders, transformational leaders tend to be found the limelight, boldly inspiring and leading. Servant leaders, on the other hand, take a more modest stance and view themselves as serving their followers without seeking recognition for their own leadership as their priority. Their focus is on developing their followers' capacity for self-leadership through facilitating their achievements and supporting and helping to mold a deeply shared vision. The servant leader places their followers' interests before their own and builds stakeholder commitment through empowering them. When the organization achieves its goals, the servant leader may or may not receive recognition. Servant leaders lead from behind. Smith et al. (2004) note, "Servant leadership is an understanding and practice of leadership that places the good of those led over the self-interest of the leader" (p. 82).

Considered the intellectual founder of the concept of servant leaders, Greenleaf (1970) describes servant leaders as individuals with a natural inclination to serve. Such people make a

conscious choice to lead to serve rather than lead to gain power or acquire material possessions. They try to serve their organizations through characteristics such as listening, empathy, healing relationships, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to human resource development, and commitment to building community (Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership, n.d.).

The characteristics of servant leadership highlighted above are founded in the leader's commitment to a set of core values from which their leadership style emerges. Like transformational and authentic leaders, servant leaders must first have a well-defined set of values upon which their planning and decision making are scaffolded. It is the foundation that supports the servant leader's success in creating a positive school climate that supports the mission and goals of their schools. The servant leader often sees a purpose to their leadership outside of themselves, outside of their own personal success or satisfaction. Servant leaders find a purpose that serves others and the greater good of their schools in their call to leadership.

Research has supported the centrality of values to servant leadership. According to Russell (2001), "the primary functional elements of servant leadership grow out of proper leadership values. The values of servant leaders not only yield observable attributes, but they also affect the leaders' organizations. The personal values of leaders, such as honesty and integrity, play a primary role in establishing interpersonal and organizational trust. Trust holds together servant-led organizations" (p. 81).

Black (2010) explored the question of whether a correlation exists between servant leadership, stakeholders, and school climate. Beginning from the baseline of evidence accumulated by earlier researchers, Black (2010) states, "Educational leaders are vital to building and fostering a positive school environment" (p. 437). Like Greenleaf before him, Black (2010)

describes the servant leader as motivated by being “a servant first” and goes on to say, “The attribute to serve others is not serving in the sense of doing things for others. The leaders’ focus is to make the person served more competent to meet their own needs and be better equipped to serve ... society in general” (pp. 439–440). When applied to a school setting, the characteristics Black ascribes to servant leaders seem well aligned to the primary work of educators, fulfilling the mission of their schools while preparing students for productive futures.

For his study, Black (2010) chose principals and teachers employed by a Catholic school board in Ontario, Canada. He acknowledges the possibility that the resulting strong correlation between servant leadership and a positive school climate may be influenced by the expectations of subjects who chose parochial education as a profession and Black suggests that further research into a broader range of schools will be enlightening. However, given the nature of expectations that all schools provide a safe, productive environment for students, it is likely that servant leadership has the potential to positively affect school climate in secular school settings too. In his summary remarks, Black (2010) states, “The current study provides evidence to support the effectiveness of implementing servant leadership principles to create a positive school climate in Catholic schools. Previous research supports the concept that a positive school climate influences student achievement” (p. 461).

Even the briefest of reviews demonstrates that scholars link attributes of servant leadership with positive school climate (Black, 2010; Smith et al., 2004). The literature affirms that a leader who exhibits the qualities of a servant leader, placing the interests of students, faculty, and parents above their own, most certainly would have a positive impact on many dimensions of school climate. It is also clear that servant leadership nurtures trust among followers which researchers agree is another necessary component that is a major contributor to

school climate. In their review of servant leadership, Parris and Peachy (2013) summarize, “Servant leadership can perhaps provide the ethical grounding and leadership framework needed to help address the challenges of the twenty-first century ... servant leadership contrasts traditional leader-first paradigms. Clearly there is a role for servant-leaders in the nurturing and growing of successful, safe, and resilient school campuses” (p. 390).

Given the mission-driven nature of schools, the role of school leaders to foster school stakeholder commitment to guide students to reach their potential, servant leadership, with its unselfish focus on the good of the whole community, is an effective leadership style when employed by school principals and heads of school. Understanding the positive effects of servant leadership is relevant to the proposed study in investigating whether elements of this effective leadership style contribute the resilience of a school community.

Notable Style Intersections

It is important to emphasize that the three leadership styles discussed above share key characteristics that facilitate leaders’ effectiveness in fostering positive school climates and achieving other significant mission appropriate goals. Successful school leaders whose dominant leadership styles are characterized as authentic, transformational and servant leadership facilitate stakeholder commitment to the community, empower stakeholders to embrace a mission-appropriate shared vision and to share the belief that the goals articulated by the leader can be achieved. While the style most appropriate to individual leaders or schools may vary, research confirms that effective authentic, transformational and/or servant leaders must build their success on a foundation of mutual trust between themselves and their followers.

Researchers have found that successful school leaders foster positive school climates, through building trusting relationships facilitated by clear, transparent communication. Earning

the trust of school stakeholders requires leaders to follow through on initiatives, engage followers through transparent communication and foster mutual respect by treating stakeholders respectfully. Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2014) focused on the importance of faculty trust in the principal, and they reinforce the value of principals building trusting relationships with school stakeholders:

The authors found that faculty trust in the principal was related to perceptions of both collegial and instructional leadership, as well as to factors of school climate such as teacher professionalism, academic press, and community engagement. Student achievement was also correlated with trust, principal leadership behaviors and school climate. (p. 66)

According to the authors, building trust is best facilitated by principals who are viewed as being open to innovative ideas, and approachable. School leaders who listen well and act in a trustworthy manner themselves seed fertile soil for the growth of a positive school climate.

In one article focused on independent schools, Decoux and Holdaway (1999) studied the perceptions of school principals in eight independent schools in Alberta, Canada. They found that philosophical congruence between the principal's beliefs and practices with the school's climate and culture was key to success, as was the ability of the school leader to communicate those values and beliefs in routine day-to-day actions (Decoux & Holdaway, 1999, p. 73).

In another study of high schools in the UAE, Halawah (2005) discovered that there is a strong connection between school climate and the school leader's ability to communicate well. The study surveyed 208 teachers and 555 students in eight schools using two instruments that measured school climate and principal perceived communication styles and found that "better

climate exists in schools where effective communication between school principals and his/her teachers exists” (Halawah, 2005, p. 334).

All three dominant leadership styles discussed here share the characteristics described above. When seen as authentic, transformational or servant leaders, school principals and heads of school strive to build trust, communicate openly, and articulate a shared vision.

Summary

The overall message from the review of this literature on leaders’ styles is clear and consistent. School leaders, such as principals and heads of school, who successfully contribute to building positive school climates employ a variety of leadership styles all of which share significant characteristics, including fostering a shared vision based on values and mission, communicating clearly, and encouraging stakeholder commitment to their schools. Generally, school stakeholders view these leaders as inclusive and even inspiring because effective school leaders communicate openly and often. Crucially, they build excitement for their vision of what the school can be and empower their faculty to bring their best to students every day.

While effective school leaders share much, the primary characteristics stakeholders experience initially may be significantly different due to the leaders’ personalities and dominant leadership styles. Based on the literature reviewed, transformational leaders are often described as inspirational (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Bass & Riggio, 2005). Authentic leaders are frequently seen as being committed to core values and transparent communication (Evans, 1996; Srivastava & Dhar, 2016). Servant leaders are often characterized as placing followers’ interests before their own and seeking no personal gain (Greenleaf, 1970; Smith et al., 2004). Whatever the dominant style, literature tells us that authentic, transformational and servant leaders bring follower potential to the fore. Successful school leaders foster a positive school climate through

building trusting and open relationships with teachers, parents, and students and by acting in a consistent and trustworthy manner themselves. The most salient finding of all may simply be the realization that school leadership matters. Whether the school serves young children or adolescents, whether it is domestic or international, publicly funded or privately sourced, whether it is a large school or a small one, the principal sets the tone and models the attitudes and behaviors that significantly impact school climate. Sergiovanni and Starratt (1998) state that “the climate of the school can be directly changed, positively or negatively by the principal’s actions” (p. 327).

The connection between school leadership and the responsibility to create a foundation that fosters growth of a positive school climate is clear. Positive school climate is characterized by caring and supportive relationships between constituencies and results in a greater likelihood of developing a thriving resilient organization where stakeholders are invested in its endurance and success. A resilient school community is positioned to meet and rebound from challenges. The connection between a positive organizational climate and resilient schools in the face of crisis and trauma is clear throughout the extant literature on school leadership, school climate and organizational resilience and frames the basis of interest in how these leaders have navigated through the COVID-19 pandemic.

Leadership, Organizational Crisis, and Resilience

This section explores the inextricable relationship between leadership and organizational resilience when crises or trauma disrupt the normal functioning of an organization. Specifically, this section takes account of the literature published regarding highly mission-driven organizations. The section includes definitions of organizational crisis and trauma, provides an overview of research describing the importance of leadership, and reviews the characteristics of

effective leaders who guide organizations, including schools, through unexpected disruptions in organizational functioning. In addition, research probing the components of organizational resilience, post an acute phase of a crisis or trauma, is discussed in relationship to leadership styles. The final part of this section affirms previous conclusions about the relationship between effective school leadership, school climate, and crises and trauma and organizational resilience.

While leadership styles are significant to organizational climate during any period, examining leadership during a crisis or trauma without delving into the emergent question of organizational resilience afterwards would yield questionable conclusions, so when studies are conducted in these areas, the quality of leaders' actions are ultimately measured against the survival and even growth of the organization after the resolution of the immediate crisis or trauma. James and Wooten (2005) emphasize the importance of leadership to the outcome of an organizational crisis noting that "it is often the (mis)handling of crises, not the crisis itself, that can have the most consequences—positive or negative" (p. 141).

Crisis and Trauma

Organizational crises are events bounded by time defined as "an event or time period involving high levels of uncertainty, important issues and time urgency" (Pearson & Clair, 1998, p. 68). For their research into crisis and crisis management, Bundy et al. (2017) define an organizational crisis as "an event perceived by managers and stakeholders as highly salient, unexpected, and potentially disruptive—[an organizational crisis] can threaten an organization's goals and have profound implications for its relationships with stakeholders" (p. 1662).

Crisis definitions for schools are like those for other non-profit organizations. The National Education Association (2018) defines school crisis as "any traumatic event that seriously disrupts coping and problem-solving abilities of students and school staff. It is typically

sudden, unexpected, dramatic, and forceful and may even threaten survival” (p. 1). The definition applies to the broad spectrum of events that occur in educational institutions.

According to the National Education Association, schools can experience crises on a large scale that may threaten operations and require a community-wide emergency response, such as a school shooting or natural disaster, or on a more contained scale such as the unexpected death of a student. In her analysis of school leadership during a crisis, in this case the current COVID-19 pandemic, Brion (2021) posits, “In educational organizations, any situation that disrupts the education process and makes it inoperable is defined as a crisis” (p. 27). According to the author, it is the role of school leaders to expect crises to occur and prepare their communities for the onslaught. It is not if a crisis will occur, but when and what it will be that are the unknowns. The organizational culture of a school will determine how well it will manage a crisis and that is determined to a great extent by the leaders of the school site who have an enormous influence on the school’s culture and climate (Brion, 2021, p. 28).

Organizations are subject to trauma in much the same way as individuals may be. Whether faced with a crisis that demands immediate attention or trauma that may build over a longer period and emerge unexpectedly, successful leaders are aware that preparation for weathering these events successfully must be woven into the intricate tapestries of their communities.

Hormann and Vivian (2018) view crises as disruptive occurrences that can result in opportunity for change and growth in an organization and traumas as occurrences that debilitate and organization for a time, or even permanently if left unaddressed. Hormann and Vivian (2018) reinforce this notion through explaining that “trauma is an injury to the organization. ... Unaddressed trauma overpowers organizational structures ... and weakens an organization’s

ability to respond to external and internal challenges” (p. 4). Hormann (2019) subsequently posits, “Organizational trauma and traumatization may result from a single devastating event, several deleterious events over time or from the cumulative impact arising from the nature of the organization’s work. Organizational trauma can originate from external or internal dynamics and consist of a single devastating event or ongoing wounding” (S. Hormann, 2019, personal communication).

In addition, it is relevant to note that schools as well as many other non-profit organizations are highly mission-driven organizations where leadership style often determines the level of commitment to the mission stakeholders develop. Leaders can strengthen their communities and help to steel them against demanding times brought on by crisis or trauma through consistent, inclusive, and trustworthy leadership (Sutherland, 2017; Vivian & Hormann, 2012). In his study of the role of trust and leadership in response to a school’s crisis, Sutherland (2017) states, “Communication, decision making, and collaboration in the community played a significant role in the community learning and growing from the crisis” (p. 2). Clearly the onset of COVID-19, presented initially as a crisis for schools forced into immediate response by mandated campus closures, yet the ensuing three years of the pandemic extended the initial crisis into trauma as organizations struggled against its persistent, painful ongoing wounding.

Leadership and Resilience

This investigation into the literature regarding organizational resilience highlights the significant research conducted into for-profit companies. There is less research focused on non-profit organizations, less still in educational communities and even less research conducted on independent schools in this regard. In general, thoughtful leadership and community strengthening behaviors seem to be at the center of resilience for organizations of all types.

Organizational resilience during and after a crisis or trauma is tied inexorably to the actions of the leaders of the organization. Under any circumstances, it is an advantage for leaders to be credible, trustworthy and to communicate verbally and non-verbally in ways that display those characteristics, and it is imperative that they exhibit those behaviors to successfully navigate organizational crises. In their study of crisis communication, De Waele et al. (2018) found, “When a chief executive officer or spokesperson responds to an organizational crisis he or she communicates not only with verbal cues but also visual and vocal cues ... sending a credible response is crucial in times of crisis” (p. 441).

Readiness to face crises and trauma and emerge successfully is dependent on the foundation laid by organizational leadership in times where crisis and trauma seem remote. Organizational leaders who foster stakeholder ‘buy-in’ to the organization strengthen the organization and the individuals that support it. According to the work of Vivian and Hormann (2012), “Organizational self-care enhances individual self-care by creating a healthy environment for individuals. Organizational self-knowledge helps with survival in tough times as we can draw on knowledge of our strengths, resources, and patterns to assess and strategize” (p. 7).

Effective crisis leadership then is viewed in great part by the impact to the organization when the crisis or trauma has passed. How has the organization been changed? How has the leader facilitated and managed that change? Is it functioning as well as or better than before? Is the organization resilient? In their study of organizational resilience in nonprofit organizations, Witmer and Mellinger (2016) define resilience in this way: “Organizational resilience refers to the ability to respond productively to significant disruptive change and transform challenges into opportunities” (p. 255).

Resilient organizations are those able to implement positive adjustments under challenging conditions. According to Sutcliffe and Vogus (2003), resilience relies on a psychological sense of mastery and self-efficacy as well as an ability to draw on high quality resources (p. 95). Witmer and Mellinger (2016) describe resilience in the following way:

Resilience is a fundamental quality that can apply to individuals, groups, organizations and systems that respond productively to significant disruptive change ... when applied to an organization , it implies the ability to adapt to internal and external demands and concurrently transform these challenges into opportunities for learning and innovation ... the study of organizational resilience is the study of the interaction of multiple parts of a system responding collectively to an external stimuli, especially unexpected emergent events. (p. 256)

For individuals and organizations, the key element of resilience is the ability to rebound and continue. Hormann and Vivian (2018) discuss the importance of leaders to organizational rebounding. While specifically focusing on university leaders, their conclusions are easily recognizable and applicable to K-12 educators as well:

Leaders play an essential role in healing from organizational trauma. A leader's approach will often set the tone for how others perceive what has happened and how they respond ... leaders can identify and name the existence of trauma ... they can behave in ways that contain the impacts and ensure a baseline of safety and stability. Leaders can help others to normalize what they are experiencing a process that enables all involved to listen and collectively name and make sense of what has occurred ... leaders and leadership teams identify and engage in priority actions. (Hormann & Vivian, 2018, p. 7)

The threads that leaders weave into the fabric of their schools that create a positive school climate also contribute meaningfully to preparing communities for weathering crises and trauma. Overwhelmingly, the literature that examines organizational resilience illustrates that deeply resilient communities are guided by leaders who build trust, who communicate effectively and include stakeholders in decision-making as frequently as possible (James & Wooten, 2005, p. 146). These leadership characteristics as well as others are aligned with the dominant leadership styles that foster positive organizational climates in schools. transformational, authentic and servant leadership are all characterized by leaders directing unselfish attention to building inclusive organizations where a shared commitment to organizational mission, stakeholder participation and clear communication are valued.

Resilience in Action

Whether in schools or other organizations, the climate and culture fostered by organizational leaders is the springboard from which resilience will emerge. James and Wooten (2005) conclude that “the best crisis leaders are those who build a foundation of trust not only within their organization but also throughout the organization’s systems ... these leaders use that foundation to prepare their organizations for difficult times ... and to leverage crisis situations as a means for creating change and ultimately a better organization” (p. 142).

On any thriving school campus, school leadership extends beyond the principal’s office and less recognized leaders have important roles to play when their communities are faced with trauma or crisis. The principal or head of school is responsible for setting the tone for the school site and presenting the organizational vision to the school community, but it truly takes belief and commitment by multiple stakeholders before a school can be best prepared to face crisis or trauma successfully. Principals who genuinely share decision-making and responsibility build a

strong network of leaders and best prepare their campuses for the wide-reaching, inevitable, and always unexpected onslaught of a crisis or traumatic event. Goldsmith and Wheeler (2009) assert, “No single crisis is an isolated event. Every crisis is simultaneously an ethical, PR, legal, communications and operations crisis. Unless leaders think systemically and connect the dots, they are ill-prepared for any major crisis” (p. 5). This research points to the fact that, when faced with a crisis, titular school leaders need to involve other stakeholders who have responsibility for various aspects of campus life to effectively address the crisis and move forward to healing. Effective crisis leadership is never accomplished by a single leader and the proposed study will examine the connections between school leaders and stakeholders.

Faculty members, school counselors and other campus managers are integral to the response of a school to a crisis or traumatic event. Fein et al. (2008) studied the role of school counselors in responding to school shootings. In the aftermath of school shootings, informal leaders are called upon to provide support as are the formal school leaders. According to the authors, “debriefings of counselors and other leaders from high-profile shootings revealed that many school counselors performed duties that were not part of their formal preparation or training” (Fein et al., 2008, p. 246). Because of such circumstances the authors conclude that formal and informal school leaders must be given the support and preparation to lead when necessary. Of course, school shootings are an extreme example of organizational trauma, but also illustrative of the need for procedures and protocols to be put in place long before trauma or crisis strikes.

In analyzing the 2007 shootings at Virginia Tech, Geller (2008) describes his personal experience during and after the event as a long-term professor of psychology at the campus. Geller’s experiences mirror those reported by Fein et al. (2008) in that he credits multiple

university leaders, formal and informal, with supporting recovery from the crisis. Geller draws broad conclusions in terms of preventative possibilities for other schools and organizations. His poignant review of the day of the shooting leads to his discussion of the aftermath and how University leaders were able to turn a shocked nation toward the healing process. Geller credits the University leadership, before and after the shootings, with prioritizing all decisions based on the well-being of students. Virginia Tech administrators encouraged faculty members, graduate teaching assistants and other staff to place the students' needs first in their interactions and decision making. Geller concludes that the actively caring behavior and the culture of shared leadership of the Virginia Tech community was experienced by students and professors as well and set a cycle of continuing caring throughout the community. He credits school leadership with having in place a positive school climate and culture where during a crisis the resiliency necessary to recouping and recovering normal University functioning was part of the fabric of the school culture. Geller (2008) asks, "What does this have to do with leadership? I say everything. ... Effective leaders inspire people to go beyond the call of duty for the organization. ... I call this behavior actively caring" (p. 12).

Geller's (2008) disciplinary training and scholarly research provided a unique perspective on the entire tragic incident. Geller describes his research interests, prior to the shooting, as being focused on the intricacies of personal empowerment and factors that bolster employees and other organizational stakeholder's willingness to participate actively in safety-improvement efforts. His research has highlighted the fact that factors leading to positive empowerment feelings that "I can make a difference" include encouraging self-esteem and belongingness to a community. These findings are significant in illustrating that schools can have a key role in helping students and other stakeholders develop these positive connections. Geller (2008) believes that a sense of

empowerment played a leading role in the shootings (p. 16). He proposes that the responses of so many first responders and members of the University community and its leadership were fueled by a positive sense of empowerment and led to Virginia Tech's ultimate resilience. Simply stated, the organization's ability to return to a highly functioning university was a function of individual and community empowerment due to the sense of belongingness to the community and the school's leadership which fostered stakeholder feelings of self-worth. There are important lessons here for other leaders addressing school trauma and organizational resilience.

The efficacy of the effective leadership characteristics highlighted above are confirmed when researchers examine the recovery of schools from crises caused by natural disasters. Fletcher and Nicholas (2016) examined the role of school leaders in leading their communities back to operational status after the Christchurch, New Zealand earthquakes in 2017. The authors readily admit that there is a "dearth of research on educational leadership and management at times of natural disasters" (Fletcher & Nicholas, 2016, p. 3). In reviewing the experiences and actions of six primary school principals in the New Zealand situation, Fletcher and Nicholas (2016) reiterated a theme that is prevalent throughout the literature on school leadership that "principals' relationships and leadership skills are central to successful schools" (p. 3). As with any crisis, natural disasters overwhelm the natural coping mechanisms of an organization and may include widespread losses to many people. While there exists an obvious range of severity, any natural disaster creates an environment where economic and emotional well-being is challenged. The conclusions of the study highlight the importance of caring and principles of transformative leadership in analyzing the schools that were most resilient.

What was evident in the Fletcher and Nicholas (2016) study amongst all the principals was their caring observations of the emotional wellbeing of their staff and the proactive actions they put in place to endeavor to alleviate the traumatic stress:

In times of disaster, they demonstrated many of the principles that underpin transformative leadership, such as moral courage, activism, understanding, caring and justice. ... Our interviews uncovered the emotional impact and caring, moral responsiveness of the six principals in our study as they reflected upon the aftermath of the Christchurch earthquakes on their school communities ... caring and knowledgeable transformative leaders show moral courage, empathy, and optimism as they build the community. (p. 13)

The resulting conclusions of the literature reviewed whether concerned with a natural disaster, a series of violent acts or other crisis or trauma point overwhelmingly to the undisputed fact that school leadership matters in fortifying communities against collapse. The qualities of leadership experienced by stakeholders can influence community members' resilience thereby affecting the healing outcome for the school.

Organizational resilience is created and built by the same qualities of leadership that foster a positive school climate, including practices that encourage stakeholder participation in decision making that inspire and unite a community to work towards achieving common goals. According to Sommer et al. (2016), "the survival of an organization during times of great stress and uncertainty relies on the ability of its members to persist and persevere in their work despite the adversity they face. In other words, employees must demonstrate *resilience* [emphasis in original]" (p. 173). As the above literature has shown, leaders bear the responsibility of creating the types of organizations where employees are empowered to do so.

Summary

There are multiple undisputed themes that emerge in this review of literature regarding organizational crises, trauma, and resilience. They include the understanding that all organizations will experience the extreme stress of crises or trauma at some time and those leaders have enormous influence in how well their organizations will weather stressful events.

There is consensus that effective non-profit leaders engage in practices and develop habits of leadership connected to transformational, authentic, and servant leadership styles that fortify their organizations against the onslaught of crises and that promote trust, transparent communication, and stakeholder commitment. It is relevant to restate that much of the extant literature on organizational resilience presents findings about for-profit companies. There is less research into non-profits and fewer studies still specifically focused on schools and their paths to resilience. However, this literature review does present enough information transferable to schools to answer several questions relevant to this dissertation:

1. Does research show a principal's leadership style is key to developing school climate? The answer is a resounding "yes." The research consistently confirms the strong link between a positive school climate and the school leaders who engage in behaviors that encourage stakeholder engagement in the community.
2. Does research show that the leadership style of the principal and other key leaders, formal and informal, at a school predict the likelihood of creating a positive school climate? Again, the answer falls into the "yes" column. Research supports this idea. Leadership styles that inspire and engage stakeholders create fertile ground for the growth of positive school climates. Leaders who are described as engaging in

transformational leadership, authentic leadership and servant leadership styles are often at the helm of successful schools.

3. Are there connections between a resilient school and positive school climate? Again, the answer is positive. Resilient communities tend to be those where stakeholders feel cared for, where communication is effective and where parents, teachers, staff, and students are bolstered by shared goals and develop a sense of empowerment and responsibility for the school community. All these are characteristics of a positive school climate.
4. Does positive school climate foster a speedy, more complete recovery in the wake of trauma? Once again, the answer is affirmative. Positive school climate is a factor in developing resilient communities. Resilient schools are those where stakeholders are fully invested. That commitment strengthens the school as it emerges from trauma and allows it to rebuild or restructure and realign with its vision and mission.

This review of literature has demonstrated that a strong link exists between a positive school climate and school leaders who systematically foster its growth. In addition, research reviewed for this chapter links the importance of effective leadership and growth of a positive school climate to developing resilient school communities and points to several effective dominant leadership styles. The literature supports the fact that school communities develop resilience when stakeholders are invested in the organization and feel they are an important part of it. Based on the findings in the literature, we see that schools can develop the strength to emerge from an immediate crisis or extended trauma and resume their work of educating students when leaders foster resilient communities.

The Pandemic's Impact on K-12 Schools and the Nature of Leadership Crisis, Trauma, or Both?

In early 2020 it became clear that COVID-19 seeded itself widely and was spreading at an unprecedented rate in the United States. Countless challenges emerged as worldwide anxiety about the virus grew, fed by uncertain outcomes, indefinite timeframes, hundreds of thousands of unexpected deaths, and the politization of science. Cultural optimism anticipating a speedy conclusion to the crisis was quickly replaced as the reality of the pandemic took root. First perceived as a crisis that would, with proper management, result in a finite solution, global leaders painfully learned that the pandemic had grown the tendrils of trauma as evidence of ongoing wounding and long-term cultural disruption mounted. COVID-19 presented the global community with an enormous challenge, a crisis and trauma encapsulated into one enormous and life-changing event.

Epidemics are not new, nor is the study of how best to manage them. The beginning of modern epidemiology, defined by Burnham (2020) as “the study of diseases that occur in groups or masses” began in the 17th century and continues today (para. 2). Impressively, there are records of early experimentation with inoculation against smallpox in the 17th century. As early as the 14th century, efforts to manage wide ranging infection from the plague included various levels of quarantine, mask-wearing, social distancing, and other measures that are still considered effective in slowing the spread of infection. (Burnham, 2020).

The early 20th century brought United States soldiers home from WWI, and with them came Spanish flu epidemic. In response to the massive number of infections, K-12 schools closed in many major cities across the country, some for as long as 15 weeks. Methods of disease containment practiced then foreshadowed many of the current precautions that have been enacted

to combat COVID-19. Recorded precautions included attempts by educators in Los Angeles to lessen the impact of the pandemic through distance learning delivered to students through packets of schoolwork sent to their homes (Atterberry, 2020).

Despite educators' past experience with contagious diseases, the more common types of crisis and trauma that have confronted schools and school leaders, prior to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, are likely to have been site-specific and site-contained. Distinguishing between crisis and trauma is relevant here as COVID-19 carries hallmarks of both. Hormann and Vivian (2018) view organizational crises as sudden, unexpected disruptive occurrences that can result in opportunity for organizational change and growth. In contrast, they view traumas as occurrences that can result from internal or external wounding triggered from one event, from repetitive cumulative damage, and/or from stress placed on the organization by the nature of its work. As an illustration of the distinction between crisis and trauma, the sudden unanticipated departure of a school head due to illness or death might shake a school community into the disequilibrium of a crisis. The discovery of ongoing wounding due to repetitive, unaddressed physical or emotional abuse might traumatize that same community. Yet still those distressing examples of debilitating events on school campuses and other serious or even tragic events like them, are confined to a relatively small number of schools, and consequently affect many fewer stakeholders than has the current COVID-19 pandemic.

It is important to acknowledge that the initial impact of COVID-19 on K-12 education challenged leaders with all the elements of a widespread crisis and with the relentless battering of re-infections and variants, COVID-19 displays elements of trauma too. The pandemic's devastating consequences are both acute and long-lasting. Until COVID-19, the world had never experienced the myriad challenges to education brought on by this pandemic that has oozed its

deathly consequences into every educational organization on the globe. COVID-19 brought us incredible uncertainty about the future and presented the world-wide community with both a perceived crisis at its onset and the ongoing wounding of trauma.

Understanding COVID's Impact on Schools

This study examines the role of school leaders and the relationship of leadership to school site resilience in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, it is important to examine the relevant research and also some significant practitioner publications. Schools in the United States began to close in the early spring of 2020 in an effort to protect students and school personnel from the unprecedented spread of COVID-19 infection. Almost overnight, schools were forced to shift to online education with varied results depending on their resources, teachers' experience with technology and electronic teaching tools, and the age and grade level of the students. Families scrambled to develop the skills necessary to engage in remote learning, to ensure proper supervision for students while caretakers, whose personal and professional lives were equally upended, struggled to ensure the safety of students who could no longer go to school. Lower income families were left out without the bandwidth or tools sufficient for their children to effectively participate and the existent disparities grew even worse. There were countless challenges as the world-wide anxiety about the virus grew fueled by uncertain outcomes, indefinite timeframes, hundreds of thousands of unexpected deaths.

As is the case with most of the literature reviewed for this chapter, the majority of the peer-reviewed research into the effects of COVID-19 on K-12 education is focused on publicly funded schools and large educational districts as opposed to individual school sites or independent schools. Much of the discussion explores the immediate challenges experienced by educators and students forced unexpectedly into remote teaching and learning during the school

closure phase of the pandemic. Like much of the research into school climate that focuses on carefully selected aspects of stakeholder experience, scholars have chosen to study specific aspects of the impact of COVID-19 on educational stakeholders by peering into and peeling back their lived experiences layer by layer. There remain many unanswered questions about the actions of school leaders and how they have affected and been affected by the pandemic. The amount of research is limited as the acute phase of the pandemic is only recently concluded. Currently, there is more research into the specific effects school closures have had on students, teachers, and their parents than on the role of school leaders.

For instance, Middleton (2020), in predicting the long-term impact of COVID-19 on student learning due to the uneven preparation of teachers, found that “teachers within the same schools, responsible for teaching the same subject, approached teaching differently. This difference may be due to a lack of knowledge of evidence-based pedagogical approaches to teaching online, lack of knowledge of technology, family/personal issues, illness, or many additional reasons” (p. 2).

Amid the year of school closures, especially during the Fall of 2020, prior to the federal approval of COVID-19 vaccines, there was much scholarly concern expressed over the impact of potential school re-openings on teachers. Lambert et al. (2020) penned an analysis of the impact on teachers as schools were weighing the consequences of re-opening: “Teachers are vulnerable, non-essential workers that continue to have significant misgivings about in-person school re-opening. ... Even before the pandemic, a teacher shortage was large, growing and generally underestimated. The pandemic may be encouraging educators to vote with their feet” (p. 2).

However, despite the frustrations expressed by teachers in 2020, it appears that, for many educators the pandemic reinforced their commitment to their profession and educating their

students. Martinez and Broemmel (2021) published their findings regarding the experiences of teachers and administrators thus far during the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, they wondered about support, self-efficacy, and equity before, during and after experiencing school closures: “Researchers rarely have the opportunity to explore the educational impact of a disaster as it unfolds, but the unique nature of the COVID-19 pandemic allowed us to do that” (Martinez & Broemmel, 2021, p. 128). Through their mixed methods approach, they accessed educators’ perspectives and concluded:

Teachers are overwhelmingly committed to the profession and their students. Despite the uncertainty of how they would teach ... the majority remained committed if not more committed to their profession ... concerns focused on students and how those students would get the resources and support they needed ... the need for thoughtful school preparation that explicitly outlines expectations for communication and support in the event of any number of traumatic scenarios. (Martinez & Broemmel, 2021, p. 129)

Other researchers have taken on the task of predicting the potential future impact of the pandemic on education. Zhao (2020) anticipated opportunities for meaningful educational change:

The epidemic outbreak of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) has disrupted virtually all aspects of human life, including the tragic loss of many lives around the globe. ... Yet even these great challenges and great difficulties offer opportunities ... so we may reimagine and recreate human institutions. ... Among these institutions, schools are built to serve the purpose of education. COVID-19 has certainly disrupted the operations of millions of schools, often forcing their closure. ... While these closures have prompted

innovation and institutional self-examination, the chance of large-scale long-term changes is largely dependent on how we treat COVID-19 in education. (p. 29)

Zhao (2020) goes on to share his hopes that educators use the pandemic experience to make long-lasting productive changes in education: “I am hopeful that this disruption can inspire school leaders to reimagine education in terms of today’s context and tomorrow’s needs” (p. 32). Zhao’s “big picture” assessment of the potential opportunities for educators emerging from the pandemic is ambitious as the world is still struggling with its ongoing effects.

Within the limited research about school leadership during the pandemic, Fournier and Donald (2020) have contributed findings about effective leadership by school leaders. They examined the efficacy of Scott (an elementary school principal) using an inclusive leadership framework during the COVID-19 pandemic and found that “whether the context is an emergency remote teaching situation such as the one we are currently facing during this pandemic, a rich online learning environment or a traditional face-to-face classroom, the core values and beliefs which guide our ethical actions must not change” (Fournier & Donald, 2020, p. 22). Their findings reinforce the opinions of researchers and practitioners alike that values-based educational leadership is consistently and unfalteringly essential to effective schools.

That conclusion has been reinforced by the few published findings centered on independent schools and their leaders. Flaxman et al. (2020) conducted a series of qualitative interviews with current independent school heads. Through questions about their crisis leadership styles and practices, the interviewers concluded that a skilled leader “leans into their strengths as a leader, whether it is being even more empathetic and understanding of one’s employees or focusing on finances to ensure that the school does not fail ... heads adjusted their leadership styles gently, rather than explicitly and abruptly” (Flaxman et al., 2020, p. 2). These

findings were interesting in light of the focus of this study on school leadership during the pandemic years.

Professional associations offer practitioner wisdom and have commissioned some scholarly studies as well. NAIS has been actively engaged in supporting its network of independent schools since the onset of the pandemic. They have published numerous blogs and magazine articles. In cooperation with state accreditation associations for independent schools, they have actively supported independent school educators in their responses to the pandemic through designing and sponsoring numerous webinars, facilitating regular networking forums bringing school leaders together, sharing presentations from health experts and developing programs to support curriculum change and reinvention in the face of the sudden reliance on remote learning. Donna Orem (2022), NAIS president, summarized several conversations with school leaders:

Most schools used scenarios to plan for the various ways that COVID-19 could disrupt the school year. All the school heads I spoke with structured the work by launching task forces made up of various school leaders and trustees; some also included local public health officials and civic leaders. All used multiple scenarios to plan and provide resources for the many forms could take in an unpredictable year. School leaders say they liked scenario planning because it gave them some semblance of control in an out-of-control world. (p. 1)

The NAIS (2020) reported the results of a commissioned mixed methods study exploring governance structures, relationships between heads of schools and their board chairs, and the increasing levels of responsibility foisted on school heads by the nature of the job, which due to its multiple responsibilities outlined in Chapter I, has become more that of a CEO than a school

principal in the traditional sense. Additionally, heads of independent schools shouldered the added layer of shepherding their school communities through the COVID-19 crisis. This study affirmed that, “heads of school are facing increasing amounts of isolation and burnout along with a sense of unsustainable responsibility. The COVID-19 pandemic continued to expose and accelerate the feeling among many heads of school that the role’s demands and expectations are untenable” (NAIS, 2020, para. 4).

With the worldwide pandemic in its third year, academic research is still in its nascent stages. Following the expected pattern, thus far researchers have mostly focused on publicly funded schools and studied the effects of COVID-19 on specific aspects of the educational experience, primarily for students and teachers and secondarily for other stakeholders including parents and school administrators. Much less has been written about independent schools. The experience of independent school stakeholders has mostly been reported through practitioner publications, blogs on websites serving independent school educators and a few NAIS commissioned studies of the effects of COVID-19 on independent schools form the body of literature thus far.

Although the initial crisis has passed, the threat of ongoing trauma, reemergence of crisis, and unpredictable nature of the impact of the virus are still very present. There is much need for ongoing research into the impact COVID-19 has had and will make on our schools.

Conclusions

This literature review highlights the stress put onto schools and their stakeholders in the face of inevitable crises and trauma. The literature reviewed herein examines several aspects of K-12 school communities including the relationship between leadership style, school climate and organizational resilience in the face of various types of organizational crises and trauma,

including the impact to schools of the world-wide COVID-19 pandemic. “Coronavirus (COVID-19), a novel, easily transmitted, and deadly illness ... within a six-month period touched every community around the globe, causing economies to shut down, institutions to halt operations and supply chains and transportation routes to stall” (University of Pennsylvania, 2020, para. 1). Schools closed, pivoted with varying levels of success to remote learning overnight, and began to plan for an unprecedented future.

Within this context, the literature highlights the critical nature of school leadership in fostering a positive school climate and the significant role that a positive school climate plays in ensuring effective learning environments. School climate is characterized by a variety of measures that include assessments of student progress, faculty engagement and satisfaction, stakeholder commitment to the organizational mission and many others. Regardless of the calculations chosen by researchers, the important impact that school leaders exert on their campuses and districts is reported consistently in all the school climate literature. “Education leadership is possibly the most important single determinant of an effective learning environment” (Kelley et al., 2005, p. 17).

Further, the literature explored for this review points to several effective leadership styles employed by school principals and school heads. Linked to a values-based commitment, dominant leadership styles of effective school leaders include transformational, authentic and servant leadership. While these leadership styles differ in significant ways, they share foundational principles including a commitment to building trustful relationships with followers, a belief in the potential of stakeholders and the organization and, a comfort with shared decision-making and the practice of transparent communication. School stakeholders respond to such leaders with enthusiastic engagement that fosters connection to one another and the

school's mission. The literature reviewed for this chapter confirms that transformational, authentic and servant leadership styles that are proven effective in promoting a positive school climate also significantly impact the school's potential for organizational resilience.

The positive relationships that school leaders nurture every day strengthen the likelihood of organizational resilience during critical times of crisis and trauma. Because the leaders of resilient organizations have the ability to communicate authentically and to call on trustful stakeholders to meet challenges through having demonstrated trustworthy leadership, their ability to gather mission invested students, teachers, parents, and administrators together for a common purpose is predictive of the resilience of school communities. "Building and sustaining an organizational culture and climate where productive and positive leader-follower relationships can thrive is perhaps the single most important responsibility of those who aspire to lead" (Sopko & LaRocco, 2018, p. 65).

Discovering the strong link between school site leadership styles, school climate, and organizational resilience requires exploration also of organizational resilience in the throes of crisis and trauma. The literature proves that successful navigation of stressful events is dependent on the foundation school leaders have built in preparation for weathering challenging times. There are descriptions of the types of crises and traumas that schools are frequently subject to, including violence, schoolwide and personal one-on-one bullying, natural disasters, and other incidents of unexpected deterrents to school operations. In short, researchers have focused on multiple school disasters and reported findings about specific incidents, and the resilience of school campuses afterwards.

The concluding section of this literature review examined the scholar research and practitioner thinking into the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on K-12 education. Over the

past three years, we have been consumed by responding to the crisis and attempting to insulate our schools against the damage of the trauma affecting them. Even at this early juncture, research into the effects of COVID-19 on school leaders and K-12 education as a whole points to the enormous impact the pandemic had on school stakeholders.

According to Huck and Zhang (2021), the research that has been published regarding the impact of COVID-19 on K-12 education is heavily weighted towards understanding how the pandemic has affected student learning, how technology has been implemented to facilitate distance learning and how teachers are dealing with the challenges of teaching remotely. Currently, there is less information illuminating school leaders' experiences with the pandemic's challenges beyond the emergency responses that were, in practice at many school sites. Nor is there much research available into how leading through the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the leaders themselves. Researchers will be studying the effects of COVID-19 for many years to come. Ideally, future academic researchers will contribute a critically necessary service and provide a slice of the guidance necessary for school leaders to stride confidently ahead, reimagine their schools and foster the necessary organizational resilience in service to their students.

Literature Gaps and the Research Question

To reiterate, most investigations into K-12 education, internationally, and in the United States, have been conducted in publicly funded schools and school districts. In general, and certainly in terms of the relationship between school leadership, trauma management of COVID-19 and organizational resilience of independent schools there is still relatively little catalogued information. There are many reasons for this imbalance of interest. Most importantly, the vast majority of all K-12 students attend publicly funded schools. In the United States, school

districts and politicians set policy and approve funding for most publicly funded institutions and there are relatively few non-profit, privately funded school sites. The motivation and financial backing for research into independent schools, defined in detail in the previous chapter, is insignificant compared to the interest in public schools. This fact creates a gap in the existing educational research. There are enough significant differences between public, parochial, and independent schools to warrant academic attention paid to each type. Scholars have not demonstrated much interest in researching the independent school sector.

Despite their organizational structures, all K-12 schools share many characteristics, challenges, strengths, and interests; however, there are significant differences based on the responsibilities borne by school leaders. The existing literature, although heavily focused on the public sector, affirms several important concepts relevant to the subject matter of this dissertation. Educational researchers have investigated the relationships between school leadership, school climate and organizational resilience through many lenses and developed significant concepts of how school leaders influence and build successful school communities. They include the following facts as illustrated by the literature reviewed for this chapter:

- School leaders have enormous influence on creating school climate.
- Successful school leaders employ values-based leadership styles that engage stakeholder commitment.
- Inclusive leaders who foster positive school climate enhance the likelihood that their school sites will show resilience when confronted with crises.
- All organizations, including schools, are vulnerable to the unexpected stress of organizational crises and trauma.
- The COVID-19 pandemic had unprecedented effects on K-12 school operations.

- We have yet to understand the long-term impact of the novel coronavirus.
- Minimal published literature exists assessing how COVID-19 has affected schools and school leaders.

Research Question

As highlighted by this literature review, there are still many potential areas for research regarding the impact of COVID-19 on K-12 schools. The research for this dissertation, conducted using comparative case study methodology, resulted in findings central to the following research question: What is the relationship between school leadership and school climate and organizational resilience in the face of the ongoing wounding of the COVID-19 trauma from the Spring of 2020-Spring of 2023?

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Researchers have long been interested in investigating educational leadership and the influence of leaders' actions on their schools. The prior chapter's literature review reveals that a connection exists between the leadership styles of school leaders, the school climates they foster and impact that school climate and leadership may have on the potential for organizational resilience in the face of a crisis or trauma. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and the multitude of ways in which it impacted K-12 schools, provided opportunities to study the effects of the pandemic on school leaders, school stakeholders and school sites. This investigation explored the relationship between the actions of independent school leaders and the resilience of two independent schools having endured the trauma of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The following chapter presents the rationale for using comparative case study as the methodological approach to this subject matter and describes the steps of the research process. In his overview of the case study approach to research, Yazan (2015) acknowledges there are "diverse views regarding case study that lead to a vast array of techniques and strategies" (p. 134).

Case Study

Case study is a methodology commonly employed by researchers interested in educational institutions, programs, and leadership as well as in other areas of social inquiry. Unlike other approaches to research, there is no single universally accepted way to conduct a case study. However, Merriam, Stake and Yin are three methodologists frequently looked to as experts in educational case study applications (Yazan, 2015, p. 134). Given the differing perspectives of these major contributors to developing and teaching case study methodology it

follows that under the case study umbrella of many similarities there are also differences in their definitions and descriptions of best practices in conducting case studies. All three researchers agree that a case must have identifiable boundaries and that the researcher must study the phenomena that exist within those boundaries. They agree that the researcher has no control over the phenomenon and the context, that the case is an integrated system and that a case may consist of a variety of things, a program, group, person, or policy. In defining case study, it is relevant to quote the researchers directly: Stake (1995) defines qualitative case study as a “study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances” (p. xi). Merriam (1988) recognizes case study as “an intensive holistic description and analysis of a bounded phenomenon such as a program, an institution, a person a process, or a social unit” (p. xiii). Yin (2014) says, “Case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates the case or cases conforming to the above-mentioned definition by addressing the ‘how’ or ‘why’ questions concerning the phenomenon of interest” (p. 4).

Building on the seminal work of Merriam, Yin and Stake, Simons (2009) extended the definition of case study:

Case study is an in-depth exploration from multiple perspectives of the complexity and uniqueness of a particular project, policy, institution, programme, or system in a “real-life” context. It is research-based, inclusive of different methods and is evidence-led. The primary purpose is to generate an in-depth understanding of a specific topic (as in a thesis), programme, policy, institution, or system to generate knowledge and/or inform policy development, professional practice and civil or community action. (p. 21)

While the definitions and descriptions developed by Yin, Stake, Merriam, and Simons have much in common, there are notable differences in the emphasis each researcher places on

similar aspects of a case study design, data-gathering and analysis. There are aspects of all these approaches that were useful in constructing this dissertation, as discussed below.

Epistemology

Although Yin does not directly address his epistemological orientation in his discussion of case study, it is generally agreed that Yin's views of case study are grounded in a positivistic approach (Yazan, 2015). The use of the term "generally agreed" is important here as there is not universal agreement. In fact, Baxter and Jack (2008) assert that Yin and Stake both approach case study from a constructivist perspective (p. 544). While Yazan (2015) asserts that Yin comes from a positivist perspective and Stake and Merriam's philosophical foundation is constructivist (p. 148).

According to Yazan (2015), in research terms, positivism assumes that study conclusions will yield objective and transferable facts. Yin's (2014) approach to case study requires strict adherence to maximizing the study design quality measured by "construct validity, internal and external validity and reliability" (p. 137).

Yin (2014) defines these measures of study validity in the following ways (pp. 238–240):

- Construct Validity: The accuracy with which a case study's measures reflect the concepts being studied.
- External validity: the extent to which the findings from a case study can be analytically generalized to other situations that were not part of the original study.
- Internal validity: The strength of a cause-effect link made by a case study, in part determined by showing the absence of spurious relationships and the rejection of rival hypotheses.

- Reliability-the consistence and repeatability of the research procedures used in a case study.

Stake (1995) comes from a different perspective in describing when and why researchers should use case study. His views are transparently founded in constructivism and existentialism. Stake (1995) details his epistemological approach:

Infants, children, and adults construct their understandings from experience and from being told what the world is, not by discovering it whirling there untouched by experience ... what they know of reality is only what they have come to believe, not what they have verified outside their experience. ... No aspects of knowledge are purely of the external world, devoid of human construction. (p. 100)

According to Stake's (1995) philosophical approach, case study researchers' roles are primarily to gather and report their interpretations and constructions of the case. The readers of the case will then construct their interpretations and knowledge on the other side of the case. In fact, Stake (1995) states that "most qualitative researchers not only believe that there are multiple perspectives or views of the case that need to be represented, but that there is no way to establish, beyond contention, the best view" (p. 108).

Merriam (1988) aligns herself mostly with Stake's constructivist epistemological stance. She maintains that "the key philosophical assumption upon which all types of qualitative research are based is the view that reality is constructed by individuals interacting in their social worlds" (Merriam, 1988, p. 6). She contends that what really interests researchers are the ways in which other people make sense of and act in their worlds. Merriam (1988) states "the final product of this type of study is yet another interpretation by the researcher of others' views filtered through his or her own" (p. 22).

Simons (2013) clarifies the distinctions between Yin's positivist epistemology and the constructivist stance championed by Stake and Merriam and suggests valid uses for all perspectives. She suggests that post-positivism is most useful to researchers interested in policy enlightenment, cost-effectiveness of programs and other questions where quantitative methodology is most effectively employed. Simons supports constructivist epistemology when understanding personal experience is at the heart of the researchers' interests. She suggests that qualitative methods, including interviews, observation and document review are applicable in these instances (Simons, 2013, pp. 34–35).

Additionally, in considering the evolution of case study methodology, it is relevant to consider Bartlett and Vavrus (2017) more open description of what constitutes a "case." Their approach requires the researcher to compare the findings in at least two cases before concluding their study and, rather than beginning with pre-defined bounded cases, they propose that the researcher build understanding of the cases they will compare and define their boundaries through a 'process-oriented' design with a degree of flexibility to describe the cases based on the study's aims and the researcher's motivations and skill set (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017, p. 38).

Like Stake, Merriam and Simons acknowledge that case study leaves room for interpretation, by the researcher and also for the study participants who are encouraged to offer their perspectives on personal experiences. Case study offers flexibility for the researcher. To follow interesting paths that may emerge during interviews, observations or even data -based research. These options made case study appropriate for this study as it is people-centered and focused on perceptions and actions made and received during an unprecedented yet widely shared trauma. Case study proved well suited to accommodating the nuances of human experience that emerged from this research.

Applicability

Independent schools are structured as bounded systems, with each school offering the potential for interesting cases consisting of programs, people, cultural practices, and student behavior. The study treated each independent school campus as a “case” and investigated the leadership style of the school head during the three years of the COVID-19 trauma (Spring 2020-Spring 2023) and the pandemic’s multiple effects on the head’s leadership and the climate of the school.

The flexibility of case study as described by Stake (1995) made it a particularly attractive methodology for this study. Stake (1995) describes case studies as holistic, empirical (because of the components of field study), and interpretive, as case study places a great deal of responsibility on the researcher to develop and describe the case based on human intuition, researcher-subject interaction, and the researcher’s intuition and empathy. Stake (1995) also touts the flexible design of case study which allows the researcher to make changes once the research has begun. He holds to the importance of the researcher having a few focused research questions and acknowledges that the entire research design cannot be charted in advance. Stake (1995) places an enormous amount of responsibility on the researcher’s skill set. The researcher’s responsibilities include “knowing what leads to significant understanding, recognizing good sources of data, and consciously and unconsciously testing out the veracity of their eyes and robustness of their interpretations. It requires sensitivity and skepticism” (Stake, 1995, p. 50). Stake (1995) affirms that the primary tools of the case study researcher include observation, interview and document review and data collection and analysis often occur simultaneously.

Merriam's (1988) requirements for case study methodology and its processes are aligned with Stake (1995) in their philosophical underpinnings although she uses her own descriptive terminology and differs slightly in her focus. Like Stake (1995), Merriam views case study as the study of a bounded situation, or phenomenon. Stake (1995) refers to case study as being "holistic," and Merriam refers to case study as being "particularistic." She uses terms such as "descriptive" in her explanation of the methodology and "heuristic," in that a case study should illuminate the reader's understanding of the situation under study (Merriam, 1988). Stake's (1995) parallel views that case study is interpretive, empathic, and based on empirical evidence align with Merriam's requirements. Merriam and Stake (1995) are again aligned when it comes to the skill set the researcher needs to develop. Merriam speaks to the need for the researcher to acquire the ability to conduct effective interviews, observe carefully and find relevant data in documents.

Simons (2013) too views the strength of case study in its flexibility and the variety of research methods available to the case study researcher. She notes that "case studies written in accessible language, including vignettes and cameos of people in the case, direct observation of events, incidents and settings allows audiences of case study reports to vicariously experience what was observed and utilize their tacit knowledge in understanding its significance" (Simons, 2013, p. 23).

Yin's (2014) description of a case aligns with Merriam's (1988) and Stake's (1995) in that Yin (2014) describes it as a "bounded system" and a case study as a study where the researcher investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and in its real-world context (p. 237). Yin (2014) directly connects the initial research questions to relevant empirical data and ultimate conclusions that the researcher will unearth in the investigation. However, in Yin's

(2014) vision, there is less opportunity for the researcher to adjust the original research questions, the types of data employed or the methods of analysis once the study has begun than in the vision of case study put forth by Stake (1995), Merriam (1988), Simons (2013), and, most recently, Bartlett and Vavrus (2017).

Bartlett and Vavrus (2017) encourage case study researchers to view their cases in a more open way than previous researchers have suggested. They suggest that the study design must be emergent, the boundaries of the case permeable to allow for “iterative and contingent tracing of relevant factors, actors, and features” (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017, p. 39) within the context of relevant temporal elements. The interconnections of school leaders, their responses to COVID-19 and the impact of the ongoing wounding of the trauma on their leadership and the climate of their schools led to the necessity for viewing the cases selected for the proposed study from a historical perspective—over time and in relation the ebb and flow of the pandemic’s effects on the school sites under study.

The opportunity to draw from these varying views to research and make sense of the relationship between school leadership, school climate, and school resilience in the face of the pandemic made comparative multiple case study the ideal qualitative research method for this investigation.

Research Problem

Merriam (1988) suggests that the researcher begin designing a case study by envisioning a funnel—with the problem statement forming the wide mouth at the top and several research questions, moving from general to more specific narrowing the funnel until the research ‘gap’ becomes evident and the opportunity to develop one or more specific research questions

emerges. The investigator then develops a research design suited to unearthing a rich understanding of the phenomenon in question.

In beginning the narrowing process described by Merriam (1988) the specifics of the research emerged. The extended duration of the current COVID-19 pandemic affected K-12 school leaders, school stakeholders and school campuses and provided opportunities to investigate how schools and their leaders fared. In following Merriam's instructions to narrow the research problem into several questions and attending to Yin's (2018) strong suggestion that case study is best suited to answering 'how' and 'why' questions, the following questions frame issues of interest:

- How have school heads navigated the many school leadership challenges posed by the pandemic?
- How do educational leaders, in particular, the head of school, help buttress an independent school community against lasting negative effects of trauma?
- How do school leaders build resilient school communities?

Beyond focusing on "how" and "why" questions, Yin (2018) encourages the researcher to think carefully about and articulate the underlying propositions that may fuel the questions. Based on information confirmed in Chapter II's literature review, the propositions to be considered in developing research questions were:

- Independent school leaders have influence in building a positive school climate.
- Leadership style and actions influence the sense of community and belonging experienced by stakeholders.
- School climate and the satisfaction of school stakeholders impact the resilience of a school in its recovery from trauma.

Multiple Case Study—The Design

The study investigated two independent schools and explored connections between leadership, school climate and school resilience in the face of the shared trauma presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. Each was treated as an individual case. Stake (2006) explains that each case must be investigated individually. The study findings from each case should then be cross referenced through comparison and contrast. Next reasonable evidence of transferability to other similar circumstances is recorded in the study report. Ideally, the findings then become transferable to practitioners faced with navigating similar circumstances and to other researchers seeking to dive deeper into the findings.

In describing the value of conducting a multiple case study, a “quintain,” to use his term, Stake (2006) says:

In multi-case study research, the single case is of interest because it belongs to a collection of cases. The individual cases share a common characteristic or condition. The cases in the collection are somehow categorically bound together. They may be members of a group or examples of a phenomenon. (p. 6)

The research design of this dissertation aligns directly with Stake’s (2006) description. Two independent schools with fundamentally similar organizational and leadership structures that have borne the onslaught of the COVID-19 pandemic were chosen as the cases under review.

Bartlett and Vavrus (2017) agree with Stake (2006) regarding the value of multi-case study. While Stake (2006) speaks of a “quintain,” Bartlett and Vavrus use the term “comparative case study” to describe their approach to evaluating more than one case before drawing final conclusions. They encourage the researcher to review their research findings through comparing

the cases over three axes. The authors suggest a horizontal look that contrasts key elements of one case with similar elements of another, a vertical analysis that compares the influences on each case from distinct levels in their shared hierarchy and a previously referenced transversal review based on the relevant historical influences and temporal impacts present for each case.

Case Selection

Appropriate sample selection was key to enabling the deep understanding and rich description central to unearthing the valid results possible in comparative multiple case study methodology. Merriam (1988) advises the researcher to create a list of attributes that are essential to the study and use those criteria to identify and engage each case to be studied. She further explains that two levels of sampling are usually necessary; first the choice of the case(s), “the bounded system—the unit of analysis—to be investigated and then the choices of sampling within the case that will best serve the investigative course of the study” (Merriam, 1988, p. 65). In considering criteria important to the proposed study, several characteristics readily emerge as ideal.

Two independent elementary schools were chosen as the cases. In developing the list of relevant attributes useful to expanding shared understanding of the role school heads play in creating resilient schools several leadership and site characteristics emerge. It was significant that the school sites chosen are similar in several ways. The school heads have multiple years of leadership experience so that their leadership styles and decision-making experience was established prior to the onslaught of COVID-19. The small size of the schools studied was also important as diving deeply into the culture of two schools presents a challenging opportunity for a single researcher and the similar structure of the schools supported the necessary comparison.

Case Attributes

- Independent Elementary Schools including grades Pre-K-6th (Hollywood Schoolhouse [HSH]) and grades K-8th (Westerly School).
- Small Schools-HSH 280–285 students, Westerly 180–185 students.
- Fully enrolled for the 2019-2020 school year.
- Financially stable, operating within best practices per the California Association of Independent schools and the individual school’s budgetary guidelines.
- Accredited by the California Association of Independent Schools.
- Member of the NAIS.
- Governed by a board of trustees.
- Incorporated as non-profit organizations.
- Strategic institutional goals identified (prior to COVID-19).
- Experienced Head of School (2 years or more as a Head of School).
- Employed as Head pre-Covid 19. Contracted to stay at school minimally through 2021 school year.

In-Case Sampling and Data-Gathering

As previously stated, Merriam (1988) and Stake (1995) subscribe to the constructivist view that the investigator helps the reader construct their own reality and understanding of the case based on the data that are presented by the researcher in the case study report. Hence, it is the researcher’s responsibility to acknowledge his/her biases and draw careful conclusions supported by the data gathered in qualitative research through interviews, observations, and document review. Simons (2013) too cautions researchers to clarify their positionality. She advises researchers to “ensure that you distinguish between error and bias, eliminate the first and

account for the second; document your conscious biases and indicate what procedures you followed to minimize them” (Simons, 2013, p. 89).

As I prepared to launch the study, I was aware of personal biases that threatened my objectivity in evaluating the leadership of the school heads. Having served in that capacity for over two decades, I have a tendency to err on the side of the school leaders and feel empathy for the challenges of their positions. To ensure the validity of my study conclusions I followed and documented accepted protocols at both schools and with all the subjects interviewed and observed for the study. Initial school visits were conducted in October of 2022 at HSH and November 2022 at Westerly School.

Interviews

For the proposed study, sampling within each case was parallel with mirrored investigations conducted at each school. Interviews were conducted with those holding similar positions in each school, observations were coordinated to ensure data collection under the most similar circumstances manageable and similar documents were chosen for review.

The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format that asked for direct responses to some pre-planned questions and left space for unanticipated information to emerge.

A list of stakeholders interviewed, situations observed and documents to be sought follows:

- Head of School
- Assistant Head of School
- Financial Officer
- Director of Admissions
- Director of Advancement (Development)

- Trustees
- Parent volunteer leaders (Parent Association leaders)

The interviews with the two school heads focused on:

- Personal leadership philosophy and style
- Perceptions of their school communities prior to the onset of COVID-19; organizational changes implemented due to the virus
- Perceptions of school community before and through COVID-19
- How their school community has weathered the stress of the trauma

Additional stakeholder interviews focused on the interviewee's perceptions of:

- Head's leadership and any perceived changes to leadership style due to COVID-19
- Changes to organizational operations that resulted from COVID-19
- Perceptions of the effectiveness of the school's response
- Strengths, weaknesses, surprises within the community that emerged

Interviews were recorded via iPhone Voice Memo app and then uploaded and transcribed using Otter.ai. The interview transcripts were uploaded into Dedoose and coded. Lastly, themes were identified through analyzing the coded interview excerpts and triangulating the emergent themes with additional types of data gathered and then additionally, physically displaying the emerging information on the wall using poster-board and post-it notes.

Observations

Field notes were taken on an iPhone using the Notes app and supplemented with a few photos. Additional notes were handwritten using pen and paper during and immediately after each observation. All of the notes were organized and analyzed afterwards. The observations and field notes illuminated aspects of school climate and stakeholders' responses to the leadership of

the head of school and reactions to COVID-19 protocols. The following is a partial list of observations at each school site.

- Observed school safety protocols implemented during COVID-19
- Observed head of school interacting with stakeholders: employees, parents, and students
- Informal observations—students at play, teachers outside of the classroom—supervising students and socializing with one another

Document Review

Document review was useful in triangulating from interviews and observations.

Documents reviewed included:

- Admissions Data (enrollment, marketing plans, events, website) pre and post COVID-19
- Budget Data –operating budget information pre and post onset of COVID-19; increases and decreases in expenses; budget cuts; were funds redirected in order to manage the pandemic?
- Fundraising Data pre and post the onset of COVID-19
- Written protocols for health, safety, and impact that additional COVID-19 related policies and procedures have had on school financially
- Communications from the head of school, written, video
- Social media messaging
- School website

Additionally, due to the pandemic, significant events impacted the leadership of school heads, the climate of the schools and the resilience of the schools post the crisis phase of the pandemic

were noted. This clarifies how the school sites being compared have responded differently or similarly to external influences that they have shared over time. Bartlett and Vavrus (2017) describe the value of exploring this transversal plane:

The transversal axis connects the horizontal elements to one another and to the vertical scales to study across and through a phenomenon as a way of exploring how it has changed over time...we need new ways of studying interconnections across dispersed locations that include examining multiple sites at the same scale. (p. 92)

Extent of Data Gathering

The purpose of this multiple case study to seek and open the research conversation around the impact of a school head's leadership on school climate and the resulting resilience of the school community when confronted with the trauma of COVID-19 was kept at the forefront of all data gathering efforts. Data was collected until the criteria listed below were met. Experienced qualitative researchers including Stake (1995), Merriam (1988), Yin (2014), and Simons (2013) all agree that the researcher is finished gathering data when:

- Sources are exhausted.
- Saturation of categories occurs.
- Emergence of regularities is evident.
- New information gleaned is far away from the core research problem of the study.

Data Analysis and Validation

Case study research frequently requires that data- gathering and analysis occur simultaneously. The researcher learns something unanticipated from an interview and follows up with relevant clarifying questions, s/he observes an interaction that casts a new light on a relationship or discovers documents that affirm or challenge an earlier expectation. Stake (1995)

contends that researchers make meaning through both direct interpretation of an individual instance and through aggregation of instances that can be categorized, tallied and pattern matched:

The search for meaning is often a search for patterns, for consistency within certain conditions. ... We can look for patterns immediately while we are reviewing documents, observing, or interviewing—or we can code the records, aggregate frequencies, and find patterns that way. Or both. (p. 79)

For Merriam (1988), rigor in case study research “derives from the researcher’s presence, the nature of the interaction between researcher and participants, the triangulation of data, the interpretation of perceptions and rich, thick description” (p. 151).

Yin (2018), Stake (1995), and Merriam (1988) agree on the necessity to verify data through triangulation. As defined by Yin (2018), the triangulation requires that the researcher determine “the convergence of the data collected from different sources of evidence, to assess the strength of a case study finding and also to boost the construct validity of measures used in the case study” (p. 288). Clearly analyzing and validating the data mined from interviews, observation and document review will be significantly supported when confirmation of one impression from two or more sources can be reported.

Simons (2013) and Bartlett and Vavrus (2017) support the views of the three methodologists mentioned above. All concur that analyzing and validating data requires accurate record keeping. Developing systems for transcribing interviews, writing observation field notes, and organizing and categorizing documents are a prime responsibility of the researcher—as is acknowledging personal bias, perspective, and acknowledgement of preconceived notions of the case(s) being studies.

Multi-Case Analysis

Both schools studied were considered first as single cases. Data were gathered and analyzed separately for each school. Then, following the direction of Yin (2018), Merriam (1988), and Stake (1995), the findings were cross-referenced seeking common themes. Next, the axes of comparison proposed by Bartlett and Vavrus (2017) for analyzing comparative multiple case studies were applied.

1. The vertical axis of analysis is constructed based on interviews and observations and used to assess the leadership characteristics and actions of the schools' heads in response to the trauma of COVID-19.
2. The transversal/temporal axis connects the schools' responses to the external pressures including public health guidelines and governmental requirements precipitated by the pandemic from the spring of 2020-spring of 2023. It reveals the influences of the passage of time, changing external events and leaders' decisions on the organizational resilience of the schools.
3. The horizontal axis is used to compare and contrast the outcomes for HSH and Westerly School of Long Beach post the acute phase of the pandemic. The findings are discussed within the confines of the identified themes and in relationship to the research questions central to this dissertation—the essence of which is: What have we learned from these two small independent schools about school leadership and organizational resilience in light of enduring the world- wide COVID-19 pandemic from the spring of 2020-spring of 2023?

What Actually Happened?

The schools chosen for this comparative case study are small independent elementary schools.

1. HSH is located in a diverse setting in the middle of Hollywood, the world-famous movie production capital of the entertainment industry. Today's Hollywood is plagued by modern urban dilemmas and also blessed by tourism. The diversity of the school community reflects the broad community that feeds it. The school enrolls approximately 280 students annually in grades Preschool-6.
2. Westerly School of Long Beach is located in a suburb south of Los Angeles, noteworthy for its combination of tourist attractions and blue-collar industry. The city is deeply impacted by the busy port of Los Angeles that hosts the enormous maritime trade welcoming goods transported from around the world. Westerly School also reflects the diversity of its local community. It occupies a unique space in the educational landscape as it is the only independent school in the area. It welcomes approximately 180 students annually from grades K-8.

Data were gathered identically at each school and consisted of interviews, on campus observations and accompanying field notes, review of several school documents including the most recent self- study. Triangulation of these data exposed the themes discussed in Chapter IV. The heads of both schools were very welcoming and eager to share their stories and evolution as leaders throughout the pandemic years (2020-2023). The only challenges in terms of gathering the necessary data were imposed by the busy schedules of the schools' leaders. Both heads of school were gracious in their welcome and encouraged their administrators and volunteer leaders to be as open as possible in terms of answering interview questions and offering up information

about their own experiences, challenges, and triumphs. After the initial interviews, school leaders responded to clarifying follow-up questions via email and opening their campuses again in the spring for in- person researcher visits. Additionally, once the interviews were transcribed (using Otter.ai) each participant received a copy via email and confirmed that the transcription was accurate. Once that confirmation was received, the interviews were coded using Dedoose.

Detailed information regarding the research protocols follows below and is supplemented with a summary list noting the timeline of the research process that follows (Table 3.1):

Table 3.1

Timeline of Research Actions

Period	Hollywood Schoolhouse	Westerly School
September 2022	Confirm visit and interview dates	Confirm visit and interview dates
October 2022	On-campus visit/interviews/transcribe interviews	
November 2022	Coding interviews	On-campus visit/interviews/transcribe interviews/coding interviews
December 2022– January 2023	Follow-up as necessary, emails, phone calls	Follow-up as necessary, emails, phone calls
February–March 2023	Reviewing research/analysis/writing	Reviewing research/analysis/writing
April 2023	On-campus visit/additional observations/field notes	Continued writing
May 2023	Continued writing/follow-up factual corrections from HOS	On-campus visit/additional observations/field notes
June–July 2023	Writing/editing	Writing/editing/follow-up factual corrections from HOS

Note. HOS = head of school.

Interviews with school leaders included (see Table 3.2):

- The head of school
- School administrators
- Volunteer leaders (board member and parent association leader(s))

On-campus visits for interviews and observations were conducted in the fall and spring of the 2022-2023 schoolyear:

- HSH on 10/24/22 and 4/10/23
- Westerly School on 11/7/22 and 5/15/23

Opportunities during on campus observations included:

- Campus tours
- Classroom visits
- Playground observations
- Carpool observations
- Casual introductions to several faculty, staff, and parents
- All school assembly observations
- Conducting participant interviews

Additionally, the heads of school were given the draft narratives of their cases and asked to make factual (not inferential) corrections to the draft of their school. The corrections were delivered via email by Ilise HOS @ HSH and during an off-campus in- person meeting with Lauren HOS at Westerly in May of 2023. Those corrections were incorporated into the case descriptions in May of 2023.

Documents reviewed included:

- Self-study that was created collaboratively by the school in advance of their most recent accreditation visits from the California Association of Independent Schools.
- Various communications to faculty and families about covid protocols via emails, and newsletters.
- School information on website including COVID-19 protocols.

Table 3.2

Experience of Interview Participants by Position

Position	Gender		Experience in years			
	HSH	WS	In position		Total ^a	
			HSH	WS	HSH	WS
Head of school	F	F	7	5	30	20
Assistant head of school	F	M	1	1	20	20
Chief financial officer/director of finance	M	F	7	5	7	15
Director of admissions	F	F	15	5	20	10
Director of advancement	F	F	1	3	5	8
Director of curriculum and tech	M		1		15	
Director of early childhood education	F		5		10	
Director of technology		M		2		5
Parent association leader			4	3	2 ^b	2 ^b
Trustee			5	5	5	5
Administrative assistant			30		30	

Note. HSH = Hollywood Schoolhouse; WS = Westerly School; F = female; M = male.

^a As educator, administrator, or independent school volunteer. ^b Two-year terms extended due to pandemic.

As stated above, the analysis of data included transcribing (using Otter.ai) and subsequent coding of interviews (using Dedoose), identifying relevant excerpts, and developing thematic understanding through triangulation of the data with the other methods of data gathering employed including the observations and document reviews. Several relevant themes were chosen for discussion based on the participant responses to questions that were derived from the research questions using two particular types of analyses recommended by Bartlett and Vavrus (2017). For the purposes of this comparative case study the vertical analysis focused on the priorities, actions and experiences of the schools' leaders and emphasized the role of the head of school. The transversal/ temporal analysis highlighted the actions taken in response to the on-going wounding of the pandemic at each school and also evaluates some of the challenges and successes encountered from March of 2020 through the spring of 2023. The third type of analysis they recommend comes into play in Chapter VI of this dissertation when a 'horizontal' lens is used to compare and contrast the findings at both schools studied.

Based on the results of the research into each school site, the discussion of each school is built on the following common themes:

- School Climate
- Leadership
- Reaction/Response to the Pandemic (emotional and physical)
- Resilience

Study Limitations

Limitations inherent in this qualitative comparative case study include its small number of cases and small number of participants. There is also a need to recognize researcher bias and

acknowledge that a long association with independent schools may impact the objectivity of the researcher.

Ethical Considerations

Because this study required human participants, it also required certain ethical considerations. The research was conducted in strict adherence to IRB guidelines and recruitment of cases did not begin prior to IRB approval. Participants interviewed provided their consent in writing. After reading the narrative descriptions of HSH and Westerly School of Long Beach contained in Chapter V both school heads agreed that there was no need to disguise the identity of their schools or themselves. They sought and received consent from all the interview participants. Part of the justification for this is that both schools are uniquely set in their geographical spaces and their locations impact their school communities greatly.

Conclusion

The multi-case study described above produced useful findings regarding the research problem and questions grounding this study. Because of the unpredictability of the pandemic, the flexibility inherent in a constructivist view of case study was particularly useful in planning this study.

CHAPTER IV: THEMES AND INSIGHTS

Introduction

This chapter provides a discussion of the four major themes that emerged from research conducted into HSH and Westerly School of Long Beach, the subjects of this comparative multiple case study. The themes were developed based on the content of participant interviews that were then triangulated with researcher field notes from on-campus visits, written information published on the schools' websites as well as written communications sent to stakeholders from the school during the pandemic. Copies of these communications were provided by the schools. Following this introduction which explains the sources of information and approaches to organizing the information gleaned from the research is a narrative explanation of the context in which the research was conducted.

The context section compares the organizational structure of the schools and lists the interview participants by role and general responsibilities. Next there is a narrative description of each theme followed by a table that illustrates the elements of each theme, the codes used to organize the interview transcripts, and a sampling of excerpts from the interviews related to each theme and set of codes. Next is a narrative and table focused on the external public health guidelines the schools followed during the pandemic that were instrumental to developing policies and procedures for their communities during the pandemic years from spring of 2020-spring of 2023.

The chapter concludes with a narrative cross-comparison of the insights provided by the themes into the research questions at the center of this dissertation using vertical and transversal methods of case study analysis. A vertical lens is used to frame the themes of school climate and leadership through seeking perspectives of multiple stakeholders and reviewing researcher

observations. A transversal/temporal lens is used in discussion of the themes of organizational response and resilience from the Spring of 2020-Spring of 2023. These are investigated based on the interviews with school leaders, information on the schools' websites and other published communications to stakeholders that describe some of the actions taken by the schools in their efforts to fend off the ongoing wounding of the trauma for almost three years. A timeline is provided to clarify the onset of temporal external challenges presented by the pandemic and the public health guidelines imposed on schools and the responses of the two subjects of this study. The final summary section of this chapter compares the similarities between the schools in light of the themes presented based on participant interviews triangulated by reference to researcher's field notes and evidence published on the websites of the two schools.

The research questions under study were:

1. How has the head of school perceived her leadership during the pandemic years 2020-2023?
2. How have key stakeholders perceived the leadership of the head of school and their own roles during the pandemic?
3. Is the school resilient? Post pandemic, has the school resumed operations?
4. What temporary changes have been implemented in response to the pandemic? Are there permanent changes that have occurred in the school because of the trauma of the pandemic?

The relevant themes discussed in this chapter include:

1. School climate
2. Leadership
3. Reaction/Response to COVID-19

4. Organizational Resilience

The themes were chosen based on the semi-structured interviews founded on queries designed to explore the stated research questions. The overarching themes discussed here confirmed the direction of the research questions and illuminated the path of this case study exploration into organizational climate, leadership, COVID-19, and organizational resilience. The interview participants included the heads of the two schools, the administrators who populate the leadership teams at each school, and the volunteer leaders of the parent associations and members of the governing board of trustees at both schools. While individual perspectives sometimes differed and were colored by the position and experience of participants, there were several areas of interest and discussion common to all the interviews based on the research questions asked as well as the unsolicited conversational comments made by study participants. The coding then emerged from the participant stories, thereby localizing, and particularizing the four overarching themes.

Contributing to the interview questions chosen and themes pursued, were also the impressions and field notes derived from researcher visits to the school sites, information gleaned from school communications shared with the researcher and perusal of publicly available information on each school's website. These sources of information serve to triangulate the information presented. The summary section of this chapter compares the similarities between the schools in light of the themes presented based on participant interviews, researcher's field notes and evidence published on the websites of the two schools.

Context

The narrative information contained in this section was gleaned from participant interviews, researcher onsite observations and field notes and the schools' websites.

Interview Participants (by School and by Position)

The subject schools of this case study, HSH and Westerly School, share a similar organizational structure. The roles of the heads of school, administrators and volunteer leaders are parallel. The administration at HSH is slightly larger than at Westerly because HSH serves a larger community. Every year, HSH serves approximately 300 students and Westerly serves 180. The governing boards are also similar in size (17 trustees at HSH and 14 at Westerly) and identical in functions which include the hiring and firing of their one employee, the head of school, and the responsibility for strategic policy development which the head of school helps to create and implement. Both schools have parent associations led by volunteer parents whose mission it is to build positive connections with stakeholders, friends, faculty, and parents through working with the school's administration on fundraising and community 'friend-raising' events.

In addition to the similar leadership positions described below, the structure of the leadership teams and how members work individually and collectively with their heads of school and interact with one another is also analogous as evidenced by researcher observations and comments in participant interviews. At both schools, the leadership teams hold a regular weekly meeting led by the head of school to ensure that the leadership team is connected and in the loop about any current issues, needs and triumphs happening at school. Due to the similarity of the heads' leadership styles, the meetings are organized around an agenda yet have an air of informality as the conversation flows freely and team members seem comfortable sharing openly, asking for or offering support to one another. Additionally, the heads at both schools schedule a weekly meeting with each administrator individually to discuss issues pertinent to his/her/their department. There are also innumerable daily connections between members of the leadership team at both schools some of which include the head of school and others which do

not. Overall, there is a feeling of genuine collegiality and collaboration due to the informal communication norms that encourage the free flow of information between the administrative leaders of the school.

Regular meetings and open support also characterize the connections between the volunteer leaders of the schools. The directors of advancement work closely with the parent leaders to organize events and plan special celebrations at school with the combined purpose of fundraising and “friend-raising.” Parent leaders also liaise frequently with the directors of admission in their efforts to support enrollment marketing events held by the schools. Often the heads of school are involved as well but they usually delegate the detailed planning of the various initiatives undertaken by the parent association to the members of the admin team and parent leaders who marshal other parent volunteers as needed.

The board of trustees holds regular meetings (every 4–6 weeks) where the head of school plays a key role in developing the school’s strategic direction, collaborating with the members in policy development, helping the board to stay on track in accomplishing its annual goals, and apprising the trustees of the state of the school giving information and clarification about operational issues, accomplishments, or concerns. The sub-committees of the board also meet regularly and often the heads of school will attend those meetings as well. Most often, the school heads attend meetings of the finance committee, marketing committee and governance committee. Additionally, the relevant administrators are often asked to attend committee meetings. The financial officers at the schools regularly attend and support the head of school at the finance committee, the directors of advancement and admissions will often attend marketing committee meetings and so on. Members of the leadership team will also frequently be invited to board meetings to present information about various areas of interest to the trustees. Lastly, with

the leadership of the heads of school, there are often ad hoc committees called together. The Covid task force at HSH and the Health and Safety committee at Westerly are examples of these temporary committees, populated in both schools by the school head, the schools' financial officers, board members and medical professionals. These advisory groups were created by the heads of school in collaboration with the boards of trustees to offer regular, professional advice to the heads in the management of COVID-19 at their schools. During the first two years of the pandemic, there was much communication, at times almost daily, between the school and members of the task force as well as formal weekly meetings. Significant changes in guidelines, for facilities, testing, best practices in terms of masking and distancing were frequent and normalized and that made fluid communication between the schools' heads and administrators with the pandemic task forces a necessity. It is relevant to note however, that these committees served in an advisory capacity only and the final decisions as to school practices were left to the heads of school, both of whom welcomed the advice of health and facilities experts as well as guidance from public health organizations, school district practices and that offered by CAIS and NAIS. As systems and practices dealing with the pandemic became routinized and vaccines became widely available, and the rate of COVID-19 infections began to drop, the need for such frequent meetings diminished. However, the committees remain intact as both school heads and other members of the admin teams have grown to rely on the access to advice developed during the first few months of the pandemic. Currently, the meetings are scheduled on an 'as needed' basis with informal communications via email or phone occurring in the interim.

The list below indicates the interview participants at each school and a brief explanation of their job duties. Both Westerly and HSH have the following positions:

1. Head of School—Educational leader of school; responsible for all day-to-day operations; develops/implements board policies/responsible for hiring and firing of staff; overall responsibility for program, enrollment, and adherence to school's mission.
2. Assistant Head of School— Number 2 in overall responsibility; works closely with head of school; works with faculty, students, and curriculum.
3. Chief Financial Officer—Responsibility to advise head and board as to school finances; collaborates with head in devising budget; works with board and head in developing financial policies and making decisions. Day-to-day human resources responsibilities. Overall responsibility for facilities.
4. Director of Advancement—Responsible for events and fundraising; collaborates with head, parent association volunteers and other administrators.
5. Director of Admissions—Responsible for student enrollment; collaboration with head in reaching goals for number of students.
6. Parent Association Leaders— Responsible for recruiting volunteers for events and projects; collaborates with school administrators to put on events and support school climate. Responsible for recruiting volunteers for events and projects; collaborates with school administrators to put on events and support school climate.
7. Board members (trustees)— Members of governing board; responsible for strategic planning; policy development and hiring of head of school. (No operational responsibilities; all operations under head of school's purview).

At HSH only:

1. Director of Curriculum—works closely with faculty; curriculum issues; and technology purchases/implementation for remote learning.
2. Director of ECE—division head for preschool; responsible for preschool program.

At Westerly only:

1. Director of Technology—responsible for campus wide technology, devices, remote learning processes; supporting faculty with technological issues.

Themes

School Climate

As discussed in previous chapters, an understanding of the school's climate and stakeholders' intellectual and visceral experience of it is essential in gaining an authentic understanding of the school's viability when faced with a trauma such as the pandemic presented. For the purposes of this study, learning about the school climates of the cases was important to understanding the predominant leadership styles of the heads of school and other administrators and in evaluating the resilience of the community pre and post pandemic. Information gleaned from on campus visits and the interviews at each school informed the descriptions of school climate as presented in the next chapter (V) and reinforced the common views of their school communities expressed by school leaders in the Tables 4.1 and 4.2 and in Chapter V. Tables 4.1 and 4.2 describe relevant elements of school climate, list the codes used to identify interview excerpts by theme, and list a few sample quotes from several interviews that illustrate the theme.

Table 4.1*Elements of School Climate*

Element	Description
1	Stakeholder feelings about community (positive and/or negative).
2	Confidence in leaders
3	Connectedness (to mission, to other stakeholders)
4	Perceived feelings of comfort/support

Table 4.2*School Climate Excerpts and Codes*

Sample excerpt	Relevant codes
Hollywood Schoolhouse	
“I think every school leader affects their school climate” (Ilise).	Head’s leadership journey/description Admin leadership/description School climate
“Many of our families recruit other families because once they feel connected, they want their friends to come and have that same feeling too” (Jordann).	School climate Parents Responsibility to stakeholders Admin leadership/decisions Diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging
“I would say the parents and students feel connected. And I know that the admin was intentional about making sure that everyone felt connected [during COVID-19]” (Danisha).	School climate Parents Responsibility to stakeholders Volunteer perspectives
Westerly School	
“I think we all have a role in climate-definitely strong leadership contributes. I think the climate is warm, welcoming” (Molly).	School climate Leadership decisions Diversity, equity, justice, and belonging. Admin leadership/description
“[During the pandemic] there was a layer of frustration and fear ... there were a lot of tears ... everyone put in their heart and soul, but it was also like, we shared that collectively” (Amber).	Admin leadership/description Parents Responsibility to stakeholders Stress on school leaders School climate
“I would say it’s an amazing climate. And I would	School climate

say that it is a mirror of a family. Whereas the opinions are different. The personalities are different, but the common love is there for the school for the children and that makes it work. I think it's an amazing space in terms of the learning. We have excellent educators. They have great dispositions, great communication, and it's a continuous improvement. So, I think it's a climate that's dynamic" (Tiffany).

Collaboration
Diversity, equity, inclusion, and
belonging.
Communication
Parents
Volunteer perspectives

Leadership

Leadership during the years of the pandemic (2020-2023) is central to framing answers to all the research questions of this project. Gaining an understanding of the leadership styles of the heads of the schools was a research priority enabling evaluation of the heads' self-perceptions of their actions/decisions in managing their traumatized schools during the pandemic and analyzing any changes in their leadership precipitated by the necessity of leading during those difficult years. Also relevant to this study was gaining an understanding of the leadership styles of administrators and volunteer school leaders, their priorities, and perceptions of the head's leadership during COVID-19. Leadership decisions while undergoing the on-going wounding of the destructive force of the pandemic were central to determining not only the resilience of the schools in their ability to return to normal pre-pandemic operational modes, but in assuring their very survival as educational institutions. Tables 4.3 and 4.4 describe relevant elements of leadership, list the Dedoose codes used to identify interview excerpts by theme, and list a few sample quotes from several interviews that illustrate the importance of leadership as a theme.

Table 4.3*Elements of Leadership*

Element	Description
1	Vision for community
2	Commitment to mission
3	Communication skills
4	Collaboration
5	Values
6	Connection to stakeholders
7	Responsibility for welfare of school

Table 4.4*Leadership Excerpts and Codes*

Sample excerpt	Relevant codes
Hollywood Schoolhouse	
Self-assessment: “I’m on the community side. ... If you ask me to give you measurable goals about my job, I’m frustrated. How do you measure how families feel so good? How do you measure what is really valuable [in a school]?” (Ilise, head).	Head/leadership/journey/description Communication strategies Leadership decisions (style/choice) Responsibilities to stakeholders Community concerns Diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging. Visionary leadership
Change because of COVID-19: “I don’t think I’m very authoritative. I’m more democratic as a leader. I’ve been forced into making decisions during Covid: ‘Ilise, it’s just up to you. You’re the leader.’ I can’t tell you how many times that has been on me. So, I’ve learned to make decisions, but I try to be mindful of the people it will affect” (Ilise, head).	Head/leadership/journey/description Communication strategies Leadership decisions (style/choice) Responsibilities to stakeholders Head/leadership/journey/description Stress on school leaders
Westerly School	
Self-assessment: “I come from being a teacher—as a teacher you inspire joy, right? So, every day as a teacher is joyful and you get into administration and a lot of it is problem solving” (Lauren, head).	Head/leadership/journey/description Communication strategies Leadership decisions (style/choice) Responsibilities to stakeholders Community concerns
Change because of COVID-19: “I’m much more comfortable making decisions and saying: ‘look it	Head/leadership/journey/description Communication strategies

Sample excerpt	Relevant codes
has to be this way.’ That has been a tremendous learning curve. I mean it’s just lonely. On the other hand, I think that there is a sense of comfort knowing that if we can make it through that or if I can make it through that, I can make it through a lot of challenges”(Lauren, head).	Leadership decisions (style/choice) Responsibilities to stakeholders Stress on school leaders Visionary leadership
Both schools	
From admin: “What I appreciate about Ilise is that we can have very open conversations about not just my strengths and where I can grow, but her strengths and where she can grow” (Nate, Hollywood Schoolhouse).	Admin leadership descriptions of self/team Admin perspective on head’s leadership Collaboration Diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging.
Admin: “Lauren and I work really well together. It goes beyond I’m working under her ... you know, we have a friendship as well. This helps because there was so much that called for the humanness and vulnerability in all of us” (Amber, Westerly School).	Communication strategies

Reaction/Response to COVID-19

As the pandemic worsened over the spring and summer of 2020, the need for rapid responses by the schools’ leaders to various aspects of the on-going wounding of the trauma intensified. Reportedly, the reactions of stakeholders fell into two major categories both of which required immediate triage and ongoing attention as the pandemic’s wounding escalated. The first reactions were emotional and required leaders to calm stakeholder fears and devise methods of maintaining community connections despite the need for physical distancing. The second area of problem solving included more concrete issues. Adaptations to facilities, developing support systems for managing the landscape of changing public health protocols and accommodating wounded finances. Within the first few days of closure, the heads of both HSH and Westerly, marshalled their administrative and volunteer forces and prepared to combat COVID-19 from several perspectives.

Both school heads identify stakeholder fear as the strongest initial response to the onset of the pandemic. Recognizing that, school leaders responded by adapting systems to allow the

schools to continue operations remotely. For the next year and a half, they continued to refine their remote learning options, improving them with added technology, professional development and communication and training with families. Concurrently, both schools made large investments in facilities adaptations, designed to follow public health and school district guidelines and, importantly, devised creative ways to accommodate the pandemic-induced increased financial needs of their families.

Perhaps the most effective response tool shared by these schools and evidenced through participant interviews, visits to the campuses, as well as through their published COVID-19 policies, was their ability to change and adapt as the pandemic ran its destructive course.

The independent structure of these schools and their small sizes enabled nimble decision making by school leaders and led by the school heads, the determination to bring students back to campus and normalize operations was paramount. Tables 4.5 and 4.6 illustrate the components of the schools' responses to the pandemic, list the applicable codes, and give a few excerpts of participant interviews.

Resilience

In schools, organizational resilience can be viewed as the ability of an educational institution to effectively respond to and recover from disturbances, crises, and trauma. A combination of factors contributes to the likelihood that a school will recover from unanticipated disruption to operations. In the case of independent schools in general, and the subjects of this study in particular, the heads of school play the most prominent role in leading their institutions to recovery from trauma. Positive school climates, flexibility in leadership, collaboration and creative problem solving are characteristic of the school cultures of HSH and Westerly and were significant factors in their post-pandemic resilience. Having weathered the ravages of the

pandemic for almost three years, both schools have rebounded fully and resumed normal level of operations with healthy enrollment and financial outlooks for the future.

Table 4.5

Responses to the Pandemic

Response	Description
Emotional responses	
1	Dealing with fear
2	Keeping community connected
Physical responses	
1	Facilities
2	Accommodating financial needs of organizations and families
3	Systems for adhering to public health requirements

Table 4.6

Excerpts and Codes for Responses to the Pandemic

Sample excerpt	Relevant codes
Hollywood Schoolhouse	
“We have a really diverse community. So now we start thinking about what would happen if we were offline. And some of the families that didn’t have their own computers, what would we do and what we’ll use, you know, we never heard of zoom, barely, people would use Microsoft Teams. But we were Google, we use the Google Suite. So, we decided, if we decided to form a group of board and Task Force people and just start talking about the what ifs. And then school started shutting down. And we were one of the last holdouts and I there’s a group of heads that we talked to on the regular and we’re like, ‘We’re not going to do, no, no, we’re still holding out. We’re okay. We’re okay.’ And then I think it was one day, I think it was one of the heads of school called me and said, ‘We’re going to have a meeting at one o’clock, I think	Adaptation to Covid Stress on school leaders Admin leadership/descriptions of self/team Support for schools from outside Leading curriculum adjustments Effects of board decisions Facilities adaptations Teaching and learning Community concerns Distance learning Perspectives on head’s leadership style Covid related stressors Diversity, equity, inclusion, belonging. Financial decisions Financial impact of closure Student enrollment

Sample excerpt	Relevant codes
we're all going to shut down''' (Ilise).	
"It has been fascinating to kind of go through this progression. There was so much fear from parents ... so much fear every time we sent any notification about Covid" (Jordann).	Adaptation to Covid Community concerns Parents Communications strategies
"I would send out communications [about Covid]. I was also the one who was getting the responses. It took up my entire day, my entire week. Every time we sent something it was hours of responding!" (Tina).	Communication strategies Adaptations to Covid Stress on school leaders Covid-related stressors
Our tuition assistance went up by like 25%. And our net tuition from 20 to 21 basically stayed the same ... and we decided to give a rebate. We ended up getting iPads for everybody ... it was exhausting, that time period when we were trying to get kids back on campus" (Todd).	Financial decisions Financial impact of closure Student enrollment Diversity equity, inclusion, and belonging. Stress on school leaders Covid related stressors
Westerly School	
"I think one of the best things was our communication out to families ... to give them some insight. And we did the same with our staff when they were coming back to school because people were worried coming back on campus and it's interesting because once they got here it was like 'You know ... we're good'" (Toni).	Communications strategies Community concerns Facilities adaptations Teaching and learning
"We are super fortunate because our maintenance tech, Adrian, is very talented ... we did a lot of physical changes for COVID ... we went home in March but then summer was all prep for return to campus in September and we had all those cohort numbers that we had to get to get right so we were figuring out how to split our classes" (Toni).	Facilities adaptations Distance learning Covid-related stressors Stress on school leaders
"So, the first phase was everyone at home, then the next one was teachers in a room by themselves students at home or in a "learning center" [small pod] and then we could have a teacher in the room, but we still need to keep the cohorts separate. So, we hired additional assistants for that year" (Toni).	Facilities adaptations Financial impact of closure Student enrollment Adaptation to Covid Covid-related stressors

Tables 4.7 and 4.8 illustrate the elements of resilience, the codes used to categorize comments from participant interviews, and excerpts from those interviews.

Table 4.7*Elements Contributing to Organizational Resilience*

Element	Description
1	Adaptability
2	Agility/ability to pivot
3	Collaboration
4	Communication
5	Flexibility
6	Resourcefulness
7	Innovativeness
8	Positive school climate
9	Shared goals
10	Trust
11	Creativity

Table 4.8*Organizational Resilience Excerpts and Codes*

Sample excerpt	Relevant codes
Hollywood Schoolhouse	
“I’m very optimistic. I get overwhelmed and I feel defeated at times, but I always pick myself up. I firmly believe that like in our mantra we say with the kids, this day has been given to me fresh and clear. I can either use it or throw it away. I always believe in that” (Ilise, head).	Head’s leadership journey Stress on school leaders Effects of Covid on head’s leadership Resilience
“I feel like it’s kind of continuing. It’s odd, like you feel it’s over, but it’s not over yet. There’s so much disruption that relates to it that still continues for now” (Todd, chief financial officer).	Emotions around reopening Adaptation to Covid trauma Anxiety about the unknown Stress on school leaders
“It helped being flexible, like just jumping in helping wherever we [admin] were needed ... a lot of our admin, teachers are really passionate. Many of them have been here a long time too. I think they want to stay and continue, you know, making Hollywood Schoolhouse a successful place” (Jordann, director of early	Resilience Emotions around reopening Teaching and learning

Sample excerpt	Relevant codes
<p>childhood education).</p> <p>“At the beginning of all this, we were hearing about this thing that was far away from us and then all of a sudden, boom, it’s here ... and oh, by the way, we got to shut the school down. Like, it was like ‘What?’ I mean, you know, you’re creating a whole different system that you don’t have, and I didn’t even know what the word ‘Covid’ was two and a half years ago. Now I know it way more than my life!” (Tina, admin).</p>	<p>Adaptation to Covid trauma Resilience Stress on school leaders</p>
Westerly School	
<p>“I just put one foot in front of the other, right? ... Every challenge, you just face it. Like you don’t give, there’s no opting out. We’ve got all these core values including adaptability, like after 2020. Everyone’s saying you can’t use that core value ever again. Because [when making changes] I would always say, every day, ‘Okay, we’re practicing adaptability’” (Lauren, head).</p>	<p>Adaptation to Covid trauma Admin leadership description of self and team Head’s leadership journey Communication strategies Stress on school leaders Effects of Covid on head’s leadership</p>
<p>“Every year it has been getting better. There have just been different challenges, but I think this year [2022–2023] has been the best out of the pandemic years. We’re getting stronger as a team. I feel like we’re more prepared when urgent circumstances arise” (Molly, director of advancement).</p>	<p>Admin leadership description of self and team Resilience</p>
<p>“There was this layer of just like, all of this uncertainty, and just like this frustration and fear that, you know, permeated, like, so many shows do, while we were doing I mean, everyone really put in, you know, their heart and soul. And there was, you know, I remember a lot of tears myself, and like, a lot of people. But it was also like, we shared that collectively ... you know, to be able to be on the other side ... we’re starting fresh ... it feels really nice” (Amber, director of admissions).</p>	<p>Resilience Collaboration Stress on school leaders Emotions around reopening Admin leadership descriptions of self and team</p>

Temporal External Challenges

As previously stated, both HSH and Westerly navigated significant pressures imposed by the necessity to follow public health guidelines enacted by multiple sources including the State of California, Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) and Long Beach Unified School District (LBUSD). Local public health agencies and school districts aligned successfully with Federal and State agencies and both schools studied were able to navigate significant externally imposed requirements by making significant adjustments to their operations as described throughout this dissertation. Table 4.9 illustrates the progression of public health guidelines regarding COVID-19 (and responses of HSH and Westerly) recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, n.d.) and imposed by the California Department of Education (2022), LAUSD (n.d.), and LBUSD (n.d.) from Spring 2020 to Spring 2023.

Table 4.9

Timeline of COVID-19 Responses of Hollywood Schoolhouse (HSH) and Westerly School

Period	Government guidelines	HSH and Westerly responses
March 2020	CA governor orders schools closed for in-person instruction. LAUSD: All schools close. Transition to remote learning.	Both close March 16, 2020. Both offer increased financial assistance and cancel tuition increases for 2020–2021.
July 2020	CDC gives guidelines for reopening: masks, distancing, testing, and hygiene requirements. CA Department of Education releases guidelines for reopening: masks, distancing, testing, and hygiene requirements. LAUSD publishes reopening plan with same guidelines as CDC and CA Department of Education.	HSH: Following health requirements, opens in person for early childhood education summer camp. Westerly: Following health requirements, opens for summer camp. Both prioritize bringing students back to campus. Both increase remote and distanced efforts at connection.
Fall 2020	CA: Hybrid. Some schools offer in-person learning, others remain remote only, and some offer both. LAUSD: Remote only. Based on	Both offer limited in-person learning or remote learning. Families choose. Both upgrade technology with strict adherence to health requirements.

Period	Government guidelines	HSH and Westerly responses
	<p>high levels of COVID-19 transmission in Los Angeles and Southern California.</p> <p>No standardization of technology.</p>	<p>Both invest in facilities to accommodate distancing and health requirements.</p> <p>Both invest in tech and professional development for faculty/staff.</p> <p>Both apply for PPP loans and other government assistance from CARES Act.</p>
Winter 2021	<p>CA: Vaccine distribution to teachers and school staff.</p> <p>LAUSD publishes phased reopening plan. Students with highest needs return first.</p>	<p>Both: More students return.</p> <p>Both hire additional staff to maintain distancing and facilitate health requirements.</p> <p>Both receive PPP loans for faculty and staff retention and use CARES Act assistance for technology and to meet needs.</p>
Spring 2021	<p>CA: More schools reopen. COVID-19 cases decrease in California.</p> <p>Strict distancing, masking, etc. still in place.</p> <p>LAUSD expands reopening plan.</p> <p>Continues to offer remote learning.</p>	<p>Both: More students return.</p> <p>Both continue to offer remote option, encourage faculty/staff, and encourage vaccination. Many are still remote.</p> <p>School events are limited and distanced.</p> <p>HSH receives \$800,000 PPP loan.</p> <p>Westerly receives \$450,000 PPP loan.</p>
August 2021	<p>CA: Masks mandated for all students and staff regardless of vaccine status.</p> <p>LAUSD: Masks mandated. Vaccines for all eligible faculty and staff.</p>	<p>Both: Masks, testing, and distancing mandated for all students and adults on campus. Vaccines mandated for faculty and staff.</p> <p>Both at healthy enrollment numbers, retaining many public-school students who enrolled when LAUSD and LBUSD were closed longer.</p>
October 2021	<p>CA lifts mask mandate for kindergarten through Grade 12.</p> <p>LAUSD keeps mask requirement.</p>	<p>Both keep all health requirements.</p>
Spring 2022	<p>CA: Omicron variant identified.</p> <p>Some schools adopt stricter safety measures.</p> <p>LAUSD keeps masking and testing requirements. Gradually reduces frequency of testing.</p>	<p>Both: Students and faculty return to in-person learning. Remote options in place for compromised or ill students.</p>
Fall 2022– Spring 2023	<p>CA: Health requirements and testing protocols relaxed.</p> <p>LAUSD: School resumes per CA guidelines.</p>	<p>Both: School resumes. Vaccines mandated for faculty/staff.</p> <p>Both: Resilience evident. Enrollment and financial outlooks healthy. Fundraising</p>

Period	Government guidelines	HSH and Westerly responses
		resumed; financial aid moves close to pre-pandemic levels for families.

Note. HSH and Westerly followed state and local mandates. CDC = Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; CA = State of California; LAUSD = Los Angeles Unified School District; PPP = Paycheck Protection Program; LBUSD = Long Beach Unified School District.

Summary Cross-Comparison of HSH and Westerly as Related to Thematic Research

The vertical analyses of school climate and leadership require an assessment of the participants' interview statements, an evaluation of researcher field notes to assess consistency of the observations with the interviews, and also a review of documents accessible to stakeholders. In analyzing the interviews from both Westerly and HSH house stakeholders, the consistency is notable in the discussions surrounding school climate and the leadership of the heads of school and the experience of the stakeholders in relation to the heads and to one another. The interview participants indicated an appreciation for the school's goals, mission and vision as articulated by the head of school as well as a deep appreciation for their school communities. Both HSH and Westerly were consistently described as inclusive, warm and values based. Stakeholders also described the leaders of their respective schools warmly and were very appreciative of their leadership styles that encourage collaboration and empower other voices in leadership decisions. Added to that, school leaders, both staff and volunteer, expressed extremely robust levels of trust and respect for their heads of school. There is much acknowledgement for the intensive challenges and courage with which the heads led their schools during the pandemic.

Researcher notes generated during visits to the campuses confirmed the feelings expressed by stakeholders. The warm welcome and evident comfort of students and adults on the campuses reinforced the impressions of the positive school climates so openly described in the

interviews. Additionally, a review of the schools' most recent accreditation reports and a perusal of the websites confirm the welcoming and inclusive aspects of each school. Although independent schools differing in many ways one from the other, HSH and Westerly do share fundamental values and priorities in terms of the warmth and welcome offered by school leaders and the positive influence that warmth has on each schools' climate. These observations are integral in understanding and explaining the consistency of commitment by school leaders and other stakeholders to seeing their schools through the pandemic successfully despite the trauma it inflicted beginning with the full operational shut-down and continuing with ongoing destructive wounding for many months. These school leaders were empowered by the school climates and the deep commitment of their heads of school to undertake the exhausting work of managing through the pandemic.

A transversal/temporal evaluation of the schools' responses to the pandemic and the resulting outcomes requires an understanding of the external factors that put pressure on the school communities that are the subjects of this comparative case study. The schools were obligated, by state law, and common sense, to adhere to the public health guidelines that public schools and other educational institutions were also required to follow.

The independent school organizational structure allows for individual decision making and each school, like other non-profit enterprises, operates as an entity unto itself subject to following federal and state laws. While neither HSH nor Westerly are free to operate based solely on leaders' preferences, they are structured with the expectation of independent decision making by their leaders. As the pandemic pounded these small schools from many directions beginning in March of 2020 with a mandated shut-down of operations, their agility and ability to make their own decisions about supporting families financially, investing in technological

devices and support for online learning, and the countless efforts made by leaders to stay connected with the members of their communities, served them well in their shared goal of emerging successfully from the COVID-19 pandemic. Today, in the spring of 2023, their success is demonstrated by the fact that both have resumed educating students onsite and operating at pre-pandemic levels of enrollment and financial stability.

Table 4.9 illustrates the external requirements and some of the actions taken by each of the schools from March of 2020-Spring of 2023 as well as the outcomes for each institution in the spring of 2023. The transversal/temporal evaluation of the pandemic's effects on HSH and Westerly is supported by the content of participant interviews recounting school leaders' responses to the many challenges of the pandemic. Further detail is found on the school's websites where COVID-19 protocols are regularly displayed and updated. Additional confirmation was gleaned by in-person researcher observations at HSH and Westerly, where, for example, on one visit to HSH, third-grade students were required to wear masks as they entered campus due to an outbreak of COVID-19 in that grade level. At Westerly, homage to the pandemic was visible as late as May of 2023 where several adults, parents and teachers attended an all school gathering voluntarily masked, no-one seemed worried or surprised. By the spring of 2023, masking was normalized as a personal choice and no community member present at the assembly commented or even looked surprised.

It is evident that through years of fear and uncertainty, systems and expectations have been modified to accommodate the trauma inflicted on the schools by the pandemic. Pathways have been found that allow these small schools to move forward with their business of educating their students within a safe and nurturing environment. The schools have resumed operations, proven their resilience, but there is a residue of acquiescence and compromise that coats

stakeholder experience. Even at this time, three years later, with the pandemic emergency having been declared “over” by U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2023), there are adults and students still being infected with virus and others suffering the residual wounds of exhaustion, anxiety, social difficulties, and academic gaps.

CHAPTER V: CASE DESCRIPTIONS

Introduction

This chapter describes two small independent elementary schools, the subjects of this multiple comparative case study. The schools are miles apart yet located within the loosely connected sprawl of city and suburbs that are Los Angeles. Like so many educational institutions, they were battered by the trauma of COVID-19's onset and the multi-year on-going wounding it delivered. From March of 2020 through the spring of 2023, school leaders faced extreme challenges that assailed them from every angle. Struggling at first with fear of the disease and deaths precipitated by the pandemic, schools were suddenly required to shut down in March of 2020 with no time to prepare. Simultaneously, school leaders were charged with developing strategies to continue educating their students remotely while also creating systems to restore operational viability and on-campus learning as quickly as possible. The leaders of these subject schools dug deeply into their experience, common sense and connectedness and proactively expanded their skill sets to ensure their schools' resilience.

The cases are outlined in similar fashion throughout this chapter beginning with setting the school within the larger community, describing the school climate and stakeholders' commitment, exploring the leadership style of the head of school and how the administrative team is integrated with her, describing how they managed throughout the pandemic and then evaluating the end result in terms of enrollment, the school's current financial health and operational steadfastness and lastly describing the resilience of the institutions.

Case 1

Setting/School Climate

Stitched between the sleek glamor and sexuality of mythological Hollywood and the stark, concrete despair of today's unhoused who rest uneasily against leering graffiti guardians is spread a pulsating, vibrant community. Much like a piece-work quilt, the fabric of today's Hollywood is multi-hued and textured and deeply padded with the exotic and ordinary fabrics of many cultures. This curiously diverse community comprised of extremes draws tourists, residents, and workers in, offering up welcome through art, food, and other necessities of life. Demographically, Hollywood is home to 146,514 residents, only a small fraction of the diverse 12.5 million population of greater Los Angeles where 7.5% of school aged children attend private tuition-based schools (California Department of Education, 2023) The racial diversity of Hollywood's residential community akin to that of the enormous city surrounding it—Latinx 43%, White 37%, Asian 8%, African American 7%, Two or more races 4%, Other 1%. (Statistical Atlas, n.d.). With a population that swells daily due to show business, commerce, and tourism, Hollywood is magical and complicated and, significantly, home to Hollywood Schoolhouse (HSH)—a thriving pre-K-6th grade independent school.

Traveling south on Highland Avenue, past the faded “walk of fame” sidewalk stars at the intersection with Hollywood Blvd. and beyond the famed Hollywood High School campus at Sunset is the brightly painted because of the HSH established in 1945. Since then, the campus has been expanded, the main entrance moved around the corner in the midst of a residential block and classrooms and play-spaces added to accommodate the school's burgeoning enrollment. Its roots as a private residence are still evident, not only in the building's clapboard architectural style, but in the placement of the swimming pool that glistens in the center of

campus. Over its storied history, the school, originally a family-owned business, grew from a small preschool serving 20 children to its current status as a non-profit independent school with 285 students ranging in age from 18 months to 12 years old. Governed by a board of trustees and led by an experienced head of school, HSH is accredited by the California Association of Independent Schools, the Western Association of Schools and Colleges and is a member of the NAIS.

The current school is based on the philosophy that “children thrive academically in a nurturing environment, which provides them challenges and encourages them to take risks” (HSH, 2022, p. 5). This straightforward philosophy statement provides the fertile ground from which the school’s mission statement has emerged: “Hollywood Schoolhouse knows, values, and encourages fearless curiosity. Through a blended program of innovative academics and structured learning, our diverse community inspires students to be academically strong, artistically proud, physically active, and socially grounded” (HSH, 2022, p. 5).

Sewn together through myriad connections, the school community is separated by only the thinnest layer of often permeable batting from the brightly patterned Hollywood quilt. HSH is nestled into a neighborhood characterized by a mix of modest post-war houses, blank -faced apartment buildings, and a variety of commercial enterprises.

Among the core values deeply embedded in the HSH community, is the commitment to socially responsible action. Through a number of outreach programs, the HSH community partners with various community organizations that include the Gay and Lesbian Center, Project Angel Food, and the local Fire and Police Departments. Support for the rich, diverse fabric of the Hollywood community is fully evident within the school’s programs and members of the school community value the opportunities to engage with the larger local community.

Vine-covered walls and cheerfully painted buildings just visible behind them greet visitors entering the school's main gate. Next, a few stairs, with painted risers encouraging the virtues of "Fearless Curiosity" and "Inspired Learning" and then the small front office festooned with student art, informational bulletins and a screen announcing current and future school events. From the helpful smiles of the security guard at the parking lot, to the warm greeting and friendly conversation from the employees at the front desk, arriving at the school is a welcoming experience that foreshadows the warmth of the community and is illustrative of the school's climate.

According to Loukas (2007), school climate reflects attitudes and feelings elicited from stakeholders about multidimensional experiences at the school. Physical, social, and academic dimensions all play a role and the school's leaders have the responsibility for providing a safe, comfortable physical environment, encouraging positive social relationships between students, faculty, and staff, and offering a rich curriculum, aligned with the school's values and mission. (Loukas, 2007).

Woven into the fabric of the HSH school climate is an open reliance on core values. The following values are published on their website, actively acknowledged by school leaders, and seem to permeate the atmosphere on campus. There is a vibrant sense of community characterized by connectedness and the shared vision of encouraging students based on the values listed below.

- Community
- Diversity
- Individuality
- Curiosity

- Achievement
- Character
- Kindness
- Compassion

The result is a joyful campus where individual challenges as well as strengths are welcome. The concept of connection is referenced frequently when stakeholders are asked about their school's climate. One active volunteer, a leader of the school's parent association, described the school's climate in the following way during a Zoom interview with parent association leaders on October 23, 2022: "I feel like the school is intentional with its connection ... and then, just overall ... walking on campus, there is this joy. You see so much smiling, so many smiles and laughter and like skipping through campus, everyone seems genuinely happy."

Fostered by the head of school, consistent appreciation for the community's connectedness is expressed regularly by administrators and volunteer leaders. Their authentic appreciation for one another and for the diversity of the community is fundamental to HSH. When Maria, the assistant head of school, a newer member of the administrative team, was asked about the school's climate, she responded eloquently:

I know you're asking about climate, but I can't help but bring up the word eclectic because they are a very eclectic group. Many of our kids march to the beat of their own drums without any sense or desire to conform ... that is not true of many schools, and I do believe it to be firmly true of our school. So, I mean, when I think about climate and culture, I think about think of words like funky cool, eclectic, odd? Just funny, it's a funky place. And, and I think with that comes belonging because no one's weird, like everyone, everyone is weird in their own way.

And it's probably the first school that I can dress the way I want. Where kids who are gender non-conforming as early as two or three years old can come to school and not fear any kind of ridicule, whereas any school in which I've ever been, administrators have often said, children are welcome as they are. But that doesn't necessarily permeate a school. I understand the environment. I do think when you're working in a school, where down the street, there's an LGBTQ community center that houses trans youth, just the visibility of that alone sends a signal, like, we're all kind of weird and cool and eclectic in our own way. (Maria, interview, October 23, 2022)

Observing the morning drop-off offered an informative introduction to the school's climate and highlighted the warmth of the school's administrators, faculty, and staff. On a sparkling late October 2022 morning, two and a half years after the initial trauma of COVID-19 forced the school to shut down, students and parents flowed through the gate chatting and laughing. The head of school welcomed everyone by name and was joined by several members of the school's leadership team, faculty, and staff. Big smiles and lots of hugs set the tone for the day and an undertone of excitement rippled through campus as it was Monday, the day of the all school, weekly morning meeting.

Respect for the school's COVID-19 safety protocols was evident too as several stakeholders wore medical masks and administrators offered them to parents and students as they entered campus. Three days before, a few third-grade students had tested positive for COVID-19 and the current protocol required that those students stay home and that their classmates, who were not ill, wore masks while in school. This rule had been eased over time and the entire class no longer had to quarantine as it would have in the early months of the pandemic. As the children arrived at school, those who were required to have masks took one cheerfully moved on

to start their day, happy to drop heavy backpacks and unnecessary jackets and prepare for a special celebration of Diwali, the Indian festival of lights, featuring beautifully costumed dancers and musicians.

The tradition of the Monday morning meeting provides the school community with an important opportunity to connect, to celebrate and learn together. It is hosted by the 5th graders under the protective eye of the head of school. School values are celebrated, performances cheered, special announcements are shared, and individual and group achievements are honored. In closing, students are reminded of the potential of the day ahead with the following affirmation: “This day has been given to us fresh and clear. I can either use it or throw it away.” And then, of course, meeting leaders extoll their assembled audience to have a great day and use it well!

The Monday morning meeting concluded, students, teachers, administrators, and staff dispersed across campus on to their various morning pursuits. The community is steadied by the embrace of the school head’s leadership and the predictability of the traditional start to the week. The head of school exudes optimism and gentle encouragement, and by the smiles, hugs, and warm greetings she receives on the way to her office, it is clear that the connectedness she works so diligently to foster is firmly embedded.

The positive school climate is driven by the shared values of the community and founded on the school’s mission and philosophy. Led by the vision and example set by the head of school and the leadership team, students and adults feel valued for their individuality, and secure in the support they receive at school. Stakeholders are welcoming to outsiders and proud of their school. Students move comfortably around campus, interacting with peers and adults. Warm smiles and open respectful conversation set the tone for the very deep sense of connectedness

that permeates the community. A member of the leadership team, Jordann, the director of ECE (early childhood education), summarized the value of connectedness this way: “I think that is the biggest draw for people coming back...and people wanting to join this school, many of our families recruit other families, because once they feel connected, they want their friends to come and have that same feeling too” (Jordann, interview, October 23, 2022).

All indications point to a robust recovery from the battering delivered by the pandemic. HSH felt the trauma of COVID-19 acutely as the campus closure and ongoing wounding of COVID-19 struck a dangerous blow to the connectedness of the community. School leaders suddenly found themselves in unknown territory struggling to keep their community connected despite the shocking isolation and fear engendered by the pandemic. But now, in the fall of COVID-19’s third year, the head of school describes the school climate and her role in creating it this way:

I think every leader affects school climate ... I think I’m way more involved in nuance of things than many ... I chose this profession because I love children. So, I think it affects me as a leader in that I think it affects the school in that I am so involved.

And then, with a dazzling smile, she asks:

But how do you measure what you saw this morning? Right? How do you measure how families feel so good? There’s no happiness thermometer—like 100 degrees, 4 days a week? So how do you measure what is really valuable? (Ilise, interview, October 23, 2022)

An almost palpable air of positive energy permeates the campus, eluding quantitative capture, yet as real to the HSH community as is the operating budget or the number of students enrolled.

It is the gold thread running through the fabric of HSH's place in the piecework quilt of Hollywood.

Leadership

The head of school is vivacious and full of energy—her warm smile invites conversation and confidences, and her deep connectedness to the HSH community models its value to everyone on campus. Ilise began her career at HSH thirty years ago as a preschool teacher. Over time, she became director of the ECE and, later, the assistant head of school. She was appointed head of school seven years ago. During her professional lifetime at the school, Ilise has also balanced the responsibilities of raising her own children and views her role at the school through a maternal lens:

I've been here for 30 years—I've been instrumental in so much change here. It's like my fourth kid. Good and bad. I worry about the future of the school, and I know that some people are drawn here in part by the love and energy and the extra I give. (Ilise, interview, October 23, 2022)

Ilise's passion for the HSH community is evidenced in the tremendous sense of responsibility she has for the school's well-being and continued growth. Her leadership is founded in core values, an optimistic vision for the school's success and a genuine appreciation and connection with the members of the leadership team, and other stakeholders. In reviewing the interview transcripts of those who work most closely with her, consistent descriptions of her leadership are apparent. She is described as approachable, caring, a good listener and a leader who invites others to share ideas, to actively solve problems. Her team finds her transparent in decision making, respectful, and trustworthy. According to those who work with her, Ilise leads

with integrity first and, when solving problems, always seeks the answer that will be best for HSH students. Ilise is aware of her strengths and shortcomings as a leader.

I am very mindful of who I am as a person, and who I am as a leader. And I'm always trying to work on myself. I think we are lifelong learners. I know what I do for the school is really valuable and I don't want to change that because I think it is really important. But I do listen, and when people give me feedback, I do take it to heart...I have to check my ego and that is something I'm working on myself and with the admin team, we have to check our egos outside the door. (interview, October 23, 2022)

Without ego displacement, Ilise is willing to implement ideas that are better than her own or that exceed her scope of expertise. She garnered the admiration of the school's administration and board of trustees by her quick response to the onset of the pandemic when she created an advisory task force which included medical professionals, financial experts, and decision makers at the school. She also readily acknowledges that she is a big picture thinker, and a people person who is most effective as a leader when administrative team members are authentically empowered to make decisions and lead within their own areas of expertise. In speaking of her leadership team, she says: "I have really good people in place. You know, you need the people who are like, ILISE, that's a great big idea, but if you do this, this, and this, you might trip on this landmine...and so yes, we talk about those things, and I think our diverse team is really important for the school."

The members of the HSH leadership team collaborate with Ilise and one another freely. The team members have a wide range of experience and tenure at HSH. Each of them brings unique expertise to their roles and they come to the work with a genuine passion for the school despite the many difficult months of managing through the pandemic. Nate, the director of

teaching and learning, is only in his second year at HSH and among the newest members of the leadership team describes working with Ilise in this way:

What I appreciate about Ilise is that we can have very open conversations not just about my strengths and where I can grow, but her strengths and where she can grow. And she has taken feedback really well and you can see where she's trying to implement things that we've asked her. And I think that's a really important quality that not every leader has. (interview, October 23, 2022)

The members of the leadership team experience Ilise's leadership style as self-aware, values based and collaborative. The interviews paint a consistent picture of authentic leadership as being Ilise's dominant leadership style with some aspects of servant leadership accompanying her interactions and decisions. The short definition of Authentic Leadership aligns with the more detailed explanations of the value of authentic leadership in schools summarized in Chapter II.

Authentic leadership is a leadership style exhibited by individuals who have high standards of integrity, take responsibility for their actions, and make decisions based on principle rather than short-term success. They use their inner compasses to guide their daily actions, which enables them to earn the trust of their employees and peers—creating approachable work environments. (Gavin, 2019, para. 3)

The definition above describes Ilise's leadership well but is lacking in a description of her personal warmth and connectedness to the HSH community—the aspects of her leadership best described as 'servant leadership' with the good of the community always taking precedence over any personal gain or ego gratification. As Lisa, the director of admissions, and long-term colleague of hers notes: "For Ilise, this is her life's work and there's no doubt about it, her passion and love for this school is her everything." Other descriptors frequently referenced when

describing the leadership of the head of school include, “open, inclusive, collaborative, very connected to the HSH community and prioritizes caretaking of others. She is aware of leadership styles, hers, as well as others,’ and genuinely appreciates diversity of thought and style ... sometimes Ilise is too ‘in the weeds’ but she is genuinely working on it and trying to pull back-she is open and willing to work on her challenges” (Admin, interview, October 23, 2022).

The vertical analysis of the school’s leadership clearly indicates that within the dominant leadership style of the head of school and the administrative team, transparency, honesty, and genuine caring are paramount on the list of priorities at the school. Admiration for the head of school’s leadership was summed up by Maria, the assistant head of school, who, like Nate is in her second year at HSH.

I believe in Ilise. Daily I think about having to balance all these constituents, kids, parents, teachers assistant teachers, and I don’t know many other jobs, unless you’re a CEO of a company where you have to do that every day ... I respect her deeply as a human being ... I think that comes with a lot of trust we can share very honestly from the get-go. If we don’t like something she is very candid with me and I’m very candid with her because there is a level of respect. (Maria, interview, October 23, 2022)

It is no wonder that the school provides a haven where students thrive and where adults feel appreciated and heard nor is it surprising that with the onset of COVID-19 this relationship-oriented community was shaken to its core. Nevertheless, strong, consistent leadership by the head and leadership team, bolstered by support of the board of trustees and covid task force, proved instrumental in the school’s recovery from the ongoing wounding and potential chronic damage threatened by the pandemic.

The Pandemic—A Temporal Analysis

Phase 1—March 2020–September 2020

On a drizzly gray day in early February 2020, Ilise attended a meeting with a group of school-heads from around the country where the frightening specter of a widespread pandemic was discussed. Hundreds of independent school leaders and educators were gathered in Philadelphia for the annual NAIS conference. Most expected to attend presentations, hear interesting keynote speakers, and reconnect with colleagues over a glass or two of wine in the evenings of the 3-day meeting. But by the second day, there was enough national coverage and anxiety about the potential of the pandemic seriously affecting school operations that conference leaders added a meeting to discuss what was known and what might happen if the current expectations of the spread of this new and deadly virus proved true.

When she left the meeting, she and her colleagues were aware that little was known about COVID-19 and that it was likely to present unprecedented challenges to schools in the near-term—there was little indication then that they would be facing a world-wide pandemic that would traumatize their organizations and require unprecedented leadership if their schools were to survive its on-going wounding. And there was certainly no thought that three years later the pandemic would have impacted everyone and every organization on the planet and still pose the possibility of re-igniting.

It was a few weeks later that the mandate for closure was issued: As reported in the Los Angeles times on March 13, 2020:

Los Angeles school officials on Friday announced that the nation’s second-largest school system will shut down its 900 campuses serving more than 670,000 students beginning

Monday, citing concerns over the rapid spread of the coronavirus, and joining an escalating number of districts throughout the state and nation.

The Los Angeles closure is initially scheduled to last two weeks, but a firm reopen date will depend on the status of the outbreak.

“The public health crisis created by the coronavirus is not something any of us could’ve reasonably expected to happen and we are in uncharted waters as we work to prevent the spread of the illness,” said L.A. schools Supt. Austin Beutner. (Blume et al., 2020, para. 3)

Following guidelines mandated by the California Department of Education, Los Angeles Department of Public Health, and the LAUSD, HSH announced a temporary shut-down of the school for two weeks. At that time, the HSH leadership as well as most educators around the country, expected the mandated shutdowns and unprecedented requirement to devise remote learning systems, to be lifted quickly. Ilise recalled her initial reaction by saying “I thought it was a moment that was going to be short. And we were going to get through it and come out on the other end” (Ilise, interview, October 23, 2022).

Tina, the office manager, and administrator who has worked with Ilise for two decades articulated a common initial reaction: “you know, at the beginning of all of this, we were hearing about this thing that was far away from us, and then, all of a sudden, boom, it’s here and oh, by the way, we’ve got to shut the school down. Like, it was like, what? Whoa!” (Tina, interview, October 23, 2022).

Community Impact. The initial impact of the pandemic, like all trauma, was shocking in its onset and in the unexpectedly serious consequences it brought to the school as its initial wound. Closing the campus was unprecedented and among the many painful consequences was

not knowing when school could reopen. This fact engendered fear within the community that, fueled by the isolation imposed by distancing regulations, threatened to endanger the existence of the school. The shutdown elevated the level of fear among HSH stakeholders as reported by Maria, Nate, the head of school, and other study participants (interviews, October 23, 2022). The school was shaken to its core by the unprecedented closure and immediate ceasing of usual operations. For a community characterized by connectedness, the sudden jolt of separation from the campus, and the wide-spread fear sparked by the unsolved mysteries of COVID-19 placed a huge burden on the head of school and her leadership team.

It is not surprising, given the tremendous sense of responsibility the head carries for her school, that while others were frozen in fear, she chose action. Her response was strategic and aligned with her practice of inclusive leadership. She created the COVID-19 task force whose members had expertise in areas foreign to her, but necessary to save the school. Realizing that the school's survival required a new level of expertise in technology to facilitate distance learning, wisdom in managing its suddenly uncertain finances, as well as medical expertise, Ilise says: "I called the group together, I had a couple of parents that were Google people and started their own company, I had a couple of former board chairs, a couple of board members that were doctors and we formed what we would call our task force. And we just started talking about what do we need to do?" Alisa, a trustee at HSH believes that Ilise's leadership style was instrumental in the school's ability to weather the pandemic's frequent surprises: "She [Ilise] has that ability to be vulnerable, to be inclusive and not to feel threatened by somebody else's expertise. I think that is very interesting and sometimes, unfortunately, unique in a leader but it is very helpful in an independent school" (Alisa, interview, October 25, 2022).

For her part, Ilise prioritized creative efforts to maintain the connectedness of the school community. While on lockdown, Ilise began making unscripted weekly videos that touched base with families, acknowledged the difficulties of the pandemic.

I would just check in. How's everyone doing? Because I wasn't seeing them at carpool.

I'm somebody they see all the time ... and they weren't seeing me ... then after a while, my brother and I love music, so we started making playlists for the families, we would send home a curated list ... hey, have a dance party with your family, here is some appropriate music. (Ilise, interview, October 23, 2022)

Led by the head of school, school administrators and members of the faculty were encouraged to stay connected with families through social zoom gatherings and even through distanced 'front lawn visits.' School celebrations were held despite the restrictions of distancing. It was the school's 75th anniversary and the annual gala was held online, other traditions were continued albeit mostly on-line, but these efforts towards maintaining connection and prioritizing the well-being of families proved successful and were instrumental in ensuring the school's ultimate resilience.

Throughout the first months of the pandemic, Ilise found that her role became even more pastoral than before the trauma.

Ilise's focus on keeping the community intact was understood by paid staff and volunteers alike. She asked the leaders of the parent association to help figure out ways to keep people engaged with HSH during a time where people were disengaged. "we were very mindful about not asking this community for money, because we know that people were just struggling to feel connected during that year" (interview, October, 23, 2022).

HSH was completely locked down until July of 2020. During that spring and early summer, in keeping with their commitment to the larger community, Ilise allowed a local food bank, Project Angel Food, to store supplies on campus as they were delivering to so many isolated Hollywood residents unable to leave their homes due to actual illness or multiple risk factors for COVID-19. Ilise's consistent authentic leadership was evident in this example of modeling social responsibility through community engagement even at the most stressful time for the HSH school community when it would have been much simpler to pull inward and only care for the school.

In addition to her countless other responsibilities, Ilise worked closely with her facilities team to organize the campus to bring students back as soon as possible. Following state, county and LAUSD public health mandated guidelines, spaces on campus were organized to create appropriate distancing, with plexiglass barriers to ensure it and colorful fences to indicate areas for each small pod of children, the pre-school children were invited back to campus in July, 2020 for half-day, outdoor sessions. During these early days of the pandemic, the distancing guidelines for schools were so restrictive that most of the space on campus was used to house a relatively small number of students and faculty. Yet, their ability to return to school stemmed a potential exodus of many preschool families who experienced the almost insurmountable obstacles of online education for the littlest children.

Jordann, the ECE director, remembers the school's response to the beginning of the trauma as effective and meaningful.

I think they got a jumpstart on all of the planning and step by step. Here's what we have to do for parents, here's what we have to do for kids, here's what we have to do for teachers, here's what we have to do for ourselves. So, I think there was a lot of structure

and organization that came from that pre-planning and the task force. (Jordann, interview, October 23, 2022)

Financial Impact. One of the sharpest blows to HSH initially delivered by the pandemic was a financial one. With careful calculation, Ilise, guided by the COVID-19 Task force, trustees and HSH's CFO, developed strategies to offer financial assistance to struggling families. Todd, HSH's CFO, a long-term member of the school community, first as a parent and later as its financial expert, reported that the upheaval caused by the school's closure upended usual operations in the business office. He says: "All the accounting stuff stopped except paying the bills and doing payroll-the most critical things we had to do. Beyond that it was constant board meetings, emergency board meetings about enrollment, money, the tuition and concern that other auxiliary income had stopped—like after school programs and summer camp" (Todd, interview, October 23, 2022).

True to the school's core values, the primary concerns expressed by leadership were for keeping the community connected and stemming the threat of unprecedented attrition due to the financial hardships placed on HSH families through losing jobs, being sidelined by illness and caretaking responsibilities, or the numerous other disruptions to daily life that the ongoing wounding of the pandemic dropped on individuals, families, and organizations.

The pandemic's financial impact on the HSH community is documented in their self-study: "We found that our community was hit hard. Many families in the entertainment and music industry suffered when the business shut down" (HSH, 2022, p. 7). The school's leadership responded in measured steps to the unexpected financial need within the school's community. Todd recalls:

We had a lot of families where both parents lost their jobs. Many of them were used to having money and suddenly they didn't! On many levels we wanted to hold on to these families, not only because it was a community, but also just financially, we needed to get them through this time, just like we needed to get through it, hoping they would stay. I was having lots of conversations with families, and I almost felt like a therapist. (Todd, interview, October 23, 2022)

Per the advice of Alisa and other board members, Ilise and Todd relaxed the terms of tuition payment due dates hoping that families who recovered quickly financially would be able to resume their commitments quickly. Beyond that, there was an elevated need for increased financial aid. With support from the board and a decision to delve into the school's financial reserves (at that time they were \$4M), additional financial aid was made available, and the awards given increased by 30% (\$300,000). The already very generous financial aid policies of the school were stretched even farther with the bottom-line commitment to keeping the community connected and hoping that students would return for the fall, even with distance learning still most likely. Further measures to alleviate financial pressures and to acknowledge the many challenges that online learning presented for young children and their families included freezing tuition costs for the upcoming school year and the offer of a tuition refund of \$1,500.00 per child. For families who declined the rebate, the \$1,500.00 was counted as a donation to the school and they received the appropriate tax credits.

After much debate, since the school had financial reserves, and after analysis of a series of financial scenarios based on various potential levels of student attrition, the board and school leadership applied for and received a total of \$845,000 from a government backed PPP loan. They projected correctly that managing through the pandemic would present unknown financial

pressures on the school and that bolstering the reserves with this loan designated for employee compensation, would allow the school to meet increased staffing needs (made necessary due to the small number of students allowed to be together and significantly increased absenteeism among the faculty).

None of these measures were easy to enact. Whether it was deciding what to do about financial aid, projecting the additional operating expenses based on so many unknowns about the duration and ultimate severity of the pandemic or choosing to apply for government backed loans despite the relative financial health of the school's reserves. Ultimately, the decisions made served the school's survival and were made with the school's values of inclusion and connectedness as the deciding factors. Yet, every choice was stressful for the decision makers and took a toll in different ways for each individual. The head of school summarized these early financial triage decisions this way:

It felt like the right thing to do for our community. Some people were like, no, no, no but it just felt like taking care of someone in a moment where we shouldn't be short sighted. And we were going to be OK in the long run ... there was the PPP loan that we were probably going to get, and we had a reserve that if we had to take it, that is what it was for—it could off-set the moment. (Ilise, interview, October 23, 2022)

True to her values and her deeply felt responsibility for the welfare of her school community, working collaboratively with administrators and other school leaders, Ilise led the school forward and through the immediate financial pressures. Yet, every choice was stressful for the decision makers and took a toll in different ways for each individual that is now becoming more apparent with a little elapsed time.

Phase 2—October 2020–August 2021

The new school year began with the pandemic still uncontrolled, with the approval of vaccines on the horizon and with heated divisions of opinion on a national level and even with the HSH parent body, about how best to manage through this unprecedented stress, disease, and worry. Calm heads prevailed among the leaders at HSH and despite daily outside pressures, the school moved forward with efforts to get kids back on campus as soon as possible, with a commitment to making distance learning as effective as possible for the near term and with a determination to keep their community connected and strong.

In addition to the pressures and on-going anxiety about the pandemic, the nation was deeply wounded by the murder of George Floyd in May of 2020. Throughout the following months of protests and the arrest and conviction of the police who murdered him, racial tensions ran high. Unprecedented pressure was placed on schools and other institutions to acknowledge the existence of systemic racism woven into the fabric of our communities. Those raw sensitivities aligned with the ongoing pressures presented by COVID-19 to create enormous stressors that were felt by individuals and organizations alike. The anxiety it presented to HSH, whose foundational values are based on diversity and inclusion and equity and belonging reverberated throughout the community and required careful and sensitive responses from the leaders of the school. Ilise described the pressures of that summer and fall this way.

It wasn't just covid. It was the reckoning; you know the racial discord and anger. I feel like it is just really hard to please independent school people sometimes. I keep thinking our value add (of a small independent school) should be enough, right? But nothing is really enough. And I feel bad that the teachers work so hard, and the admin work so hard, and it just feels for some families that it's not enough. (Ilise, interview, October 23, 2022)

Ilise credits the support of other school heads in helping her manage the multiple challenges the school faced every day. She shared that “heads of schools were coming together and sharing during this time. LA County was not very helpful because no-one really knew what to do. But I felt like my colleagues were exceptionally helpful.” The California Association of Independent Schools (CAIS) offered regular zoom sessions where heads of California independent schools would come together to discuss issues around COVID-19. CAIS also brought in organizational and medical experts to help the school heads manage the multiple stressors of the pandemic and the challenges of fostering deeply inclusive communities in response to the tensions surrounding systemic racism brought to the fore by the murder of George Floyd.

Community Impact. By October, the LAUSD and the County had developed mandates for distancing and facilities management in schools so that the neediest students could return to in-person school. For some schools, which included students with serious learning differences, for HSH, who already had the preschoolers back on campus, which meant they could prepare to invite the next youngest group of learners in kindergarten-2nd grade. Despite the best efforts of their teachers and the school’s efforts to ensure that every student had a tech device and access to the internet none of that was as yet completely consistent and many parents found it hard to manage their jobs and supervise their children’s school day at home.

Following government guidelines and investing in yet more plexiglass partitions and cordoning off areas of campus for small pods of students, the Kindergartners were invited back for masked, in person school in October of 2020. They also had the option to stay home and learn remotely and about half of them returned to campus initially. There were stringent rules for

on campus health protocols and reporting known covid cases. Frequent covid testing was mandated by the county and strict quarantine guidelines were enacted. The second tier of re-opening proved successful with only one case of covid reported. As the year wore on students were slowly invited back to campus. By March of 2021, a full year after the initial campus shutdown, all students were invited back to school for restricted, distanced but in person learning. Still there were those who preferred to learn from home and so staffing, technology, and curriculum conversion continued.

By the late winter, vaccines were available for adults and over the next months, following CDC, LA County and CAIS recommendations, the school required faculty to be vaccinated. It was then that Ilise was confronted with a level of ongoing fear among the faculty and staff that surprised her. She said:

Getting the teachers back was hard, really, really hard. I didn't realize how hard it was, the fear, getting families back and the teachers back—the teachers were the hardest. I had to nurture them and have conversations with them and talk to them about all the things we were doing. You know, I had to mandate vaccines. I got a lot of pushback from staff that didn't want that. And I said, "I understand, but I need to keep you safe." (Ilise, interview, October 23, 2022)

Financial Decisions. That same year, two new administrators were hired, the assistant head of school and the director of teaching and learning. The need to replace the former AHOS who had moved across the country and the extreme pressures of managing the school through the pandemic allowed the hiring of a new position, the director of teaching and learning, whose job it is to oversee curriculum and offer support to faculty members. It was also decided to make sure

that all students had consistent access to technology and to standardize the devices that students were given to ensure equity in access to the curriculum.

Fortunately, the carefully wrought financial decisions of the previous year, had minimized student attrition and the access to the PPP loan (which was forgiven in spring 2021) and other government support through the CARES act, gave the school the means to purchase iPads for all students and meet their need for uniformity. The continued investment in technology included the necessary professional development for teachers and other staff and the new director of teaching and learning spent the summer of 2021 working on all these projects.

September 2021–August 2022

By the beginning of the 2021-2022 school year, the frequent wounds of the pandemic had become somewhat normalized. By then they were an inconvenient truth rather than daily massively threatening events. The CDC and LA County and LAUSD had published health related requirements for schools which, keeping with their protocols, HSH followed carefully. Thoughtful leadership decisions and embedded strategies for managing COVID-19 outbreaks on campus combined with the school's concentrated communications strategies had allowed operations to resume albeit with multiple restrictions dictated by the reality of the ongoing pandemic.

Community Impact. Most students attended school in person during the 2021-2022 school year. There were still remote options and remote requirements if group of students had to quarantine because of an outbreak of covid in their grade or class. The investment in iPads and improved technology and professional development for teachers proved helpful to families although balancing in person and remote learning platforms often presented challenges and stressors to the school's teachers and school leaders.

During that year, once the overwhelming sense of fear subsided, and the school had reopened, the next level of disruption to the community became more evident. The volunteer leaders of the parent association found that the enthusiasm among families for volunteering had noticeably declined. Even though school had resumed on campus, there were still many restrictions on events and in-person celebrations. In speaking of the 2021-2022 school year, they commented:

Last year the mood was so difficult. It was because people were expecting things to go back to normal and they weren't taking into consideration all of the changes necessitated by the pandemic. I think it was really frustrating, I could feel it in the teachers, you know, the kids, and the parents ... we didn't have many volunteers at all during COVID—it was pretty much me and my co-president and the admin that worked with us. We planned every event and then I would beg my friends to come help us do things [virtually and/or in person]. (parent association leaders, Zoom interview, October 23, 2022)

Continuing efforts by volunteer and administrative leaders to 'reconnect' the community had a positive effect. The addition of the position of 'director of teaching and learning' and the additional three faculty positions as 'in-house' subs to help cover the increased levels of COVID-19 related absenteeism, provided much needed support to the teachers. Nate, the director of teaching and learning shared: "The comment I get most from our staff is that they feel pretty supported in a way that they haven't felt in a long time and while there have been instances where I've just had to make a decision, they have felt included in almost everything that's happened" (Nate, interview, October 23, 2022).

The assistant head of school was then able to offer expertise and energy to parents and other community members in a more focused way than when the position also required oversight

of the curriculum. Maria is able to focus with Ilise in shoring up the connectedness of the community through availability to parents, and spending time working with parent groups on DEIB (diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging) issues and other important school initiatives.

Both Nate and Maria assimilated well into the community and the administrative team grew stronger as they worked together. The team is bonded by shared values and mutual respect for one another. In speaking about Ilise's leadership, Maria commented: "I respect her deeply as a human being. So, I think that comes with a lot of trust. We can share very honestly." In speaking of her response to the pandemic, Maria says: "Ilise is very much a pillar of this community. She shows up time and time again. And I think that alone garnered a lot of respect from the get-go" (Maria, interview, October 23, 2022).

Financial Impact. The 2021-2022 school year brought good news of financial stability to HSH. The sometimes painful and difficult decisions made collectively by the head of school, CFO, board, and task force had worked to stabilize COVID-19 related attrition. And the school was able to open with only 10 fewer students than would have been expected prior to the onset of COVID-19. Of course on an \$8M operational budget, where \$1M was traditionally given out for financial aid and that had been increased by \$300K to support the additional need sparked by the pandemic, losing 10 students (approximately \$250,000) was not a welcome financial outcome, but it was certainly not a disaster given the school's reserves and the fact that their PPP loan was forgiven and much of the cost associated with upgrading technology was reimbursable by the federal CARES act and other sources of government assistance for schools.

September 2022–March 2023

Visiting the campus for the first round of interviews and observations in October of 2022, it was abundantly clear that the school was operating at 'full speed' Students were joyful,

administrators, led by the head of school, were welcoming and gracious and shared openly how the school had been affected by the pandemic over the previous two and a half years.

At the time of this writing, three years from the forced closure of campus in 2020, stakeholders, while clear that the threat of COVID-19 is not over, are quite confident that they have weathered the worst of the trauma and survived the ongoing wounding that rained on the school for so many months. The sense of community panic that occurred like a game of whack-a-mole when one problem was solved, another would appear, has quieted, but it has left a residue with which school leaders continue to contend.

Community Impact. Danisha and Leann, the parent association leaders, detected a definite change in the mood of parents as this school year began. Danisha shared: “For some reason, whatever happened over the summer, I think people have come to terms with COVID-19 and are in a better mood. And so now we are in year three, and we can really use this year to figure out what we want to do as a parent association” (Zoom interview, October 23, 2022). That sense of renewal speaks to the resilience of the HSH community.

As events are re-imagined and connections renewed, Ilise and the leadership team are conscious of the challenges ahead for HSH and aware that many current issues existed three years ago, before the pandemic. The concern about attrition is a constant, balancing the commitment to financial diversity and equity with budgetary reality, and building an always more inclusive community where every stakeholder feels they belong are ongoing priorities that define the school at its core.

Financial Impact. Looking back through a business office lens, the school weathered the pandemic well. Due to additional needs precipitated by the pandemic, expenses increased and created a \$200,000 operating deficit on paper. However careful management and assistance from

government programs mitigated the potential damage to the school's operating budgets going forward. There are expenses that were initiated because of the pandemic, for instance, increased technology costs, additional compensation for new hires that will become permanent. However, tuition increases, and renewed fundraising efforts will be possible now that the acute phase of the pandemic has passed.

The school has emerged from the trauma relatively unscathed financially. The value-based leadership that placed the well-being of the community at the forefront of decision making in terms of tuition freezes, rebates and increased financial aid served HSH well. Attrition was kept to a minimum; the projected financial picture is positive, and the school has resumed operations with well-crafted covid protocols in place.

Changes and Resilience. The HSH community is warm and embracing. To an outsider, the connectedness is evident through the ease and kindness of interactions between stakeholders—children, adults, employees, and parents. There is consensus among the school leaders, paid and volunteer, that HSH is focused on repairing the small tears in the fabric of the community precipitated by COVID-19.

Although there are many aspects to organizational resilience and multiple scholarly definitions, there is general agreement that resilience is defined by an organization's response to disruption or threat of destruction. Resilient organizations recover and even develop during a state of uncertainty, discontinuity, and emergency according to Xiao and Cao (2017). HSH was able to meet these criteria of resilience and the community is thriving today. However, there is an invisible price paid due to covid and to the deep commitment by the school's leaders to ensure organizational resilience.

During the crisis moments of the pandemic, courageous leaders prioritized the school's recovery over individual and personal well-being. The head of school modeled this selfless leadership. Given her dominant leadership style of values based authentic leadership with secondary attributes of selflessness characteristic of servant leadership, it is no surprise that she and several members of her administrative team were impacted deeply by the stressors of the past three years.

Ilise acknowledges the tremendous stress of 2020-2022: "For a while I didn't sleep well, I was sick to my stomach over the pandemic and then add on the racial discord going on, we have a lot of black families that were just feeling so hurt and we were all already so fearful of the disease and now families were fearful for their lives" (interview, October 23, 2022). Even beyond those enormous issues, they were managing the multiple views about vaccines, about how best to manage the guidelines for the pandemic and how to keep the school community connected and focused on those fundamental values that drew them to HSH in the first place.

Ilise has taken measures to mitigate the stress that include working less on weekends and responding to work emails and messages during the week only unless they are really important issues. She also acknowledges that she is learning to delegate more: "I think Covid taught me to delegate more which is helpful as a leader. I'm learning how to let stuff go ... I have really good people in place." She also acknowledges that her big picture thinking has pushed her to think of a time when she will no longer be at HSH and has admitted that leading through COVID-19 caused her to imagine that time—something she had never considered before: "The job has changed. Boards have changed, expectations are changing ... I think a head of school job now is too much for one person" (Ilise, interview, October 23, 2022).

For Maria too, the experience of working so closely with Ilise and experiencing the stress that she works under has changed her future ambitions. “I’ve done a complete 180 ... I don’t wish for that life. That is really challenging and filled with conflict daily. I don’t know if it is an area in which I have to grow as a leader or if it’s sort of recognizing like, I want something else in this life.” And Nate, the director of curriculum acknowledges that he is rethinking his initial desire to become a head of school one day having witnessed the extraordinary stress of the position up close as a member of the leadership team.

Todd, the CFO who was so instrumental in the wise financial course chosen by the school, has decided to leave HSH at the end of this year. Todd acknowledges that this is the best job he has ever had, that his relationship with Ilise and the other administrators is strong but also realizes that the stress of his position is too much and leaves no room for his family responsibilities. During Covid he says:

Everything was pushed back a few months ... you know as a finance person that kind of drives you crazy ... at times we were so short staffed that I was literally working seven days a week and I supervised yard duty and recess and lunches and might get pulled into a classroom to sub ... we were all doing that though ... all the admin was ... I feel like for us now, it’s kind of continuing. It’s odd, like you feel that it’s over, but it’s not over yet. There is so much disruption that relates to it. It continues for now. (Todd, interview, October 23, 2022)

And Tina, in reflecting about managing the office and communications during the pandemic remembers the stress this way: “It took so much of our time...so much energy so much time away from what we normally do on a daily basis, you know, that some people have left their education careers altogether just because I think they were so exhausted.”

It appears then, that though the changes wrought by the trauma and on-going wounding of COVID-19 affected the school leaders deeply. Their commitment and dedication to the school ensured its resilience and return to the joyful place it was before the pandemic—but the stress has affected several of them—perhaps not publicly, but privately anyway. In describing Ilise’s leadership prior to and during the pandemic, Lisa, HSH long-term director of admissions noted:

I feel like she’s the same. Last year was super difficult. Every day there was a challenge thrown her way, like every day— and she got up and came to school. And she smiled and she greeted the kids. And she was, she’s such a positive energy and she’s so optimistic. I think that really helps our community especially at a time like this where you know, people could fall into the negativity. She gives a way of looking at things to assure you that this community is going to thrive. (interview, October 23, 2022)

In analyzing the impact of the pandemic on HSH on a vertical plane, it is clear that the authentic leadership of the head of school and the strong, connected leadership team she has created, and which supports her, had a unified focus and dedication to ensuring the emergence of the school from the pandemic in as healthy a way as possible. Based on Viewing HSH through a temporal lens, it is also evident that the chronic stress of the three yearlong pandemic impacted the school leaders in significant ways. Most notably, several members of the leadership team are rethinking their long-term career goals and considering their lifestyle priorities. Despite their contemplated transitions, they continue to lead the school with passion and creativity seeking balance and recovery from the residual stress of the pandemic’s traumatizing years.

The holes that the years of COVID-19 wounding ripped in the school’s community fabric are stitched together with an even stronger thread of renewed determination to thrive. The tightly woven community fabric glitters with the gold threads of shared values. Full campus operations

have resumed, the projected financial picture is bright, and the connectedness of the community is evident in the warm, joyful school climate. HSH has reinforced its place in the piecework quilt of the Hollywood community through the wise leaders who unflinchingly faced the fear and daily challenges that threatened to rip the school apart. Their proactive choices led by their head of school ensured the organizational resilience of HSH.

Case 2

Setting/School Climate

Long Beach is part of Los Angeles—or is it? According to Thrillist (2014), Long Beach is not Los Angeles, nor is it Orange County. Rather it appears that, culturally anyway, this 4th largest suburb of Los Angeles, and the 7th largest city in California, is an entity unto itself. In reality, the community of Long Beach is located about 20 miles south of downtown Los Angeles. Heading South on the 405, sandwiched between the luxurious Palos Verdes Estates, where homes and rents are outrageously impossible for most California residents, and the cool, SoCal city of Huntington Beach, where young surfers from around the world aspire to visit, is the Port of Long beach and the city named for it.

The city of Long Beach rises from an oil rich core, with offshore oil rigs artfully disguised as alluring small islands by the same artists who merged the fantasy and reality of Disneyland into the southern California landscape. Downtown Long Beach like a contemporary sculpture, boasts glass, steel and concrete monoliths that confront the harbor's giant cargo ships, stacked high with bright containers, bringing goods from around the globe to quell the appetites of millions of open-mouthed consumers.

Long beach melds tourist attractions, the SoCal beach vibe, a world-famous aquarium, a modern convention center and perhaps the most famous of all long beach attractions, the Queen

Mary II luxury liner with her restaurants, bars, and an unparalleled view of the city lights, with a history of military service, aerospace innovation and blue collar, hard driving delivery of trade goods to the United States. It is not a wealthy community. It is home to 461,150 residents (United States Census Bureau, 2022) and is ethnically diverse, mirroring the racial mix and multi-culturalism of the whole of Los Angeles. The racial breakdown of the Long Beach population as follows: The largest Long Beach racial/ethnic groups are Latinx 43.9%, followed by White 27.8%, Asian 12.6%, multi-racial 8.7% (Data.USA, 2021).

Most local families send their children to one of 82 public schools of LBUSD, which serve over 62,000 students. Of the 39 non-public schools in Long Beach, the vast majority are parochial, proudly boasting faith-based missions. For the 2023 school year, there are 39 private schools serving 5,979 students. Westerly School of Long beach is the lone non-denominational, non-profit independent school, accredited by CAIS and WASC and belonging to NAIS, contributing to the contemporary academic landscape.

The campus is lodged on a side street and is almost hidden between industrial buildings and bland, windowless warehouses storing goods brought to shore by the trade of the Long Beach port. Across the street from the school the freeway buzz is audible. The lumbering trucks and impatient cars are only partially masked by a chain link fence disguised by tired vines and a tangled mass of grass, weeds, and scattered trees.

It is easy to pass right by the Westerly School campus unless the driver's eye is drawn by the oasis of green grass, full-leafed mature trees and giant palms stretching their thatched heads to the sun. On closer observation, the signed semi-circular driveway invites visitors to enter and gives access to the school's contemporary façade and front entrance. Earth toned brick and concrete block construction, liberally broken by large windows and welcoming double glass

entry doors, invite the visitor into a large open lobby. A curved front counter separates the open area from several administrative offices built in a horseshoe pattern with glass doors opening into a common area partially shielded by the front counter. Entering this space, the approachability of the administrative team and the free flow of their workspaces is brilliantly obvious.

Accompanied by the welcoming smile of Westerly's administrative assistant and the ease with which students, parents and employees greet one another, the warmth of the school climate begins to emerge.

Westerly has a surprisingly generous campus for a school in the midst of an urban, industrial setting. Built on five acres, students enjoy the freedom generated by open, grassy play spaces, gardens where they can plant and learn and plenty of room for sports. On a sunny day, there is space for a basketball game, soccer drills, and flag football practice all at once. Rainy days pose a challenge since Westerly lacks an indoor gym, but that is in the thoughts of school leaders for the future. There is certainly enough space to build it!

The classrooms have outdoor patios with wide glass sliding doors that open to blur the space between indoors and out—essentially doubling the size of each classroom. Faculty and students often take advantage of the mild long beach weather to enjoy class outside. Most of the classrooms open onto courtyards and other outdoor spaces, richly adorned with native California plants and the gently winding pathways used to traverse the campus. At one end of the campus is Westerly's Arts Village. It is an impressive complex that houses a large indoor/outdoor art studio, with open space for young artists to create and display their accomplishments, a sun-filled and well-equipped music room and a welcoming outdoor amphitheater shaded by full grown leafy trees.

Founded on an inquiry-based, constructivist and inclusive educational philosophy, Westerly strives to prepare each child for success when they graduate from school. Their philosophy statement is bold:

Westerly School develops the whole child through an inquiry-based educational program that balances academic engagement, creative expression, critical thinking, socio-emotional awareness, and physical development.

Westerly School celebrates and understands the differences in viewpoint, culture, and capabilities of each individual child so they may serve as compassionate and global-minded citizens.

Westerly School illuminates the joys of learning through collaborative inquiry, experiential learning, and real-world connection-making.

Westerly School cultivates a safe and trusting community in which students are seen and known, allowing them to take academic and emotional risks.

Westerly School engages our young leaders through authentic service opportunities to understand the value of giving back to the community on both a local and global scale. (Westerly School, n.d., Service Learning, para. 2)

This ambitious statement of Philosophy paves the way for the Westerly school mission statement below:

Westerly School develops the whole child through a challenging and stimulating program in an inclusive and diverse community. We ignite within each child a lifelong love of learning by encouraging them to discover their full and unique potential every single day. Our students develop a true sense of self through meaningful opportunities for

self-expression, service, and character development. Westerly graduates are leaders, helpers, and creators today and in the future. (Westerly School.org, n.d., Mission, Vision and DEIJB)

Westerly has welcomed students for 30 years. A relatively young school, unique in its geographical space, thoughtful leadership has been integral to its survival. Stakeholders are passionate about the school and appreciate its small size and very personal interactions and care for each of its 180 students.

The curriculum at Westerly is deeply connected to several core values that the school celebrates in many ways. They are published in admission materials on the website and are frequently part of the conversation with school personnel. They are “Responsibility. Adaptability. Respect. Kindness. Honesty” (Westerly School, n.d., Mission, Vision and DEIJB, Core Values) More importantly than where the values are listed is that this commitment is manifested in many ways for students. Westerly’s program includes opportunities for them to engage in mentor-mentee programs where older students become mentors for their younger counterparts and, at every grade level, in structured opportunities for community service engagement with the larger Long Beach community. Students are encouraged to engage in school leadership through organized opportunities for enhancing the community and to actively participate in small group advisory meetings with teachers and administrators, working together to ensure that Westerly is a place where all students are valued and develop a genuine sense of belonging.

Tiffany, one of the leaders of the Westerly Parent Association, described the positive school climate she and her family experience at the school and confided that it is the school climate that fuels her love and enthusiasm for the school: “I would say it’s an amazing climate.

And I would say that it is a mirror of a family. Whereas the opinions are different, the personalities are different, the common love is there for the school and for the children and that makes it work” (interview, November 9, 2022).

That sense of family, of inclusion, carries through in obvious and subtle ways. Multiple celebrations honoring the cultural diversity of Westerly’s students are organized and add to the traditions of the school. The visitor has a sense that students and adults are proud of their diverse community and eager to share in one another’s traditions and celebrations.

Last November, sitting in the open foyer, waiting to meet with the head of school, the student created altar, celebrating the recently concluded Dia de los Muertos, was brightly decorated with the children’s tributes to their ancestors, to other friends and family and even to pets they had loved who had passed away. These were colorful art pieces, figures, photos, flowers, dolls, and other tributes. These very personal mementos made a grand display as well as a very personal one, giving insight into the student-centered ethos of the school. As students, parents and school staff passed through the lobby bustling off to start their busy day, almost everyone acknowledged the altar with a smile and an appreciative comment.

Molly, Westerly’s communications, and advancement coordinator, acknowledges that all the school stakeholders have a role in the school’s warm and welcoming climate: “I think we all have a role in creating the climate. Definitely, leadership, strong leadership, contributes, but we all have a role in how we approach each other with respect and always trying to do what is best for our students” (interview, November 9, 2022).

Leadership

The head of school’s charisma is sparkingly evident on the first meeting. She has a great deal of natural presence when entering a room and seems to personify the joy that characterizes

the Westerly school community. There is no doubt that she is the head of school, her confidence precedes her. As she crosses the room, Lauren greets everyone there with a moment of genuine attention and then introduces herself with a warm smile and enthusiastic welcome that feels like an embrace.

Lauren is in her fifth year as head of school at Westerly. This is her first headship and caps a varied 20-year career as a teacher in an independent secondary school, an administrator in a small elementary Jewish day school, and an upper school division head in an independent school serving highly gifted students. Her academic credentials are impressive too as her commitment to educating the ‘whole child’ is evident in her dissertation which focused on teacher intervention strategies to support the emotional wellbeing of middle school girls in their social relationships at school. Lauren’s wide experience in different types of schools coupled with her passion for teaching helped hone her vision for Westerly and for the sort of head she strives to be. “I came from being a teacher ... and as a teacher, you inspire joy, right? Like every day, even on the toughest days, it’s learning, it’s a culture of positivity and building and so every day as a teacher is joyful ... and you get into administration ... it’s a lot of problem solving but it’s all geared towards the kids and building programs and bringing them together.”

The enthusiasm that drives Lauren extends to her administrative team as they work effectively together. It is a small group, including the head of school, there are only six members. They share a great deal of pride in the school, in its unique status as the only independent school close by and each member of the leadership group credits Lauren’s leadership for inspiring their commitment to Westerly.

One member of her admin team describes Lauren as very “energetic and enthusiastic ... she has very big hopes and dreams for this school and high aspirations ... she is also very kind

and likes to give praise to people for their achievements ... I appreciate her” (Molly, interview, November 9, 2022).

Lauren, a parent of two school-aged children, readily compares leading a school to motherhood: “It’s like motherhood, right? ... Your school is your child, and you have no idea what every right answer is, the challenges come, and you just put one foot in front of the other and do the best you can with the information you have.” David, the assistant head of school for academic and student affairs, values Lauren as his partner who places student growth and wellbeing at the center of her decision making. He notes their productive division of labor, where often she articulates the big ideas and then empowers him and other members of the administration to implement them: “Lauren has tremendous experience and will throw things my way and then I have this ability to say like OK, what needs to happen to make that happen? ... We have formed a good partnership for sure” (David, interview, November 9, 2022).

An air of mutual respect permeates the leadership team, and the members find Lauren approachable and warm. They describe her as brilliant, trustworthy and a thoughtful listener. Jesse, the director of technology and innovation, appreciates that she is open to discussing challenges and conflicts and working through them collaboratively, acknowledging areas of technology where he is the expert and taking his advice and ideas seriously. Overall, the members of the Westerly school administration are consistent in their descriptions of Lauren’s leadership.

She listens to opinions and advice and is willing to act on the ideas presented to her. The members of the administrative team appreciate her openness to new ideas and willingness to accept the expertise of others. Amber, Westerly’s director of admission, says, “I feel like my voice is absolutely heard. Yeah, I mean, there are many conversations that we’ve had, and I can

directly see that after that conversation, something as happened” (Zoom interview, November 14, 2022).

Among Lauren’s many strengths as a leader is her talent for clear and forthright communication. Her ability to articulate her vision for Westerly and inspire stakeholders to embrace her vision for the future of this small, flourishing school sets the tone for the positive school climate that permeates the campus.

The consistent perceptions of Lauren’s leadership extend throughout the administrative team and to other Westerly stakeholders as well. Her influence on the Westerly community is evident in her vision, intellectual capacity, ability to inspire others and the individual respect and consideration she provides for adults and students alike. These leadership habits are all among the significant characteristics of transformational leadership as identified by Bass (1985).

In analyzing her leadership style from a vertical perspective based on the interviews with the Westerly administrative team and volunteer leaders as well as observation of the school’s climate illustrated by the positive comments and interactions among stakeholders, adults and students alike, Lauren is a transformational leader whose clarity of vision, personal charisma and effective communication style provide inspiration and excitement to stakeholders who eagerly contribute their energies to fulfilling the school’s mission. With transformational leadership as her dominant style, Lauren’s commitment to making all decisions based on what is best for students through alignment with the core values of ‘responsibility, respect, adaptability, kindness, and honesty create a well-constructed foundation for her leadership. In short, her openness and genuine care for the members of the Westerly community provide the level of authenticity that encourages trust and that strengthens the school.

Her ironclad commitment to seeing Westerly through the ongoing wounding of the pandemic trauma played an enormous part in its organizational resilience over the past three and a half years while COVID-19 raged around the world ravishing individuals and institutions. The collaboration and support of the key administrators, her board of trustees, the leaders of the parent association and the covid task force, formed by Lauren (to include board members, administrators, and medical professionals), enabled the school to weather the potential destruction of the pandemic storm and emerge from it with a bright enrollment picture fueling ongoing financial stability and a return to business as usual. Lauren's nimble leadership bolstered by her determination to see Westerly through the on-going wounding of the trauma created the resilience that allowed the school to thrive.

Lauren readily acknowledges the strain and changes that she has experienced while she and her administrative team steered the school through the pandemic. Reflecting on these issues, she shared: "I'm much more comfortable making hard decisions now and saying, 'look this has to be this way—a non-negotiable—However, here is what is open for negotiation ... that has been a tremendous learning curve ... I recognize that has been part of me that is definitely a strength."

In creating the vertical analysis of Lauren's leadership, during the pandemic and now, as the immediate threat seems to have eased, it is fascinating to note that the stakeholders with whom she works most closely have not perceived the same changes in her leadership that she articulates. The admiration with which employees and volunteer leaders describe her leadership is anchored in their perception of Lauren's vision for Westerly's success, determination to reopen the campus as soon as feasible and care for every student and adult involved—all of

which, they report, was frequently and consistently conveyed through transparent communication to the school community.

The Pandemic—A Temporal Analysis

Phase 1—March 2020–September 2020

Like many of her fellow educators, Lauren returned from the 2020 NAIS conference with a skeletal knowledge of COVID-19 and the mysterious specter of the novel virus haunting her thoughts. As yet, there was little imagining among school leaders of the enormous trauma they and their schools were to be called on to weather, but rather a surreal sense of disbelief that the worst-case scenarios could possibly come true. As it turned out, of course, the theoretical worst-case scenarios of that time proved to be only shadowy visions of the much more deadly reality that the world was about to endure.

Lauren was only two years into her first headship in March of 2020. By then, she had some perspective on the school and reports that rumbling of fear growing ever louder throughout the school community forced her almost immediately, to shift from her preferred collaborative decision-making protocols and communication strategies to more singular leadership requiring frequent ‘top-down’ decision making.

During Covid there was no right answer. [Particularly at the onset of the pandemic], It’s not like I could say, this is informed by best practices, this is what other schools are doing. Your decisions seem arbitrary, ... like they’re insular ... and there is so much at stake with each of them you know, everyone was in a state of trauma, everyone was scared, everyone! When you’re living it, and when you’re living it alongside everyone, every decision is very, very weighty. And it all feels like it’s on your shoulders. And

every decision you make is wildly unpopular, no matter what. The fear, everyone is scared, because there is no normal. (Lauren, interview, November 9, 2022)

Lauren's sense that some of the difficult decisions she made were unpopular was greeted with uniform empathy in the interviews with the school's leaders. All of the school's administrators as well as the volunteer leaders shared their appreciation for Lauren's leadership style and acknowledged the many difficult decisions she had to make. In regard to Lauren's leadership throughout the pandemic, Amber, director of admissions, described Lauren this way: "There's a lot of trauma that we have all experienced and leading, I can only imagine, what that's like for Lauren." Tiffany, one of the leaders of the parent association, shared her admiration for Lauren's ability to make hard decisions even if they were unpopular with some families. She said: "I think true leadership has to be able to operate in the face of conflict" (Tiffany, Zoom interview, November 15, 2022).

Community Impact. As the news of the pandemic worsened during February and the early days of March 2020, Lauren relied on multiple sources of information to inform her decision making. She listened closely to other independent school heads, regularly joined the advisory zoom meetings hosted by CAIS and followed the guidelines of the CDC, monitored the advice given by federal, state, and local public health experts and watched closely as the large public- school districts of Los Angeles and Long Beach worked through the debate about whether to close schools. She engaged her board on a regular basis and collaborated closely with the members of the administrative team to ensure that families and members of the faculty and staff felt cared for, and that transparent communication was the goal as decisions were made whether or not those decisions were to be met with general approval or not.

In collaboration with the board, Lauren formed a health and safety committee to advise her and the administrative team on COVID-19 related matters. The committee proved to be of great support as the pandemic threatened to overwhelm the Westerly community. In partnership with her board chair, a physician by profession, Lauren established the committee which included two physicians, Lauren, and Toni, Westerly's director of finance and facilities.

Health and safety were at the forefront of all decision making. Partnered with that overriding concern, however, was tremendous anxiety about the fragility of the community due to the worsening financial circumstances of many of the Westerly families. There was deep concern about how this very small school, with no endowment and only minimal reserves could survive the financial damage of attrition and the wounds of anticipated low enrollment threatened by COVID-19.

It was an especially bold decision therefore when Westerly's leadership announced that they were closing school, and moving to remote learning in consort with the Los Angeles schools, a full two weeks before the local LBUSD made the same declaration. As the sole independent school in Long Beach, Lauren and the school's leaders chose to follow the recommendations of the much larger LAUSD, Los Angeles public health leaders, and the recommendations of CAIS in closing March 13, 2020. Like all schools, the initial announcement from Westerly predicted a short-term closure, anticipating remote learning for two weeks. However, as the pandemic worsened relentlessly, the announcements extended all school closures, including Westerly's, through the end of that school year.

Despite the best intentions by the board, the COVID-19 health and safety committee, and Lauren, she reports that there were some conflicting priorities between those of the board of trustees and hers. Lauren reports that for the most part, the board was sensitive to the competing

dilemmas brought about by the ongoing wounding of the trauma and understandably, the concerns expressed by many trustees were how to ensure the financial viability of Westerly while still delivering on the promised mission. Concurrently, she felt the overwhelming responsibility to also attend to the very human needs of the school's faculty and staff. "[The trustees] were not really understanding that the school is a very human endeavor ... and while some of us can adapt very quickly, others needed more time. We were pushing folks" (Lauren, interview, November 9, 2022). Lauren emphasizes that as the head of school she and her administrators were tasked with managing and recognizing the very human toll that stress, training in technology and retrofitting the campus etc. was having. Essentially, trustees were thinking of the financial bottom line while the head of school, and the administrative team were faced with melding concerns about enrollment and attrition with actively supporting the faculty and staff and a school full of anxious families through the traumatic onslaught of the pandemic.

The Westerly value of adaptability was put to the test throughout the early days of the pandemic as Lauren, the administrative team, the board, and health and safety committee determined the safest and most creative ways to deploy the advantages their generous acreage provided and developed protocols, directed resources, human and financial to re-opening as quickly as possible.

Toni, the school's director of finance and facilities recalls working closely with Lauren and Westerly's outstanding facilities team throughout the spring closure to ready the campus to reopen for a small camp program that summer and then for a larger 'academic' camp for the fall. In talking about Lauren's leadership at that time, Toni says: "I think she did a really great job of communicating to the families and also working to figure out the best way forward ... we were able to give them some insight—we did the same thing with our faculty and staff because people

were worried coming back on campus ... and it's interesting because I think once they got here it was like, you know, we're good ... we had a lot of protocols in place ... I think they were much more comfortable then" (interview, November 9, 2022).

Financial Impact. In addition to approving additional funding to outfit the campus with physical necessities, plexiglass desk dividers, new individual desks (instead of the more mission-appropriate tables where two or more students sit and collaborate with one another), and a large investment in technology to ensure that every student and faculty member had the necessary technology access and training to enable remote teaching and learning, Lauren's recommendations to the board to increase financial aid to current families and to freeze tuition increases for the upcoming 21-22 school year were approved. Prior to the pandemic, about 20% of Westerly's families received some sort of financial aid. Due to the negative financial impact of COVID-19 on Westerly's families, the need grew markedly and an additional 10% of families applied for and began to receive financial assistance.

The immediate energy put into transparency about re-opening campus as soon as possible, as well as the generous financial investment directed toward stabilizing enrollment proved successful. Despite the financial modeling of worst-case scenarios that assumed enrollment as low as 125 students for the 21-22 school year, enrollment actually remained stable to the great relief of the school's leaders. "It was scary ... I was doing worst case scenarios for the year and enrollment was up and then down ... we ended up gaining students from Long Beach public schools ... they weren't happy because no public schools offered anything in person" (Toni, interview, November 9, 2022).

Due to the vision and foresight of Lauren and the Westerly board, the school received permission from the city of Long Beach to re-open for a series of summer camps, described by

Lauren as a technology boot camp to prepare students for remote learning in the fall, in the summer of 2020. Toni recalls that Lauren forged a productive relationship with the city of Long Beach Health Department representatives, and the school, after completing a great deal of paperwork and undergoing several campus inspections to ensure compliance with the stringent health regulations in effect at that time, was approved to open. Toni recalled that “once that happened, our enrollment jumped ... it was crazy. But we kind of held steady ... we lost some Westerly students, but we kind of backfilled with new ones ... being in a school environment was a big plus for people” (interview, November 9, 2022).

Despite the restrictions for distancing, the fact that Westerly was able to accept students on campus for camp and then in the fall for what was called ‘academic’ boot camp ensured the school’s endurance through the many challenges brought on by the pandemic and is directly attributable to the vision and proactive engagement of the head of school, her leadership team, and the board. Toni describes the school’s resilience in this way: “We are like a little speedboat, and we were able to adjust pretty quick. ... Yeah ... you know the public schools are like a giant ocean liner and they just can’t turn, can’t pivot, like that...Because when you’re small, you don’t have to wait for some district to tell you yes or no ... you know, if we needed to spend money, in order to get kids back in school it was just a cost ... and we could adapt” (interview, November 9, 2022).

During that first successful summer Westerly established itself as a healthy island oasis, set in a dark sea of closures and pandemic required isolation. Westerly welcomed its children in person and, although restricted by masks and distance, they found enough shelter from the misery of the roiling pandemic to do what children do so authentically and easily—learn, play, and laugh.

Phase 2—October 2020–August 2021

With the expertise gained during their successful summer camp experience, the leadership team at Westerly developed workable protocols to bring students back to campus for the academic year. The Long Beach public schools and most of the area's parochial schools remained closed and struggled to devise successful opportunities for remote learning. The challenges faced there were similar to those reported nationwide by large school districts in terms of providing access to remote learning technology for all students, conducting adequate teacher training and finding the money needed to increase support services for students and their families. Toni, Westerly's director of finance and facilities described the time period in this way:

We did a lot of changes for Covid. Our goal was to get people here, right away back on campus ... we went home in March, and that was it for the schoolyear. But then in the summer, it was all prep for return to campus in September ... and we had all those cohort numbers we had to get right, and we had to figure out how to split our classes-the teachers could not be in the room with them, so we had supervisors ... luckily our after-school supervisors and teaching assistants came back.

It was exhausting ... that little time period, when we were trying to get kids back on campus...So the first phase was everyone at home, then the next one was teachers in a room by themselves and students at home or on campus in small groups. We called the pods "Learning Centers"—right? Parents were dropping off their child on campus, but the learning was still remote, on- line ... and then we got to the point where we could have teachers in the rooms, but we had to hire additional Teaching Assistants to supervise the small groups. (interview, November 9, 2022)

For Westerly, however, these challenges provided opportunities too. With support from the board, the health and safety committee and the abiding commitment of the administrative team, the school invested in iPads and laptops for every student. With Jesse's guidance, they installed technology in every classroom that allowed students to attend lessons in person or remotely while ensuring that the distancing guidelines demanded by health officials were maintained.

Small pods of students were managed by hiring an increased number of childcare staff members and lead teachers taught from isolated spaces so that students both on and off campus were able to attend classes taught via technology with their lead teachers. As school opened in the fall, approximately half of Westerly's students returned to campus with the remaining half learning from home. As the months passed, more students returned to campus for the in-person experience although the remote learning option remained available and was still necessary for children living with family members with underlying conditions or suffering with underlying conditions themselves, that made them even more vulnerable to the health dangers embedded in the pandemic.

Community Impact. Led by Lauren, the laser focus of the administrative team on maintaining the opportunity for on campus learning, encouraging returning families to re-enroll and new families to explore the opportunities available at Westerly, the only independent school in the area, accomplished the goal of ensuring Westerly's viability not only financially, but also as a community. Westerly's unique positioning as a place where children could physically come to campus was much appreciated by the school's stakeholders. Lauren's leadership inspired her administrative team and encouraged the loyalty and commitment that was integral to Westerly's survival and ability to continue to build towards normal operations that allowed the school to

thrive prior to the pandemic. In speaking about 2021, the height of the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on schools, when the most stringent protocols for returning to school, masking, distancing, and testing were in place, Amber, the director of admissions, summed up Westerly's positive community picture this way: "you know, we hit the ground running ... I think that they [students and faculty] decided to come back because they felt like they believed in what we had done ... and were able to trust ... that Lauren was doing the best she could" (Zoom interview, November 14, 2022).

It was during that year that David, the current AHOS, and former head of the middle school who had moved to the east coast prior to Lauren's headship, decided he wanted to return to Westerly.

I decided to move back to California for the 2022-2023 school year. The assistant head position had opened up and we were coming out of Covid. But to be able to see that like, wow, that little school is making it work through this impossible environment ... it was a draw for me to come back. (interview, November 9, 2022)

Financial Impact. With the priority of ensuring the school's resilience at the forefront, the administrative team and board made efforts on multiple fronts to encourage families to re-enroll while they continued to recruit new students for the fall. With support from the board, Lauren, Toni, and the entire administrative team developed the strategies that ensured Westerly's survival. In the spring of 2020, the reenrollment contracts for the 2021-2022 school year were being returned very slowly as families absorbed the ongoing impact of the nascent pandemic: "It was scary" (Toni, interview, November 9, 2022). Parents were worried about how the next school year would be organized and if the value proposition that the school offered, a closely knit community where children are known and valued, could be maintained and whether the cost

of the tuition was a sensible investment for parents given the trauma and ongoing wounding that COVID-19 presented. In response to the emergent financial need precipitated by the pandemic, the school reopened the financial aid process for families under additional hardship due to the trauma of the pandemic. Toni and Lauren reached out personally to encourage them to seek additional financial assistance rather than withdraw from the school. The additional financial aid was like a lifeboat extended by the school that encouraged families to reenroll for the fall. The oasis provided for their children was a welcome one in the ever more stormy and uncertain seas of COVID-19. Several families accepted their suggestion and by the time school started in 21-22.

In addition, the board did not increase tuition for that school year. The \$24,000 tuition is low by Los Angeles independent school standards, however, because Westerly is the only independent school in Long Beach, and their competition comes from public schools and parochial schools where the tuition is often lower, the additional offer of financial aid was well received by Westerly parents.

At the same time, the school made significant financial investments in facilities improvements and also in technology, to ensure that every student had an appropriate device for learning whether off-campus remotely or on campus where zoom classes were still in the majority. Along with that commitment came an increased need for professional development for the faculty and also a need to increase the supervisory staff since students had to be kept in such small groups.

Continuing efforts by Amber, the director of admissions, and the entire administration to recruit new students were successful too: “We ended up gaining students who left public schools ... they weren’t happy because the public schools had no in-person options for parents and students ... so our enrollment jumped” (Zoom interview, November 15, 2022). Much to the

relief of the leadership team, Westerly's enrollment remained robust, and they were able to open school for the 21-22 school year with 180 students, Covid protocols in place, and permission from the Long Beach Health Department to resume operations as an academic camp with students distanced, masked, and working in very small groups.

The ongoing attention given to transparent communication, through newsletters, the school's website and more importantly active outreach to families and the clear priority of the school's leaders that the students are first, their well-being always at the center of the decision-making processes helped to ensure the trust of the community.

The accommodations made to surviving the trauma of COVID-19 and preparing to open school were expensive. The school applied for the PPP loan and received \$375,000 (forgiven in the spring of 2021) that was instrumental in funding the necessary acquisitions and changes that armed the school against the pandemic. Additionally, funding from the CARES act helped fund technology purchases and the ability to receive COVID-19 tests and other supplies for free from the city of Long Beach were welcomed. The school received forgiveness for their PPP loan in the spring of 2021.

By the end of the 21-22 school year, most students had returned to school and families, faculty and staff had become acclimated to the covid-testing and distancing protocols and managing with all the constraints generated by the pandemic became more ordinary and the rhythm of the school community resumed.

Lauren shared that for her that year is all very much a haze:

Simultaneously you have to be thinking up here, survival of the school, the big picture things. How are we ensuring that, right? And we are also moving furniture around, and thinking omg, I heard that child sneeze, how are we making sure everyone is following

all the protocols. And so, you're living up here and down here and it feels very binary! Yeah, it's an interesting place where I was spending my mental energy. There were no tangible measurements of success at that time. You have no idea whether you are being effective because you're not working towards major strategic goals. You're like, ... "OK, so getting the PPP loan was a win, right?" (interview, November 9, 2022)

September 2022–March 2023

It was raining on November 9, 2022, but on that first day of interviews, the school was buzzing with activity, a few students and staff still wore masks and even though many of the mandatory rules of spacing, had been relaxed, there was a lingering sensitivity on campus to the fact that COVID-19 is still very much present. There are protocols in place to manage it now, so the fear is gone—frightened eyes above facial masks obscuring expression, have transformed to friendly eyes bright with curiosity and visibly warm smiles below. Certainly, the atmosphere on the campus was joyful. Students were laughing, learning, and playing and adults were engaged with students and one another in a relaxed and appreciative mood.

Community Impact. The school leaders are relieved that normal operations have resumed. When students returned in the fall of 2022, there was a general calm and acceptance of the now familiar COVID-19 protocols. Volunteer leaders report that they are now able to reinstate traditional school events, and parents are eager to return to their volunteer support roles. Molly, the communications, and advancement coordinator, is grateful for the parent association volunteers: "They are about cultivating a positive community, they help coordinate a lot of events and community get together." And Tiffany, the vice president of the Parent association, is thrilled about the return to normal operations: "It's really nice to have people around you who will just knock things out and get it done ... for the good of the school. To be surrounded by

everyone that has that common goal for the school is just, it is unparalleled. I'm still in awe” (interview, November 9, 2022).

Financial Impact. Once again, the board of trustees held tuition at its pre-pandemic level much to the relief of many families. Additionally, the financial aid budget has remained robust, and the school is able to offer all the financially qualified families appropriate levels of discounted tuition. Enrollment remains strong and the school now boasts a near record number of students at 184. Perhaps a silver lining of the pandemic was that new families who had never considered Westerly, explored this tiny independent school island in the educational sea of impersonal and uneven remote learning offered by the local public schools. Clearly, Westerly's leaders were united in their efforts to recruit new students and developed effective strategies for outreach even in the midst of managing the health challenges of the pandemic.

Westerly has emerged from COVID-19's most dangerous, acute years well positioned to continue operations, resume, and build its fundraising efforts and grow enrollment. Forgiveness of the \$375,000 PPP loan is also integral to the school's success and has allowed the school to maintain financial stability. Strong, thoughtful financial management melded with the clarity of goals articulated by Lauren and the administrative team have also been key factors in stabilizing the school's position.

Changes and Resilience. The leaders of Westerly have created a nurturing and welcoming campus that offers its students a school experience where they are appreciated for their unique qualities as students and people and where they are encouraged to grow into the best they can be. With the visionary leadership of the head of school in collaboration with the administrative team and members of the board, the school has proven its resilience as defined by the resumption of classroom learning, increased enrollment, and a balanced operational budget.

When analyzing the effects of the COVID-19 trauma on Westerly School through a temporal lens bounded by the pandemic's three-year duration, there is evidence of change precipitated, at least in part, by the pandemic. Most significantly, Lauren, Westerly's head of school, has announced that she will be leaving at the end of the school year. She has accepted a new headship at a larger school that offers incredible challenges, but also many opportunities for growth. Her decision to leave Westerly indicates that she has emerged from the COVID-19 leadership experience with the passion and energy still burning inside her to lead a school. Lauren is looking forward to the different challenges that her new position will offer. The school is twice as large and includes a preschool division. The advantages of her new position were too numerous for her to decline despite her deep and abiding connection to the Westerly community.

The board's search committee has concluded the search for Lauren's replacement and the new head of school will begin their tenure July 1, 2023. It is fortunate for the school that the worst shocks of COVID-19 appear to be over and that the school has proven to be so resilient. Many stakeholders at Westerly are deeply disappointed in her departure. It remains to be seen how it will impact the community and its apparent resilience in the wake of COVID-19. It is an enormous change for this small school that has so recently emerged from the most acute trauma of its history.

Leading through the pandemic affected the members of the administrative team and each of them responded to it differently. It is a young group of school administrators with relatively few years at Westerly and they responded willingly to Lauren's leadership. Toni appreciates Lauren's collaborative style and her partnership on the financial side of things and is committed to her role at Westerly indefinitely. David, having returned to Westerly after an absence of several years had the advantage of his outside perspective to evaluate the school's leadership and

positioning during the first year and a half of the pandemic before making a commitment to return. David's goal to become a head of school one day has survived the stress of the pandemic. Molly and Amber are young administrators who appreciate the warm school community and their place in it. Amber values Lauren's respectful and collaborative leadership style as an employee of the school and also as a parent of a young student there.

The entire team also acknowledges Lauren's enormous responsibility in having to make many difficult decisions. Overall, despite the stress they have endured in leading the school throughout the COVID-19 years, the members of this leadership team remain committed to the work they are doing and speak openly about their admiration for Lauren's leadership. Amber expressed the shared opinion of the leadership team. "I think that, taking a step back, obviously, we're not in that sense of urgency, panic mode, all the time anymore. There is a lot of trauma we have all experienced in leading. I can only imagine what that has been like [for Lauren]." When asked about her future career goals and how the pandemic experience may have affected her, Amber goes on to say:

I know that I want to be in schools, and I know that for a lot of people (after COVID) that wasn't the case—they're like, "I'm done!" But I feel like, because my voice has been heard that I've been able to go through this and come out the other side. And I think because I'm also a parent I've seen how good we have it here even with all the hiccups and challenges. (Zoom interview, November 15, 2022)

In reflecting on her leadership during the ongoing trauma of the pandemic, Lauren has noticed that members of the faculty and staff have been deeply affected. As was necessary during the height of the pandemic, she continues to focus much energy on ensuring that employees feel heard and are allowed spaces to share their stress. I think everyone has gone through so much

trauma that the level of support that they need in terms of like “I see you and I want you to feel valued is much greater than what it was before.” David, in his position as AHOS, also mentioned the additional attention he has given to ensuring that teachers feel comfortable and supported in their work at school especially now that everyone has returned to campus: “There has definitely been an increase in faculty absenteeism and in their expressed need to work in an environment where health and safety are assured” (interview, November 9, 2022).

When asked about her feelings of leading during covid, Lauren remembers:

I think that I felt tremendously challenged and exhausted but also just humbled with the responsibility ... your decisions seem arbitrary, seem like they're insular, and there is so much at stake with each one of them ... and that's with the families, that's with the teachers, that's with fellow administrators ... and they're looking towards you to like make that call...and you can't waiver on them right? It's just lonely ... I mean on the other hand, I think that there is a sense of comfort knowing that if we can make it through that, we can make it through a lot of challenges. Yes and that is a sense, like my own personal sense of success and reflection.

I think certainly when we look at morale, and when we look at culture, and we look at resiliency of an institution, I think we're still on a swinging pendulum ... and so I think, ask me five years from now and I'll have a better answer. Right now, I am still putting one foot in front of the other. (interview, November 9, 2022)

In analyzing the impact that three years of the COVID pandemic had on Westerly School, and listening carefully to school leaders, the head of school's transformative leadership style that included frequent articulation of Westerly's success, her personal charisma and collaborative style of connecting with the members of the administrative team inspired stakeholders. In

visualizing the vertical leadership hierarchy, Lauren's values-based leadership also identifies her secondary leadership style as authentic. Driven by her commitment to strengthening the Westerly community through respect for the expertise of others, both in words and actions, she earned the loyalty and support of the school's leadership team and volunteer leaders, steeled the school for successful return to full pre-pandemic level operations, and inspired stakeholders to weather the storm brought on the pandemic's ongoing wounding.

Madi Odeh et al. (2021) explored the relationship between transformational leadership and organizational resilience. They concluded that transformational leadership is positively associated with both adaptive culture and organizational resilience. Certainly, Lauren has nurtured the adaptive culture of Westerly that was so instrumental to their successful emergence from the trauma of COVID-19. With visionary leadership at work, Westerly became a carefully protected island of safety for its families providing a warm, engaging, and vibrant community climate respite from the sea of isolation precipitated by the pandemic. As Westerly approaches the 2023-2024 school year and welcomes its next head of school, it remains to be seen how this small, safe island will fare.

CHAPTER VI: THE CCASE FOR RESILIENCE

The secret of change is to focus all of your energy not on fighting the old, but on building the new.

—Dan Millman, *The Way of the Warrior*

The sentiment expressed in the quote above resonates with the findings of this study. The brutal trauma of COVID-19 forced significant change and rained ongoing wounds on organizations and individuals around the world. This dissertation explored its impact on two small independent elementary schools through investigating the relationship between school leadership, school climate, COVID-19, and organizational resilience. The findings herein indicate actions leaders may choose to take to prepare for trauma and rebuild their schools when unsolicited change is thrust upon them.

This chapter presents five key research findings. It begins with a summary list of the findings and acknowledgement of the sources that are aligned with each one. Next, the key findings are discussed in relation to-existent scholarship. Per Bartlett and Vavrus (2017), the findings are then viewed through a horizontal lens focused on the schools' similarities and differences. The limitations of the study are then noted. The chapter continues with an assessment of the findings' contribution to scholarship and a discussion of the implications for future scholarship and then the implications for professional practice. The chapter concludes with some personal reflections and final thoughts.

In summary, the findings discussed here provide answers to the research question that fueled the investigation and provide at least a partial exemplar for proactive steps school leaders can take when faced with an organizational crisis or trauma that, by its nature, forces organizational change. The results of this comparative case study clear a potential pathway for

leaders to follow to prepare for, and even embrace, unforeseen disruptive change with the goal of ensuring the post-trauma and/or post-crisis resilience of their schools.

Findings

The overarching research question of this study was: What is the relationship between school leadership and school climate and organizational resilience in the face of the ongoing wounding of the COVID-19 trauma from the Spring of 2020-Spring of 2023?

The sub questions were:

1. How has the head of school perceived their own leadership during the pandemic years 2020-2023?
2. How have key stakeholders perceived the leadership of the head of school and their own roles during the pandemic?
3. Is the school resilient? Post pandemic, has the school resumed operations?
4. What temporary changes have been implemented in response to the pandemic? Are there permanent changes that have occurred in the school because of the trauma of the pandemic?

Whereas Chapter IV analyzed the data relative to those questions, this Chapter presents the findings, which have been organized around the acronym CCASE: C(limate of the school); C(ommunication styles); A(daptive leadership); S(tructure of the organization); E(mbracing change).

1. C—School Climate - A positive school climate prior to the onset of an organizational crisis or trauma enhanced the potential for organizational resilience. This finding was affirmed through participant interviews, on-campus visits and literature reviewed and discussed in Chapter II for the study.

School Climate - A positive school climate prior to the onset of an organizational crisis or trauma enhanced the potential for organizational resilience. This finding was affirmed through participant interviews, on-campus visits and literature reviewed and discussed in Chapter II for the study.

2. C—Communication: Frequent, transparent, and trustworthy communication enhanced community-wide connections and supported stakeholder confidence in the school's leaders. This finding is confirmed through participant interviews, school communications regarding COVID-19 protocols, and literature reviewed for this study.
5. A—Adaptive Leaders: Operating from a set of core values positioned their schools for resilient outcomes. Participant interviews, literature reviewed for the study and review of school communications outlining financial policies and evolution of COVID-19's on-campus protocols inform this finding.
6. S—Structure: The size of the school and its independent financial and governance structure impacted organizational flexibility and ability to respond to rapidly changing circumstances. Participant interviews, review of the schools' financial decisions and review of communications regarding the pandemic led to this key finding.
7. E—Embracing Change: Resilient schools found opportunities for growth during uncertain and hazardous conditions and found pathways to positive change resulting from disruption. This finding was supported by on-campus visits, review of post-pandemic enrollment and financial situation at two schools and literature reviewed for this study.

Discussion of Findings

The key findings presented here summarize much that is found in the literature written about sound school leadership—whether in calm times or seasons of enormous upheaval. There is no discrepancy evident between the key findings of this study and those that are reported through scholarly research or practitioner experience.

Key Finding 1—School Climate

C—School Climate-A positive school climate prior to the onset of an organizational crisis or trauma enhanced the potential for organizational resilience.

It is not surprising that a positive school climate impacts the resilience of a school community under threat. Stakeholder commitment, one indicator of positive school climate (Allen et al., 2015; Busch et al., 2009; Dinham et al., 1995; Price, 2011) impacts their loyalty to the organization and willingness to do the hard work necessary to recover from trauma.

Scholars (Bossert et al., 1982; Dinham et al., 1995; Price, 2011; Thapa et al., 2013) and the practitioners interviewed for this study agree on its importance. Many months of research into HSH and Westerly confirmed the schools’ recovery from COVID-19’s devastating impact was strengthened because of the fundamental consensus by stakeholders about the positive climates at their schools when the pandemic struck. The key finding about the importance of a positive school climate in setting the stage for organizational resilience was confirmed through participant interviews and the onsite observations conducted for this dissertation. This aligns with prior scholarly research as well (Brion, 2021; James & Wooten, 2005).

Peterson and Skiba (2001) define school climate as follows: “School climate might be defined as the feelings that students and staff have about the school environment over a period of time. These feelings may have to do with how comfortable each individual feels in the

environment” (p. 155). School climate is of consistent scholarly interest and the definition has not changed much, nor has the recognition of the importance of a positive school climate. The NSCC (2007) states: “[School climate is] the quality and character of school life. ... Positive school climate is fostered through a shared vision of respect and engagement (para. 3).

Stakeholders at HSH and Westerly reported being attracted to the schools initially, whether to work there, or to place their children there as students, because of the positive, inclusive school climate they perceived. Their experience upholds the consensus among scholars that positive school climate enhances stakeholder ‘buy-in’ and, in the case of weathering the pandemic, the positive school climate at each school site provided a strong baseline for the school communities. It was a motivating factor in stakeholders’ collective commitment to doing what was necessary to return their communities to the safe, connected schools they valued.

This response to the onset of COVID-19 was predictable based on conclusions drawn by Mutch (2015) in her research into crisis management by school leaders in response to the 2015 New Zealand earthquakes noted, “One of the key findings is that the inclusive culture of the school and the strength of the relationships before the event will have a bearing on how well a school manages the crises they might face” (p. 39). This current study affirmed this finding.

In this study, it was apparent that while all school stakeholders can contribute to maintaining a positive school climate, it falls to the school’s head and leadership team to inspire the vision of all that the school can be. In quiet times, there is innate opportunity for school leaders to engage in behaviors that encourage positive feelings about the school among stakeholders through a focus on articulating the school’s vision, mission and building trustful, productive relationships with students and adults alike so that when trauma strikes, the school community is anchored by the authentic commitment of stakeholders. For HSH and Westerly,

the small schools that were the cases studied for this dissertation, certainly the strong connections among stakeholders and a shared passion for the mission and vision of the schools in place long before the pandemic, enabled them to survive its wounds and return quickly to normal operations after three years of potentially shattering occurrences.

This finding, reinforcing the importance of the connection between stakeholders' commitment to their schools, fostered by a positive school climate, (interviews, observations), and organizational resilience, appeared over and over again throughout this study, illustrating the alignment of actual practice with the relevant scholarship (James & Wooten, 2005; Sutherland, 2017; Vivian & Hormann, 2012).

Key Finding 2—Communication

C—Frequent, transparent, and trustworthy communication enhanced community-wide connections and supported stakeholder confidence in the school's leaders.

One of the threads linking the effective leadership styles of school leaders to resilience is the ability to communicate well. The importance of effective communication is fully aligned with the second finding of this study. In one of the few published studies on independent school leaders, Decoux and Holdaway (1999) found that one key to success is the ability of the school leader to communicate values and beliefs in routine day-to-day actions.

A commitment to prioritize frequent and trustworthy communication is imperative to sustaining productive school climate during times of crisis. McLeod and Dulskey (2021) point out its importance in assessing the resilience of schools during the early months of COVID-19: "Relationships and connectivity resonate throughout educational settings because these values form the foundation of strong school communities...in the initial stages of the COVID-19 crisis response educational leaders recognized the need for frequent often daily communication with

teachers, students, and parents. Communication came from every level of educational organizations” (p. 6).

Confirmation of the value of transparent communication was apparent in the data gathered for this study. Both heads of school saw stakeholder connectedness as a priority and employed multiple strategies to ensure that they and their leadership teams were actively engaged in communicating with faculty, parents, and students from the onset of the pandemic and closure of their schools in March of 2020 through years of anxiety, changing COVID-19 protocols and, full reopening of schools during the 2022-2023 school year. This was confirmed in participant interviews, by viewing written communications sent by HSH and Westerly, and by reviewing the schools’ websites which continued to post updated information on school health protocols through the spring of 2023. The resilience of both HSH and Westerly was also due to the creative ways the schools’ leaders chose to communicate. Distanced ‘front lawn’ visits to school families during the closure, hosting traditionally in-person events on- line, creating fun videos from the head of school to connect with students and families who couldn’t come to campus, communicating personal concern for the financial burdens COVID-19 initiated, and personally delivering learning materials to families and/or hosting almost festive ‘drive-thru’ pick-ups of school supplies were among the communications strategies employed (Ilise [HSH], interview, October 23, 2022; Lauren [Westerly], interview, November 9, 2022).

The importance of frequent and transparent communication affirms the literature reviewed for this dissertation (De Waele et al., 2018; Halawah, 2005; Sutherland, 2017). Building connected communities is one of the many responsibilities of school leaders and there is consensus between scholars and practitioners that bold communication strategies are instrumental in success. Urick et al. (2021) support that view: “While communication is essential

during a crisis, leaders who regularly practice open two-way communication to build relationships, transparency and decision-making capability with an ethical orientation are more prepared to navigate threats and unfamiliar circumstances” (p. 8). The current study’s findings affirmed this during participant interviews, many of which were rich in description of the heads of school frequent methods of communication during the pandemic (Ilise [HSH], interview, October 23, 2022; Lauren [Westerly], interview, November 9, 2022).

School leaders’ communications to families and faculty were essential in steeling the school to weather a trauma or crisis in this study. Both heads of school and other members of their leadership teams reported stakeholder fear as the initial response to the dangers of COVID-19 and the closing of their schools. Leaders were immediately placed into a pastoral role, meaning that many stakeholders turned to school leaders for much more than their day-to-day expertise—reportedly they sought comfort on a much larger scale and sought answers that were virtually nonexistent at the beginning of the pandemic. The heads of school, fearful of the unknown themselves, turned to health experts, sought advice from inside and outside of their immediate communities and, with their own fear pushed aside, led their communities boldly and with courage. In uncharted waters, they provided their communities with a vision of successfully navigating the pandemic. They anchored their school communities through giving practical and emotional support. These leaders internalized the stress the pandemic produced and adapted to months of change—some frightening and some providing hope—all to realize the resilience of their schools.

Key Finding 3—Adaptive Capacity in Leaders

A—Adaptive Leaders operating from a set of core values positioned their schools for resilient outcomes.

Researchers have confirmed that effective dominant leadership styles for heads of school and other school leaders include authentic, transformational and servant leadership (Allen et al., 2015; Black, 2010; Evans, 1996; Sagnak, 2010; Sopko & LaRocco, 2018; Srivastava & Dhar, 2016). Founded in a commitment to values, these leadership styles place varying levels of emphasis on the well-being and growth of followers, empowering stakeholders and setting the direction for the organization through compelling and trustworthy communication. Additional positive characteristics include the leaders' ability to adapt their leadership decisions to various situations. Echoing Millman's advice noted at the beginning of this chapter, Witmer and Mellinger (2016) suggest that successful leaders responding to disruptive change share the "ability to adapt to internal and external demands and concurrently transform these challenges into opportunities for learning and innovation" (p. 256). In the case of trauma and crisis, nimble leadership has proven integral to organizational resilience and adaptive capacity is frequently referenced as a strength in connection with leading during trauma or crisis when new and unexpected challenges are prevalent. Fernandez and Shaw (2020) remind school leaders that they must have the "adaptive capacity to learn and evolve in crisis, to emerge better able to address future crises" (p. 39).

The positive post-pandemic outcomes for HSH and Westerly reinforce that concept as the heads of school were consistent in their support of creative solutions to unforeseen challenges in every area of school life. The saliency of adaptive capacity to survive and thrive in the face of COVID-19 is reinforced as Bagwell (2020) noted, "By adopting an adaptive approach to leadership, school leaders can build resiliency and capacity for their school communities to weather future disruptions caused by the pandemic (p. 31).

One element of a leader's adaptive capacity in successfully navigating organizational trauma is the increased desirability of implementing shared leadership—distributing responsibility and empowering others to support the organization during turbulent times. “A complex adaptive challenge such as that posed by the coronavirus pandemic cannot be successfully navigated by the charismatic academic leader acting alone (Fernandez & Shaw, 2020, p. 42). The leadership demonstrated by the heads of HSH and Westerly was such that the members of their leadership teams at both schools had agency in decision-making. The leadership teams were prepared to step-up to support their school communities in unforeseen ways. Administrators were often helping out in classrooms, managing new facilities requirements and challenges, implementing systems to safeguard stakeholders' health and, communicating to faculty and families about COVID-19 protocols and helping to manage the anxiety expressed by many stakeholders. Volunteer community leaders and professionals were called upon to advise the school heads, help develop policy and even communicate confidence to anxious stakeholders.

Adaptive capacity in leadership also calls for strength in decision-making by school leaders. While ensuring that responsibilities were appropriately distributed, the heads of school reported the need to make many difficult ‘top-down’ decisions. The requirement for nimble leadership was constant and both Ilise and Lauren reported that their preferred inclusive leadership styles, while mostly effective, were not right for every situation during the pandemic. There were unprecedented situations when decisive, top-down action was required from each of them. Over the three years of managing the pandemic, both acknowledged that the experience of having to make singular decisions had pushed them to expand their overall skill as leaders (Ilise [HSH], interview, October 23, 2022; Lauren [Westerly], interview, November 9, 2022).

Relative to this finding, the heads of HSH and Westerly have much in common. The missions of their student-centered schools are unique, yet comparable. Focused on embracing students within a warm, productive school community, these successful heads of school practice inclusive leadership based on unwavering commitment to a set of core values. Due in large part to the compatibility of their leadership styles with their school communities, Ilise as an authentic leader and Lauren as transformational, both schools provided warm school climates for stakeholders. During the years of the pandemic, Ilise and Lauren were determined to ensure the resiliency of their schools and consciously thrust the well-being of stakeholders and the actual survival of their small schools to the forefront of their actions. With the threat of permanent community damage looming, other initiatives were pushed to secondary position. Their adaptive capacity was stretched, as they intuitively integrated more servant leadership to their dominant individual authentic and transformational leadership styles. As experienced leaders, they realized that Fernandez and Shaw's (2020) suggestion that emerging from the pandemic successfully would require "a certain type of servant leadership, that emphasizes empowerment, involvement and collaboration and places the interests of others above their own" (p. 39). Embracing that reality, personal self-interest and self-care were relegated to the background, as their extraordinary energies were devoted to ensuring the resilience of their schools. They were successful.

Their success exacted a price, however, and by the spring of 2023, both school heads and several members of their leadership teams spoke of exhaustion and some even shared that they were seriously rethinking long-term career and personal ambitions. Leading through the pandemic had been so stressful for some, that the experience had spurred deep self-examination of their future hopes and dreams. This outcome reported in this study, affirmed the results of

NAIS's (2020) report, which affirmed that "heads of school are facing increasing amounts of isolation and burnout along with a sense of unsustainable responsibility. The COVID-19 pandemic continued to expose and accelerate the feeling among many heads of school that the role's demands and expectations are untenable" (p. 4).

While this finding affirms the value of the role of nimble and adaptive leadership during the pandemic, it also opens up questions in an area still under-studied: What is the impact on the individual leader who leads through major crisis or trauma?

Key Finding 4—Structure of the Organization

S—Structure—The size of the school and its independent financial and governance structure impacted organizational flexibility and ability to respond to rapidly changing circumstances.

One aspect of recovery from organizational trauma is dependent on the organization's structure, the fourth key finding of this study. Small organizations that are able to set their individual direction and control their resources may have unique strengths and be well-positioned for resilient outcomes from crisis or trauma. There is scant literature on independent schools' recovery pathways. Therefore, this key finding was drawn from study participants reporting the outcomes at HSH and Westerly and from connections to literature focused on resilience. There is consensus that organizational resilience refers to the ability to respond productively to significant disruptive change and transform challenges into opportunities (Witmer & Mellinger, 2016, p. 255). It can thus be suggested that the operating organization structure that provides opportunities for strategic self-determination supports the likelihood of positive outcomes.

Just as adaptive capacity in the schools' leaders fueled organizational resilience, the small size and self-contained independent structure of the schools studied enhanced their potential for survival. As a reminder:

Independent schools are non-profit private schools that are independent in philosophy: A unique mission drives each one. They are also independent in the way they are managed and financed: each is governed by an independent board of trustees, and each is primarily supported through tuition payments and charitable contributions. They are accountable to their communities and are accredited by state-approved accrediting bodies. (NAIS, 2021, para. 2)

The leaders at Westerly and HSH were empowered to make the financial decisions best suited to the needs of their school and local community, not having to negotiate those decisions with larger bureaucracies. Necessity was the mother of invention. Both schools chose to offer financial support to families through tuition reductions, increased financial aid, and freezing tuition raises. They also invested in technology upgrades, thus ensuring that all students had access to the remote learning curriculum. Additionally, they funded professional development opportunities for faculty, staff, and parents to make remote learning as effective as it could be during the many months of required complete or hybrid remote learning.

Operating independently the schools' leaders were able to tailor their responses to the needs of their communities in terms of financial support, applying for and accepting emergency funding from the government (PPP federal loans and funding from the CARES Act) and developing timely policies that were most effective for their immediate constituents.

In referring to measures taken by independent school heads who faced the COVID-19 trauma, Orem (2021), NAIS president, highlighted the quality of self-determination that

characterizes independent schools and differentiates their operations from large public-school districts. After many conversations with heads of school, she reported that, at their own school sites, most independent school heads chose to “structure the work by launching task forces made of various school leaders and trustees, some also included local public health officials and civic leaders. All used multiple scenarios to plan and provide resources for the many forms the pandemic could take. ... School leaders reported that they liked scenario planning because it gave them some semblance of control in an out-of-control world” (Orem, 2021, p. 1).

In this study, nimble leadership focused on local constituencies was a hallmark of the ultimate resilience of HSH and Westerly. The similarities are striking. Both school heads put their communities’ survival ahead of individual interests while the pandemic raged. They deferred to public health guidelines, advice from outside associations such as CAIS and NAIS, they empowered their leadership teams and invested resources as needed. The interview participant’s (Toni [Westerly], interview, November 9, 2022) metaphor of her school as a small ship able to maneuver rough waters and change direction more easily than a cumbersome ocean liner contrasts the experience of Westerly and HSH with that of many large public-school districts. Extending that image a step farther, navigating rough waters is stressful for the captain and crew and certainly leading through COVID-19 took its toll on all the school leaders who participated in this study with varying degrees of impact in terms of personal and professional goals. However, the independent structure and small size of HSH and Westerly were advantages for school leaders who were able to make decisions and devise strategies to serve their individual schools and promote their resilience.

What is particularly striking about this finding is that we seem to live in an era when big is better, when scaling is considered the answer to all problems. Yet this finding speaks to an

entirely different strength and resilience found not in scale and numbers, but in small size, independence, and solidarity. This is a powerful finding that counters prevailing approaches in education and opens up avenues for further exploration.

Key Finding 5—Embracing Change

E—Resilient schools found opportunities to embrace growth during uncertain and hazardous conditions and found pathways to positive change resulting from disruption.

A concise definition of resilience found is the ability to “rebound and continue” (Webster’s Dictionary, n.d.). Hormann and Vivian (2018) discuss the importance of leaders for organizational rebounding in this way:

Leaders play an essential role in healing from organizational trauma. A leader’s approach will often set the tone for how others perceive what has happened and how they respond ... leaders can identify and name the existence of trauma ... they can behave in ways that contain the impacts and ensure a baseline of safety and stability. (p. 7)

Organizational change was a by-product of COVID-19. It forced every school and school leader to make changes. Some of those changes have strengthened the confidence of school leaders, some have actually added measurable skills through the necessity of upgrading technological expertise, managing facilities creatively and developing communications strategies that keep stakeholders’ investment in their schools steadfast.

McLeod and Dulsky (2021) reinforce this notion in their discussion of post-pandemic resilience: “We were impressed with the resilience and courage that we witnessed from many of our participating educators. Even while struggling personally with the impacts of the pandemic, they still leaned into the immense challenges before them. They were brave enough to try new approaches and create new structures even when they weren’t sure what would work” (p. 11).

In this study, the school leaders interviewed acknowledge that the enormous, unforeseen demands made on them during the pandemic forced professional growth. Leading through the ongoing wounding of COVID-19 for many months meant facing significant changes on a frequent basis. As new questions and problems emerged so did solutions and leadership skill expansion. As the school leaders at HSH and Westerly developed strategies and designed policies and protocols to minimize infection while redirecting curricula towards remote compatibility and working frantically to maintain the connectedness within their school communities, the heads of school reported increasing pressures to make more top-down decisions and rapid recalculations during dynamic situations. Members of the administrative team and many of the schools' volunteer leaders reported that their duties were expanded. They were called upon to step outside of their expected job descriptions and manage in surprising areas of school life. Yet, as time passed those leaders became more comfortable with the new levels of flexibility demanded of them and reported that their professional horizons were expanded. At both schools post-COVID-19, there is a shared sense of accomplishment that having emerged from three years of COVID-19 and learned so many lessons, they will be better prepared for future disruptions. Leaders anticipate that they have honed adaptive skills and expanded their leadership frameworks.

The fifth finding of this study concerns the importance of embracing post pandemic changes. And aligns with literature on resilience and crisis management. For HSH and Westerly, the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated remote learning that resulted in heightened technology skills, for administrators, teachers, and students. Development of creative communications methods and the opportunity to rethink and refresh school routines and habits were also byproducts of the trauma. All of these opportunities were necessities during the years of the

pandemic. There is still relatively scant research into COVID-19's effects on school leadership and how changes forced during the pandemic will impact public, parochial, and independent schools going forward. However, Witmer and Mellinger (2016) partially describe organizational resilience in this way: "[Resilience] implies the ability to adapt to internal and external demands and concurrently transform these challenges into opportunities for learning and innovation" (p. 256). Embracing change is imperative for school leaders to access the opportunities for growth that the COVID-19 pandemic has presented.

Horizontal Analysis—Making the CCASE

The leadership priorities and choices made by the heads of school and leadership teams at HSH and Westerly are fully aligned based on the analyses of their actions in managing the pandemic and preserving the viability of their schools following the traumatic years of COVID-19. Table 6.1 summarizes some of their actions and relates them to the key findings of this dissertation using (CCASE) to define the broad categories of leadership actions that led to the resilient outcomes for these schools. Per Bartlett and Vavrus (2017), this horizontal analysis is "homologous, meaning the entities compared have a corresponding position or structure to one another" (p. 52).

In this comparative case study, the subject schools shared that correspondence. Horizontal analysis requires that contemporary processes have influenced the different cases. The shared experience of weathering ongoing wounding of the trauma of COVID-19 placed HSH and Westerly well within this framework. Table 6.1 highlights the many similarities between the two cases compared here. No core differences were apparent and similar actions and leadership styles were evident. There are differences between the school communities, yet none are relevant to the ultimate resilience of either school.

Table 6.1*CCASE Findings at a Glance*

Category	HSH	Westerly School	Actions and attitudes of school heads
Climate: Stakeholder descriptions and leaders' actions geared to caring for and maintaining community.	Characterized as connected. "The parents and the students feel connected. And I know like admin. At one point, that was something that they were intentional about making sure that everyone felt connected" (Parent association leader).	Characterized as family. "I would say it is an amazing climate and it is a mirror of a family" (Parent association leader).	Heads of school prioritized maintaining a positive school climate during years of pandemic. Poured resources and energy into maintaining relationships and ensuring families were cared for financially and emotionally as much as possible.
Communication: School leaders used technology and distanced in-person visits creatively. Media employed included emails, social media, the schools' websites, in-person distanced connections.	Characterized as frequent/empathetic. "[We were] super, with our communications out to the families and able to give them some insight. And we did the same with our staff when they were coming back to school, because people were worried" (Admin team member).	Characterized as: transparent/ responsive. "I was the one who would send out the communications for the school, I was also the one who was getting the responses. It took up my entire day, my entire week. Every time we sent out something, it was hours of responding" (Admin team member).	Both heads of school prioritized communications throughout the pandemic. Frequent updates of COVID-19 school protocols- school policies and reasoning for them. Showed empathy regarding stakeholders' feelings.
Adaptive capacity: School leaders demonstrated their adaptive capacity in meeting constantly changing demands of pandemic through	Characterized as high/ values based. "Last year was super difficult Every day, it felt there was a challenge thrown her [Ilise] way, like	Characterized as high/ values based. "Every challenge, you just face it ... there's no opting out. It's like raising children, right? You do what	School leaders navigated frequent pandemic challenges. Responded quickly and intelligently to constant change.

Category	HSH	Westerly School	Actions and attitudes of school heads
optimism, embracing change and creative decision making.	every day, right? And she got up and when she came to school, she smiled, and she greeted the kids. And she was, she is such positive energy” (Volunteer parent association leader).	you know how to do and when you know better, you do better. Yeah, everyone will joke at the number of times that I use the word adaptability. We’ve got all these core values including adaptability, everyone now says, ‘You can’t use that core value ever again.’ Because [about pandemic challenges] I would say, ‘Okay, we’re practicing adaptability’” (Head of school).	Challenges requiring adaptive capacity included: Pivot to remote learning; developing systems and health protocols, financial flexibility, dealing with facilities and, many more changes.
Structure of school: Independent, not encumbered by school district oversight. Able to make financial, facilities, curricular decisions aligned with individual school mission and needs of school community.	Characterized as independent/operated as non-profit organization. “[Speaking of initial financial impact on families] It was really hard. So, the board and I came up with the idea to give everyone a \$1,500 rebate back to just cash. It was \$1,500 back. And we asked people that if they didn’t need it, to please not take it and just give it back. Let the school keep it so that we can help offset people who are really	Characterized as independent/operated as non-profit organization. “[Speaking about nimble leadership in financial aid] It’s because we’re so small, you know ... it’s easier, just to talk about it. Whether families apply, [for more aid] or they don’t apply. But it’s like your every student counts” (Admin team member). Financial aid decisions made by head of school and administrators.	Independent structure and small sizes (HSH, 280 students; Westerly, 180 students) allowed nimble leadership by school leaders. Both school heads, attuned to technological, financial, and child-care needs of their families developed mission appropriate solutions to these issues working collaboratively with school leaders (their admin teams, boards of trustees, health and safety task forces, and parent

Category	HSH	Westerly School	Actions and attitudes of school heads
	struggling” (Head of school).		association leaders) and utilizing financial resources, clear communication, and adaptive leadership to ensure the schools’ resilience.
Embracing change: Determination to survive the pandemic included embracing creative problem solving and encouraging adaptive capacity of stakeholders. School leaders acknowledge expansion of their leadership styles because of need to respond quickly to COVID-19 challenges.	<p>Characterized by confidence in being better prepared for future challenges. Top-down decisions are easier.</p> <p>“I do seek opinions, I do like to hear people’s thoughts, before I make a decision on something, but I have found that I’ve been forced into just making a decision on my own. You know, during COVID, it’s like, “Ilise, it’s up to you. You’re the leader.” I can’t tell you how many times that has been on me. So, I’ve learned to make decisions, but trying to be mindful of the people that will have the most people it will affect” (Head of school).</p>	<p>Characterized by confidence in being better prepared for future challenges. Sense if I can do this we can get through anything.</p> <p>“I’m much more comfortable making decisions and saying, ‘Look, this has to be this way. That’s non-negotiable. However, here’s what’s open for negotiation.’ That has been a tremendous learning curve. And I recognize that that has been that part of me has definitely been strengthened” (Head of school).</p>	<p>Both school heads embraced the impact of the pandemic on their schools and moved thoughtfully and quickly to meet the challenges it presented.</p> <p>The determination to preserve their school communities, to maintain their values-based leadership style and to adapt to circumstances led to the schools resilience and recognized expansion of their leadership skill sets.</p> <p>Both Ilise and Lauren are more confident now, but they also report a deep level of post-pandemic exhaustion.</p>

Note. CCASE = climate of the school, communication styles, adaptive leadership, structure of the organization, and embracing change; HSH = Hollywood Schoolhouse.

Contributions to Scholarship

This dissertation contributes to the field by studying independent schools and their leadership during the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic from the spring of 2020 to spring of 2023. These schools' leaders responded to multiple leadership dilemmas during those years and faced previously unimagined threats to the very existence of their schools. Because of the unique operational structure of independent schools, leaders at each school site shouldered enormous responsibility for the survival of their communities. Boards of trustees, school heads and administrators were responsible for making independent decisions regarding health protocols, technology, financial support for stakeholders. Unlike most public schools where layers of governmental and administrative control may insulate, or obstruct, site leaders from the pantheon of responsibilities in all operational areas, independent school leaders bear the holistic responsibility for their school sites. During the pandemic, they operated with guidance from their own associations, NAIS and CAIS, and followed governmental protocols with much greater freedom of choice than public schools and, also, with much greater risk to their successful emergence from the pandemic. There remains much to be learned. Research into the effects of COVID-19 on schools and school leaders is in the early stages for all types of schools, public, parochial, and independent, from K-12 to colleges and universities. The universal nature of the pandemic will spur study for many years to come. Ideally, there will be lessons learned from the operational structure of independent schools and perhaps a growing scholarly interest in understanding the advantages and challenges of organizational self-determination and autonomy.

This dissertation also contributes to scholarship because it focused on an understudied group. To reiterate, there is a dearth of research into independent schools in general and this dissertation opens a small window into their leadership and operational strategies. As this study

showed, there is strength in independent schools fueled, at least in part, by their very independence. Their organizational structure requires a high degree of self-determination and allows school leaders the flexibility to make holistic decisions about all aspects of operations based on the direct needs of their individual school communities. Relative to the scale of public schools, snared in a larger bureaucratic system, independent schools tend to be small and nimble. In this study, the small size of the schools proved to be an asset. This runs counter to our cultural appreciation for bigger, better resourced, and scalable operations. Perhaps smaller more flexible institutions are better set to weather crisis and trauma and emerge successfully? Thus far, NAIS has led the way and continues to publish articles and share research into various aspects of independent school operations. Some of their published findings have been helpful in writing this dissertation. However, relative to the many potential areas of research as yet untouched, there is ample room for more scholarly interest in independent schools. With their unique structure and place in the educational field, new research into independent schools would be a welcome addition to the broad spectrum of educational research.

There are multiple areas for future research including those that would contribute to our understanding of school leadership and resilience during crises or trauma. There is potential for conducting larger studies involving more schools, different sized schools, geographically diverse schools and so forth within the independent school community. There is also a broader opportunity to conduct research across school types--studying and comparing leadership during crises in public, private and independent schools might identify common threads of learning between school types and transferability for school site leaders in general. It would be helpful to compare experiences of school leaders in tuition supported schools with that of government supported public- school leaders. Another interesting area of investigation would involve gender.

Is it a factor in how leaders approach crises and trauma? It would also be helpful to study schools that did not do well during the pandemic and did not emerge with such happy endings to their stories. What factors might have contributed to a school closing?

It would be fascinating to better understand the place of self-care, or lack thereof and its contributions to stress and if/how that stress will impact schools and leaders over the long term. In the case of this comparative case study, both heads of school emerged from the pandemic with healthy schools, but they were personally exhausted. Both acknowledge that the lack of self-care and time for reflection has been a negative outcome and has caused them to rethink their priorities for the future. The members of their administrative teams encountered the same challenges and many report an intellectual recognition of the need to engage in self-care, but a lack of time, energy and will to do so. That led to several of these leaders contemplating or actually making changes. As previously discussed, one administrator at HSH has actually left the school due in large part to the stress COVID-19. There are two young administrators who are reconsidering whether they ultimately want to be school heads, a shared goal prior to the onset of the pandemic and both heads of school, having experienced the extreme stress of COVID-19 layered atop their already significant responsibilities, have given serious thought to their tenure. The emerging question becomes what can schools do, what can leaders do to make themselves more resilient? Are there support structures that could be put in place for school heads and administrators before the next trauma appears? Is it an institutional responsibility to care for its leaders? What can be done to preserve the strength and health of the extraordinary school leaders who led their schools through the pandemic to resilient outcomes? Should school employment contracts routinely include required vacations and/or sabbaticals for leaders? Should they include professional coaching? Gym memberships? Personal trainers? Perhaps they should encourage

ongoing therapy to help manage the countless stressors of leading schools. Or could there be a smorgasbord of self-care options to choose from? There is ample room for research into ways for institutions to support leaders and help them to become even more resilient.

Perhaps some of the stress produced by the onset of the next school crisis or trauma can be mitigated if leaders have insight into potential ‘next steps’ as they tread another unanticipated path. For practitioners, the key findings outlined in this chapter may offer an accessible pathway when they are again confronted with community threatening events. Hopefully, the findings produced by this study focused on two small schools, gifted with courageous and committed leaders, who successfully managed through COVID-19, will serve as a starting place for some and encourage future organizational resilience.

Study Limitations

A significant limitation of this case study includes its small sample size, a comparative case study of only two schools. While it went deep it did not go broad. Comparing only two small school communities, the leadership styles of the school heads, the circumstances presented to them by the onset of COVID-19 and the connection of these factors to the schools’ resilience is not broad enough to adequately answer all the relevant questions about schools’ organizational resilience in COVID-19.

Additionally, both schools are located in Southern California, in urban areas, and the transferability of the findings may be limited based on the demographics of the region. More research is needed to determine whether or not this limitation is an accurate concern. The similarity of the schools, both small and independent, which was important for the purposes of this comparative case study, impacts the findings outlined in this chapter. That fact may limit the

usefulness of the findings for school leaders working in other types of schools—larger schools and publicly funded schools are two examples.

Another limitation of this study is that it is confined to the three years of the COVID-19 pandemic from spring of 2020 to spring of 2023. We do not yet have the benefit of time and hindsight since the end of the pandemic to determine its long-term impact on school leaders and school resilience.

Using case study methodology presents limits as well. This study tells the stories of two small independent schools that are emblematic of other schools of the same type. However, there are additional opportunities for conducting larger studies. Mixed method studies including both qualitative and quantitative research methods would reach many more participants and could ask similar research questions that would expand our learning and the transferability of their findings.

Despite the limited scope of this study, the key findings will be helpful in opening opportunities and interest in better understanding the structure and function of independent schools and their leaders. The sustained and shared consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic offer us an opportunity to compare leaders' responses to the same shared trauma. More than comparing leadership and its effects in similar circumstances, the pandemic presents a rare opportunity for research simply because it is a singular crisis that affected us all.

Implications for Practice

One of the purposes of this study was to systematically uncover effective strategies employed by school leaders during the pandemic that supported organizational resilience and therefore could potentially be helpful to other leaders who find themselves and their organizations in similarly disruptive circumstances. Despite the enumerated limitations of the

research, significant implications for best leadership practices did emerge from this study. My perspective is guided by my professional experience as a long-term independent school leader, as well as related experience serving as a trustee for the California Association of Independent Schools (2010-2014) and on several independent Southern California school boards over the past two decades (Los Encinos School, Windward School, Pilgrim School). Additionally, I have been both an informal mentor and professional consultant to school leaders and boards since my retirement from headship in 2020.

Among the primary lessons learned was the value of prioritizing strategic initiatives during non-crisis times in order to enhance the likelihood of organizational resilience when crisis or trauma suddenly descends. There is protection against destruction when leaders consciously prepare for the next crisis or trauma by engaging in preparatory practices that foster positive school climates where stakeholders are engaged in creating a healthy school community.

There are several steps, derived from the findings discussed in this chapter, that I would urge school leaders to consider as they prepare themselves and their schools emotionally, physically, and organizationally for weathering the inevitable next trauma or crises impacting their schools. Specific advice is impossible to give unless exact circumstances are known. However, in general, there are directions to consider, steps to take to prepare for crisis and trauma and guidelines extrapolated from the findings of this study, which may help allay the fear that naturally accompanies the onset of unexpected disruptions or disasters.

Framed by the study's findings and my years-long professional experience, using CCASE as the guide, the following list summarizes practical advice for school leaders seeking to strengthen their organizations' potential for resilience before, during and after the devastation of a crisis or trauma.

1. **CLIMATE**—Expect that there will be another crisis or trauma that threatens your school. Take advantage of the quiet times to prioritize development and nurturing of a positive school climate and encourage both administrative and volunteer school leaders to support that work. Encourage engagement in school initiatives, be a focused listener, develop trust among stakeholders by following through on promises and inviting conversation. Personal experience as well as the findings of this study support the notion that school leaders who are viewed as accessible are able to build trusting relationships and foster ‘buy-in’ among stakeholders.
2. **COMMUNICATION**—Ensure that stakeholders feel valued and included as necessary members of the school community. Build trust. Effective communication is a tactic necessary to build a positive school climate and it becomes imperative to expand communication efforts during a crisis or trauma. Communicate frequently and transparently in times of crisis and in calmer situations. Develop habits that keep stakeholders informed and feeling valued and necessary. Be an interested listener, help stakeholders feel heard, encourage sharing of ideas, and use all means available to enhance communication. School leaders must also be prepared to take on a ‘pastoral’ role. Stakeholders will turn to their community’s leaders for reassurance and support during disruptive times.
3. **ADAPTIVE CAPACITY**—Empower others; Distribute leadership This practice too will engage school stakeholders and encourage a positive school climate during quiet operational times. However, when coping with extreme stress and disruption, school leaders must engage in flexible leadership. Demonstrating a willingness to adapt decision making style to rapidly changing circumstances is of paramount importance.

Learning to lean on others with differing skills, expertise and experience is vital in managing disruptive events. As proven during the pandemic, no school leader can be expert in everything. And crises and trauma may demand leadership in unfamiliar areas. Certainly COVID-19 did and, as an example, the heads of HSH and Westerly relied heavily on guidance from medical experts, financial advisors, and professionals with expertise in technology. Delegating responsibility and modeling the ability to move nimbly will be valuable to organizational resilience.

4. **STRUCTURE**—Build partnerships with internal and external partners with wide expertise. For independent school leaders, the structure of self-determination that places so much responsibility on individual school heads, administrators, and boards can be a great advantage. The opportunities embedded in the structure of independent schools, include the necessity to make financial decisions, facility decisions and curricular decisions based solely on the character, culture and needs of each independent school. This enhances the all-important opportunity to be flexible, to manage through unexpected disruptions using best practices geared towards the needs of each school community.
5. **EMBRACE CHANGE**—Expect Change; discover opportunities for growth within it. Be ready to embrace the changes that will follow trauma or crisis. School leaders are tasked with implementing strategic goals based on achieving desired changes during the best of times. Trauma or crisis will force unanticipated change. Resilient leaders will take advantage of the changes, and lessons learned. Leaders may take time to review and rethink their strategic priorities based on their experiences and situations after the emergency has abated. I would urge leaders to pause to reflect and find the

areas of growth for their communities. Certainly, the pandemic accelerated the use of technology and acquisition of tech skills among stakeholders. Academic leaders at HSH and Westerly gained valuable experience that will drive curriculum and teaching strategies forward. Communication strategies also grew stronger, and several interview participants reported a new sense of confidence born from leading their communities to resilient outcomes. They reported feeling better prepared to meet the challenges of the next crisis or trauma successfully. Leaders will be changed by the experience of managing through crises and trauma. Perhaps one of the most important and most difficult changes to embrace will be actually taking time for reflection and self-care to recover from the impact of leading during organizational disruption.

There is much more to be discovered about trauma, crisis and organizational resilience and there is room for extended research into these areas for independent school leaders and others.

However, I hope that the findings and advice summarized here may provide a roadmap for leaders when crisis or trauma strikes. Ideally, thinking in terms of CCASE will provide a lifeline for leaders navigating through stormy waters of organizational disruption and help buoy their schools until time and circumstances allow for systemic repairs and development of lasting solutions.

Concluding Reflections for Practice

1. The key findings of this study are aligned with significant prior research into effective school leadership and are organized into an understandable set that offers a baseline of advice for school leaders when managing unexpected disruptive events.

Visualizing and implementing leaders' responses to future crisis or trauma using

- CCASE as a framework offers leaders important points of reference and concrete direction.
2. As time passes, reflections on the impact of the pandemic are growing more frequent. Already there is evidence that leading through the pandemic and emerging from its series of blows has boosted the confidence of many school leaders. Their skill set for facing future crises has expanded productively due to the pandemic. Through learning from and embracing the multiple organizational changes demanded during COVID-19, their expectation is that their ability to guide organizational resilience has improved and that in the face of future trauma they will be able to respond and adapt more efficiently.
 3. “Resilient school leaders have the ability to sustain their energy under pressure, and not only cope with changes but adapt to them. They have a level of optimism and growth mindset that sees setbacks as temporary and challenges as opportunities to learn” (New Leaders, 2022, para. 4). Ilise and Lauren are examples of school heads who embraced challenges and emerged from the wounding and trauma of the pandemic as stronger leaders than before it—They were exhausted by it and are still managing the after- effects of three years of previously unimagined stress and responsibility. Yes, COVID-19 took its toll, AND, amid its rampage, Ilise and Lauren became wiser and more confident school leaders too.

Final Personal Reflections

Life is a succession of lessons which must be lived to be understood.

—Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Conduct of Life*

Doing this study brought on a range of powerful personal feelings. As I conducted the interviews and site visits and read various communications at Westerly and HSH, I experienced a strong sense of familiarity and empathy with the school leaders struggling with sense-making and the challenge of developing solutions to the countless daily problems that arose during the pandemic. My connection with the feelings and stress experienced by the school leaders was heightened by a taste of shared experience, as I was employed as a school head for the first few shocking months of COVID-19. I retired in July 2020 and therefore had been responsible for the initial decision to close our campus, and the pivot to remote learning. Like the school leaders who participated in this study, I was tasked with managing the unforeseen emotional, physical, and financial challenges for several months. I felt their fear. I experienced their ‘not knowing.’ I too relied on my team.

Capping a four-decade long career as an educator and school leader at the onset of the first world-wide pandemic in a century, was shocking to say the least—and the opportunity my research provided to connect so intimately with school leaders as we emerged from it was a privilege. I am grateful beyond measure to the dedicated educators who participated in this study. Their generosity has made this dissertation possible and contributed significant wisdom in understanding the ravages of the pandemic and a pathway towards ultimate resilience.

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APPENDIX A: KEY TERMS USED IN THIS DISSERTATION

Board of Trustees: The board of trustees is the employer of the Head of School in an independent school. The board sets policy and focuses on long-range and strategic issues for an independent school. An individual trustee does not become involved directly in specific management, personnel, or curricular issues.

Comparative Case Study: Developed by Bartlett and Vavrus (2017), "...the comparative case study approach attends simultaneously to macro, meso, and micro dimensions of case-based research. The approach engages two logics of comparison: first, the more common compare and contrast [of two or more bounded systems]; and second, a 'tracing across' sites or scales." [using vertical, horizontal and/or transversal research lenses]. (p.1)

Crisis: A crisis is defined as: 1. a stage in a sequence of events at which the trend of all future events, especially for better or for worse, is determined; turning point. 2. a condition of instability or danger, as in social, economic, political, or international affairs, leading to a decisive change. (dictionary.com/browse/crisis n.d.)

Head of School: The Head of School is the administrative leader of an independent school. S/he is the singular employee of the Board of Trustees and reports to that body. The Head of school is responsible for all hiring, firing of faculty, staff, and administration, and is responsible for all operations of the school; The Head collaborates with the Board of trustees to develop the mission and vision for the school and then is responsible for carrying out the board's policies.

Independent School: Independent schools are non-profit private schools that are independent in philosophy: each is driven by a unique mission. They are also independent in the way they are managed and financed: each is governed by an independent board of trustees, and each is primarily supported through tuition payments and charitable contributions. They are

accountable to their communities and are accredited by state-approved accrediting bodies (NAIS, 2020).

Leadership: Leadership is defined as: 1. The position or function of a leader who is a person who guides or directs a group. 2. The ability to lead and, 3. an act or instance of leading. (.dictionary.com/browse/leadership n.d.)

Organizational Resilience: Organizational resilience refers to “the ability to respond productively to significant disruptive change and transform challenges into opportunities” (Witmer & Mellinger, 2016, p. 255).

Organizational Trauma: “Trauma is an injury to an organization. Organizational trauma may result from a single devastating event, several deleterious events over time or from the cumulative impact arising from the nature of the organization’s work. Organizational trauma can originate from external or internal dynamics and consist of a single devastating event or ongoing wounding” (Hormann, 2019, PowerPoint slide #11).

School Climate: School climate refers to the quality and character of school life. School climate is based on patterns of students, parents’ and school personnel’s experience of school life and reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures (NSCC, n.d.).

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS WITH PARTICIPANTS

Interview Guide

Questions for study participants:

Heads of School:

Leadership style:	<p>How do you describe your leadership style?</p> <p>Have you noticed changes in your leadership style over the past 2 years as you managed the pandemic? Examples?</p> <p>What were your greatest leadership challenges during COVID-19? Examples?</p> <p>What surprised you about leading a school through the pandemic?</p> <p>Did you feel supported by your community during the pandemic? How? Examples?</p> <p>Did you receive criticism about your leadership related to COVID-19?</p> <p>Did you view the onset of the pandemic as a crisis for your school community? As a trauma?</p>
School Climate:	<p>How would you describe your school's climate pre and post the pandemic?</p> <p>Have you taken steps to bolster stakeholders' perceptions of the school climate and improve it? Examples?</p> <p>How much influence do you believe you have as the head of school-on-school climate?</p>
School Resilience:	<p>How has your community responded to the pandemic? How has the response evolved over time?</p> <p>What changes have occurred to your school because of the pandemic?</p> <p>What effects do you observe that the pandemic had on your admin team, on your faculty, parents, students?</p> <p>Are there permanent changes to your school because of COVID-19?</p> <p>Do you view your school as resilient? How do you measure that resilience?</p> <p>What role does leadership play in building a resilient community?</p>
Effect on Head:	<p>How has leading through COVID-19 affected you?</p> <p>Have your feelings about heading to a school changed?</p> <p>What was most helpful to your leadership during the pandemic? Examples?</p>

What support would you have liked that you didn't receive?
Examples?

Administrators:

Leadership:

How do you describe your leadership style?
Have you noticed changes in your leadership style over the past 2 years as you managed the pandemic? Examples?
How would you describe the leadership style of your head of school? Has their style changed during the pandemic? Examples?
How are decisions made in your school?

Communication:

How do you communicate with your head? With your leadership team?
Were communications structures and expectations changed during COVID-19?

School Climate:

Did your job responsibilities change? How?
How would you describe your school's climate pre and post the pandemic?
How much influence do you believe you have on the school climate?
How much influence does the head of school have on creating and sustaining the school climate?

School Resilience:

From your perspective, how has your community responded to the pandemic? How has the response evolved over time?
What changes have occurred to your department because of the pandemic?
Are there permanent changes to your department and/or the school because of COVID-19?
Do you view your school as resilient? How do you measure that resilience?

Effect on individuals:

How has the pandemic affected you in relationship to your school?
Have your feelings about working in a school changed? In what way?
Has your ambition to be a school leader changed?
What are the lessons learned from COVID-19 that you might apply to other crises in the future?
What was most helpful to you in weathering the crisis? What else did you need?

Board Members:**Leadership:**

How do you describe your leadership style in relation to the head of school?

Can you describe your head's leadership style?

Did your leadership responsibilities change during the pandemic?

How do you view your role in relationship to creating school policy during the pandemic?

How do you support the head of school?

Communications:

How frequently do you communicate with your head? Did that evolve during the pandemic?

How do you share essential information from other stakeholders with your head of school?

School Climate:

How would you describe your school's climate? Has that changed since the onset of COVID-19?

Who is responsible for creating the school climate?

School Resilience:

From your perspective, how has your community responded to the pandemic? How has the response evolved over time?

Are there permanent changes to your school because of the pandemic?

Do you view your school as resilient? How do you measure that response?

Has the pandemic changed your perspective on the school? What are the lessons learned for your community?

Do you believe that managing through the past two years has affected your school head? How about teachers, administrators-what do you observe?

Effect on Board:

How supportive do you believe the board has been during COVID-19?

How have your feelings about serving on the board evolved?

Are there lessons learned for weathering future crises?

Parent Leaders:**Leadership:**

How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected you as a parent leader at your school?

Have you felt that the administration and parents were supportive of you?

Have parents been supportive of the measures taken by the school to manage the pandemic?

Communications:	Can you describe your head's leadership style? Has that changed during the pandemic? If so, how?
	How have communications worked during the pandemic? Do you feel that the school has kept parents informed of policies and practices implemented during COVID-19? How has the parent association been helpful in communicating with the community?
School Climate:	How would you describe your school's climate? Has that changed since the onset of COVID-19? Who is responsible for creating the school climate?
School Resilience:	Do you view your school as resilient? How do you measure that response? Has the pandemic changed your perspective on the school? What are the lessons learned for your community? Do you believe that managing through the past two years has affected your school head? How about teachers, administrators- what do you observe?
Effect on Parents:	How have your feelings about the school evolved through the past 2 years? Do you feel the school managed the COVID-19 crisis well? How do other parents view the school's response to the crisis? Has your commitment to the school been affected by the pandemic? Do you feel that you were supported as a parent leader?

Concluding question for all interviewees:

In this study, I am attempting to discern the relationship between the leadership of your head, the school's climate (pre and post the pandemic) and the school community's resilience in response to the challenges posed by the pandemic. What else is important that we haven't discussed?

APPENDIX C: INFORMATIONAL SUMMARY FOR SCHOOLS

SUMMARY OF PROPOSED STUDY—SCHOOL LEADERSHIP, ORGANIZATIONAL RESILIENCE AND COVID-19.

This proposed study will explore school leadership in the context of the current COVID-19 pandemic. Facing this ongoing crisis has forced schools to implement a reimagined educational structure and has presented unprecedented challenges to school leaders, teachers, parents, and students. The stress of leading during the pandemic has tested both the flexibility and the resilience of educational leaders and their school communities.

The goal of this proposed study is to illuminate the experience of school leaders navigating the pandemic in the hope that these experiences may provide insights that are transferable to school leaders facing future crises. The intention is to examine two bounded case studies that explore how individual school leaders have navigated the COVID-19 crisis in terms of their leadership styles, decision-making processes, relationships to stakeholders and the impact of those factors on the school's resilience.

The following questions will be investigated, and the findings will form the scaffolding upon which the conclusions of this comparative case study will be built.

- a. How has the head of school perceived his/her/their leadership through the pandemic? (Interviews, observation).
- b. How have key stakeholders perceived the leadership of the head of school in managing the on-going effects of COVID-19 on their school communities? (Interviews, observation).
- c. Is the school resilient? Has it continued/resumed full operations? (Document review, interviews, observations).
- d. What temporary changes have been implemented in response to the pandemic? Are there permanent changes that have occurred in the school because of the trauma of the pandemic and its continued existence? (Document review, interviews, observations).

The study participants will all be adult school stakeholders who will be chosen based on the relevance of their roles at the school to the proposed research. They will be included based solely on their roles at the school. The list of proposed participants at each school include Employees: The head of school, assistant head of school, director of admissions, director of advancement, CFO In addition proposed participants also include adult volunteer school leaders including: The board chair and the volunteer head of the parent association.

As described above, the participants for the proposed study will be selected based on their roles at their respective schools and will include the school heads, school administrators and volunteer leaders. After discussing the study with the heads of the two schools, the potential participants at each campus will receive written information on the proposed study, the questions the research is designed to answer and its potential transferability/usefulness to other school communities.

APPENDIX D: LETTER FOR STUDY PARTICIPANTS

REQUEST TO POTENTIAL PARTICIPANTS AT EACH SCHOOL CAMPUS

Dear Study Participant:

I served as head of Village school in Pacific Palisades for over two decades and prior to that began my independent school career as a teacher and later director of admissions at Campbell Hall and at Pilgrim School. I retired in July of 2020, just as COVID-19 was ravaging schools throughout the nation and have since developed a deep interest in gaining understanding how school heads and other leaders have managed their schools through this ongoing trauma.

I'm pursuing my doctorate through Antioch University and am writing my dissertation on Independent School leadership and organizational resilience in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. I'm excited that (school head's name) has agreed to support my research by sharing the experiences of your school community in this regard and has given her (his) permission for me to ask other school leaders to participate in the study as well.

I hope that through interviewing key school leaders, visiting campus and learning about the effects of the pandemic on your areas of responsibility, I will gain an understanding of the unique professional challenges, problems, solutions, and triumphs you have experienced at (Name of school). **I am writing to request a 60-minute interview with you.**

Through participation in my study, you will contribute to a better understanding of effective leadership through an organizational trauma. My hope is that the findings may be helpful to other school leaders seeking to provide productive leadership when they are faced with the inevitable fact of future organizational trauma.

I have attached a more detailed description of my study to this email. If you are interested in participating in my study or if you would like to discuss it individually before deciding, please let me know. Prior to beginning the interviews, I will also be offering a group opportunity to discuss the study with potential participants. Your participation is entirely voluntary, and you are free to withdraw from them at any time and any information you provided previously will not be used in summarizing the findings.

Thank you for considering this request. I know how busy you are, especially at this time of year, and I appreciate your interest and support of effective school leadership.

Sincerely,
Nora Malone

APPENDIX E: INFORMED CONSENT LETTER FOR STUDY PARTICIPANTS

This informed consent form is for administrative employees and volunteer leaders at Westerly School who we are inviting to participate in a research project titled “SCHOOL LEADERSHIP, RESILIENCE AND COVID-19”.

Name of Principal Investigator: Nora Malone

Name of Organization: Antioch University, PhD in Leadership and Change Program

Name of Project: School Leadership, Resilience and COVID-19

You will be given a copy of the full Informed Consent Form

Introduction:

I am Nora Malone, a student at Antioch University, PhD in Leadership and Change Program. As part of this degree, I am completing a project to understand how leadership impacted your school’s resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic. I am going to give you information about the study and invite you to be part of this research. You may talk to anyone you feel comfortable talking with about the research and take time to reflect on whether you want to participate or not. You may ask questions at any time.

Purpose of the research:

The purpose of this project is to illuminate the experience of school leaders navigating the pandemic at their schools. This information may help us to better understand how school leaders have navigated the COVID-19 crisis in terms of their leadership styles and decision-making processes and the impact of those factors on the school’s resilience in the hope that these experiences may provide insights that are transferable to school leaders facing future crises.

Type of Research Intervention:

This research will involve your participation in an interview, where your experiences as a school leader will be discussed. Each of these interviews will be tape recorded solely for research purposes, but all of the participants’ contributions will be de-identified prior to publication or the sharing of the research results. These recordings, and any other information that may connect you to the study, will be kept in a locked, secure location.

The interview should take no longer than one hour of your time. Afterwards, you will have the opportunity to review the interview transcription for accuracy. Also, after the initial interview, you may be asked for clarification of your comments. The entire process of engagement with the researcher should not take more than two hours of your time.

Participant Selection You are being invited to take part in this research because of the position you hold at your school.

Voluntary Participation:

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may choose not to participate. You will not be penalized for your decision not to participate or for any of your contributions during the study. Your position at your school will not be affected by this decision or your participation. You may withdraw from this study at any time. If an interview has already taken place, the information you provided will not be used in the research study.

Risks:

No study is completely risk free. However, I do not anticipate that you will be harmed or distressed during this study. You may stop being in the study at any time if you become uncomfortable. If you experience any discomfort as a result of your participation, employee assistance counselors will be available to you as a resource.

Benefits:

There will be no direct benefit to you, but your participation may help others in the future.

Reimbursements

You will not be provided with any monetary incentive to take part in this research project.

Confidentiality:

All information will be de-identified, so that it cannot be connected back to you. Your real name will be replaced with a pseudonym in the write-up of this project, and only the primary researcher will have access to the list connecting your name to the pseudonym. This list, along with tape recordings of the discussion sessions, will be kept in a secure, locked location. Personal identifiers will be removed, and the de-identified information may be used for future research without additional consent.

Limits of Privacy Confidentiality:

Generally speaking, I can assure you that I will keep everything you tell me or do for the study private. Yet there are times where I cannot keep things private (confidential). The researcher cannot keep things private (confidential) when:

- The researcher finds out that a child or vulnerable adult has been abused
- The researcher finds out that that a person plans to hurt him or herself, such as commit suicide,
- The researcher finds out that a person plans to hurt someone else,

There are laws that require many professionals to take action if they think a person is at risk for self-harm or are self-harming, harming another or if a child or adult is being abused. In addition, there are guidelines that researchers must follow to make sure all people are treated with respect and kept safe. In most states, there is a government agency that must be told if someone is being abused or plans to self-harm or harm another person. Please ask any questions you may have about this issue before agreeing to be in the study. It is important that you do not feel betrayed if it turns out that the researcher cannot keep some things private.

Future Publication

The primary researcher, Nora Malone reserves the right to include any results of this study in future scholarly presentations and/or publications. All information will be de-identified prior to publication.

Right to Refuse or Withdraw:

You do not have to take part in this research if you do not wish to do so, and you may withdraw from the study at any time without your job being affected.

Who to Contact:

If you have any questions, you may ask them now or later. If you have questions later, you may contact Nora Malone at: (XXXXX).

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact: Dr. Lisa Kreeger at: (XXXXXX) (Chair, IRB) or Dr. Laurien Alexandre at: (XXXXXX) (Chair, Antioch University, Department of Leadership and Change).

This proposal has been reviewed and approved by the Antioch International Review Board (IRB), which is a committee whose task it is to make sure that research participants are protected. If you wish to find out more about the IRB, contact Dr. Lisa Kreeger.

DO YOU WISH TO BE IN THIS STUDY?

I have read the foregoing information, or it has been read to me. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about it and any questions I have been asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study.

Print Name of Participant _____

Signature of Participant _____

Date _____ Day/month/year

DO YOU WISH TO BE AUDIOTAPED IN THIS STUDY?

I voluntarily agree to let the researcher audiotape me for this study. I agree to allow the use of my recordings as described in this form.

Print Name of Participant _____

Signature of Participant _____

Date _____ Day/month/year

I confirm that the participant was given an opportunity to ask questions about the study, and all the questions asked by the participant have been answered correctly and to the best of my ability. I confirm that the individual has not been coerced into giving consent, and the consent has been given freely and voluntarily. A copy of this Informed Consent Form has been provided to the participant.

Print Name of Researcher/person taking the consent _____

Signature of Researcher /person taking the consent _____

Date _____ Day/month/year

APPENDIX F: PERMISSION LETTER FOR ON CAMPUS VISITS

Company address: I WILL ENTER THE ADDRESSES OF EACH SCHOOL FROM WHOM I AM SOLICITING PERMISSION.

Date: THE SCHOOLS WILL BE SOLICITED IN SEPTEMBER 2022/SENDING DATE WILL BE ENTERED ON THE DAY LETTER IS SENT.

Campus IRB Address: THERE WILL NOT BE IRB PERMISSIONS NECESSARY FROM THE SUBJECT SCHOOLS AS NO INDEPENDENT SCHOOL HAS AN IRB

Please note that Nora Malone, Antioch University Graduate Student, has the permission of (NAME) Head of School at (NAME OF SCHOOL) for her study, "SCHOOL LEADERSHIP, RESILIENCE AND COVID-19". The purpose of the study is to understand how leadership impacted the school's resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Ms. Malone will email school administrators, the officers of the board and the officers of the parent association to recruit them as participants in the study through interviews, observations (when appropriate) and review of relevant documents which fall within the purview of their respective positions. Ms. Malone will also invite all potential participants to an on- campus meeting where she will explain the purpose of the research, the format for data gathering and answer questions of potential participants. She will also offer an opportunity for potential participants to discuss the research with her privately if anyone chooses to do so.

There are no direct benefits to the participants who participate in this case study research except that they will be entitled to a copy of the aggregate results of the comparative case study. If requested, the participants will receive a copy of the IRB-approved informed consent document.

This research serves as the basis for Ms. Malone's doctoral dissertation and will be published through Antioch University upon its completion. It will be accessible to scholarly audiences and to educators perhaps through conference presentations or her consulting work with independent schools. However, the schools' names, participants' names and locations will be changed. Pseudonyms will be used so that neither the schools nor the participants are identifiable.

Ms. Malone has agreed not to disrupt normal, day-to-day operations in any way. Interviews will be scheduled at the participants' convenience. Employees will be allowed time from their work duties to participate. Ms. Malone has also agreed to provide to my office a copy of the Antioch University IRB-approved, stamped consent document before she recruits participants, and will also provide a copy of any aggregate results.

If there are any questions, please contact my office.

(NAME)

Head of School

APPENDIX G: REQUEST TO HEAD OF SCHOOL TO USE SCHOOL FOR CASE STUDY

REQUEST TO SCHOOL HEADS TO ALLOW MY CASE STUDY RESEARCH AT THEIR SCHOOL:

Dear.....

I'm pursuing my doctorate through Antioch University and am writing my dissertation on Independent School leadership, organizational resilience in the face of COVID-19. My goal is to conduct a comparative case study through conducting research at two independent schools, gaining an understanding of the unique challenges and triumphs experienced by the schools' heads and other campus leaders over the past two years.

As you may know, I served as head of Village school in Pacific Palisades for over two decades and prior to that began my independent school career as a teacher and later director of admissions at Campbell Hall and at Pilgrim School. I retired in July of 2020, just as COVID-19 was ravaging schools throughout the nation and have since developed a deep interest in gaining understanding how school heads and other leaders have managed their schools through this ongoing trauma.

My research will consist of interviewing the school heads, their administrative leadership teams, as well as the volunteer leaders of your parent associations and the board chair of each school's governing board. After the initial interviews, I will circle back to ensure that my understanding of the conversations matches what the participants recall as well. I would also like to spend a few hours on campus to observe any operational changes that have been implemented on your campuses in the face of the COVID-19 trauma. Additionally, it would also be helpful to me to learn how admissions, advancement and your operational budgets were affected through reviewing relevant documents. Participation by you or other personnel at your school is completely voluntary and a participant can withdraw at any time during the study and any findings relating to them will be withdrawn from the study's conclusions.

I realize that I'm asking for a great deal of information and access. I assure you that I will be as unobtrusive as possible when on campus and will pre-arrange my visits at your direction. Also, I plan to schedule interviews in person or via zoom at the convenience of participants. Additionally, I want to emphasize that your school, the participants in the study and the location of the school will all be disguised so that your privacy institutionally, professionally, and personally will be maintained. I anticipate that the interviews will each take about an hour, and follow-up conversations will probably be quicker.

There are several attachments for your information. They include:

- A brief description of the research questions that form the basis for the study.
- A copy of the 'recruitment' email I will send to potential participants in the study.
- A copy of the consent form for human participants that outlines the protections in place for them.

- A copy of an assent form-(that will require your signature) that is part of the Antioch University IRB (Internal Review Board) requirements for student or faculty conducted research under their auspices.

I would be delighted to discuss the study and my goals in conducting this research at your convenience. Please let me know if you would like to do so. I know that you are incredibly busy with the start of school and am deeply grateful for your consideration of allowing your school to be the focus of this case study.

All the best,
Nora Malone