



Resilience, Reorientation, and Reinvention: School Leadership During the Early Months of the COVID-19 Pandemic

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As the COVID-19 pandemic spread rapidly across the globe, many schools struggled to react both quickly and adequately. Schools were one of the most important societal institutions to be affected by the pandemic. However, most school leaders have little to no training in crisis leadership, nor have they dealt with a crisis of this scale and this scope for this long. This article presents our findings from interviews of 43 school organizations around the globe about their responses during the early months of the pandemic. Primary themes from the interviews included an emphasis on vision and values; communication and family community engagement; staff care, instructional leadership, and organizational capacity-building; equity-oriented leadership practices; and recognition of potential future opportunities. These findings resonate with the larger research literature on crisis leadership and have important implications for school leaders' future mindsets, behaviors, and support structures during crisis incidents.

Keywords: crisis leadership, school leadership, pandemic leadership, crisis management, COVID-19, schools, administrators, leadership

ARTICLE

The news headlines became increasingly alarmist in the early months of 2020. In late January the *New York Times* asked, "Is the world ready for the coronavirus?" (Editorial Board, 2020). A month later the *Los Angeles Times* headline read, "Coronavirus spread in United States is inevitable, CDC warns" (Shalby, 2020). As the COVID-19 pandemic intensified, schools were forced to take notice. In a front-page article, the writers at *Education Week* noted that school districts were "likely to be on the front lines in efforts to limit [the virus'] impact" (Superville, 2020, p. 1).

By mid-March it was clear that the virus was going global. School systems across the planet began to close and the *Washington Post* headline read, "Coronavirus now a global pandemic as United States world scramble to control outbreak" (Zezima et al., 2020). Early outbreaks in China and Italy led to drastic societal lockdowns in Southeast Asia and Europe. The rest of the world soon followed.

Most school systems were caught flatfooted, despite the fact that many locations had several months warning. School boards and administrators dithered about what to do. Government support for schools and families was ambiguous. Uncertainty reigned everywhere. The global pandemic spread rapidly and most schools struggled to react both quickly and adequately. Schools

in the United States began to close in early March whether they were ready or not (Lieberman, 2020) and several weeks later America faced “a school shutdown of historic proportions” (Sawchuk, 2020, p. 12). Today COVID-19 continues to spread across the planet, with many countries—including the United States—facing their worst rates of infection and death to date (Schnirring, 2020). While some schools are fully open, others have closed again or have moved to remote instruction for nearly all of their students (Gewertz and Sawchuk, 2020).

By now it is evident that the global pandemic has created an unprecedented challenge for school leaders. Although principals and superintendents are used to handling smaller crises such as fights in the hallway, a leaky boiler, irate parents, disagreements over budgetary choices, or even a scandal concerning a local educator, most school leaders have never dealt with a crisis of this scale and this scope for this long. Even the immediacy of larger crises that often force school closures—such as a large snowstorm, a hurricane, or a school shooting—typically expires after a few days or weeks. Like no other crisis before, the COVID-19 pandemic has illustrated the deficiencies of our educational systems and the lack of administrator preparation regarding crisis leadership. As the pandemic continues to stretch the outer limits of our individual and institutional resiliency, this article is an attempt to understand the responses of P-12 school leaders around the world during those first few critical months.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The literature base on crisis leadership has been broadly consistent for decades. Often drawn from the government, military, business, or health sectors, several key themes and leadership behaviors regularly emerge from the scholarly research. In the sections below, we briefly describe what we seem to know about leadership during crisis situations, both in education and across other societal sectors.

What Is Crisis Leadership?

Since crises occur regularly in the lives of organizations, several researchers have attempted to create conceptual models and sense-making frameworks to help leaders and institutions think about effective leadership during crisis events. Boin et al. (2013) created one of the most comprehensive crisis leadership frameworks. Noting that crisis episodes bring out instant “winners” and “losers” when it comes to leadership, they articulated ten key *executive tasks* that accompany successful crisis management. Initial tasks include early recognition of the crisis, sensemaking in conditions of uncertainty, and making critical decisions. Other tasks include vertical and horizontal coordination within the organization and across organizations, as well as coupling and decoupling systems as necessary. Other critical tasks include robust communication, helping others engage in meaning-making for others, and, finally, reflecting on and learning from the crisis and rendering accountability regarding what worked and what did not. The authors noted that the overall goal of a leader should be to increase organizational resilience before, during, and after a crisis (pp. 82–87). Each

of these executive tasks has been unpacked in further detail in the scholarly literature and most of the elements in the framework from Boin, Kuipers, and Overdijk occur frequently in others’ conceptual models (see, e.g., Smith and Riley, 2012; Dücker et al., 2017).

As noted by Boin et al. (2013), one of the most consistent elements of crisis leadership appears to be sensemaking in conditions of uncertainty. During a crisis, challenges arise quickly and both information and known solutions may be scarce. During the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, some of the key challenges for school leaders were the unique nature of the crisis (i.e., most school organizations have not experienced a pandemic), the rapid timeline, and the accompanying uncertainty that hindered effective responses. Leaders’ experience mattered little when the COVID crisis had few “knowable components” (Flin, 1996; Kahneman and Klein, 2009; Klein, 2009). Boin and Renaud (2013) articulated that joint sensemaking is “particularly important to effective crisis management: if decision makers do not have a shared and accurate picture of the situation, they cannot make informed decisions and communicate effectively with partners, politicians, and the public” (p. 41). Unfortunately for many school leaders during the first months of the pandemic, policymakers—and often the administrators above those leaders in the organizational hierarchy—often lacked an accurate picture of what was occurring, nor did they share what they knew with others in ways that enabled effective leadership responses and partnerships. Anecdotal stories abound of front-line educators and administrators struggling to get information and guidance during the pandemic’s first few months from those above them in the school system or from their local, state, and federal politicians.

Another consistent element of crisis leadership is effective communication, and numerous scholars have emphasized the leader’s role in communicating with both internal and external audiences. Marsen (2020) noted that crisis communication must deal with both issue management during the crisis and reputation management after the crisis. In their handbook on crisis communication, Heath and O’Hair (2020) emphasized that good communication is critically important because of the social nature of a leader’s work and because crisis management is inherently a collective activity. Effective communication builds trust and helps to create shared understandings and commitments across stakeholders (Lucero et al., 2009). During times of crisis, effective leaders engage in *holding*, which means that they are containing and interpreting what is happening during a time of uncertainty. As Petriglieri (2020) noted:

Containing refers to the ability to soothe distress and interpreting to the ability to help others make sense of a confusing predicament. . . [Leaders] think clearly, offer reassurance, orient people, and help them stick together. That work is as important as inspiring others. In fact, it is a precondition for doing so.

Another important finding regarding crisis leadership is that what constitutes effective leadership often changes over the time span of the crisis (Hannah et al., 2009). As conditions shift and new needs emerge, leaders must be flexible and adaptive (Smith and Riley, 2012). During the first few months of the COVID-19 pandemic, for example, most school leaders progressed

through several key response phases (McLeod, 2020b). Phase 1 represented a focus on basic needs and included feeding children and families, ensuring student access to computing devices and the Internet, and checking in on families' wellbeing. During Phase 2, administrators reoriented their schools to deliver instruction remotely. This work included training teachers in new pedagogies and technologies, as well as establishing instructional routines and digital platforms to facilitate online learning. Once schools began to settle into new routines, leaders then could begin paying attention to richer, deeper learning opportunities for students (Phase 3) and look ahead to future opportunities and help their organizations be better prepared for future dislocations of schooling (Phase 4). This latter phase is what many scholars have identified as a *reconstruction* (Boin and Hart, 2003) or *adaptive* (Prewitt et al., 2011) stage of crisis leadership (see also Coombs, 2000; Heath, 2004; Jaques, 2009; Smith and Riley, 2012).

Finally, some researchers have noted the importance of leaders' attention to social and emotional concerns during a crisis (see, e.g., Meisler et al., 2013). After finding that "the psychosocial dimension of crises has received little attention in crisis management literature" (p. 95), Dückers et al. (2017) created a conceptual model of psychosocial crisis management that emphasized such leadership and organizational tasks as "providing information and basic aid" and "promoting a sense of safety, calming, self- and community efficacy, connectedness to others, and hope" (p. 101). The authors noted that effective crisis leadership involves more than effective communication and response coordination and also must attend to the general wellbeing and health of employees and other stakeholders.

Crisis Leadership in Schools

The literature cited here from other contexts also is applicable to school systems. During a crisis, school leaders—like their counterparts in other institutions—must engage in effective communication, facilitate sensemaking in conditions of uncertainty, be flexible and adaptive, and pay attention to the emotional wellbeing and health of employees. The executive tasks described by Boin et al. (2013) are relevant for school organizations and their leaders, just as they are in other societal sectors. In addition to the more generalized research base, some crisis leadership research has been conducted on school settings specifically. For instance, Smith and Riley (2012) recognized that school administrators' crisis leadership is very different from that necessary to be successful in a more "normal" school environment. They also noted that critical attributes of effective crisis leadership in schools include:

The ability to cope with—and thrive on—ambiguity; a strong capacity to think laterally; a willingness to question events in new and insightful ways; a preparedness to respond flexibly and quickly, and to change direction rapidly if required; an ability to work with and through people to achieve critical outcomes; the tenacity to persevere when all seems to be lost; and a willingness to take necessary risks and to "break the rules" when necessary (p. 65).

In a study of school principals' actions after the 2011 earthquake in Christchurch, New Zealand, Mutch (2015b) articulated a three-factor conceptual model of school crisis

leadership. The first factor was *dispositional* and included school leaders' values, belief systems, personality traits, skills, and areas of expertise. The second factor was *relational* and included leaders' visioning work as well as fostering collaboration, building trust, enabling empowerment, and building a sense of community. The final factor was *situational*, which included understanding both the past and immediate contexts, adapting to changing needs, thinking creatively, and providing direction for the organization. In her case studies of four elementary schools, Mutch identified specific leadership actions that fell under each of these factors. In a separate article that same year, Mutch (2015a) noted that schools with an inclusive culture and with strong relationships beforehand are better situated to manage crises that may occur.

Many researchers have noted the importance of maintaining trust during a crisis (see, e.g., Mutch, 2015a; Dückers et al., 2017). Sutherland (2017) examined leadership behaviors in light of a school crisis caused by the accidental deaths of two students on a service-learning trip. Utilizing Tschannen-Moran and Hoy's (2000) model of trust in schools, Sutherland found that closely held, non-consultative decision-making by top executives eroded the school's ability to communicate effectively and thus hindered trust in the larger school community. He also found that subsequent implementation of new communication structures fostered better collaboration and rebuilt trust with educators and families. Sutherland's findings are relevant for school leaders who have struggled to balance often-conflicting parent and educator expectations during the pandemic and thus have seen community trust erode as a result.

Mahfouz et al. (2019) studied Lebanese principals and schools as they responded to the international Syrian refugee crisis. They noted that "instead of focusing on leadership and academic performance, principals [faced with a large influx of Syrian refugee families spent] most of their time "putting out fires," resolving urgent issues, and attending to basic needs that typically are taken for granted in other schools" (p. 24). Those challenges resemble the lived experiences of many principals and superintendents during the first months of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Crisis Leadership in Schools During the Pandemic

Some very recent publications have attempted to apply principles of crisis leadership to the COVID-19 pandemic in non-educational sectors. For instance, Pearce et al. (2021) employed leadership concepts from the military to the global pandemic, identifying some "key components of mission command" as unity of effort, freedom of action, trust, and rapid decision making (pp. 1–2). These leadership concepts are similar to a list identified for public health officials several years ago, which also emphasized trust, decisiveness with flexibility, and the ability to coordinate diverse stakeholders (Deitchman, 2013).

Contemporary research on leadership in schools during the COVID-19 pandemic is starting to emerge as well. Although it is still relatively early to make sense of schools' responses to the pandemic, scholars are beginning to try to understand

the early phases of the crisis. Much of this work has been theoretical or conceptual, however, rather than empirical. For instance, Bagwell (2020) noted that the pandemic “is rapidly redefining schooling and leadership” (p. 31) and advocated for leaders to lead adaptively, build organizational and individual resilience, and create distributed leadership structures for optimal institutional response. Likewise, Netolicky (2020) noted many of the tensions that school leaders are facing during the pandemic. These tensions range from the need to lead both fast and slow, to balancing equity with excellence and accountability, to considering both human needs and organizational outcomes.

During the pandemic, Fernandez and Shaw (2020) recommended that academic leaders focus on best practices, try to see opportunities in the crisis, communicate clearly, connect with others, and distribute leadership within the organization. Harris and Jones (2020) offered seven propositions for consideration and potential research attention, including the ideas that “most school leadership preparation and training programs . . . are likely to be out of step with the challenges facing school leaders today” and that “self-care and consideration must be the main priority and prime concerns for all school leaders” (p. 245). They also recognized that “crisis and change management are now essential skills of a school leader . . . [that] require more than routine problem solving or occasional firefighting” (p. 246).

In one of the few empirical studies to emerge so far on pandemic-era school leadership, Rigby et al. (2020) identified three promising practices for P-12 school systems: treating families as equal partners in learning, continuing to provide high-quality learning opportunities for students, and decision-making that is coordinated, coherent, and inclusive. Through their interviews of thirteen central office leaders in the Puget Sound area of Washington, they also made three recommendations, which were for school districts to focus on “building on” not “learning loss,” to prioritize relationships, and to create anti-racist, systemic coherence (p. 6). Regarding their first recommendation, they noted that “this is an opportunity to design systems to understand and build on what children learned (and continue to learn) at home” (p. 6).

As the pandemic progresses, there is a clear need for more empirical research on the effects of COVID-19 on schools and other institutions. Educational scholars and school leaders need evidence from the field to inform the theoretical and conceptual approaches that have dominated during the first months of the global crisis.

METHODS

The exploratory research in this study involved interviews with school leaders from across the United States and in nine other countries. The interview series was not originally conceived as a research study. Instead, it originated as a series of informal recorded conversations that were dubbed the *Coronavirus Chronicles* and posted on the blog of one of the authors (McLeod, 2020a). Participants gave consent prior to their interviews to make their conversations public in this manner. A YouTube channel was created to host the

videos. The interviews also were posted as audio recordings on several podcast hosting services, including Apple, Spotify, and SoundCloud. All interviews were publicized through the blog, Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, and other social media channels. The goal was to make the interviews accessible to other school leaders who might find them informative and to make the interview series subscribable for those who wished to receive regular updates. As the number of interviews grew, we began to receive requests to identify larger themes that cut across the conversations and to delineate specific leadership behaviors that seemed to be useful during the crisis. We agreed that might be helpful to others and received permission from the Colorado Multiple Institutional Review Board to begin thinking about these interviews as a qualitative research study.

Because of the organic evolution of this project, the participants for this study were selected through convenience sampling. Convenience sampling is “a type of non-probability sampling in which people are sampled simply because they are “convenient” sources of data for researchers” (Lavrakas, 2008). Convenience sampling was employed in this study for several reasons. Because the global pandemic was a particularly stressful event for schools and their administrators, the earliest interviewees were chosen based on personal connections and school leaders’ resultant willingness to make time for a conversation. As visibility of the *Coronavirus Chronicles* interview series grew, we also began to receive requests from others to participate. The blog posts that accompanied each new interview solicited viewers and listeners to participate in the series if they were interested and multiple school leaders took us up on that offer. At times we purposefully extended invitations to certain schools. For instance, we invited a series of international schools in order to get a spread of perspectives across multiple continents. We also invited several project- and inquiry-based learning schools to share their experiences, which we thought might be different from more traditional school systems. Accordingly, the results of this study may not be generalizable to other schools or school leaders, and care should be taken when interpreting our participants’ responses. Nonetheless, we believe that the information provided by the school leaders who participated in this interview series has value for other educational administrators, particularly as they consider their own leadership behaviors and support structures during this worldwide crisis.

We interviewed a total of 55 educators from 43 school organizations. Eleven of those institutions were international schools and the other 32 schools, districts, and educational programs were based in the United States. Three different schools in China were selected because the COVID-19 virus appeared to originate there, schools in that country were the first in the world to close down, and we thought that their early responses would be informative to schools in other countries for whom the virus was just starting to influence decision-making. We made some attempt to loosely sample a cross section of America, and we eventually talked with school leaders in 21 different states. Most of our interviewees were principals, superintendents, or central office administrators. A few were teachers or instructional coaches.

All interviews were conducted using the Zoom videoconferencing software platform and were scheduled at times convenient for all participants. The intent of the interviews was to gain an understanding of how interviewees' school organizations were responding during the early months of the global pandemic. As Kvale (1996) noted, personal interviews are a particularly powerful method for "studying people's understanding of the meaning in their lived world" (p. 105). We were particularly interested in hearing about what learning and teaching looked like in participants' schools as they shifted into remote instructional modalities. We also asked these school leaders to describe the decisions made by their leadership teams that seemed to work well during this difficult time, and they told us about some of the challenges and opportunities that they foresaw in the months to come. Additionally, many of the interviewees shared with us their immediate personal and institutional responses in the earliest days and weeks surrounding the closure of their schools.

We utilized a semi-structured approach for the qualitative interviews in this study (Yin, 2011). First, the relationships between ourselves and our interviewees were not strictly scripted. The interviews had a few standard questions but the wording of the questions, the wording of the follow-up questions, and the order in which the questions were asked varied according to the flow of each discussion. Second, the interviews were conducted informally rather than in a scripted style, allowing each interview to be personalized and to provide a more casual dialogue between subject and interviewer. Third, we primarily asked open-ended questions so that participants would offer more rich detail in their responses. Interviews lasted from 9 to 20 min and were intentionally kept short so that episodes might fit more easily within participants', viewers', and listeners' busy work lives.

All interviews were transcribed using NoNotes, a secure third-party transcription service. Corrections were made to the transcriptions as necessary. We determined an initial set of codes through ongoing, open, inductive coding. We then engaged in selective coding to validate the relationships between themes against the data. Through this process, the initial set of codes and subcodes were refined and expanded based on the data set. Coding was conducted both jointly and individually. However, we reviewed each others' coding and collaborated on the coding scheme until consensus was reached.

FINDINGS

Although there were a few common, open-ended questions to spark discussion, conversations with our 55 participants ranged widely. In the sections below, we describe the main themes that emerged from our coding and analysis of the 43 *Coronavirus Chronicles* interviews. Our participants shared with us that centering their crisis leadership work around the school's vision, leaning on individual and institutional values, and deploying robust communication and family engagement strategies were all critically important. Our interviewees also were deeply engaged in attempts to care for staff and build their capacity through instructional leadership and professional

learning activities. The schools leaders who we interviewed approached their work during the early months of the pandemic with a strong equity lens, and many of them saw the potential emergence of future organizational opportunities despite their present challenges and struggles.

Vision and Values

When faced with a true crisis, a strong organizational vision founded on clear values enables school leaders to respond in intentional and highly effective ways. The critical importance of these foundational structures cannot be overstated. Successful outcomes of responsive decisions made during critical moments of a crisis depend on the strength and clarity of a school organization's underlying values and vision. As noted in the research literature on crisis leadership, leading from a strong organizational vision and institutional values facilitates administrators' sensemaking in conditions of uncertainty, guides critical decisions, enables coherent communication, and helps school leaders engage others in shared meaning-making (Boin et al., 2013).

For example, the school district administrators that we interviewed from Bismarck, North Dakota told us that they knew they needed to approach their response to the COVID-19 crisis with careful and intentional planning, citing "the old African proverb if you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go slow and go together." These administrators and their teams took time to identify a "coherent, long-term plan of how [they] would like to approach the work for distance learning." Organizational decision-making frameworks based on their values guided district- and school-level leadership teams as they moved forward with their response plans.

Tanna, a director of technology innovation, stated that time and identification of core values were critical as she identified the importance of relationships:

[R]eally taking some time to think about what are the core principles and different pieces of this? What are the... frames that we run decisions through? So that's been tremendously helpful as you get more and more variables and other decisions that you're making just to be calibrated on what do we really care about? And so, I think we... really tapped into what the Chinese schools... had been doing... being very vulnerable and being willing to share... I've been so grateful for the sharing and the generosity of educators around the world sharing things, and people have been very open and asking questions.

As educators around the world empathized with one another, there also was universal adherence to the value of empathy for students and families. Empathy drove immediate action focused on basic student and family needs such as providing food pickup and delivery. Gerald, a middle school principal, captured the breadth of his school's empathetic approach: "We did take some time in the beginning to recognize that we care about relationships. That's staff relationships and student and family relationships."

Other core values surfaced early in the crisis response process for many schools. In addition to identifying the importance of relationships as they framed their planning and decision-making

processes, our participants identified connectivity, collective wisdom, collaboration, empathy, adaptation, and risk-taking as values that drove their responses to the pandemic.

The importance of maintaining and strengthening relationships and connectivity between students and teachers, administrators and teachers, and administrators, teachers and families, became a clear first priority for many educational institutions. Relationships and connectivity resonate throughout educational settings because these values form the foundation of strong school communities and student success. As stated succinctly by Mary Beth, a director of educational technology, “we know those relationships are key to students feeling connected and successful.” Moreover, by identifying these values, the door to reimagining education in a remote setting opened up a little. Shannon, an English teacher in Amsterdam, shared her excitement about the evolution of this process:

We've talked a lot about community building and how to build a community in this virtual world and stay connected, and then I think in terms of teachers. . . really thinking that we can't teach in the same way. So how are we going to reimagine our teaching practice? So I think a lot of us that wanted to do like a flipped classroom, but never found the time or wanted to set up Google Groups or Meets or whatever, well, we have time now, we have to do that. . . and I keep thinking that even though this has been really stressful time for educators and students and parents, there's some really nice things that have come out of this. . . to reimagine the way we do things.

While establishing a clear focus on relationships and community connection came quickly to many organizations, the inextricably linked values of collective wisdom and collaboration also brought directional clarity into view. Ben, an assistant superintendent, recognized early on in the crisis that “there is a lot of collective wisdom not only across [the] district, but through everyone’s personal learning network.” Aaron, a head of school, echoed the important contributions of the broader educational community when he acknowledged that his institution “benefited from having a strong network of schools, locally and nationally, that we could bounce ideas off of, [and] like any good teacher, steal ideas [from] and make them our own.”

Accessing the collective wisdom of the educational community also permeated the international community. International schools in particular benefited from their global network. John, an international school deputy principal, approached the international educational community with vulnerability and deep gratitude:

We have a very rich, professional learning network amongst the international schools. [I]t's about being patient, being kind to others and to yourself, and recognizing that in this chaos there's a lot of really good things that can happen and we have to keep our most vulnerable a hundred percent in the forefront of our minds. If there's any way we can take this and put more resources and more support for our most vulnerable learners, then the results are going to be good and that has to be our priority.

Ultimately, all of the values-based crisis responses could only occur if leaders modeled and encouraged adaptive practices and risk-taking solutions. Jori, a dean of students, explained:

I think what we're finding is we're learning something new every day and that it's okay. Just like we tell our students that we're looking for growth over time and it's not always just about the end product, it's growth over time for us and we are trying new things. Daily, I get emails from teachers or a phone call, “Hey, I found this, I'm going to try it with my students.” The answer is always, “Yes, please. Try something new.” Take risks, which are another thing that we're asking our kids to do, we're asking our staff to do, too.

The power of a values-driven approach to crisis management clearly resonated with our participants. This approach resulted in actionable responses to the COVID-19 pandemic that were founded on the values of relationship, connectivity, collective wisdom, collaboration, empathy, and adaptive risk-taking.

Communication and Family Community Engagement

The need for all educational organizations to communicate effectively with their stakeholders became paramount as the global pandemic forced every institution into remote learning. As expected from the research literature (see, e.g., Lucero et al., 2009; Boin et al., 2013; Heath and O’Hair, 2020), the leaders who we interviewed recognized instantly that communication in all forms was a critical component of navigating the rapidly changing uncertainty that they faced.

In the initial stages of the COVID-19 crisis response, educational leaders identified the need for frequent, often daily communication with teachers, students and parents. Communication came from every level of educational organizations immediately. Cory, a superintendent, wrote an update for his entire district every day and even led a parade through every community in the district to launch his communication efforts:

I write a daily memo to our entire district every day. And about three quarters of it is positivity. I highlight things our kids are doing that teachers put in and say, “Hey, these kids handed all their work, and I put that on the memo.” And I highlight positive emails parents send us. We have been flooded with positivity from them. We've had to approach a couple things differently. . . We held a parade. And because we basically serve eight communities, I'm afraid it was 75 miles long and four and a half hours long, and we drove in every community.

Many school leaders also created daily lines of communication with teachers, students, and parents. Danny, an international middle school principal, ensured connection across the entire community by communicating with everyone on a daily basis:

The other key piece that we do is we communicate with the parents. Every single day a letter from me. It's actually an Adobe Spark note with a short opening from me and then it has pictures of student work they submit during the day. We have our school spirit theme weeks. So every single day something goes home to all the parents, all the students, [and] all the teachers that is a message from me: here's how we're doing, here's where we are, here's where we're going, and then it celebrates student work, it celebrates the teacher's work, there are video clips, and it just connects everyone back to school and parents and kids.

Phone calls became one of the most important initial methods of reaching out to students and families. The personal nature of voice-to-voice connection became an essential component of the difficult transition to remote learning. Gerald, a middle school principal, emphasized “that all communications with home had to be through the home room teacher” to maintain close connections between students and teachers. That investment in maintaining those connections paid “huge dividends” as remote learning began, although it took quite a toll on teachers due to initial phone calls often lasting for hours as teachers comforted and reassured frightened parents and families.

Structures and systems of communication that existed prior to the pandemic were relied upon heavily to ensure that meaningful connections were maintained. Office hours, regular class meetings, and daily or weekly student check-ins became the official norm for many schools. As clearly stated by Jeff, a department chair, the “number one priority going forward to the end of the school year [is] getting a hold of every student we can and then making sure that we’re regularly staying in contact.”

The importance of feedback in a school’s communication strategy was recognized as a critical component of managing the challenges of remote learning. Mary Beth, a director of educational technology, shared that “we’re listening regularly to our parents, we’re listening to our teachers, and we’re listening to our students.” Feedback in the form of parent and student surveys were important to Cory, a superintendent:

You let people share. You connect with them relationship-wise. . . we survey our parents and kids every other week. Every teacher surveys them. We grab that information and then we look at it. We make small adjustments. Our educators have been fantastic about really meeting the needs of parents. . . [and] kids.”

Communication at all levels and between all stakeholders was enhanced by the use of technological tools. Tanna, a director of technology innovation, relayed the early discussions about the tools necessary for supporting clear communication and learning:

So from a technology standpoint, we spent most of the first week that we knew about this [pandemic] really promoting and talking about the communication and the connectivity tools that we have. . . in a digital environment. And to and from us and families, and setting that up. and helping people practice with those tools. Because without that, we can’t really advance the distance learning pieces.

These communication tools included district learning management systems such as Google Classroom, Schoology, and Canvas; collaboration tools such as Seesaw, Microsoft Teams, and Google Apps for Education; videoconferencing tools such as Zoom and Google Meet; social media platforms, including Twitter, Facebook, and TikTok; and many others. While a plethora of digital tools were available to almost everyone, the majority of schools chose to focus on using tools that were familiar to staff in order to, as Shameka, a high school principal said, reduce family confusion and make it “so much easier for us to communicate.”

The importance of clear, constant, and effective communication was universally recognized by all school leaders as an essential component to a successful transition to

remote learning. Establishing and maintaining clear channels of communication became a universal goal of the educational leaders whom we interviewed.

Staff Care, Instructional Leadership, and Organizational Capacity-Building

As the pandemic crisis manifested, educational leaders around the globe quickly identified the importance of taking care of the needs of their staff. Jeff, the chief administrator for a regional educational service agency, spoke for many when he stated, “our first and foremost priority was making sure our own people [were] okay.” Knowing that building capacity would come later, many school leaders approached their staff with an eye for compassion and grace rather than compliance. Glenn, a superintendent, said that his district’s primary ask of staff members was, “What can we do for you?” These leadership approaches align tightly with the research that underscores the importance of leaders’ attention to social and emotional concerns during a crisis (see, e.g., Meisler et al., 2013; Dückers et al., 2017).

As people in organizations began to come together, the need for connection among staff members became paramount. Virtual time for connection through general staff meetings where celebrations and challenges were shared became commonplace. In addition, creative virtual social activities began to emerge as a stand-in for informal, face-to-face interactions and a way to maintain relationships and connection. Humor was highly valued, as demonstrated by the staff challenge at Shameka’s high school. The competition was fierce around which educators had the most toilet paper in their homes (in light of a national, never-understood panic run on the commodity). Shameka’s school also hosted open discussion hours for staff, which often diverged into lighthearted but energetic conversations about topics such as “What is the best flavor of ramen noodles?” These staff bonding events solidified the ties between educators and created strong foundations upon which instructional capacity could be built.

Attention to mindset, fluid roles and expectations, responsive professional development, and efficiency and prioritization of structures and systems all formed the basis of our participants’ efforts to build, sustain, and strengthen capacity across their organizations. Setting the stage for capacity building began with clarifying and embracing a mindset of acceptance and support. Dan, a director of learning innovation, described this important component:

[G]race and flexibility, and I think that goes all the way around. Teachers toward their students, students toward their teachers, parents toward the school community, and. . . our administrators. . . they’ll come back to that grace and flexibility as far as what happens with kids, and teachers in their new virtual environments, knowing that it’s not going to be perfect. And we always, in the tech world, we always talk about risk, right? We take these risks, and now people are being forced to do that. Because some type of people didn’t maybe necessarily before, now you’re being forced to do that and be okay with it. Reflect, change what happens tomorrow if it didn’t work out right. If it worked out, great, do it again, right? So, grace and flexibility.

After recognizing the importance of infusing capacity-building with grace and flexibility, leaders began creating specific supports for teachers, including an “all hands on deck approach” to staffing and responsive professional development. Tanna, a director of technology innovation, summed up this part of the process when she stated, “It’s about helping all teachers be able to feel comfortable and be vulnerable as learners.”

At many of our interviewees’ schools, all non-teaching staff members were leveraged to help create supports for students, thereby increasing teachers’ capacity to focus on instructional practices. Bus drivers, cafeteria managers, and librarians were among the many who joined forces to create support structures. During a planned meal pickup event, Andrea, a superintendent, said that her librarians found a creative way to support students:

Yesterday at our meal pickup we had our librarians, two librarians, who had pulled a bunch of books out of their libraries that students could check out on the curb. I would say the creativity is just fantastic.

With staff and student supports in place, professional development became a key strategic component for building teacher capacity. Jeff, the chief administrator for a regional educational service agency, recognized the unique opportunity presented by the crisis, noting that, “we have some time now that internal staff could do some learning that maybe we’ve been wanting to do all year long and just never have that extra time.”

Training on technological tools dominated professional learning early in the pandemic. For example, one school district in Colorado offered 25 training sessions on Google Classroom the day before the district went live with remote learning. The critical importance of this type of training, especially for teachers without these skills, became obvious. As Dan, a director of learning and innovation, shared:

We do have a... we’ll call it an opt-in sort of PD model for most things, technology being one of those. And there are a handful of teachers who are struggling right now because they [had previously] opted out. They are more traditional teachers... we’ve had our beginner Google Classroom sessions where we’re full of those people... but not as many from some friends I have in other districts who say they’ve never used Google Classroom.

Over time, professional learning at many of our interviewees’ institutions expanded from an almost-pure technology focus to include mental health, trauma, social-emotional learning, and—as time went on and teacher capacity grew—virtual instructional strategies. Jeff, a high school principal, summed up the experience of staff learning:

This is the best real life, real-time professional development... there is a constant feedback loop. This is what we’re trying and is this going to work or is that going to work? We’re getting a lot of information. At some point when the world stops spinning we’ll have to sit down and take everything we’ve learned and think about how we’re moving forward.

Maximizing efficiency of prioritized structures and systems was another area of focus for instructional capacity building. Simplicity and familiarity were embraced when it came to selecting learning management systems, and this paid off

for many organizations. As Dave, a director of technology integration, noted:

What’s working well is that we’re trying to keep everything really super simple and keep tools that are familiar. So we’ve started with strengths, started with what the students are familiar with, so, getting a simple learning management system, making sure that it’s either Google Classroom or Seesaw. So, things that teachers are familiar with and they can support each other... .

At many schools, schedules also were simplified in an effort to “stave off distance-learning fatigue,” as Danny, an international middle school principal, said. Staggered schedules with built-in flexibility allowed students and teachers to connect when needed during synchronous time. Options during asynchronous time allowed for necessities like individual or small group check-ins and work delivery times, as well as opportunities for students to reconnect with teachers as needed. Blair, an international secondary school principal, expressed his satisfaction by stating, “I think that we ended the year really well with a solid structure that allowed for both flexibility as well as enough structure to support students well.”

Many of our participants’ school systems also made decisions to increase instructional capacity by prioritizing essential standards. Mike, a director of curriculum and technology, astutely pointed out the issues that had to be addressed, noting that, “we are not going to be able to do everything, so what are the most important things for our learners?” As Melissa, a high school principal shared with us, prioritization of standards fostered new learning opportunities for students, robust staff conversations, and collaborative efforts about how to best garner available resources, including curriculum, to meet targeted learning goals.

Educators at one of our participating international schools created online “learning grids” to effectively accomplish this task. Don, an assistant head of school, explained that these grids were “user-friendly formats that really scripted what we needed kids to do and then what we’re requiring teachers to do.” This creative solution increased school capacity and facilitated easier school-to-home connections:

So it was a new way of collaborating for our teachers who... in a normal school... have a little bit more say in how they approach each of the learning standards that... they’re trying to reach. So that was a bit of learning as well to figure out how that collaboration would work. But it’s worked out really well and it certainly has simplified life, I think, for teachers as well. And it has freed them up to do more things... so that we could be sure that the basic resources are being shared and the standards are all being met through these learning grids.

Finally, as Sean, a digital specialist, described, attention could turn from emergency responsiveness to aspirational responsiveness as teacher capacity was built:

I think we have our aspirational goals and then we have the reality of the pandemic and the emergency happening. We’re starting to see some of those aspirational pieces take off as far as how content is designed and delivered. Our teachers are becoming a lot more confident in their ability to do this online, beginning to understand the routines that are useful for them as teachers and then routines

for the students, and there's a lot of feedback from our teachers going on about that.

The power of teacher collaboration, coupled with the familiarity of emerging routines and recognizable successes, empowered teachers at many of our participating schools. Best practices in brick-and-mortar settings often proved to be best practices in the virtual classroom. Small group and individualized instruction was critical, student-led project-based learning correlated with high engagement, and greater student agency equated with greater student success. This was particularly true in some of the schools that we interviewed which had project- and inquiry-based learning structures in place.

Ultimately, leaders who built capacity through attention to mindset, embraced fluid roles and expectations, facilitated responsive professional development, and prioritized efficient structures and systems were able to create environments for teachers to reach students in meaningful ways and increase engagement in virtual settings. As the initial crisis moved into a sustained “new normal,” organizations began finding ways to move from their initial state of emergency to a state of best practices.

Equity-Oriented Leadership

Across the globe, issues of educational access and digital equity were thrust into the forefront as schools scrambled to provide access to remote education platforms. Equity requires that every student be supported with the resources necessary to successfully access what is needed to learn and thrive in an educational setting. As the pandemic took hold, it became clear that access to food and mental health supports initially needed to take priority over access to instruction. Our school leaders' emphasis on—and quick investments in—basic needs, social-emotional health, and technological access are underscored by the research literature's recognition of these stabilizing aspects of crisis leadership (see, e.g., Smith and Riley, 2012; Mutch, 2015b; Dücker et al., 2017; Mahfouz et al., 2019; McLeod, 2020b).

Since access to at-school free meal programs was severed, feeding students in the community became paramount for many of our school leaders. Jim, a chief executive officer of a charter school, described the situation faced by so many schools:

We have about 98% of our kids on free and reduced-price lunch programs. So, you know, when we first got the information around the closure, our first instincts were to make sure we were feeding our kids—the most basic fundamental expectation of survival. And we were able to launch that in about 2 weeks. We started with the daily drive-thru, and then we've been able to move that to once a week, so we can supply 7 days worth of food to all of our families. We have a pre-heated meal system with distribution of food and gallons of milk every week. It's going really well. We have about a 100% participation rate, almost everyone participates. We accept anyone under the age of 18 to come to our drive thru and pick up food, so it doesn't even matter if they're part of our school system or not.

Meeting families' primary needs required school communities to adapt quickly and often. Glenn, a superintendent, shared:

As far as food services, we provide food twice a week, our communities are roughly about 45% free and reduced lunch. So,

one of the biggest things that we are focusing on is the health and well-being of those families as well. So we constantly put out phone calls saying, “Hey, if you recently lost your job and or you think you're now eligible, please sign up,” and we can go through that paperwork with them.

Mental health supports also were considered as the overall health and wellbeing of students and families was prioritized. Kristina, a principal, noted that “we really need to focus on the heart, on overall well-being and mental healthiness and physical healthiness.” Looking to the future, Kristina also expressed her grave concerns “about everyone's mental health as this continues.”

After addressing students' basic health needs, issues of instructional equity quickly came into focus. Nancy, a principal of an elementary International Baccalaureate school, summed up the issues faced by so many:

We had a lot of problems in the beginning getting kids on [the Internet]. The Internet wasn't working correctly. They didn't understand [how to use a] hotspot. Their iPad locked up, they couldn't remember their password... We did a lot with our interpreters getting kids and families logged on... We called them. I was going to kid's houses: “Why can't you get on, let me help you?” You bring food, you bring whatever, because a lot of them were really scared when I came by. They [thought] because they weren't online, [that I was there for] attendance but, no, I was there to help them.

Even for schools that had heavily invested in technology before the pandemic, issues of digital equity and data privilege quickly became a pressing concern. Shameka, a high school principal, explained:

I would be remiss if I didn't mention the concerns around digital equity because we still have to champion that. Just because a kid has access they don't necessarily always have the digital capital necessary to engage in a way that is authentic... just because the kid has a phone doesn't mean that they live in a place of data privilege. I have not had [a fixed set of] minutes on my phone or had to worry about data in years. I'm on an unlimited plan but when thinking about kids submitting assignments and families who share data... we live in a place of data privilege. And we have to recognize in that vein of digital equity [that] access is one thing, but not really... You don't have access for real.

Again and again, school leaders discussed Internet access as one of the biggest hurdles students faced after moving to remote learning. Because access could not be assumed even when students had or were provided with devices, innovative and practical, equitable solutions were required. Aaron, a middle school assistant principal, discussed the need to use paper packets when it was understood that families, “had too many kids in the house, so that even if they had pretty decent Internet coverage, if three kids are connected at once, it certainly couldn't stand up to that.” Dave, a director of technology integration, concurred by stating, “We're learning about families who may not have the access that we thought they did.” In addition to the Internet access hurdles faced by so many students, the ability of schools to continue to support devices also quickly surfaced. Dave noted, “I think the challenges now are helping to manage and support

those devices virtually, making sure that we know that everybody has what they need, [and] finding out where those gaps exist.”

Unsurprisingly, issues of equity persisted during the global pandemic crisis. Even if basic student needs for food were met, mental health supports and digital resources often were woefully inadequate. Many schools still have not been able to ensure that students’ overall well-being is adequately supported. Hundreds of thousands and perhaps millions of students still cannot access instruction remotely. Educational access and equity issues that existed beforehand often seemed insurmountable during the early months of the pandemic. Educational equity for all students has never been a reality and now has slipped even further away for millions of students. Despite the enormity of the challenges, the school leaders we interviewed continued to strive to support students to the greatest extent possible.

Silver Linings and Future Opportunities

Despite the enormity of the challenges that COVID-19 has thrust upon P-12 educational systems, many of our interviewees felt that some “silver linings,” or unexpected positive outcomes, had begun to emerge, even during the first few months, that would lead to future opportunities for students and staff. These possibilities for change spurred excitement, even during this challenging time period for schools. Jeremy, a superintendent, acknowledged the call to action for all educational communities:

I think if we come out of this experience and fall back on traditional ways of doing things, shame on us. We cannot unlearn what we are learning right now. If anything, the silver lining here is that. . . that is pretty exciting to think about what could be. I know our teachers and students, and families are living that alongside us. That is probably one of the highlights we have seen.

Jeff, the chief administrator for a regional educational service agency, noted that the global pandemic and the concurrent changes in school structures and activities have given everyone the permission to “think about the future of education,” and to question the *status quo*. Changes in almost every area of education are being considered, including new commitments to the collective wisdom of the educational community, new structures of family engagement, expansive integration of technology, the creation of new resources, and, most importantly, a new appreciation and recognition of student voice and self-directed agency. Past research indicates that organizational reorientations are common as crises begin to settle down and leaders have the opportunity to reflect on the future of their institutions (see, e.g., Coombs, 2000; Boin and Hart, 2003; Heath, 2004; Jaques, 2009; Smith and Riley, 2012).

The school leaders that we interviewed had a renewed recognition of—and appreciation for—the importance of the collective wisdom of the educational community. Mike, a director of curriculum and technology, described his experience:

I think there are some really good positives that have come from this experience. . . there is a lot of sharing going on and reconnecting with our personal learning networks has been fantastic. . . People are talking and sharing at a rapid pace so that there is a lot of crowdsourcing around that information. I think that has been really helpful.

The importance of connections between educators, and the opportunities created by those connections, cannot be overstated. Kristina, a principal, summed it up when she said, “If this [pandemic] has done nothing else, [it has shown us that] we need to work together in a connected world and leverage our shared brilliance, our shared experience.”

Another silver lining from the pandemic appears to have been the explosion of better technology integration across educational systems. Aaron, a middle school assistant principal, recognized that educational communities have been thrust into a non-negotiable “technological immersion course”:

I think it has just upped our technology. You hear it all the time where, hey, if you want to learn a foreign language, go to that country and live there for 6 weeks. Well, if you want to learn online education. . . I wouldn’t want a pandemic. But certainly getting dropped into a situation where you have to do it for X number of weeks has just raised everyone’s level astronomically, and it forces you to ask questions. You come up against that reality. You have to troubleshoot things. . . And I think those things can carry forward. . .

Many of our interviewees said that they planned on carrying forward the creation of virtual resources for students and staff. While the availability of these resources is not new, the broad-based implementation and long-overdue recognition of the availability and potential benefits of these resources is a significant change for many educators.

The most-widely recognized silver lining of the COVID-19 pandemic is arguably the collective recognition of the power of community and the accompanying importance of valuing the voices of all community members, especially parents and students. Learning has become more visible to everyone. This increased transparency and visibility has the potential to change the face of education going forward. Mark, a director of an international school, said:

I think that the learning for all of our community members was so much more visible. Parents were part of the learning experience. Students were definitely advocates and agents in their own learning. And teachers, in order to deliver experiences, they had to be able to communicate much more actively with different groups. . . And I think the more that we can make our experiences visible and include the community members in those experiences, I think that that’s something that we can bring back to the on-campus instruction and try and support through a continued partnership to support our students.

Cory, a superintendent, noted that parents are seeing and experiencing more of “what their kids are doing in school than ever before” and, in turn, as educators have committed themselves to a new level of family engagement, they are seeing sides of their students previously unrecognized. He went on to state that remote learning has given students more voice and agency as they have been provided with opportunities to show their learning in new ways.

Students at many of the schools we interviewed are doing more than just showing their learning in new ways. Remote learning is changing students in ways that will benefit them in all areas of their lives. Danny, an international middle school principal, looked forward to these changes with excitement:

[O]ur students are certainly learning a lot of independent skills and making a lot of choices on their own right now and they're pursuing a lot of their own interests because they have time to do it because they're not on a regular school time schedule. So, when they come back to school, it will be very, very fun to capitalize on this new independence and this new confidence and this new self-assuredness of "Oh, yeah, I can do that."

The school leaders we interviewed were able to see some "silver linings" and potential benefits that might emerge from a harrowing pandemic. Opportunities they identified included time to reimagine school, chances to test new ideas and take risks, and the ability to welcome back students who have embraced a new version of themselves.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The primary themes that emerged from our interviews with the *Coronavirus Chronicles* participants echoed many of the broad ideas from the scholarly literature. Research is clear, for example, that a strong emphasis on organizational vision and institutional values facilitates leaders' sensemaking and guides critical decisions during conditions of uncertainty (see, e.g., Prewitt et al., 2011; Boin et al., 2013). Similarly, the school leaders who we interviewed utilized a variety of focused but far-reaching communication strategies (see, e.g., Heath and O'Hair, 2020) to maintain some semblance of instructional and organizational coherence and to support educators and families. This coordination often involved outside entities. For instance, Glenn, a superintendent, shared with us:

Two weeks before this all really started coming down to southern New Jersey... we put together a giant group of team meetings and we brought in our chiefs of police, fire, public works. We had our mayor in contact. We had our city manager, board of education, our administrators, and our food services. And we sat together as one big team and put all of our egos aside and said, "What do we need to do to work together as the months go on?" And we [continue to regularly] work together, hand-in-hand.

Care for others was another dominant theme that we heard from our interview participants, underscoring the importance of leaders' attention to educators' and families' social, emotional, and mental health concerns (see, e.g., Dücker et al., 2017). Often that care focused on resolving fundamental inequities, particularly regarding food insecurity, counseling, social services, or technological access (see, e.g., Dücker et al., 2017; Mahfouz et al., 2019; McLeod, 2020b).

A few other leadership observations emerged from our interviews that we think are worth noting here at the end of this article. First, our school leaders repeatedly recognized their reliance on the collective wisdom that exists across organizations and geographic boundaries. Schools that intentionally looked to what was happening elsewhere were able to be more proactive. These schools tapped into their collective networks and connected with colleagues in parts of the world that were among the first affected by the pandemic, thus allowing their organizations more time for conversation, planning, and response.

Second, schools that previously had made certain investments reaped the benefits during the pandemic (Stern, 2013). One obvious example would be the schools that already had implemented 1:1 computing initiatives. These technology-rich systems were able to pivot to remote instruction more easily because most students already had computing devices and home Internet access. A second example would be the middle school that already had competency-based student progressions in place and thus was less concerned than other schools about student "learning loss." Another example would be the project- and inquiry-based learning schools that we interviewed. Students in those schools already were comfortable with greater self-agency and directing their own work, a useful skill set for learning at home during the pandemic. Other examples include the international schools that had certain processes in place due to previous pandemics such as SARS or MERS or the schools in Alabama that had experience with quick shifts to online learning after hurricanes.

Third, we heard regularly about the ongoing importance of relationships. Sometimes these relationships were simply about coordination of organizational functions, similar to the meetings described above in Glenn's New Jersey community. More often, however, they represented love, empathy, and care of both the school and the larger community. The educators who we interviewed did heroic work during the first few months of the pandemic to combat food insecurity, care for the people around them, and ensure that learning still occurred for children.

Fourth, many of our participants shared that their clear visions and values, whether individual or institutional, allowed them to maintain operational focus instead of simply being reactive to the ongoing, smaller, day-to-day crises that regularly occurred. Organizational responses that had greater consistency and coherency created fewer stresses on educators and families.

Fifth, schools continue to reflect the contexts of our larger society. For many of our participants, the equity concerns that existed pre-pandemic were magnified during the first few months of the crisis. Food and housing insecurity, digital inequity, and lack of access to mental health supports were all amplified after the pandemic closed down schools. There is a great need for equity-oriented leadership in both schools and their larger communities and political contexts. We need better investments, support systems, and policy approaches to offset the inequities that erode institutional and societal vitality.

Sixth, 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. We heard numerous examples of individual and organizational risk-taking. Many of those new ideas, support systems, and skill sets will persist after the pandemic. For instance, teachers' newly acquired technology skills won't just disappear. Similarly, the increased participation rates that many schools witnessed once parent-teacher conferences went virtual are probably worth preserving.

Finally, some of our participants expressed optimism that the pandemic may radically reshape certain elements of their school systems once they have time to reflect back on what has happened. This reflection on organizational possibilities and institutional futures is common during the “reconstruction” phase (Boin and Hart, 2003) of a crisis (see also Coombs, 2000; Heath, 2004; Boin et al., 2005; Jaques, 2009; Smith and Riley, 2012). Time will tell if these “silver linings” actually occur. Although many scholars have noted the revolutionary potential of major crises (see, e.g., Prewitt et al., 2011; Harris, 2020), Boin and Hart (2003) stated that there are inherent tensions between crisis management and reform-oriented leadership. During a crisis, leaders often try to “minimize the damage, alleviate the pain, and restore order” (p. 549), which conflicts with attempts to disrupt the organization and move it in a new direction. If some of these longer-term changes do indeed occur when the pandemic recedes, many of our interviewees will be ready to reap the promises of a newly reimagined world of education.

Crisis leadership matters, primarily because “it is often the handling of a crisis that leads to more damage than the crisis event itself. Learning from a crisis is the best hope we have of preventing repeat occurrences.” (James and Wooten, 2011, p. 61). When it comes to education however, Smawfield (2013) stated that “one of the most under-represented areas within the literature. is the capture of knowledge on how schools have been able to respond to real-life disasters” (p. 9). He noted that we have much still to learn about the leadership and institutional challenges that accompany crises, the roles that educators are required to play, and the structures and behaviors that seem to be successful.

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Although this study examined school leaders’ responses during the first few months of the COVID-19 pandemic, Mutch (2015b) noted that “12–24 months after the onset of [a crisis seems] to be a useful time to start to review what has happened” (p. 187). Much of what we will learn about effective school crisis leadership during this pandemic remains unknown and it will take years to reveal the longer-term impacts of COVID-19 on schools and their leaders. Harris and Jones (2020) stated that, “a new chapter is being written about school leadership in disruptive times that will possibly overtake and overshadow all that was written before on the topic” (p. 246). That chapter—and the overall story of pandemic-era schooling—continues to be written. For many of the schools that we interviewed, their reorientations and reinventions may well be underway.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

SM conducted all of the interviews. Both authors contributed equally to the coding, analysis, and writing of this manuscript. Both authors contributed to the article and approved the submitted version.

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Conflict of Interest: The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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