

School leadership during times of major change

by

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B.S., St. Mary of the Plains, 1989
M.S., Fort Hays State University, 2002
Ed.S., Walden University, 2010

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

Department of Education
College of Educational Leadership

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

2021

Abstract

With this research project, I intended to describe the skills and dispositions needed by school leaders during times of dramatic change. Change is a given; during this study, our world underwent an extraordinary transformation. In March 2020, President Donald Trump announced that our nation was facing an unprecedented pandemic. With this, schools across the country shut their doors to the educational process most of us know and understand. At once, our nation's educational leaders were faced with teaching students in ways no one would have dreamed could be implemented, let alone in such short order. As fear of the virus dissipated and educational leaders and others began to look at the new delivery model, a new normal began to emerge. With this research, I intended to determine the skills and dispositions needed by school leaders in what has become the most significant and dramatic change in my career as an educator.

As a result of the COVID-19 Pandemic, the leaders who participated in this study were dealing with unprecedented concerns related to health and safety. Each of these leaders was passionate about leading student achievement and supporting their staff during this time of uncertainty. However, the harsh reality of the pandemic was schools were dramatically impacted and forced to change their practices to meet the immediate and short-term educational goals, while at the same time dealing with possible life and death situations. It is important to note all participants in this study were part of the Kansas State Department of Education's Redesign Project and had been involved in voluntary change initiatives prior to the research, but the forced change caused by the pandemic, definitely put mental stress on each of the participants due to the pandemic. The results of this study indicated that communication, and culture, which included specifically targeted and timely support, as the primary skills and dispositions needed by leaders during times of dramatic change.

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to my parents. They are no longer with me to witness my journey, but this was a gift I wanted to give them in honor of all they gave to me. I have had tremendous support from my two daughters—I am blessed to be their mom. To Dean Mercer, there is no chance I could have finished this work without your constant support and guidance. Thank you to all of you.

Chapter 1 - Introduction

“The greatest leader is not necessarily the one who does the greatest things. He is the one that gets the people to do the greatest things.” – Ronald Reagan

In 2015, Kansas Education Commissioner Dr. Randy Watson and Deputy Education Commissioner Dr. Brad Neuenswander set out on a mission to discover what Kansans wanted from their schools. This first step of a plan promoted and supported by the Kansas State Board of Education challenged Kansas educators to find the methods that have the maximum positive impact on students. By discovering what communities around the state were saying about the current education system, and then discussing the changes needed, the commissioners were poised to promote and create a new vision for education in Kansas. This study seeks to more fully understand how to support leaders who desire change in their educational systems.

This introduction includes background details about how, in 2015, the new state commissioner and deputy commissioner traveled across the state gathering information from stakeholders concerning what those stakeholders wanted from their public education system. It also discusses the need for change in Kansas education and details the distinct challenges discovered when a diverse group of stakeholders were asked about the direction of their current educational system. Finally, it will provide a brief explanation of the rationale, theoretical framework, and methodology before examining these areas more fully in Chapter 3.

Chapter 2, a presentation of the literature describes how accelerated change can occur when led by the school and district level leader and includes discussion on four specific areas of necessary concentration. Chapter 3 outlines the methodology, the research site and its access, the data collection methods proposed, and the data analysis. Chapter 4 presents a summary of

the research findings. And finally, Chapter 5 discusses how the results might best be used to support leaders in Kansas who wish to advance the educational system.

Background and Setting

Community conversations across Kansas addressed both the academic and the nonacademic skills needed after high school graduation for postsecondary success. According to the Kansas State Department of Education (KSDE, 2017), beginning in the spring of 2015, Watson and Neuenswander set out across 84,000 square miles of Kansas to gather stakeholder information. The purpose of the tour was to find out what Kansans wanted from their education system (Neuenswander, 2018). According to Neuenswander (2018), the community conversation data was analyzed in the fall of 2015 and “helped inform the State Board of Education in creating a new vision” (p. 14). The commissioners spent time touring Kansas to gather community data to support the upcoming work, with the intention to use the information in strategic planning for the State Board of Education (Neuenswander, 2018).

Information was solicited from community members representing economic interests, businesses and industries, and school personnel, with a focus on children as the future of Kansas (see *Figure 1.1*). In total, 20 community conversations and seven Chamber of Commerce groups were held throughout Kansas and involved approximately 2,000 individual participants in the discussions. Additionally, more than 100 people participated in business and industry focus groups. Neuenswander (2018) noted that in each of these focused conversations, the same three questions were asked: (a) What are the skills, attributes, and abilities of a successful 24-year-old Kansan; (b) What is K–12’s role in developing this successful Kansan and how would we measure success; (c) What is higher education’s role in developing this successful Kansan, and how would we measure success. (p. 44). According to the participants, successful high school

graduates require critical thinking skills; openness (i.e., adaptability, independence, and creativity); communication skills; interpersonal skills such as teamwork; and a sense of citizenship and moral duty (KSDE, 2017). This study examined the specific leadership skills needed during this period of school redesign and aims to encourage redesign success by aligning strategies with these identified skill sets.

Figure 1.1.

Advertisement for the Community Conversation Tour



Each initial community conversation was advertised on a variety of mediums: social media, various local media agencies, and through school administrators who helped promote the event in each area (Neuenswander, 2018). The intent was to create an environment in which all participants felt comfortable responding and sharing. Each site used an electronic means of soliciting responses to increase involvement. Specific guidelines were placed to help guarantee candid responses. One such guideline was not placing two individuals at the same table if they were associates or if they shared the same employment title.

By the conclusion of the listening tour, events had been held in more than 20 locations; approximately 1,900 constituents had participated, and an electronic survey had gathered another 100 responses (Neuenswander, 2018). The 287 focus groups contained members from diverse backgrounds, positions, and political parties, as well as business and community leaders (Neuenswander, 2018). Events were held both during the day and in the evening, responses were gathered and analyzed from each of the community conversations, and all the datasets were compared for consistency (Neuenswander, 2018).

Finally, the 2015 Kansas community conversations and future strategic planning by the Kansas State Board of Education led to a new effort: the Kansans Can School Redesign Project (KSDE, 2017). This new vision for education in Kansas was grounded in the tour data and consistently referenced the information gathered from the participants. The new strategic plan was intended to encourage stakeholders to think differently about Kansas education and to lead the world in the success of each student (KSDE, 2015). The State Board focused on five areas: academic preparation, content preparation, technical skills, employability skills, and civic engagement (KSDE, 2017). The aim of this qualitative case study was to extend the implementation of this vision into the hands of school leaders and to determine how they can help meet the needs of each student in Kansas.

The Need for Change

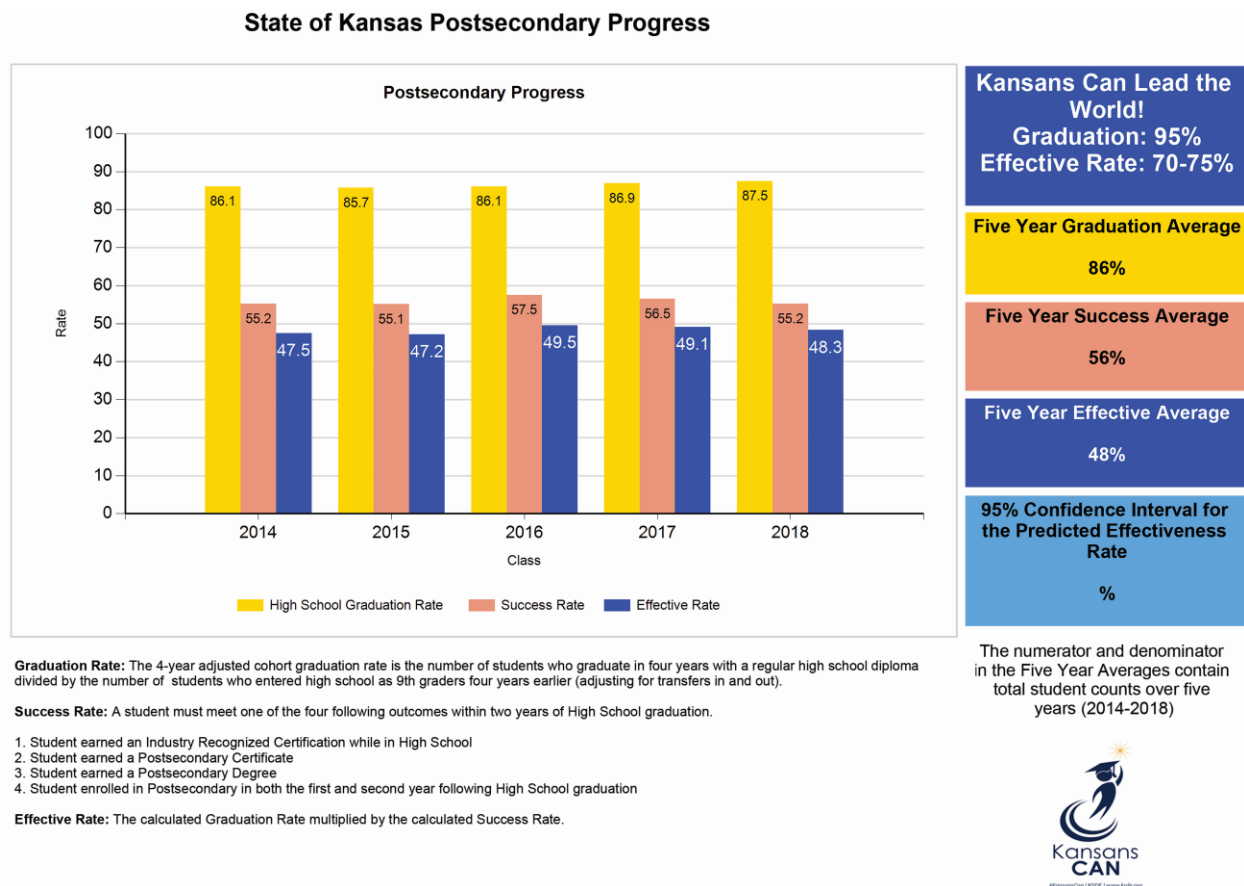
According to the Kansas Board of Regents (2017), in January of 2017 only 52% of the workforce in Kansas had some form of postsecondary education, which did not fully meet the current needs of business and industry and would not meet its future needs. This means that having only a high school diploma is no longer sufficient to secure a middle-class lifestyle (Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2013). Not surprisingly, this also holds true at the national level.

Today, 80% of all jobs are in the service sector. Jobs in industries such as business services, education, healthcare, and office services require higher levels of interpersonal and problem-solving skills because the work entails higher levels of human interaction and personalized response to people's desires and needs (Carnevale et al., 2013).

This information, as well as the Kansas postsecondary information included in Figure 1.2, implies that Kansas students who graduated between 2013 and 2018 did not leave high school with the skills they needed for postsecondary success. Postsecondary success is defined, in Kansas, as students who continue their enrollment in college beyond the first year, or who obtain a certification from a technical school, or similar institution. This definition includes consideration of an effective rate. This rate, according to the KSDE, is the graduation rate multiplied by the success rate, which is the status of a student two years after graduation (2017). Examples of these statuses include earning an industry-recognized certificate, postsecondary certification, or postsecondary degree, or enrolling in postsecondary education in the first or second year following high school graduation (KSDE, 2017).

Figure 1.2.

Kansas Historical Postsecondary Data for High School Graduates



The data collected during the Kansas community conversations built the background for proposing this case study, specifically relative to the school leadership skills and dispositions necessary to enable dramatic change. The essential student skills shared during the Kansas community conversations are currently foreign and might not have been included in many school leadership conversations and training sessions. This study was built on the community conversation narrative by collecting additional data from school leaders who are currently involved in the Kansans Can School Redesign Project and who were also leading during a national pandemic. The goal was to identify specific skills and dispositions required from school leadership figures during times of dramatic change.

Included in this research effort are my own experiences leading rural Kansas schools during the Kansans Can School Redesign Project process. Many unique challenges were observed during several professional development opportunities that I conducted with small groups of teacher leaders, building-level staff members, and superintendents. These leadership experiences were explored during the research process. I used a case-study design employing qualitative inquiry methods to elicit data to reveal the types of skills and dispositions used by school leadership to direct and influence rapid change.

Challenges

Throckmorton (1967) noted that the Kansas education system has seen little change since the 1800s. Children enter kindergarten around age five and move through the grade levels according to age. These children sit in rows, are addressed by an expert teacher, are given information, and are expected to memorize and regurgitate the material in a standardized testing process. Schools in Kansas predominately open their doors in August and close in May (KSDE 2018), perpetuating an educational system whose history spans almost 200 years. Moving a school system away from that dynamic is difficult and wrought with human challenges. As stated previously, focused community conversations allowed Kansans to speak out about the educational environment and how it could change to meet the current needs of the state (2015). According to Bush (2008), one major challenge to creating new learning environments is a lack of leadership at the individual school and district levels that would help teachers feel safe and confident in making crucial classroom instructional changes.

School leaders and teachers face enormous pressure to advance students academically and to show growth in learning. Our current education system does not always allow leaders the time needed to make the changes that Kansans suggested are necessary during the community

conversations. Additionally, a challenging conversation must be had regarding recent innovation in education, including the historical perspective of the critical legislation No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2001) as a means of centering the conversation on goals and change. Guilfoyle (2006) felt this attempt to focus our educational systems was “the most ambitious federal education law, which proposes to close achievement gaps and aims for 100 percent student proficiency by 2014” (p. 8). Under this standard, schools that showed increased student academic achievement in reading and math—to the exclusion of all other academic areas—received federal dollars. According to KSDE, school systems set achievement goals centered on these two content areas alone, and over time, their focus on these assessments indeed led to demonstrable growth (2008). However, as Marzano (2007) retorted, “this approach is noble but terribly unfair as a method of determining the effectiveness of a district or school” (p. 25). Marzano (2007) determined four areas in which this unfairness could be seen: the transient nature of students; the varying demographics; measuring achievement only by standardized means; and the use of summative measures that give very little, if any, guidance for improving student achievement. Change is challenging for school leaders who are attempting to find the time to transform the traditional structures and processes of schools.

Rationale

As the need for scholastic change increases in Kansas, research is needed to guide school administrators on the skills and dispositions necessary to lead with purpose and achieve success. Although much research has been conducted on change management, Kansas school communities find themselves in a unique position to lead an initiative that is being promoted by the Kansas State Board of Education, which has coincided with the emergency changes provoked by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The results of this qualitative case study of the schools

involved in rapid school improvement may provide details regarding the types of competencies leaders will need to effect such change in Kansas.

Baxter and Jack (2008) stated that case study research “enables the researcher to answer ‘how’ and ‘why’ type questions while taking into consideration how a phenomenon is influenced by the context within which it is situated” (p. 556). An informal process of inquiry for this case study created an opportunity to gather participants’ experiences in a natural way. Denzin and Lincoln (2008) found that this type of qualitative inquiry could delve into the points of view of individual participants regarding an experience. Denzin and Lincoln (2008) stated that “quantitative research can give its message in the tables, but qualitative work needs to deliver its message in the text of the reading” (p. 960). This leadership study, which examined the current leaders of the Kansans Can School Redesign Project and interprets their experiences, may help others who wish to drive dramatic scholastic change in Kansas and perhaps outside of the state.

Research Purpose and Questions

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the skills and dispositions necessary for school administrators to lead during times of change. Since 2015, the State of Kansas has been involved in a school redesign effort to change K–12 education to meet the needs of the Kansas economy. In 2020, the COVID-19 global pandemic presented additional challenges to educators, who were forced to overhaul their pedagogical delivery modes in mere days. Leading staff toward the goal of school redesign and school change can result in a tremendous amount of pressure on school leaders.

The following research questions guided this case study:

1. How do school leaders navigate challenges during the change process?
2. How do leaders determine the skills and dispositions most beneficial during rapid change, including during the COVID-19 pandemic?
3. Why do school leaders perceive certain skills and dispositions as valuable during change processes?

Theoretical Framework

This study used an interpretive approach to evaluate how leadership skills and disposition affect the goals and outcomes of school redesign in Kansas. The primary characteristics of interpretivism allowed the researcher to create a way of understanding the social world, which, in this context, is that of the public-school culture in Kansas (Bhattacharya, 2017). It is with the foundational assumptions of interpretivism in mind that the research and analysis were conducted.

Survey data and interviews with Kansas building and district leaders were the sources of data for this study. First, the development of survey questions was built and guided by the literature review detailed in Chapter 2. This provided broad input from principals and superintendents and helped to inform the semi-structured interview questions. NVivo (Castleberry, 2014) was used as a tool for data analysis. Welsh (2002) noted that the use of a software program during data analysis could add rigor to a qualitative study. According to Yin (2017), the main purpose of open-ended questions is to tie the respondents' answers to the original questions. Next, during the recorded interview process, semi-structured questions were asked following a review of the qualitative survey to assist in the identification identify themes. Analysis of the transcriptions provided future guidance on the skills that Kansas superintendents

and principals must possess to lead a school redesign initiative. Finally, documents were obtained to help provide detail about particular interview topics, such as communication, schedules, educator professional learning, and so forth.

Methodology

This qualitative case study and the data collected intended to describe the insights of school leaders involved in the Kansans Can School Redesign Project. The study is qualitative in that it seeks to understand the leadership skills and dispositions of current school leaders serving in Kansas schools who are participating in the project. The theoretical framework lends itself to the notion of interpretivism as a means of informing the research that was conducted and is discussed in a later chapter. The primary characteristics of interpretivism allow the researcher to create a way to understand the social world (Bhattacharya, 2017), which, in this context, would be that of the public-school culture in Kansas.

Baxter and Jack (2008) supported Yin's (2017) assertion that the most appropriate time to use a case study is when the situation calls for the provision of context around a phenomenon. This case study was divided into "how" and "why" questions, and then an assumption was made that the research factors cannot be manipulated because of the many variations in the contexts. Furthermore, Creswell (2015) suggested that creating specifics around time and place are of importance to case study methodology. This case study provided an opportunity for me to bind a specific time and place of study to research the leadership skills and dispositions required of school leaders during times of change.

The survey responses of Kansas school leaders helped inform the questions posed during the semi-structured interviews with each of the school and district leaders. One advantage of using survey data is that the resulting information can be viewed as reflective of a moment in

time or an individual's real-world experience (Kelley, Clark, Brown, & Sitzia, 2003). The survey questionnaire was sent to all Kansas school principals and superintendents directly involved in the Kansans Can School Redesign Project. The collected data was analyzed with the intent to discover themes that may lead to further conversation about developing leaders. The qualitative survey was sent to 85 Kansas school leaders and then the results were analyzed. The survey was designed around the key areas that emerged in the literature review, contained in Chapter 2. The results of the survey then informed the development of the semi-structured interview questions. By guiding the dialogue to key areas identified from the results of the survey, deeper reflections were obtained and supported the interview process.

In addition, select school leader participants were asked open-ended, semi-structured interview questions, which then allowed each to explain the redesign process from their perspective as a leader and allowed for ease of conversation. In the Dixon-Woods, Agarwal, Jones, Young, & Sutton (2005) model, prominent themes arose from qualitative analysis. Therefore, a thematic analysis of the interview transcriptions guided the final presentation of the data, which reveal the dispositions required of school leaders to effectively lead their schools during times of change.

The interviews with Kansas school leaders, coupled with the survey data, were the primary source of data in this study. Themes arose from the recorded interviews and data review. An analysis of the transcriptions uncovered conclusions about Kansas school leaders and the skills and dispositions they need to lead a school redesign initiative effectively.

Significance and Limits of the Study

Within the scope of the Kansans Can School Redesign Project, state department leaders and other professionals currently work with approximately 150 schools to create a new system

for Kansas students. The purpose of this study was to determine what skills and dispositions leaders need during the Kansans Can School Redesign Project to support staff during dramatic change. The findings of this study may be of use to individuals who support leaders and teachers and to those responsible for selecting leaders who can intentionally lead dynamic school change.

As a state, Kansas provides many opportunities for leaders to practice and hone their leadership skills. In their article review of the *National College for School Leadership*, Earley and Evans (2004), noted multiple approaches to scholastic leadership and how the contrast among leadership theories could create leadership success. The results of the qualitative survey, the semi-structured interviews, and any documents and artifacts collected may also be of use to all who work with and support educational leaders outside of the state of Kansas.

One limitation of this study is that I remained employed as the director of Teacher Licensure and Accreditation at the Kansas State Department of Education while I conducted the research. Because I conducted the interviews, participants might have perceived the interviews as evaluative in nature and may have been reluctant to engage in honest and forthright conversation. However, I believe that, because of the length of time I have been involved with each system—more than two years—I have established trusting relationships with these school leaders, and I did not find this reluctance to be the case. I am also involved with the Kansans Can School Redesign Project, and I have performed work for the study sites where the semi-structured interviews took place. This could be perceived as presenting a conflict of interest. Nevertheless, I intend to share these concerns with each participant, to reassure them that the conversations are completely confidential and anonymous, and to guarantee that the results will be used for educational purposes only.

The major focus of this study was to determine the skills and dispositions required of school leaders during times of change. However, on March 13, 2020, shortly before the closing of the draft of the defense and proposal work, President Donald Trump declared a national emergency concerning the novel coronavirus disease (2020). This declaration precipitated radical changes to life across the nation. Important for this study, our schools ceased to exist as we knew them, and many school leaders and educators scrambled to find new ways to continue student learning. Additionally, Kansas Governor Laura Kelly issued the first of several executive orders (2020) limiting the size of public gatherings, finally implementing a statewide stay-at-home order on March 28, 2020. The pandemic has increased the urgent need for successful change leaders, as all school leaders are now involved in managing the changes initiated by school closures, new safety processes, and systemic protocols.

Although this study may result in the creation of positive goals and the achievement of a new direction for school leaders in Kansas, forces at play could prevent even the most successful leaders from moving an initiative forward. It could be argued that only using Kansas leaders who are currently involved with the Kansans Can School Redesign Project may not provide a complete and comprehensive picture because of the homogeneity of the leadership characteristics within this population. It is essential to understand that the Kansans Can School Redesign Project is only in its fourth year of implementation, and future analysis will outline its successes and failures. Furthermore, this study may be limited by not including the voices of each individual school's teachers. A decision was made early in the study design process not to add this input and to encourage others to analyze and engage with these vital participants in Kansas education. As a researcher and lifelong educator in Kansas, I came to this decision in part because of the current role I hold as a Kansas educational leader.

Operational Definitions

1. Kansas State Board of Education (KSBoE): The 10 elected board members who oversee K–12 education in the state of Kansas.
<http://www.ksde.org/Default.aspx?tabid=92>
2. Kansas State Department of Education (KSDE): The state educational agency that works on behalf of the KSBoE to ensure federal and state compliance and to advance and implement the goals of the KSBoE. <http://www.ksde.org/Home>
3. College and Career Ready (CCR): As defined by the KSBoE, a successful Kansas graduate has the academic preparation, cognitive preparation, technical skills, employability skills, and civic engagement to be successful in postsecondary institutions or to move directly into the workforce without the need for remediation.
<http://www.ksde.org/Default.aspx?tabid=1007>
4. 21st Century Skills: Commonly referred to as “soft skills” or “employability skills,” including grit, conscientiousness, work ethic, teamwork, interpersonal and intrapersonal skills, and agreeableness.
<https://k12.thoughtfullearning.com/FAQ/what-are-21st-century-skills>
5. Community: A group of people who are socially interdependent, who participate together in discussion and decision-making, and who share certain practices that both define the community and are nurtured by it. Such a society is not quickly formed. It almost always has a history and is thus also a community of memory, defined in part by its past and its memory of the past (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 2007).
6. Kansans Can School Redesign Project: A process by which school systems and buildings transform the delivery of education around the following principles: student success skills, community partnerships, personalized learning, and real-world applications.
7. Dispositions: Those underlying assumptions values and beliefs [*sic*] that were employed while leading a school during times of change (Sanders & Kearney, 2008, p. 6).

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I built a framework describing the KSBoE's goal to redesign all Kansas schools by 2026. The aim of the proposed study is to identify the skills and dispositions needed by leaders participating in the Kansans Can School Redesign Project. The rationale for this study aimed to determine how school leaders—most importantly, superintendents and principals—are navigating the challenges of this critical work, even during a time of unprecedented health concerns, and the study tried to pinpoint the skills and dispositions that lead to success. Furthermore, I discussed why I used a qualitative case study to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the approach's leaders have used to support educators during this process. In addition, I shared the possible limitations of the study and some thoughts on the future implications of the results. The intention was that the information gathered might continue to support our Kansas leaders as they redesign our schools.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

This chapter presented a review of the extensive research associated with school leadership, change, and continuous improvement. In his early study, related to leadership in schools, Small (1902), Superintendent of the Rhode Island school system, wrote about the beginnings of Boston's Latin School from 1635 to 1636. Since that time, myriad ideas arose about the ways that school leaders affect learner achievement. In Kansas, the push to redesign education began in 2015 (KSDE). The intended goal was to change the vision of education. District and building leaders continue to work hard to lead the proposed change. This literature review sets out to determine the skills and dispositions that are already considered necessary for school superintendents and principals to acquire or learn to support large-scale change. To ground the definition of skills and dispositions, I referred to Katz's (1993) explanation: "a pattern of behavior exhibited frequently in the absence of coercion constituting a habit of mind under some conscious and voluntary control intentional to broad goals" (p. 16).

Beer and Nohria (2000) noted that 70% or more of most change initiatives fail because of challenging environments. The key to success lies in prepared leaders (Kowal, Hassel, & Hassel, 2009) who realize that a strong commitment is necessary, and a transformed leadership is key to that commitment. Knudson, Shambaugh, and O'Day (2011) reported that turnaround strategies included an influential culture of change, the appointment of a strong leader, active teaching, data analysis, community involvement, and piloting those ideas that showed promise as factors that improved struggling schools in California.

Four Domains

For the purposes of centering this research on school leadership and its effect on rapid school change, the following framework builds a strong foundation. The framework was

developed by WestEd, a nonpartisan, nonprofit research, development, and service agency that works with the education sector and other communities. This organization has roots in a bipartisan initiative from 1966 that allowed Congress to create regional laboratories across the country to improve education and learning for students. The intention was to create a starting point for the extensive volume of available research relating to school leadership and to build a broader understanding of the impact on school leaders during times of rapid change.

More recently, the Center on School Turnaround at WestEd (Jackson et al., 2018) developed the *Four Domains for Rapid School Improvement: A Systems Framework* (Redding, McCauley, Jackson, & Dunn, 2018). These scholars conducted a meta-analysis of existing leadership research. They found strong evidence that these four areas are the most impactful when examining school improvement efforts. This model was developed as a framework to assist states, districts, and schools that are working to change education. Turnaround leadership (Baroody, 2011; Brady, 2003; Hitt, 2015; Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008), talent development (Anderson, Steffen, Wiese, & King, 2014; Darling-Hammond, 1999, 2007; Guskey, 1999; Hallinger, 2003; Steiner & Hassel, 2011), instructional transformation (Anderson, Leithwood & Strauss, 2010; Brownell & Walther-Thomas, 2001; Hamilton et al., 2009; Tomlinson et al., 2003), and culture shift (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Epstein & Sanders, 2000; Lambert, 2002; Masumoto & Brown-Welty, 2009; Redding, 2014) are the keys to school turnaround and improvement that education systems should address to successfully change schools, and they are the fundamental practices for school improvement. Further, WestEd clearly articulated a framework to include each level of education: the state agency, the local district, and the school. Each of these four domains will be defined and expanded throughout this chapter.

Turnaround Leadership

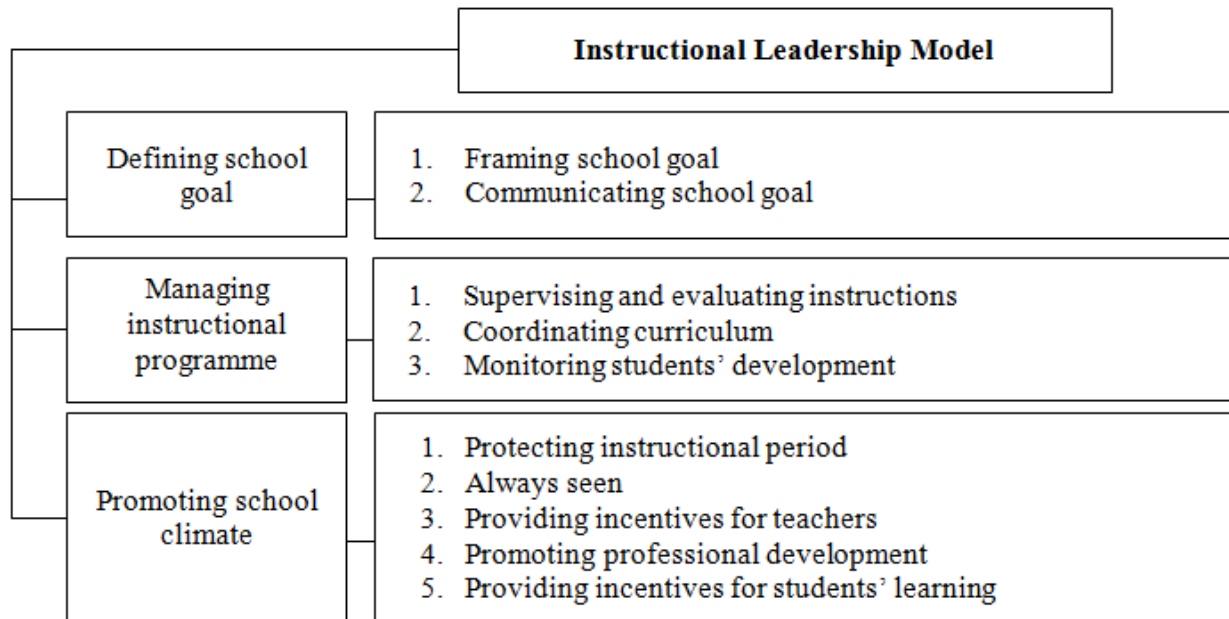
Turnaround leadership is defined as prioritizing improved communication, monitoring short-term and long-term goals, and customizing and targeting support to meet the needs of the improvement process (Jackson et al., 2018). In-depth school redesign lies in the vision and goals of school improvement implemented by the district leadership teams. Harris (2005), when looking at the field of school improvement, noted that the most recent studies point toward the importance of capacity building as a means of generating and sustaining school improvement. Hassel, Hassel, Arkin, Kowal, and Steiner (2006) said that it is imperative that the turnaround leader possess adequate leadership strength to depart from the way things have always been done.

Communication

Further developing the definition (Jackson et al., 2018), Hallinger (2003) found very similar results; essentially that the most effective instructional leadership strategies focus on three areas: “defining the school’s mission, managing the instructional program, and promoting a positive school-learning climate” (p. 332). Hallinger (2003) divided these three communicative areas into 10 sub-instructional leadership functions. Taking this further, Hallinger (2003) concluded that there was agreement regarding prior understandings of leadership as a means of promoting instructional change. When the leader provides integration among the 10 leadership functions, schools can benefit (see Figure 2.1).

Figure 2.1.

Instructional Leadership Model



Goal Setting

In his work in the corporate field, Kotter (2009), warned leaders not to move too quickly to declare success regarding major change. In his words, “change sticks, when it becomes the way we do things around here ... when it seeps into the bloodstream” (p. 67). School leaders must have data that shows either movement toward the stated goals or growth and improvement over a substantial amount of time to declare a school redesign project a success. In Canada, large-scale change has demonstrated success in areas in which an identified leadership capacity is built and where targeted goals and data points are used to measure progress (Fullan, 2009). Whether leading educational or cooperative reform, major change initiatives take time, and moving too quickly or skipping any intentionally defined steps does not set the groundwork for sustainability.

According to Ololube (2010) the relational approach between individuals drives goal achievement. Waters and Marzano (2007) noted that if school superintendents do not monitor goal achievement, then the process of goal setting is purposeless. Inconsistency between articulated goals and the practices of a school system indicates a clear lack of focus and communication of goals. Further, Waters and Marzano (2006) stated:

The superintendent who implements inclusive goal-setting processes that result in board-adopted “nonnegotiable goals for achievement and instruction,” who assures that schools align their use of district resources for professional development with district goals, and who monitors and evaluates progress toward goal achievement, is fulfilling multiple responsibilities correlated with high levels of achievement. (p. 13)

Hallinger (2003) noted that a combination of the three focus areas, delineated into 10 sub-instructional sections (see Figure 2.1), constitutes the basis for leading and communicating the goals of schools. Fullan (2002) further stated that the best leaders manage an overwhelming amount of complexity and division. Therefore, the number of skills necessary to lead in times of change can be overwhelming.

Targeting Support

One of the characteristics of turnaround leadership is the leader’s ability to prioritize improvement and targeted support. Strunk, Marsh, Bush-Macenas, and Duque (2016) stated in their extensive study, *School Plan Quality and Implementation* that a leader’s connection to quality improvement for students and the increased involvement of central office staff resulted in success in quality implementation from the first to the second year. Further, Strunk et al. (2016)

noted that time and the experiences of leadership staff might have led to a “particularly large increase” (p. 282). Consequently, prioritizing quality improvement is a distinguishing factor in turnaround leadership.

Schmoker (2004) believed that any substantive change process needed clear goals and easy access by teams to move forward. In Schmoker’s (2004) opinion, the failure of many school improvement processes was the vastness of these efforts, as “clarity and coherence suffered” (p. 426). Fullan (2009) further stated that it is paramount for leadership to maintain transparent instructional practices to improve teaching and learning, to know that any process of improvement takes time, to share the tasks of learning, to focus on systematic change, to understand that talented people need time to work together, to set clear standards and expectations, and to foster an attitude of caring and respect among staff.

Talent Development

Talent development can be defined as recruiting, developing, retaining, and sustaining talent, targeted professional learning, and stating clear performance goals (Jackson et al., 2018). While studying the competent principal, Clark (2017) found “each principal built teacher capacity, recognized change, and responded by motivating teachers and self, supporting continued collaboration, recognizing and encouraging teacher leadership, and adapting to new circumstances” (p. 6). Furthermore, Clark (2017) noted that principals were faced with difficult decisions, and successful leaders kept all stakeholders at the forefront of their decision-making. Productive and successful building leaders may focus primarily on sustainability to support the success of school change.

Recruiting, Developing, and Retaining

In their study of successful leaders in Singapore primary schools, Wang, Gurr, and Drysdale (2016) determined that the principal, as a recruitment leader, played a significant role in the success and effectiveness of the school. Notably, celebrating success publicly as a tool for building momentum to sustain the change initiative was an effective strategy to support the faculty involved in a changing school system. Wang, Gurr, and Drysdale (2016) stated, “the principals were competent and successful in communicating the school plans to different levels of the school community” (p. 275). It can be concluded that school-building leaders who proficiently recruit and support staff appear to be more successful.

Strategic recruitment efforts are also an element of talent development. In their research on preparing leaders for a changing world, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, Orr, and Cohen (2007) noted that a dominant factor for successful schools were those with “programs focus[ed] on enrolling experienced teachers with strong teaching and leadership skills, who are committed to educational change” (p. 65). Darling-Hammond et al. (2007) further noted that the most successful leaders came to a new position with extensive teacher leadership skills and a commitment to instructional improvement. In their work, Guarino, Santibañez, and Daley (2006) supported the idea that experience matters in areas of recruitment and retention, noting that “attrition is high for young or new teachers, and lower for older or more experienced teachers” (p.185). Accordingly, focusing on planned recruitment and retention efforts may positively effect student outcomes.

In Kansas, the *Mentor and Induction Program Guidance* (KSDE, 2015) document outlines the skills needed by leaders to develop and sustain their practice as leading stakeholder teams, leading the development of a school vision, creating a positive culture, sustaining a

culture of collaboration, establishing a communication plan, monitoring a strategic plan, securing and allocating resources, and collaborating with community and special interest groups. Daresh (2001) noted that schools that work intentionally to mentor and develop school leaders showed staff members reporting higher motivation and job satisfaction and increasing their work productivity to lead others. Mitgang (2007) explained from a Wallace Foundation report, “the primary goal of mentoring should be clear and unambiguous: to provide new principals with the knowledge, skills and courage to become leaders of change” (p. 4). The Kansans Can School Redesign Project calls for leaders to be supported so that they, in turn, can support the work of others.

Guarino et al. (2006) reviewed the empirical literature on teacher recruitment and retention and found that the highest turnover rates occur during the first few years of a teaching career. In yet another qualitative study, Hughes (2012), found “helping administrators understand their level of influence and guiding them toward building a positive working relationship with teachers and empowering teachers would enhance teacher retention” (p. 247). Evident in both qualitative studies is the idea that leadership can impact the recruitment and retention of teachers.

Sustained Professional Learning

While reviewing distributed leadership, Mayrowetz (2008) explained the ways that education researchers have misused this term and created confusion relative to the learning of others. Further, Mayrowetz (2008) worked to simplify that study and found that a more activity-based approach, in which leaders work to develop their skill and that of others (e.g., using a professional learning community) to engage in reflective practices, could be beneficial. Mayrowetz’s (2008) study noted how having multiple definitions around leadership work may be

determinantal to the practice of leadership. Mayrowetz (2008) concluded: “the field should continue to operate along several tracks as we try to find connections between distributed leadership and the outcomes that many in the field care about” (p. 432). Wilson (2016) noted that empowering teachers in leadership roles influences student achievement. This supports the notion of developing, retaining, and sustaining teachers as a possible leadership skill that is necessary for change (Wilson, 2016). Further, Hunzicker (2017) developed a progression of descriptions, including the nurturing of the teacher and the nature of the setting, as a tool for developing the teacher as a leader. Teacher dispositions, as noted by Tatto, Richmond, & Carter Andrews (2016) include risk-taking, being a lifelong learner, being a team player, and having the desire to make a difference—all of which are necessary for teacher leadership. Leaders who foster teachers to lead may be more successful than those who do not have the capacity to build these skills in teachers.

Wilson (2016) further described teacher leadership as difficult to define from the principal viewpoint. Childs-Bowen, Moller, and Scrivner (2000) agreed that the best definition of the teacher-as-leader shows teachers working in “professional learning communities to affect student learning; contributing to school improvement; inspiring excellence in practice; and empowering stakeholders to participate in educational improvement” (p. 28). This study intends to clarify how leaders can understand the importance of talent development in the school setting.

Research conducted by Borko (2004) found healthy professional learning communities create a safe space for professional learning to occur. Grossman, Woolworth, and Wineburg (2001) concluded that the work of building communities of learners among teachers was arduous and time consuming. Grossman et al., (2001) states, “to foster such discussions, the professional development leader must help teachers to establish trust, develop communication norms that

enable critical dialogue, and maintain a balance between respecting individual community members” (p. 7). An intentional focus on professional learning communities will provide more support for teachers as they work to redesign schools.

In his early research, Guskey (2002) noted that meaningful professional learning should focus on what the school system wants to achieve in terms of learning and learners. Successful talent development among staff requires purposeful planning and consideration for the effectiveness of professional learning. In their quantitative research on the portion of a principal’s time spent monitoring professional learning, Grissom, Loeb, and Master (2013) noted that the greater the time building leaders spent on classroom observations, the higher student achievement. Moreover, Grissom et al. (2013) found that the direct coaching of instructional practices positively affected school improvement efforts.

Performance Goals

Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2001), in their broad study of school-level leadership, found that successful change may not occur with haphazard attention on many goals and may not result in a successful shift in strategy for student success. In fact, with unfocused attention on too many goals, even the most successful superintendent can fail at sustaining and maintaining a vision for change. The current focus of the KSDE (2015) is on specific goal areas for school success: social and emotional growth, kindergarten readiness, the implementation of individual plans of study focused on career interest, increased high school graduation rates, and postsecondary completion and attendance. Marzano (2007) referred to an idea of nonnegotiable goals as goals for which there is no leeway and stated that the district’s focus must solely be on these goals. Kansas education systems show the most success when goals are clearly defined and given the most attention. The initiatives of the Kansans Can School Redesign Project have

been predetermined by the KSBoE, meaning that school system leaders may need certain skills to focus on those areas and create goals that will, over time, show growth and improvement.

Professional learning communities within a school building have the potential for transforming instruction. Huffman (2003) believed that key to instructional change was the creation of a shared vision and shared values to direct the work of teachers in any learning community. Principals and school system leaders need these skills to learn how to jointly develop a shared mission and a vision that guides all school-building work. Marzano and Waters (2009) agreed that defining nonnegotiable goals and carefully monitoring those goals was paramount to redefining our school systems. In this setting, transformational change may occur.

Instructional Transformation

Instructional transformation means diagnosing and responding to student learning needs, providing rigorous evidence-based instruction, and removing barriers and providing opportunities (Jackson et al., 2018). Marzano's (2007) study found that goals and consistent curriculum influenced student achievement; once these items were agreed upon, adherence to these instructional goals was maintained at the district level. Any known discrepancy could be addressed by the school leadership, and corrective action could be implemented. Marzano (2007) went on to describe how goals related to curriculum and instruction must be adopted based on relevant research and must maintain clear and focused implementation. Both of Marzano's (2007, 2017) studies proposed a strong focus on solid curricular practices that led to higher student achievement.

Guskey (2002) further noted that a quality system for evaluating learning opportunities, rather than simply anecdotal information, should be used to determine the successful implementation of new learning. In their study on effective teaching, Stronge, Ward, Tucker,

and Hindman (2007) found that connected teaching and connected learning opportunities were a natural byproduct of good professional learning. Therefore, school leaders should focus on developing a well-trained, supported, and talented teacher for every student.

Diagnose and Respond to Student Learning

Newmann, Smith, Allensworth, and Bryk (2001), in their quantitative study of coherence in instructional programming, found that student achievement increased with consistent staff members and teaching practices. Furthermore, Baroody (2011) noted in a study from Calkins, Guenther, Belfiore, & Lash, (2007) that high-performing schools intended to increase the focus on aligning the curriculum and assessments, and they demonstrated a deepened understanding of instructional practice. This same study included data on low-performing schools that did not create a focused practice but allowed more freedom for teachers to choose instruction methods and assessments. This provides further proof that concentrated goals and constant attention to specified goals may increase student achievement.

The ability to diagnose and respond to student learning and to develop appropriate ways to increase student achievement could be transformational in change processes and in the Kansas Redesign process. According to Hamilton et al. (2009) in their guide *Using student achievement data to support instructional design making guide*, noted that organizing teacher teams around improved student-centered teaching enables teachers to be prepared to act out a data-based plan for instructional improvement. Furthermore, the document details the importance of setting aside structured time for “teachers and school staff to collaboratively analyze and interpret their students’ achievement data, and to identify instructional changes” (p. 25). Datnow and Park (2014) showed the belief that allowing teachers the opportunity to work together to make sense of the data, to plan instruction, and to discuss how to fully implement the needed instructional

change would improve achievement. It becomes the role of the school leader to provide these opportunities for instructional staff to respond to student learning.

Rigorous Instruction

According to Matsumara, Slater, and Crossan (2008), teacher expectations for students influence the rigor of classroom instruction. Matsumara et al. (2008) further noted that expectations and rigor support each other and lead to a deeper and more meaningful student learning experience. Rigorous standards instruction for teachers, therefore, is an important part of instructional transformation during rapid change (Jackson et al., 2018). Blackburn and Williamson (2011) stated, “if we expect student to learn at a high level, we must focus on depth of understanding, not on breadth of coverage” (p. 3). The evaluation and adjustment of the curriculum and of teachers’ understanding of standards may impact student learning in times of change.

Remove Barriers and Provide Opportunities

Hallinger (2003) noted that a leader’s capacity to develop an atmosphere of innovation created change. School leaders who best created sustainable change carefully selected purposes and practices that they supported and developed. Hallinger (2003) further noted that previous scholars “consistently found that the skillful leadership of school principals was a key contributing factor when it came to explaining successful change, school improvement, or school effectiveness” (p. 321). This research was significant because it showed how a school leader could impact the instructional environment and sustain and maintain innovation and change.

It is possible that a methodical process to determine how traditional activities or barriers might impede learning is another way that systems might affect change in the learning environment. Cantor, Smolover and Stamler (2010) noted that poverty could be a barrier to

expecting excellence in learning from students. However, studying any other barriers that might be evident, and systematically addressing those barriers, could lead to “wide-spread scalable and sustainable system reform” (Cantor et al., p. 26). This kind of organized attention paid by school leaders to obstacles may lead to improved student success and a change in the learning environment.

Culture Shift

Culture shift is defined as the ability to build an atmosphere focused on student learning and effort, soliciting action on stakeholder input, and being able to engage students and families in the pursuit of educational goals (Jackson et al., 2018). Peter Drucker (1995) is credited with saying culture eats strategy for breakfast. Hoy and Hannum (1997) defined culture as “a system of shared orientations that holds a unit together and gives it a distinctive identity” (p. 24).

Hawkins (2009) noted that leaders are being called to build trust, learn the art of delegation, team build, and possess the ability to create a sustainable vision. The environment of any workplace today demands that the leaders invite their staff to participate in conversations with open and honest discussions about the direction of a school building staff. Clark (2017) recognized that school principals who successfully created change “cultivated a spirit of collaboration as structures” (p. 7) and had more sustainability than those who did not have this innate skill.

The Four Domains (Jackson et al., 2018) definition of culture implies relationship building and eliciting input from others. As Fullan (2011b) stated, the principal “must look to the future and strive to create a culture that has the capacity not to settle for the solution of the day” (p. 19). Redding (2014) further defined culture as “the school’s values, collective beliefs, norms, and its expectations of personnel and students; its practices, routines, and rituals” (p. 34).

Particular skills and dispositions relative to relationship and climate building are needed by school leaders while they are working to change the instructional environment.

Focused Student Learning

Thapa, Cohen, Guffey, and Higgins-D'alessandro (2013) noted that teaching and student learning are the most important works related to the school environment, and leaders should work to define the governing set of principles. Thapa, et al. (2013) further mentioned that climate, or the culture of a set of human interactions, has been studied at length and that variance in definitions and understanding should not be allowed to obscure the impact of school climate. In his extensive work in Chicago public schools, Bryk (2010) determined that focusing on climate increased both student engagement and achievement. The intention of this research is to understand the effects of school culture as it impacts the skills and dispositions of school leaders.

Fullan (2002) presented work that stated, “effective leaders must always work on connectedness or coherence-making” (p. 8). Current leaders supporting change or redesign efforts may find further success if they can create environments of connectedness, where all members of the teaching team feel they are part of the process, thereby affecting the culture of change. However, as complex and challenging as this process may be, Fullan (2002) found that creating this environment helped to support an atmosphere where change was accepted and invited. School reform initiatives have often been viewed as loosely connected and overwhelmingly difficult to implement. Creating this sense of connectedness, especially when perpetuated by the school leader, may deepen the effectiveness of the change process.

Hallinger (2003) noted that a skillful leader impacts the successful transformation or effectiveness of behaviors in the school by creating a climate of positivity where change is embraced and school improvement is the hallmark of explicitly stated goals. School and district

leaders are expected to possess the level of skill needed to create a culture of risk-taking.

Hallinger (2003) looked deeper into the notion of Mortimore, Sammons, Stoll, and Ecob, (1988) and noted that principals saw themselves as culture builders. Hallinger (2003) further expanded the study to develop three constructs of leadership that included “defining the school’s mission, managing the instructional program, and promoting a positive school-learning climate” (p. 332). For the purposes of this work, climate and culture will be used interchangeably.

Stakeholder Input

Coleman (2011) found that “collaborative leadership is at once both self-supporting and implicitly contradictory in nature” (p. 312). The contradiction is human, and in part because diverse populations of people compose school faculties. To balance these qualities can be difficult for the school leader. A leader with a limited amount of skill in creating partnerships with staff will lack the collaborative finesse to structure a vision and an environment for change. Collaboration then, according to Coleman (2011), does not come without complications or controversy.

Vernon-Dotson and Floyd’s (2012) qualitative study indicated “participants in this study attributed the increased capacity to lead directly and indirectly to their membership in the leadership teams” (p. 44). Building and district leaders must work to create prosperous and successful change where teachers are not only members of a leadership team but also are the major contributors to, and leading members of, those teams. The capacity for teachers to lead is not a natural byproduct of teacher-preparation programs or an inherent skill naturally possessed by teachers. Finally, Vernon-Dotson and Floyd (2012) stated:

Through a leadership team approach, school leaders can promote all teachers as leaders by empowering their participation in school reform efforts, inspiring them to become competent in their practice, encouraging their collaboration and creating partnerships both within and beyond the walls of the school for the benefit of all students. (p. 39)

According to Bayler (2012), principals who desire change and inspire create more change. This disposition may be an accelerant for change. Leadership skills include determining the motivational strategies for nurturing the personalities of the staff and using this knowledge to increase enthusiasm for change within the school building. Bayler (2012) elaborated on this notion by encouraging for leaders to be seen in their building and outside of the traditional office setting. Leaders need to motivate staff in vastly different ways and to develop many different environments for learning (KSDE, 2018). In their work on goal setting, Marzano and Waters (2009) determined the most potent consideration in relation to lengthy and sustained change processes in schools is collective efficacy—the belief that the work of teachers can make a difference in school achievement.

Coleman (2011) noted that “each principal had the ability to motivate others to achieve the district and school vision through communication, collaboration, and dedication in establishing school identity” (p. 7). Survey data collected by the KSDE Redesign Team (2019) showed that successful school leaders in Kansas redesign schools motivated staff to move more rapidly toward the goals set forth in the project. However, in some of our Kansas redesign schools, an apparent lack of motivation undeniably determined the success or failure of each project. Research by Clark (2017) found that when principals inspired change in teachers, they in turn were personally affected and motivated by the changes in the culture of the school

building. This research underscores that these collaborative culture-building partnerships can create the most difference in the school environment.

Engage Students and Families

Espinoza (2013) defined teacher leadership and noted that strong teacher leaders collaborated effectively. School leaders must manage these relationships to create harmony. According to Brazer and Keller (2006), building leaders who showed commitment to teachers and allowed a high degree of autonomy and they fostered engagement and instructional change. Historically, principals have been managers—not facilitators—of a peaceful and collegial working environment. Juhel (2016) stated:

The skillset the participants described as necessary to address the complexities inherent in operating their institution includes the ability to build, develop, and manage effective administrative teams, almost like executive cabinets, and to delegate administrative functions while remaining well informed in order to be able to make critical decisions (p. 596).

The relationship between colleagues is complicated at best. Healthy interpersonal skills contribute to the harmony and growth of the school environment and create an atmosphere of trust in which change can happen.

Copland (2003) found the connections between colleagues determined the teaching environment. School leaders can manage these relationships to encourage harmony. Historically, the principal's role was to manage the organization of the school environment and not to facilitate the peaceful and collegial working environment necessary to create change.

Juhel (2016) concluded from direct conversations with principals that “the ability to lighten a moment with humor, to engage people in a way that makes them feel good about being here and good about me and the leadership of the building is an important contribution” (p. 597). Additionally, Fullan (2002) stated that future principals need the skills to transform the organization using people and teams.

Leadership Theoretical Framework

Adaptive Leadership

Heifetz, Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky (2009) define adaptive leadership as “the practice of mobilizing people to tackle tough challenges and thrive” (p. 2). This model builds on the fact that it takes time to build leadership and create change. Furthermore, leading during times of change requires a leader to understand that the change process depends on building upon the past, allowing time for initiatives to grow, acquiring new knowledge, and rearranging and shifting personal beliefs. Adaptive leadership asks leaders to accept the differences between adaptive challenges and technical problems. Heifetz et al. (2009) stated that “it is the adaptive elements that threaten success” (p. 9) and that merely expending our effort on technical problems will not lead to sustained positive change.

The practice of adaptive leadership is about helping people navigate the murky waters of letting go of the past and sorting through the deep conversation about how we create sustainable change while understanding that the process can be arduous. Heifetz and Linsky (2004) noted that adaptive leadership challenges affect the heart and require leaders to challenge the values and beliefs—and at times—the way of life of those being led. The following section presents *Four Domains for rapid school improvement: An implementation framework* (Jackson et al., 2018) and the adaptive leadership model (Heifetz et al., 2009) for this literature review.

According to Obolensky (2014), change is messy and there is no one right way to lead in what might be called chaos. The skill of leading during times of change, according to a framework of adaptive leadership, means that sustaining a change in any direction can be difficult.

Connecting Components of the Literature

Contained in this literature review are four components of leadership that influence school and district leaders as they lead change efforts and redesign schools. *Four Domains for rapid school improvement: An implementation framework* (Jackson et al., 2018) clearly specifies the areas of focus needed for change to occur. It is daunting to consider all the literature written about educational leadership. *Four Domains for rapid school improvement: An implementation framework* (Jackson et al., 2018), and other literature illustrate the extensive research around leadership skills and dispositions. This literature review has laid the groundwork to identify the knowledge and skills necessary to lead change.

Chapter Summary

This chapter intended to organize the literature around school district and building-level leadership in four areas—turnaround leadership, talent development, instructional transformation, and culture shift—and to connect those ideas to school redesign. Doing so required the use of *Four Domains for rapid school improvement: An implementation framework* (Jackson et al., 2018) which emerged from a meta-analysis of current leadership literature by WestEd, a research, development, and services agency that works with educators and state agencies to develop these ideas as they relate to school redesign. Extensive research supports these four key areas, as documented in this literature review.

Chapter 3 - Methodology

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the dispositions and skills necessary for Kansans Can School Redesign Project school administrators to lead during times of change. The previous chapter discussed the literature components of leadership during such times of change. This chapter discusses the methodology for the research study. To begin, it is important to reiterate the three guiding research questions for this qualitative case study:

1. How do school leaders navigate challenges during the change process?
2. How do leaders determine the skills and dispositions most beneficial during rapid change, including during the COVID-19 pandemic?
3. Why do school leaders perceive certain skills and dispositions as valuable during change processes?

Rationale for Qualitative Inquiry

Creswell (2015) noted that the qualitative method of research assumed that a certain set of circumstances can be socially constructed and took into consideration what the participants perceived to be true about a given situation. Later, Creswell (2015) stated that qualitative research was meaningful if the writing and research put the reader “in touch” (p. 278) with the setting being studied. Within one district, each of the school buildings had a unique atmosphere that I experienced during my time with them. My opportunity to be part of the district’s distinct sociocultural context, in addition to certain commonalities, such as the rural setting, gave me an opportunity to delve deeply into the localities, which supply the setting for the reader, as emphasized by Creswell (2015). Creswell (2015) further noted that the “personal style of qualitative research” (p. 16) allows the researcher to integrate personal experiences, such as my interactions with each of the schools as their redesign specialist. The qualitative case study was

aimed to pursue insight into a unique situation (Morse & Field, 1995). My current employment as a director at KSDE allows me to be in close contact with the survey participants and to be deeply connected to the semi-structured interview participants.

Additionally, Denzin (2017) noted that researchers worldwide are working to implement an approach that will help make sense of our current conditions. For school leaders, this COVID-19 pandemic created situations that are difficult to understand; no amount of coursework could prepare anyone for these situations. The researcher needs commitment to understand and interpret any given situation that may lead to a different understanding (Denzin, 2017). In agreement with Denzin (2017), I hope to use this research to define those unique qualities and dispositions that our school leaders require during this dramatic time of change and to use the findings to “teach one another” (Denzin, 2017, p. 14).

Lastly, Rosenthal (2016) noted that qualitative research is used for two reasons: “when the researcher is interested in understanding the ‘why’ behind peoples’ behavior or actions” (p. 2), and when the researcher “is interested in better understanding a particular topic from the perspective of participants” (p. 3). For this research, I as the researcher was distinctively positioned, because of my subjectivities and the current professional role, to explore and understand why the study participants use certain skills and disposition during times of change.

Methodological Framework

Schwandt (1994) defined interpretivists as those working to understand the real world and the first-person account of a situation. The use of interpretivism allows the researcher to create a way to understand the social world (Bhattacharya, 2017), which in this context would be that of the school district chosen for the case study. Schwandt (1994) further noted that the interpretivist works to create meaning through social interactions. This research study allowed

me to closely study the collective significance and meaning of the social context of school leaders engaged in redesigning their schools in rural Kansas, as driven by the KSBoE (2017). My background knowledge in interpretivism theory allowed me to carry out the research and analysis.

According to Thanh and Thanh (2015), there is a “tight connection between interpretivist paradigm and qualitative methodology as one is a methodological approach, and one is a means in collecting data” (p. 26). Further, Thanh and Thanh (2015) stated that when a researcher uses interpretivism they are looking to understand the experiences and observations of individuals. For the purposes of my research, the intention was to collect data and then use that data to understand the experiences of leaders during times of major change. Denzin and Lincoln (2008) expand on how qualitative research interprets the researcher’s surroundings over a span of time and includes the researcher’s observations. Using interpretivism as the methodology for the study allowed me to engage with the data and the participant interviews and to take into consideration the adaptive leadership model, that was presented in Chapter 2.

Vrasidas (2001) stated, “to understand the meanings of actors the researcher has to study them in naturally occurring situations and not in highly controlled laboratory settings” (p. 3). This research was conducted to understand the actors, or the building and district leaders, as they guided the work of redesigning schools while also managing rapid change due to the pandemic. Further, Vrasidas (2001) reiterated the importance of interpretive research, which allows the researcher to learn more about situations and experiences. My research intended to discover more about the skills and dispositions leaders need during times of rapid change.

Characteristics of Case Studies

Swanborn (2010) noted that the use of the case study methodology involves studying participants and noting how they view the situation at hand. This study provided a valuable opportunity to examine the lived experiences of school leaders during times of rapid change. Yin (2017) stated, “you would want to do a case study because you want to understand a real-world case” (p. 37). Swanborn (2010) further stated, “if we want more information about what (groups of) people perceive and decide, in relation to their interaction during a certain period, a case study seems to be the optimal strategy” (p. 27). Therefore, the goal of this research was to question the participants about the social structure of the school culture and provide an opportunity to check the reality of the situation from one participant to another (Swanborn, 2010). According to Swanborn (2010), a qualitative case study allows researchers to closely examine how the participants view the situation at hand. This study attempted to understand how leaders work through interruption, such as that presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, while at the same time working through a major redesign process. Ideas and thoughts about the open-ended survey data, interviews, and field notes gave me a chance to analyze the data with a broad understanding of the participants and the social situation of a school building in the redesign process.

Kyburz-Graber (2004) claimed that “a sound case study procedure is extremely demanding and requires cooperation between various partners for triangulation purposes and between the researchers in the data analysis and interpretation phases as well as when evidence is drawn and findings are generalized” (p. 63). Although I was the only researcher in this study, it did not minimize the importance of relationship building between the participants and me, nor did it minimize the triangulations that were feasible with multiple data sources and strategies

such as member checking (Stake, 1995) in the design. This research project was positioned to a case study methodology because it was driven by the research questions of “why” and “how” and these types of questions are the key ingredient of qualitative case study methodology (Stake, 1995). Furthermore, this study involved multiple data sources obtained from multiple types of participants, namely a qualitative survey of 254 district and building redesign leader participants, interviews of four redesign school leaders, and documents and artifacts collected when available and appropriate. Klenke, Martin, and Wallace (2016) showed that stories told during the research process of a case study help to provide a certain authenticity and responsibility to the information gathered. The circumstances I found myself in at this time at the KSDE gave me an opportunity to undertake an in-depth examination of the work of school leaders and discuss their stories during times of change. These stories are at the heart of this case study.

Stake (1995) viewed the case study format as “the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case coming to understand it’s [*sic*] activity within important circumstances” (p. xi). This study was a way to understand the skills and dispositions possessed by school leaders, specifically under conditions of rapid change, such as those prevailing during the COVID-19 pandemic. This case study created an opportunity for me to access the experiences of the participants in their natural settings, as my job currently requires me to work with each of the systems included in the case study. The instrumental case study site for this research volunteered to participate in the KSBoE’s Kansans Can School Redesign Project, and I worked as a facilitator for their process. My position may be advantageous to a deep exploration of the experiences of the individual participants and their perspectives on those experiences.

Baxter and Jack (2008) articulated that case study research “enables the researcher to answer ‘how’ and ‘why’ type questions, while taking into consideration how a phenomenon is

influenced by the context within which it is situated” (p. 556). This research was focused to answer the research questions and help me understand the experiences of leaders during a time of school redesign. Stake (2005) indicated that the case study is not a methodological choice but rather a choice of what is going to be studied. Therefore, for the purpose of this research, I elected to study one rural Midwestern school community that was involved in a redesign process and that graciously allowed me to take part in its journey. This school community formed the basis for the instrumental case study.

Jansen (2010) posited that qualitative research is based on the interpretation of data collection and analysis that starts with some data collection. Tellis (1997) identified the use of the case study as a qualitative method allowing for exploratory study. This use of a qualitative survey helped me develop a hypothesis and then lead to a participant sampling in the semi-structured interviews. Yin (2017) stated that case studies offer a good way to interpret and explore a specific issue. For the purposes of this research, the instrumental case study allowed for an interpretation of the skills and dispositions of school leaders during a change process.

Creswell and Miller (2000) saw the case study methodology as a research method used to describe and provide an interpretation of a social setting during a specific time period. According to Kyburz-Graber (2004), the qualitative case study is an appropriate method for understanding how school leaders bring about a required change in the environment, and thus increase student achievement and staff involvement. Kyburz-Graber (2004) further noted that painting the picture of social situations and allowing a research conversation to emerge in full collaboration allows for the illustration and interpretation of events.

Research Design

The methodology chosen for this study was an instrumental case study. The case data to be studied and analyzed is an open-ended survey that was given to school leaders involved in a redesign process; also used were interviews with four school redesign leader participants. This qualitative case study represents data collected over approximately 24 weeks, during the time of rapid change of the school redesign process and the COVID-19 pandemic. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to describe the dispositions and skills needed by school leaders during times of rapid change.

The case study was bound by the lived experiences of a Kansas school district and the building and district leaders who were amid rapid school change. First, survey data was collected across all school districts that are involved in the redesign process to provide a rich source of data. Then, I selected four leaders with whose school district I have a professional relationship. I am also involved with this district through my work in the school redesign process. Data from these four school leaders was then collected through semi-structured interviews. This combined level of data collection, which included artifacts and field notes, helped inform my understanding of the participants' experiences and guided my interpretations. The case study methodology also provided me, the opportunity to use my own experiences to enrich the findings.

Data for this study was collected over a period of approximately 6 months (see Table 3.1). Multiple data sources were used and included a qualitative survey (see Appendix A) and semi-structured interviews (see Appendices C and D). Other data included documents, Zoom transcripts and artifacts. According to Yin (2017), a key strength of the case study format is the gathering of data from multiple sources (see Table 3.1).

Table 3.1.

Data Collection Methods

Data Collection Methods	Description
Qualitative survey	18-question survey sent to all 254 redesign system leaders
Semistructured interviews	Each of four participants: three 30-60-minute interviews
Documents, photographs, and artifacts	Documents related to leadership, recruitment, instructional improvement, communication, or culture shift; photographs; and other types of communication documentation

Data Analysis

According to (Dixon-Woods, Agarwal, Jones, Young, & Sutton, 2005) as prominent themes arise from qualitative analysis, they can bring forth additional areas that might be queried during the interview process. Themes emerged from the combined survey and interview data. Survey data was first quantified if possible detailing the number and percentage of respondents that identified with a particular response. Open ended comments were read, reread and coded as themes emerged.

Semi-structured interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. The qualitative data management and analysis software NVivo (Castleberry, 2014) was used in the analysis process. For example, the node function in NVivo allows researchers to “focus around a larger concept” (Jackson & Bazeley, 2019, p. 124), which gave me an opportunity to discover broader themes. As an analytical tool, NVivo also helped narrow the perspective of the data collected and allowed for deeper interpretations and findings (Jackson & Bazeley, 2019).

Qualitative Survey

The anonymous survey (see Appendix A) was used during this qualitative study and was drafted in cooperation with the Central Comprehensive Center, a national network of centers funded by the U.S. Department of Education. The partnership with this center was a natural outgrowth of my work at KSDE. During the 2017 Kansas State Department of Education, Kansans Can School Redesign Project, it became clear that leadership was indeed a major factor in the success or failure of the redesign projects (KSDE, 2019). To that end, I began work with the Central Comprehensive Center to determine the skills and dispositions necessary for school leaders during times of change. This helped me assist school leaders. *Four Domains for Rapid School Improvement: An Implementation Framework* (Jackson et al., 2018) became the focal point of my work concerning leadership during change as I continued to work with the school leaders in the Kansans Can School Redesign Project. The 18-question qualitative survey was administered to 254 school leaders of redesign schools in Kansas.

Design

The survey was built on the *Four Domains for Rapid School Improvement: An Implementation Framework* (Jackson et al., 2018). It appeared that school leaders weave in and out of the four domains. By narrowing my research focus to the previously mentioned school leaders involved in the redesign process, the survey results helped me determine how to support future leaders during times of change. Kelley et al. (2003) stated that when planning a research survey “the following issues should be considered: (1) planning the content of a research tool; (2) questionnaire layout; (3) interview questions; (4) piloting; and (5) covering letter” (p. 263). The Four Domains for Rapid School Improvement Framework (Jackson et al., 2018) described above gave me a background for planning the research survey tool, enabled me to decide on a

questionnaire layout, provided support to finalize the interview questions, supplied information from an earlier pilot study, and gave me the opportunity to design a cover letter for participants.

In Four Domains for Rapid School Improvement: An Implementation Framework (Jackson et al., 2018) the areas that allowed for building of the survey's framework are suggested for each domain. Yin (2017) noted that the use of a survey—versus a simple question being asked—might lead to better data when participants are provided a list offering different levels of responses. This survey consisted of 18 questions with a general stem, asking the participants what actions have been taken regarding certain change-focused topics and to what extent those actions were taken. Jansen (2010) noted that surveys study a group; sampling determines the characteristics of a population. Therefore, a survey was an effective tool to determine the characteristics of school leaders as related to the dispositions and skills needed in times of major change. For the purposes of this research, the qualitative survey allowed me an opportunity to study a group of school leaders. Furthermore, the results from the survey offered direction that helped me to construct and refine my interview protocol and permit data source triangulation (Stake, 1995).

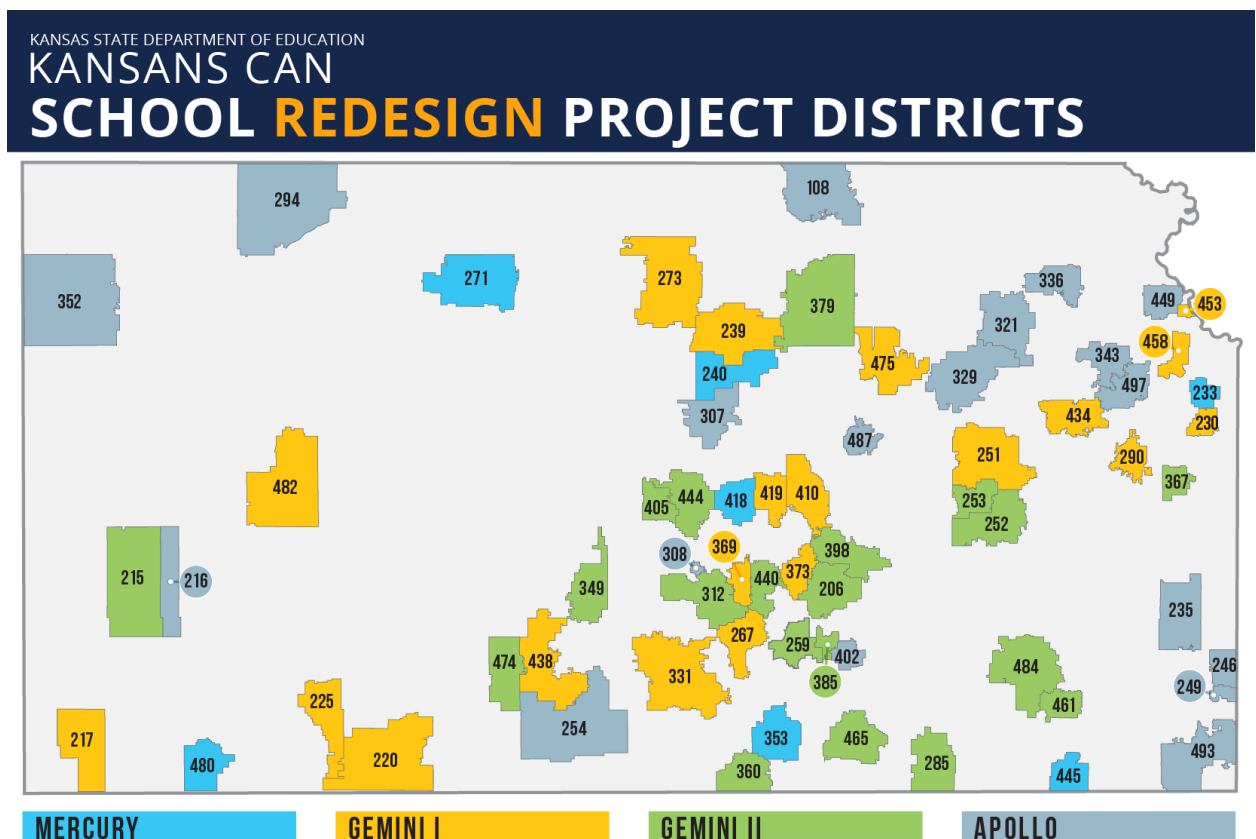
Survey Participants

This study concentrated on the experiences of district and building leaders. Saunders (2012) noted the importance of carefully considering the selection of participants. The qualitative survey participants were current redesign district superintendents and school principals. I believe that my work provided ample opportunity to consider the participants who were chosen with the objective of determining the skills and dispositions needed by school leaders in times of rapid change.

Since the inception of the Kansans Can School Redesign Project, 66 school districts have volunteered to engage in this project. These districts range in size from 137 students to 30,000 students (KSDE, 2017). All 254 building and district leaders in the Kansans Can School Redesign Project received the survey. Additionally, I sent a co-signed email, with the KSDE commissioner and deputy commissioner of education, soliciting participation. This survey, given to all of the Kansans Can School Redesign Project superintendents and building leaders, was intended to capture broad perceptions concerning the skills and dispositions necessary to effectively lead change from the viewpoint of building and district redesign leaders (see Figure 3.2).

Figure 3.1.

School Redesign Project Districts



Gaining Access

Access was gained to each school system that had applied for and been granted participation in the Kansans Can School Redesign Project. This involved each system gaining approval from their local school board, receiving support from teachers and staff members, and agreeing to participate in monthly training opportunities. Hancock and Algozzine (2017) advised that in case study research, it is important to choose the setting and participants who have the best information to help answer the research questions.

Analyzing Qualitative Survey Data

Analysis of the qualitative survey data guided the semi-structured questions asked during the interviews. Dey (2003) noted that analysis is not simply describing the data collected but rather interpreting the data and working to explain what has been learned. The qualitative survey results were analyzed for specific theme frequency, which, according to Saldaña (2015), is an “outcome of coding categorization, and analytic reflection” (p. 198). I took the time necessary to reflect and analyze the collected survey data to help inform the semi-structured interview questions. Saldaña (2015), noted that the answer the researcher is looking for can guide the coding method used but further suggested that decisions about which coding method to use should be “based on the methodological needs of the study” (p. 71). Furthermore, Saldaña (2015) noted that using an effective method of coding would allow the researcher to understand the “inner cognitive systems of participants” (p. 124). I analyzed the results for thematic analysis, and connected each of the responses to one of the *Four Domains for Rapid School Improvement: An Implementation Framework* (Jackson et al., 2018). These results helped to develop the questions needed for the semi-structured interviews.

Semi-structured Interviews

Frels and Onwuegbuzie (2013) noted that the interview process is a natural way to collect data in a meaningful way. Turner (2010) added, "it is critical to understand the need for flexibility and originality in the questioning" (p. 755). This study used a semi-structured interview approach; this type of interview structure was appropriate for a small-scale study because of its flexibility in devising a structure that allowed for the questions to be planned in advance (Drever, 1995). Additionally, this type of interview allowed for informal interactions (Turner, 2010), which I would argue are instrumental to my study, considering the relationships I established prior to entering the study phase. The focus of each interview was conversational (i.e., semi-structured) and differentiated (i.e., individualized probing questions) for each of the participants (Yin, 2017). Spradley (1979) suggested that to learn from people, the interviewer needs to speak in modest amounts and avoid directing, thus allowing the participants to express their thoughts. Having a semi-structured interview protocol for all participants provided the consistency needed across all interviews without compromising my ability to attend to the particularities or unique cues that emerge from the conversations with each individual that could be relevant or worthy of further exploration.

Research Site and Gaining Access

This study involved school leaders from Kansas who have been engaged with the Kansans Can School Redesign Project. These same leaders have also been faced with leading during the COVID-19 pandemic, further stressing the need for strong leadership during times of turmoil. As the KSDE director of accreditation, I am privileged to have been a part of this systems prior to the pandemic; I continue to closely support each of these schools during the crisis and will continue to do so afterward. I received full approval from the Kansas State

University Institutional Review Board (see Appendix E) to conduct this human-subject case study. This section presents further details regarding the proposed research design. The four school leaders who participated in the semistructured interviews were articulate and collectively have more than 25 years of school leadership experience. My role supporting the training efforts of the school redesign process in Kansas continues and provided ease of access and permission to conduct this research at each of these sites.

This rural community has a graduation rate of 80.3%, which is slightly below the Kansas average 88.3% and has a dropout rate of 2.3%, which is also slightly above the Kansas average 1.3%, (KSDE, 2021). Further, the district reports spending approximately \$12,320.00 per pupil, in regard to the normal operations of the schools, which excludes expenditures related to capital outlay and building improvement expenditures. The attendance rate can be described as the rate at which students are present at school, and is 93.6%, and is again slightly below the state average of 94.5% (KSDE, 2021). According to the city information the population of this site is currently 4,489 and the median age of the population is 41 years old, and 90% speak English as their first language (City of Prairie Ville, 2021). This site is also well representative of many of the schools in Kansas relative to size, demographics and geographic location.

Design

Each participant was interviewed three times to allow for the constraints of the pandemic and for clarification of previous interview information. Each interview was scheduled approximately 2–4 weeks apart. These 30–60 minute semi-structured interviews (see Appendices C and D) with Kansas school leaders were primary data sources for this study. Rosenthal (2016) noted that question design is paramount to a successful interview and that the questions must be well thought out, singular in nature, and clearly stated. Kvale and Brinkman

(2009) explained that the interview could be conducted using a side-by-side resource for the theoretical questions to be answered and a list of flexible questions to be asked during the general interview. Using Kvale and Brinkman's (2009) interview process allowed me to maintain an informal, conversational nature. I asked all leaders the same basic interview questions, although I replaced the district-level emphasis with a building-level emphasis for each of the participants, as I believed that, situationally, the experiences were going to be the same.

Interview Participant Selection

One school superintendent and three school building-level administrators from the respondent pool detailed above were then asked to participate in semi-structured interviews. This is a purposive sample, which allowed me to "concentrate on people with particular characteristics who will better be able to assist with the relevant research" (Suen, Huang, & Lee, 2014, p. 3). The interview participants were selected from those with whom I have worked closely throughout the school redesign process; as such, some might consider it a convenience sample, and appropriate consent for participant was received (see Appendix E).

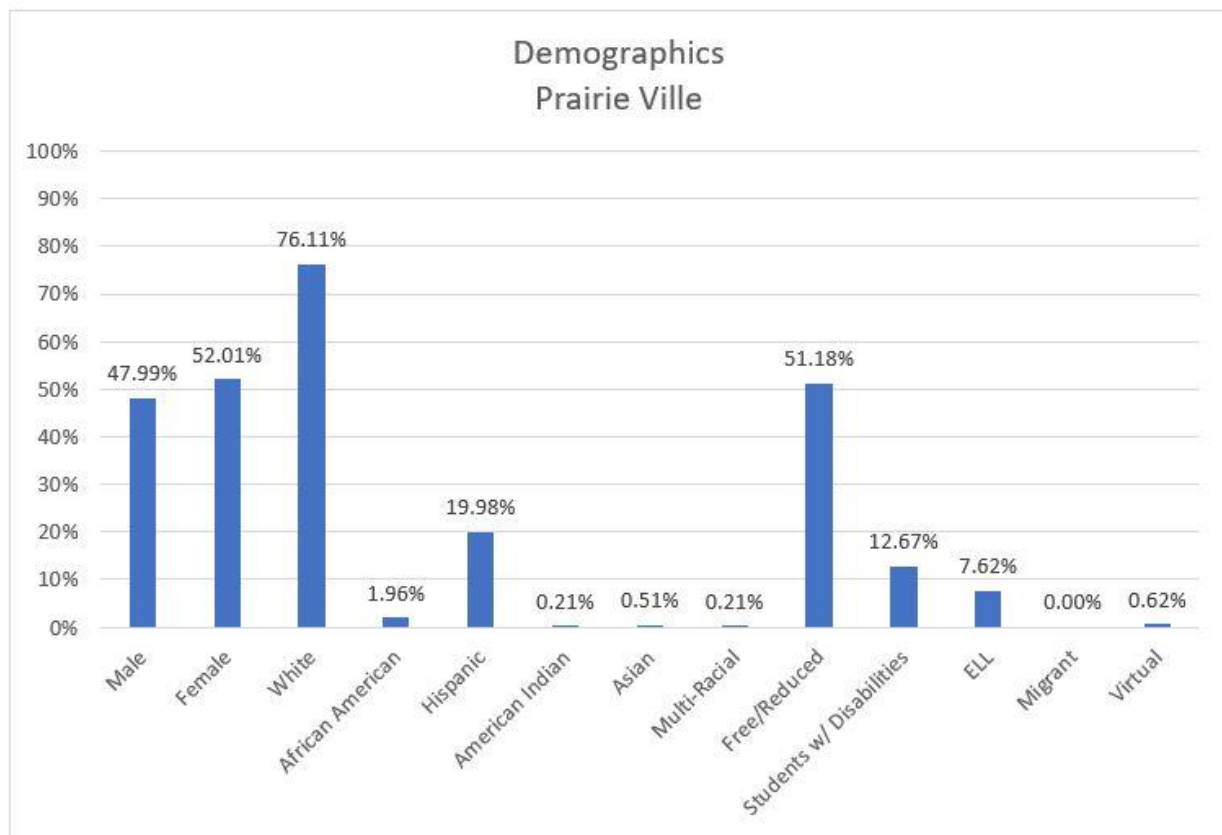
However, it is important to note that my selection of interview participants was grounded primarily in each of the participants ability to address the leadership qualities and experiences and to answer my research questions. The fact that the potential interview participants come from the group of school leaders that I worked closely with was advantageous to building rapport, and thus allowed access to key contexts and insights that could be shared (Suen et al., 2014). The superintendent has longevity in this position and has attended to the relationship building process with his elected school board, therefore, this position experience helps him in the processes of decision-making while knowing those decisions will be supported at the school board level. Each of the school principals is relatively new in their role as a leader and have also

come from inside the school district so the positive relationships among staff exist already. It is important to note that this superintendent has hired each of these leaders as well, therefore it may be assumed they have a positive working relationship. These factors must be noted in my decision-making related to the interview participants.

The semi-structured interview participants were from a small rural Kansas school district, Prairie Ville, and remain participants of the Kansans Can School Redesign Project. Figure 3.2 shows all the school systems involved in the redesign project. This district serves approximately 970 students (see Figure 3.3). The district has a varied student population that includes cultural and socioeconomic subgroups (KSDE, 2019). The three building-level administrators come from the district's two elementary schools and the combined middle/high school. The lower elementary school leader is responsible for approximately 225 students, the upper elementary is responsible for 290 students, the middle school/high school leader has 390 students.

Figure 3.2.

Prairie Ville Demographics



Documents and Artifacts

Bowen (2009) recommended using a variety of documents to help put the qualitative context together and inform the work of the researcher. However, Yin (2017) cautioned that the collection of objects, such as documents and artifacts, can be time-consuming because those items may exist in abundance. For the purposes of this research, if there were particular items—such as strategic planning documents, school leader evaluations, and so forth—I collected those. An option to gather documents and photographs from relevant communications at the school level was available before the COVID-19 outbreak. Under the current circumstances of COVID-19, any requests from the participants who referenced a particular resource or document that was supportive or that provided clarifying information were made via email.

Any of these documents and artifacts provided further indications of the leadership qualities and processes necessary for school redesign in Kansas. They constitute some of the data to be collected for the current study, and they will also be a useful resource to be shared with future administrators wanting to work in any redesigned schools. For instance, forms—such as timelines, brochures, and letters to parents and community members—could highlight the skills and dispositions of the building leaders to demonstrate the path to redesign. Interview participants were asked about such documents and artifacts; the exact documents were made clearer, varied by each individual interviewee, and depended on the availability of such data sources and the willingness of each participant in the interview phase to disclose them.

Process

For research conducted at this level, ethical concerns are paramount. The federal government has established these concerns, and they include all aspects of guarding against the misuse of participants and allow for the assumption of privacy. Before beginning my research, I gained approval from the Kansas State University Institutional Review Board (Appendix E). I also obtained permission from the participants. Yin (2017) stated that “all research with human subjects needs to be reviewed and approved from ethical and safety standpoints” (p. 42). For the purposes of this research, all processes involved in obtaining permission to conduct the research were carried out before the initial survey.

My time as the redesign coach for these school districts and my support for them in my role as a director at the KSDE gave me the opportunity to conduct this case study research. Because of the amount of time I spent with this school system, every other month over almost two years, and then via Zoom during the pandemic of the 2020-2021 school year, I was given accessibility to these school leaders. Ideally, the interviews would have taken place face-to-face,

instead we were able to connect via Zoom, and spent time at the beginning of each interview connection on a personal level in order to ease the situation. As well, after the first interview, I sent specific follow-up questions to each of the participants in order to give them more time to reflect on their answers.

Analyzing Semi-Structured Interviews

Although the interview data was analyzed using NVivo software, Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2011) noted that “it is important to keep in mind that when conducting qualitative research, the researcher is the main tool for analysis” (p. 71). In other words, the researcher has an essential role in data analysis and interpretation, even when facilitated by digital tools such as NVivo. Saldaña (2011) suggested cycles of analysis to ensure quality. The data analysis and interpretation were tied to the *Four Domains for Rapid School Improvement: An Implementation Framework* (Jackson et al., 2018). These cycles of coding and looking for themes were then linked back to the research questions.

A first-cycle coding method involved values coding (Saldaña, 2015). Values coding seeks to determine the values, attitudes, and beliefs of the participants (Saldaña, 2015). Given that a goal of this qualitative study was to understand the skills and dispositions that school leaders needed during times of major change, values coding is appropriate for the first round of analysis. This first opportunity to analyze the data gave me a way to narrow the focus before a deeper analysis. Therefore, a first-cycle coding method was an appropriate analysis method for this study.

Regarding the transcribed semi-structured interview data, I organized and color-coded the interview transcripts for affective themes before rereading in more detail to identify common themes and thoughts (Creswell & Báez, 2020). Saldaña (2015) described second-cycle coding as

a method of narrowing and grouping larger first-cycle themes into fewer categories that could help narrow the findings. Locating these “pattern codes” (Saldaña, 2015, p. 236) helped to uncover inferential codes to reveal emerging themes. However, the gathering and collecting of the final data provided the best method to narrow the analysis down to the level necessary to truly help guide school leaders during a redesign process. This second-cycle coding method helped me to condense the large amount of data, to develop themes from the data, and to examine the social networks of school leaders and their pattern of human relationships (Saldaña, 2015).

Connecting the Data

The connections to the qualitative survey analysis and the semi-structured interviews are represented in the table below (see Table 3.2). As noted, the most important connections made from the data analysis were in two of the Four Domains for Rapid School Improvement: An Implementation Framework (Jackson et al., 2018), turnaround leadership and culture shift. These areas specifically include improved communication, short and long-term goal setting, increased collaboration and actions relative to stakeholder input.

Table 3.2.

Data Summary

Four Domains	Research	Data Collection Summary
Turnaround leadership	Improved communication, short/long term goal setting	More focus

Talent development	Recruitment and retention	Less focus
Instructional improvement	Diagnose and respond to student learning	Less focus
Culture shift	Increased collaboration, act on stakeholder input	More focus

More details will be given in Chapter 4 concerning the details of the findings.

Subjectivity in Qualitative Research

Bhattacharya (2017) stated that qualitative researchers must be clear about their “values, beliefs, and assumptions” (p. 36), as this subjectivity affects the interpretation of the data collected. If I do not note the personal ideals that I bring to this opportunity, it may be unclear what role my experiences play in shaping this study. Bott (2010) noted, “the ways in which one’s subjectivity was perceived by the group impacted the data itself” (p. 168). Making the participants aware of the work I have done as a school leader helps me to create a shared experience with them. Therefore, one aspect of this research was the partnership of the participants’ experiences in conjunction with those I bring to the table. Likewise, Sullivan (2002) understood the importance of qualitative research as a means of clarifying the connections between our lives and our work, as he underscored the relevance of our subjectivities to what we intend to explore. This qualitative case study is inseparable from my personal subjectivities, as I am deeply invested in finding ways to enhance and clarify the skills and dispositions school leaders need during times of dramatic change.

Having held positions of school leadership in Kansas as a classroom teacher, building leader, assistant superintendent, and superintendent, I felt compelled to conduct this research. School leaders need a support document that can help answer questions about leadership skills in times of dramatic change. Using a qualitative case study that includes survey data and semi-structured personal interviews with leaders in Kansans Can Redesign Schools Project, my intention was to determine what skills and dispositions leaders need to create change in their schools during a rapid change or redesign process. I have been deeply involved with the school system chosen for this study as their school redesign specialist during the past 24 months. I continued those partnerships through the COVID-19 pandemic, and it is this involvement that afforded me the opportunity to conduct this research.

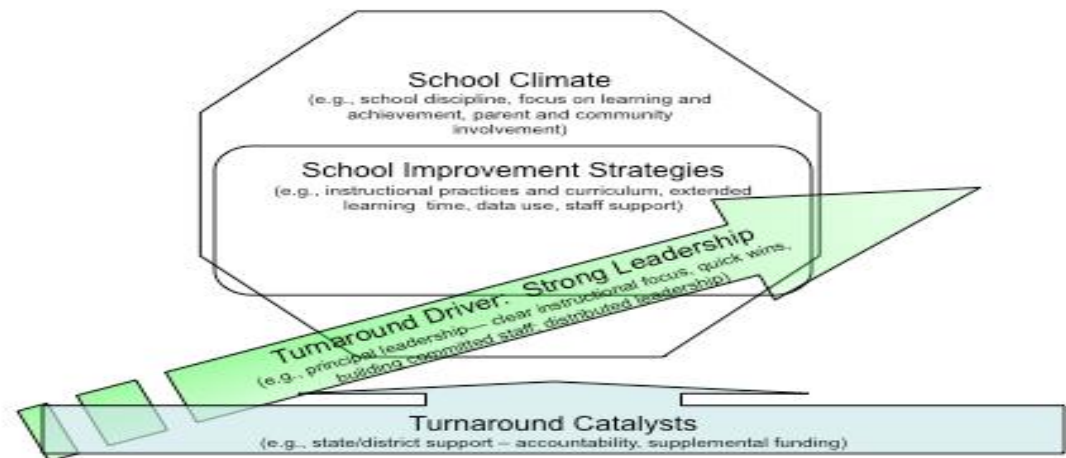
Effective leadership is a combination of many factors (see Figure 3.1). This combination is the key to school change, and the ability of school leaders to create a climate of risk-taking is paramount to success. Many factors affect a school leader's ability to create opportunities for change. Specifically, my experiences in Kansas schools, where a positive school climate exists, clearly identified school improvement strategies combined with strong leadership. My experiences have shown me that these characteristics appear to have the greatest effect on student achievement.

Bhattacharya (2017) stated, "qualitative research calls for the researcher to become increasingly vigilant in order to reflect and address the role of subjectivities in research with academic rigor and trustworthiness" (p. 36). By using survey data and the semistructured interviews, and with my background as a school leader, I was able to interpret the subjective qualities of school leaders to determine the skills and dispositions needed. These personal

subjectivities provided an opportunity to more fully interpret the survey data collected and to conduct a richer interview experience with the participants.

Figure 3.3.

Integrated Leadership Model



Data Storage

Survey Data

Data storage is an important consideration in qualitative research. Yin (2017) insisted that one could not be too careful when storing data and that the creation of multiple electronic backups is imperative. The survey data that was collected from the 254 building and district leaders was stored on a password-protected device and on a separate password-protected portable storage drive. After the analysis and presentation of the data, the information will continue to be protected securely on my personal password-protected device.

Interview Recordings and Transcripts

Richards (2014) explained, “one of the advantages of computer storage of data is that because future access to records is easy, they can be stored in any order, and the records and their order can be modified later” (p. 72). For the purposes of this research, I completed the audio

recordings and transcripts, with transcription taking place as soon as practical following the actual interviews. These recordings and transcriptions were also stored on my personal-password protected device.

Artifacts

Any artifacts that were collected during the research project were secured digitally and stored on my password-protected personal device. A signed informed consent form with printed names was collected from each participant (see Appendix B). All interview participants received pseudonyms, as did the school district, and any other person, location, or entity mentioned in the interviews.

Trustworthiness and Rigor

According to Krefting (1991), taking the time to consider the data—and not the participants—helped me to determine the credibility of the information and to determine whether it is typical. Likewise, Tracy (2010) noted that the credibility of qualitative research is enhanced when the researcher can create a space for reflection that adds additional elaboration of the findings, even if all the research participants may not show agreement in their responses. For this study, several strategies are in place to help address its quality and credibility.

Data Source Triangulation

According to (Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe, & Neville, 2014) triangulation across different data sources may produce a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under study. In the proposed study, the data collection combined a qualitative survey, semistructured interviews, and documents and artifacts. While they each focus on slightly different aspects of the guiding research question, they complement one another and allow for a more holistic understanding regarding leader knowledge, dispositions, and experiences.

Member Checking

Member checking, also known as “participant or respondent validation,” addresses any unintended bias that a researcher may have concerning the findings (Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, & Walter, 2016, p. 1802). The transcripts were returned to participants for review after each interview; this member-checking process gave participants an opportunity to review and raise questions or make corrections that otherwise would not be possible (Birt et al., 2016). This is not to say that by merely engaging member checking, the researcher is guaranteed credibility. Rather, it recognizes that understanding is constructed by the researcher–participant interaction, because relationship building is part of what shapes the research process and, subsequently, the overall trustworthiness and rigor of the study (Stake, 1995).

Attending to the Researcher’s Subjectivities

According to Kline (2008), the researcher’s prior experiences will frame their research, thus affecting its trustworthiness and rigor. This chapter details my subjectivities. By doing so, I am made aware of how those subjectivities may have influenced the ways I interacted with my participants. This caused me to pay more attention to certain things during the data collection and analysis and made me aware of how I view and interpret the data as grounded in my subjectivities, even though I was guided by the literature and theoretical framework chosen. This allowed me to remain reflective and be more vigilant when encountering data that might be contrary to my subjectivities (Yin, 2017). All of these considerations were helpful in building the trustworthiness and credibility of the research.

Chapter Summary

The goal of this chapter was to present a plan for conducting this qualitative case study research. I first examined my role and subjectivities as a qualitative researcher and presented

information about my background in the area of school leadership. I then discussed the rationale for choosing a qualitative case study as the methodology for the study. I also discussed the specifics of participant selection and recruitment, data collection, and data analysis. I concluded this chapter with information about how I would address the issues of trustworthiness and rigor that are key to the research process and its findings.

Chapter 4 - Findings

This chapter presents data that suggest the skills and dispositions needed during times of major change. The global COVID-19 pandemic continues to define a time of major change for school leaders. As I present the findings from my research related to the skills and dispositions that school leaders need during times of major change, I hold no perceived notion that these skills and dispositions will make the work of school leaders easier or less troublesome. The basis of this study is that educational leaders need certain skills and dispositions to be successful during times of change, whether that is a voluntary or forced change.

Chapter 3 detailed how this qualitative case study would be conducted to determine the skills and dispositions needed by school leaders. This research included an open-ended survey to school superintendents and principals. In addition to the survey, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a selected superintendent and three principals. This opportunity allowed me to compare the survey data with specific characteristics from the interviews to determine the skills and dispositions necessary to lead schools during times of dramatic change.

This chapter presents the anonymous qualitative survey findings and thematic considerations from the semi-structured interviews. The analysis of the qualitative survey supported the development of the semi-structured interview questions. The survey was analyzed for theme frequency and showed larger categories of thinking from the participants. This analysis, coupled with the literature review, led to the development of the semi-structured interview questions. The semi-structured interviews were transcribed; then a value coding method was used to determine the overall beliefs and attitudes of the participants. See Table 4.1 for a comparison showing how each of these data collection methods combined detail the skills and dispositions needed by school and district leaders during times of dramatic change.

Table 4.1.*Data Comparisons*

Four Domains	Survey Questions	Semi-Structured Interview Questions
Turnaround leadership	4, 5, 5a, 6, 10	1, 3, 9
Talent development	7, 7b, 8, 9	2, 5, 6
Instructional transformation	11, 11b, 12, 12a	7, 8
Culture shift	13, 13b, 14, 14a, 15	4, 10

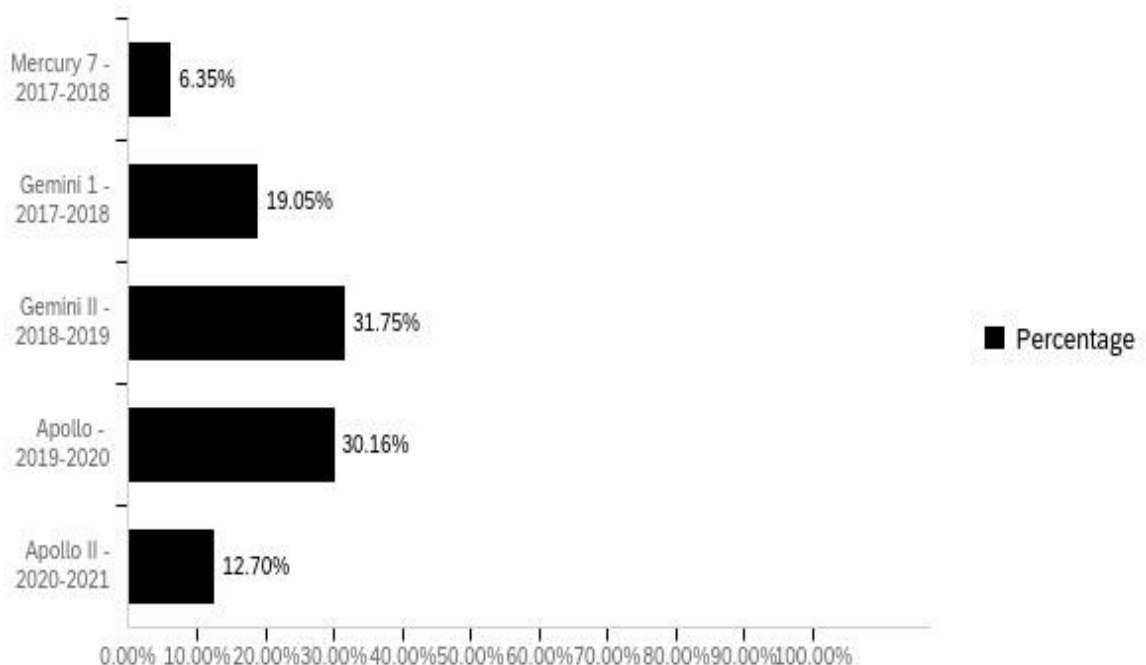
Multiple coding cycles narrowed the theme findings and uncovered the thought patterns of the participants. First, I will discuss the findings of the survey, and then I will discuss the findings of the semi-structured interviews.

Survey Thematic Narrative

This section examines the survey for thematic trends and details the themes that emerged from the closed-ended and open-ended survey responses received. The survey was sent to 254 district and school leaders who were involved in the Kansans Can School Redesign Project. A total of 113 responses is considered acceptable, meaning they had been fully answered, resulting in 44.4% return and response rate. The survey's demographic information indicated that of the 113 survey respondents, 68% were principals and 32% were superintendents; the respondents are geographically representative across the state. Each participant entered the state-wide redesign initiative at various times during the past four years (see Figure 4.1).

Figure 4.1.

Geographical Representation



Qualitative Survey Analysis

The survey questions focused on the four framework topics with the intent to gain contextual knowledge about the skills and dispositions that school leaders need during times of dramatic change. These four areas include turnaround leadership, talent development, instructional transformation and culture shift. During the survey analysis, it became evident that school leaders focused more on certain areas.

Turnaround Leadership

In the literature review, turnaround leadership was defined as prioritizing improved communication, monitoring short-term and long-term goals, and customizing and targeting support to meet the needs of the improvement process (Jackson et al., 2018). The survey asked,

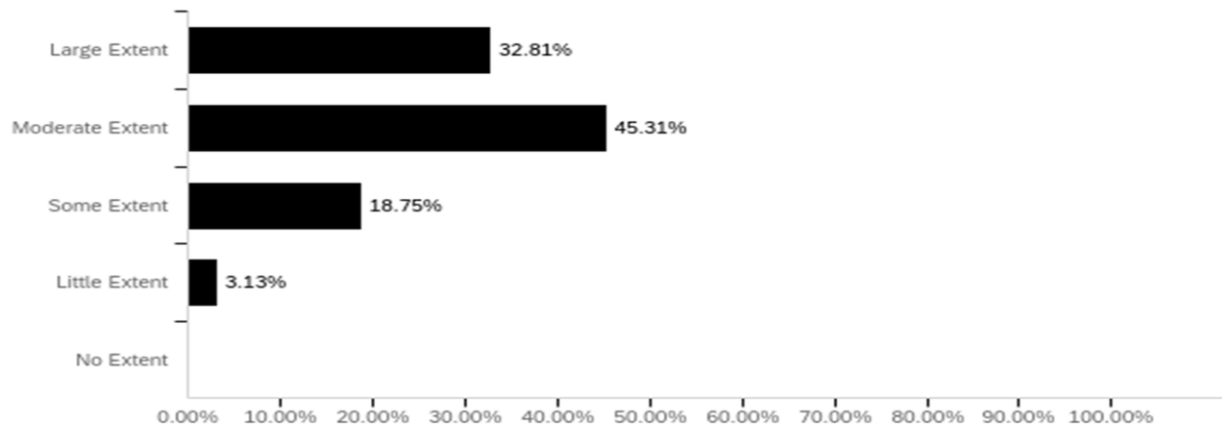
“what specific actions (e.g., writing policies, sharing resources, recruiting personnel) have you taken to communicate the need for redesign?” After analyzing the narrative open-ended responses, the commonly reported themes were communication, sharing, social media, and resources. The most cited responses included “shared resources, held community meetings, created detailed social media sites, and used surveys to get input.” Specifically:

The sharing of resources, many community events – not only to share but to gain their insight and support, using local television, radio, newspaper, and hosting of Chamber, Rotary, Lions Clubs, etc., allowed an opportunity to share what is going on in their schools.

Many other responses included phrases such as “sharing at school district level meetings, community focus groups, presentations to share the purpose and ask for feedback.” As noted in Figure 4.2, a vast majority of the respondents—almost 80%—indicated communication as key to success during times of change.

Figure 4.2.

Extent of Communication as Key to Success During Times of Change



Talent Development

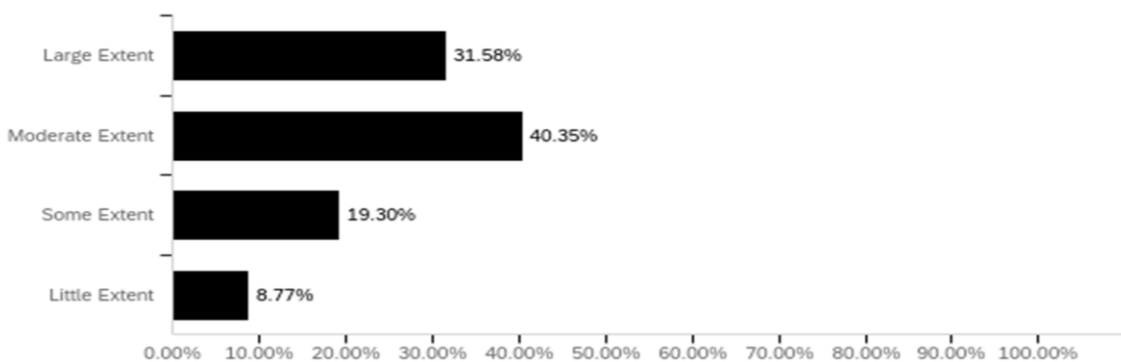
From the literature review, talent development was defined as recruiting, developing, retaining, and sustaining talent; targeted professional learning; and stating clear performance goals (Jackson et al., 2018). When the survey asked “what specific skills do you look for when recruiting talented teacher and principals,” respondents noted that they sought candidates with “a growth mindset” and those “willing to take risks, flexible and innovative.” Specifically, one respondent noted “having an open-mind, communication skills, risk taker, relationship builder, flexible, willing to fail and problem-solve,” as important considerations while recruiting staff.

When asked specifically about professional learning opportunities, the survey responses included words such as “personalized, trauma informed, project-based learning activities, and training.” The narrative responses included more detailed statements that reflected implementation of specific programs, especially programs that clearly address the social and emotional learning needs of students. One such learning activity could be “staff collaboration

around social emotional strategies, and collecting data from student perspectives.” The response to this question yielded 72% of participants indicating a large or moderate impact of aligning the learning needs of teachers to the Kansans Can School Redesign Project principles (see Figure 4.3).

Figure 4.3.

Professional Learning Opportunities for Teachers



When asked to provide any examples of performance expectations, the respondents noted that although it has been difficult to keep up with this traditional expectation during the pandemic:

Right now, we are just getting by, because COVID has eliminated our substitute pool, to help cover classes so we can talk about professional learning and performance. COVID has devastated our time lines, and to move forward without some sort of flexibility for the Redesign Project . . . and I might have mutiny on my hands.

Other responses to this question included “reflective thinking evident in daily lessons,” or “reviewing data,” and, “collaboration with colleagues/families.”

The survey asked respondents to “provide examples of changes in student support and instructional interventions.” The key theme to note is that the “student” appears to be at the center of these responses. For example, “create better communication lines with students,” “personalize student learning opportunities,” “students were allowed to work at their own pace,” and “increased capacity to support students.” These responses demonstrate how student support and instructional interventions that kept student-learning needs at the center of decision-making remain at the forefront during these opportunities for change, such as the Kansans Can School Redesign Project, or even during the difficulty of the pandemic.

Instructional Transformation

When the survey asked respondents for examples of “access to rigorous and relevant instructional practices for ALL students,” as evidenced by Figure 4.4, the survey indicated nearly 80% of respondents specified a large and moderate impact.

Figure 4.4.

Rigorous and Relevant Instructional Practices

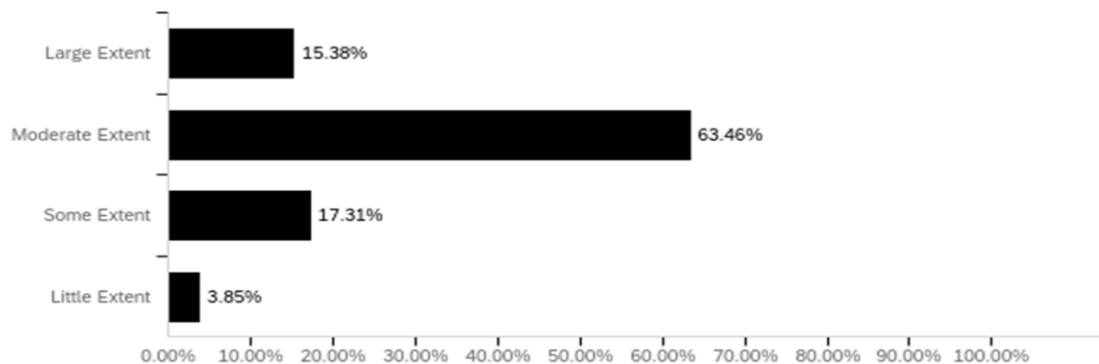
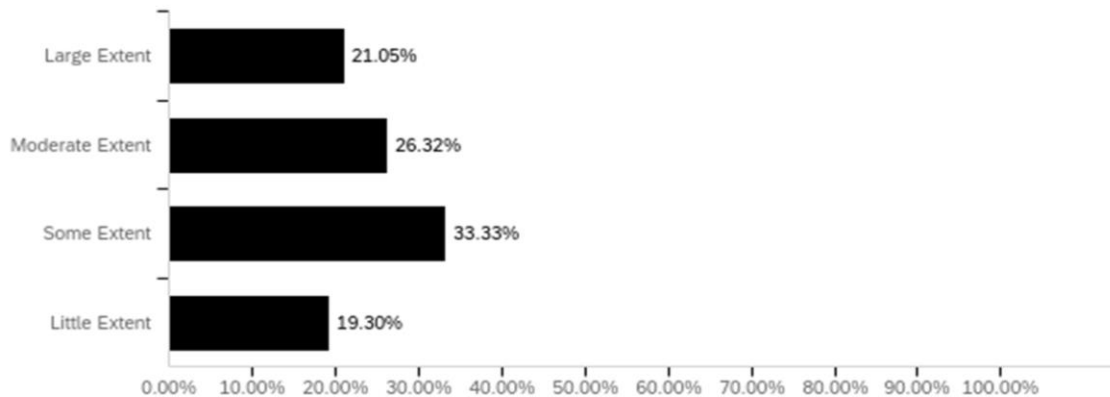


Figure 4.4 indicates that schools and school districts were providing access to rigorous and relevant instructional practices, even during the difficulty of the pandemic. For example, “our special education teachers have more access to a variety of relevant practices for our students,” and “we use proven curriculum that has been successful for our district assessments over the long haul.” Of note is “increased collaboration opportunities and academic support outside of school, personalized for teachers and students.” This apparent connection to rigorous and relevant instructional practices indicates that students continued to have effective instructional practices available.

Another question focused on the effects the change process had on professional learning relative to improving school system leader and teacher relationships. According to the responses, almost 50% of respondents noted that to a large and moderate extent, the professional learning had focused on this issue (see Figure 4.5).

Figure 4.5.

Improved Leader and Teacher Relationships

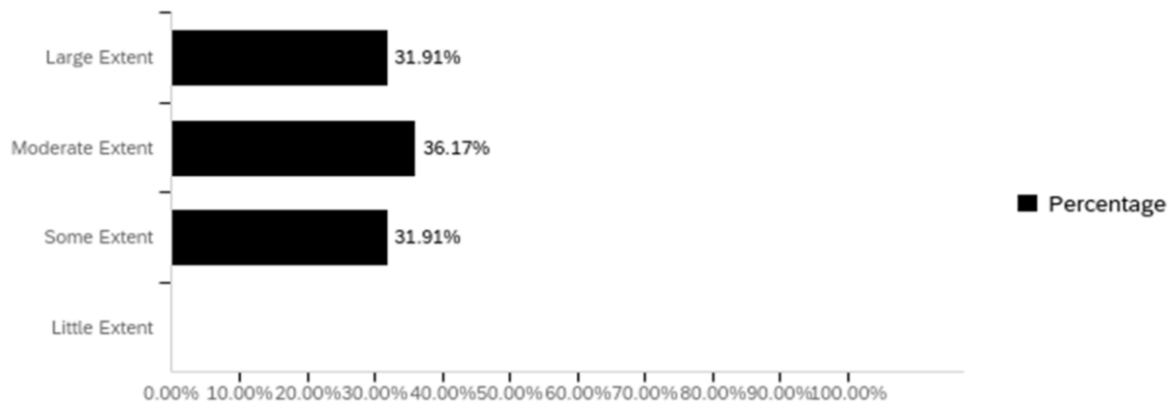


Culture Shift

The literature review defined culture shift as the ability to build an atmosphere focused on student learning and effort, soliciting action on stakeholder input, and being able to engage students and families in the pursuit of educational goals (Jackson et al., 2018). Regarding the questions that asked about “promoting an improved school culture of cooperation among staff,” and “do you feel effective in promoting cohesion,” 68% of respondents indicated to a large and moderate extent that they felt effective in these areas (see Figure 4.6).

Figure 4.6.

Improved Culture and Cooperation



Comments included, “I have an amazing staff that comes together and gets things done,” “staff has the desire to grow” and “I do feel effective in creating cohesion. I know there will always be undercurrents, but living out our excellence, permission to fail, and sustainability, we do have cohesion.” It is important to note that several comments addressed the effectiveness of coming together and working out the challenges. However, also included in the responses to this question were comments such as, “this has been challenging in a secondary setting,” and “yes, but this is difficult during the pandemic.”

When survey participants were asked to “describe some of your school’s/district’s outcomes that demonstrate how you have built a shared school culture,” respondents appeared to speak about alignment of all resources to that vision and how teacher voice became a priority. Comments highlighted “aligned school handbooks, centralized resources,” “school-wide planning,” or “more of a collective 5-8 building mentality instead of separate and independent hallways.” Specifically, regarding teacher voice, comments noted “increased processes and

opportunities for leadership/voice within the building by both staff and students” and “there is a great deal of support and union within the building.” Some comments continue to remark on the difficulties of the pandemic. Most notable:

Support and grace is given, but there is a panic right now, and I’m scared people will leave teaching because of COVID-19, and the response from some members of the community, state, and nation about how teachers should be in this crisis.

And finally, one comment stated “this has been the hardest year ever because of varying beliefs and happenings, outside of the school setting.” Again, it is worth noting that these responses indicate that the pandemic has unsettled educators and frightened many.

In the end, and relative to culture, the last survey question asked participants to take a moment to reflect on how the unplanned change event during the pandemic impacted their system’s progress of continuous improvement. Many comments positively supported having gone through a system of improvement under the Kansans Can School Redesign Project, as this process gave staff members the ability to adjust as a result of the pandemic. Respondents noted “our teachers and students were better suited, mentally, to deal with the punches that continue to come our way,” “we cannot imagine where we would have been without the redesign process,” and, “redesign has definitely impacted how we rose to the occasion with our buildings were closed last spring, and all the operational changes came our way.”

Conversely, some respondents addressed the difficulty of moving forward with continuous improvement efforts during the pandemic. For example, “the pandemic has caused us to stop working on some of the things that we had put in place,” “we put off major changes

this year,” “the pandemic has put a huge strain on our system,” and finally, “it (the pandemic) has nearly stopped us in our tracks.” Another powerful statement indicated:

We had a leadership change this year on top of the pandemic, which has been good and bad all at the same time. Everything is causing us to pause while still remaining intentional about where we are going and how we will get there. If anything, the necessity to slow down and back off a bit due to the pandemic has helped. The need for mastery-based grading is evident with the mix of student, in-person and distanced, quarantined, etc. our mindset has shifted and original plans and priorities are being reexamined.

Overall, it became apparent in the narrative responses that the pandemic influenced both much of the work school leaders are charged with implementing and the difficulties they encountered during the pandemic.

In conclusion, the survey data combined with an extensive literature review led to the creation of the semi-structured interview questions and deeper exploration from specific school leaders in the field. For example, because the survey responses noted many forms of communication, more detail was needed to understand how a school leader used communication to drive major change and the required skills and dispositions necessary to provide quality communications. Another area of deeper exploration was how these school leaders managed the intense global issues caused by the pandemic. The results of the survey addressed the four previously mentioned domains however, talent development was not strongly evidenced regarding the specific area of recruitment and retention of teachers. This may be due to the

chaos and need to survive the issues of the pandemic. However, targeting professional learning opportunities to the needs of staff and clearly stating performance goals might positively effect retention through a higher retention rate. At the time of this research, recruitment had not yet become an area of focus for school leaders. Creating the interview questions based on the pandemic-unique qualitative survey data allowed for greater understanding of the skills and dispositions leaders needed during this time of change.

Semi-Structured Interview Thematic Analysis

Site Description

The site for this study, Prairie Ville School District, was intentionally chosen because of the ease of access. This school district serves approximately 950 students; it is comprised of four building sites; and approximately 43% of the students qualify for the federal free and reduced lunch program. The student population consists of 20% as Hispanic, a small percentage represent other populations, and approximately 76% of the students are White (see Figure 3.3). The district and building-level administrators have more than 25 years of educational leadership experience.

Participant Profile

Sam, Superintendent

The school district superintendent chosen for this instrumental case study, Sam, has been a school and district leader for more than 15 years in two districts. He is a middle-aged White male, very energetic and devoted to his work as an educational leader. Sam has been the district leader for Prairie Ville Schools for seven years. He has hired his current administrative team, both from inside and outside the school district. Sam holds undergraduate and graduate degrees

in teaching and school and district leadership. He is father to five children, all of whom have been part of Kansas public education and have attended Prairie Ville Schools.

Analysis of the transcripts from Sam's three interview sessions that occurred over several weeks shows the emergence of broad themes. At the start of the analysis, I wanted to consider Sam's values, attitudes and beliefs. However, as stated in Chapter 3, using NVivo as a tool for analysis only provided an opportunity for me to be the key analyst. I noticed in a first review of Sam's transcripts that he is thoughtful and articulate and that he carefully planned each response. Sam's values and his judgement for what is important as a leader became evident. He identifies having good communication, building a strong team and creating trust as his personal leadership values.

Regarding communication as an important leadership skill, Sam stated, "having challenging and difficult conversations" and "being transparent," when reflecting on what skills he used with staff to be successful. Sam elaborated on the importance of communication with phrases such as, "we talked together a lot," and "we've been a long time talking about," further indicating the value he places on communication. Additionally, Sam mentioned "picking up the phone and calling" or "making personal contacts" as valuable leadership skills.

The literature review from Chapter 2 indicated that turnaround leadership, one of the *Four Domains for Rapid School Improvement: An Implementation Framework* (Jackson et al., 2018) included a strong need for communication. Sam's interview responses proved the importance of this skill from the lens of the superintendent. Further, Sam noted that "sharing ideas" and "restating the vision" as key to success. Another of the *Four Domains for Rapid School Improvement: An Implementation Framework* references the ability to build culture in the pursuit of educational goals (Jackson et al., 2018). Sam mentioned several times, "strong

relationships,” “planted with relationships,” “trust,” “you’re in it with them,” and “bring the team together” as indications of his skill relative to creating a culture bent on positive relationships.

Finally, the most important and narrowed focus of Sam’s transcript analysis indicated that he was driven by shared decision-making. His words, “shared decision-making as a collaborative effort,” “I’ll be there to support,” “we’ve learned,” “we won’t force,” “we could do better,” and “we build the team” all indicated the importance of sharing the decision-making process with his administrative and teacher teams. However, Sam also noted the importance of his role in making the tough decisions, especially during the pandemic. He said that the pandemic tried hard to pull the vision of changing the learning environment for students off course; however, because his staff members had built a strong trusting team that was able to communicate and work well together, he felt they were maneuvering the difficulties stronger than some schools.

Ed, Middle School/High School Principal

Ed is the middle school and high school principal and has eight years of experience in leading at this level. His leadership experience comes solely in Prairie Ville, and he resides in this area as well. Ed is in his mid-40s and is also raising a family in this community. He holds an undergraduate and a graduate degree; has taught in the school system where he is leading; and has some leadership support in athletics and activities, curriculum and instruction and technology to support his work as a building leader. It was very evident that Ed loves children and leading teachers; but above all else, he is jovial and enjoys working with people.

Analysis of Ed’s transcripts, which resulted from two Zoom sessions of more than 40 minutes each, I discovered the importance Ed places on enjoying the people and the work in front of him. Phrases such as, “being with my staff,” and “relying on our administrative

leadership team,” all indicated that Ed values the connections he has with his peers and teachers. Evidence of this was also apparent when reflecting on how Ed learned through the Kansans Can School Redesign process and through COVID-19 about shared decision-making. Many references regarded the collective “we”—the team of teachers with which he works with. Ed’s learning and value of others was apparent with comments such as, “one of the hardest parts is that it is (change) not driven by the principal” and “at the end of the day, we made the decision together.” Ed noted how hard this was for him from the beginning, and that not being allowed to just fix everything himself was a difficult shift.

A deeper transcript analysis unveiled that Ed felt it was his role to step aside and create the opportunities for his staff members to work together in a safe environment where all opinions could be shared, even though he may not have originally wanted the proposed changes. For example, he stated, “where there’s going to be lots of different opinions, directing that meeting into not letting someone just take over” as a key skill he used to moved teachers forward. Another example during the coding and analysis provided a chance to see how Ed’s human relationships evolved over time as a leader. Ed noted that, “a knack for one reading between the lines or seeing what’s really being said,” has helped him build trust with staff, which ultimately leads to a culture shift.

In Chapter 2, culture shift is one of the four domains, and as Ed dove into the conversation, he noted many opportunities that he had to shift the culture of his school. However, he was sure to say that it was a more inferential understanding than an explicit one. For example, “we asked for their trust,” in reference to teachers when change was happening and allowing for “trying to do our best,” Ed was able to show his staff that through his words and actions, he would be there to remove barriers, as also referenced in the literature review under

the instructional transformation domain. Ed mentioned from the start that, “I am a good listener,” and “I can read between the lines,” and “I’m listening and being able to hear what they want.”

Craig, Upper Elementary Principal

Craig is the upper-level elementary principal, responsible for third through sixth grades. He has been the building leader for four years, and he is energetic and devoted to student success. As with the other district leaders, Craig is in his mid-40s and raising his family in Prairie Ville. He holds an undergraduate and a graduate degree, and this building leadership position is his second in education. Craig has a strong passion for the work he does, as evidenced by the analysis, and he believes in doing the best for students every day.

During the coding analysis process, Craig appeared to relate to and understand the struggles his staff had this year. Phrases such as “giving grace,” “you could tell some days they were really struggling,” and “how can we do more things to cheer them up” were part of nearly every response. Craig mentioned other specifics, such as, “they have told me they’ve been asked to do more with less time. And I know that. So, I’ve been trying to be very understanding.” In addition, he said felt more responsibility to encourage his staff, evidenced by comments such as “being a motivator this year more than anything” and “being a cheerleader.” Craig felt this responsibility for students as well, with examples such as, “it’s a big mental stress on the kids.”

After the coding analysis and based on the first broad look at the transcripts, flexibility became an apparent theme for Craig. Additionally, Craig held high the disposition of building morale, being flexible, and showing positivity. In Chapter 1, a disposition was defined as an underlying assumption or belief. Craig’s comments deeply supported this, as evidenced by comments such as “tell them (staff members) what great things, they are doing,” “having a good

rapport with my staff,” “bringing them positivity,” and “always bringing a smile.” Further, Craig noted:

I’ve said it before, I’m kind of like that cheerleader, you know. I bring that energy, the positive energy, and I’m always upbeat, uplifting. ... I know when one kid made a comment to me one day you look tired. You know, I was like, uh oh, my face. I’ve got to change that. So that’s the one thing I think, that you know that, whether it’s me putting on that, that face that, hey, I’ve got to have a smile, you know. And it’s hard with the mask on sometimes but I really truly believe that, that rapport that, you know, that whole beginning of the day of bringing that spark to the staff of getting their day started on the right foot, um, is the most important thing I think I bring to the school to the kids And I try to remind them of that, because um, without them getting started that way, you know, it’s a struggle, and they’ve been pressed to the max with, you know, not necessarily less time but with the same amount of time and with more things on their plate.

Craig focused on positivity, and articulated the importance of being positive was the best thing he could bring to his staff during the Kansans Can Redesign change process and during the pandemic.

In the literature review, a domain relative to rapid school improvement is turnaround leadership, specifically prioritizing and maintaining goals. Craig talked about how he has grown and changed as a leader. In doing so, he mentions it is a continued priority of his for students and teachers to create and maintain goal-setting both short-term and long-term. For example, he

stated, “it was really neat to see that how they’d set goals,” and, “you know, we’ve got, we’ve had to change some of our, our short- and long-term goals, both because of COVID, but we’ve still kept part of them and just kind of adjusted and tweaked them a little bit.” Further:

Those long-term goals, we still have those out there, of bringing the community in, but it’s kind of we’ve had to make adjustments. But but like I said, the team we have and the staff, they’ve bought into that we’ve, set our long-term goals with our students. And our hope for that, is that they learn how to set goals, academic, and as they learn to set those goals, they can use that to move into the junior high.

The coding analysis also highlighted the skill of being flexible, and Craig mentions growth for himself in this area. Comments that support this theme included, “you know, I give and take a little bit with them,” “we’ve been flexible during lunchtime,” “we’ve had to make adjustment,” and “knowing that they’re frustrated and upset about that, but having to make adjustments.” Craig continued to reiterate that during the Kansans Can School Redesign change process, flexibility was key. And that once his district found itself dealing with the pandemic, this flexible and positive environment helped it be successful with students and families. The flexibility Craig showed while communicating with parents was evident in comments such as, “we’ve had some parents that have been stressed, depressed, you know, through all this, and they get easily upset,” and

I feel like it takes a little bit of talking to some parents that we can calm them down a little bit. I feel like I've got that that knack, and my wife says that knack of BS to be able to talk people down and calm them.

Karen, Lower Elementary Principal

Karen is the newest member of the Prairie Ville administrative team, serving in her third year as an administrator. She leads the PreK through second grade building, and she is serious about the work but brings as much humor and positivity to each situation as possible. She has undergraduate and graduate degrees, and Prairie Ville is the only system where she has served as an administrator. She is in her late 30s, married, and raising her family in Prairie Ville.

Initial analysis of Karen's transcripts indicated that she had difficulty articulating the exact skills and dispositions necessary to lead during change; however, after further conversations, she became more comfortable talking about herself and her skill as a leader. The analysis of the transcripts showed that Karen communicated and brought her teachers together to stay focused on what was important, as evidenced by comments such as "having those lines of communication open" and having "a really great week of collaboration" as positive occurrences for the work being done to redesign school and to lead during the pandemic. She also indicated that "we were bringing different people to meetings," and "teams meeting a couple times of the month," as ways she felt brought deeper communication and buy-in for the new processes.

Deeper exploration of Karen's transcripts indicated that her underlying assumptions and beliefs—her dispositions—were about building strong relationships and keep her staff members strong and close. She mentioned challenges in trying to hold her team together but she always tried to encourage them to "find the joy and the laughter" and to offer support even though there

were “a lot of tears shed—from happy and sad.” One challenging instance arose when Karen mentioned knowing that a staff member, “couldn’t do it anymore,” and Karen said she felt it was even more important to support and build up that individual. She noted that creating opportunities to, “let them talk,” “try things out,” and that, “these growing pains will make you stronger,” were opportunities to practice building stronger relationships and rapport with her staff.

In the *Four Domains for Rapid School Improvement: An Implementation Framework* (Jackson et al., 2018) culture shift, or soliciting and acting on stakeholder input, is key to success during the change process. Karen demonstrated this opportunity with comments such as “teachers have developed leadership skills” or that “always going back to the why” gave her opportunities to engage the stakeholders and allowed them to lead from the teacher perspective. In turn, she discovered this gave her and her staff members a great advantage during the pandemic.

Comparative Analysis

In, *The Engagement Playbook, A Toolkit for Engaging Stakeholders Around the Four Domains of Rapid School Improvement* (Jackson et al., 2018) intention and new partnerships bring about change and turn around schools to meet the student achievement needs of students. The qualitative survey analysis and the semi-structured transcript analysis revealed that during times of change, these school leaders must be able to meet the demands of both technical and adaptive challenges.

Communication

For example, during the pandemic, and during the Kansans Can School Redesign Project, communication was a key tool to move forward. In both data sets, it became evident that leaders

who saw the importance of communication and used that as a tool for improving the processes of change appeared to be more successful. Each school leader noted how communication was handled at either the building or district level, but successful communication required intentionality and repetitive opportunity.

Targeted and Timely Support

Each of the school leaders noted their development of the ability to customize and create supportive environments for teachers during this time of rapid change. The *Four Domains of Rapid School Improvement* (Jackson et al., 2018) indicated that to create turnaround schools, attention must be given to the perception and human-investment initiatives that can be streamlined to create the most powerful change. Engaging staff members and stakeholders provided a powerful opportunity to support and target exactly what steps needed to be taken to attain turnaround efforts. Competing efforts all demand attention, but when the study participants noted which efforts were most important, they saw the most support from staff members.

Culture

The Engagement Playbook, A Toolkit for Engaging Stakeholders Around the Four Domains of Rapid School Improvement (Jackson et al., 2018) specifies the importance of culture. Chapter 2 defined culture as the ability to build an atmosphere focused on student learning and effort, soliciting action on stakeholder input, and being able to engage students and families in the pursuit of educational goals (Jackson et al., 2018). However, the findings of this qualitative instrumental case study revealed that—especially during a pandemic—this is not always the case. For this study, soliciting action and input regarding the details of the safety concerns of staff members, students and families became more important than the pursuit of educational

goals. Specifically, in the domain of culture, engaging stakeholders is necessary. Each of the school leaders labeled staff members as stakeholders and also shared that the simple act of listening to these stakeholders seemed to be a successful tool for calming the rattled nerves of teachers both during the redesign process and during the pandemic. One leader noted the need to build on this skill in the future. Nevertheless, it is important to note that as this research continued and the pandemic concerns began to subside, the instructional and achievement goals of students reentered the conversation for school leaders and teachers.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter presented the findings of an instrumental case study relative to the skills and dispositions leaders need during times of major change. The original purpose was to determine these skills of those Kansas school leaders who were involved in the Kansans Can School Redesign Project. However, in the middle of that process, the global COVID-19 pandemic struck, and the change being examined was that of both a voluntary and forced nature. The context of the pandemic allowed the analysis of the leadership dispositions used during this time of major change.

Chapter 5 - Conclusions

The global pandemic of 2020-2021 impacted the American educational system in profound ways. The struggles the COVID-19 pandemic created for the Prairie Ville School District as it dealt with these tremendous difficulties made this site a prime research study opportunity for this instrumental case study. The participants indicated that this year has been the most difficult of their leadership career. Even leading during the crisis of death or personal illness did not compare to the overarching context of the pandemic. To describe the issues of the pandemic, the participants used phrases such as “the world turned upside down,” “you don’t know what tomorrow looks like, or next week,” and “then BAM, everything got pulled out from underneath us.” Through the difficulties of the pandemic, this staff stayed together, took care of their school children and families and took care of each other to do what was best for the students every day.

Conclusions and Implications

The purpose of this instrumental qualitative case study was to determine the skills and dispositions needed by school leaders, specifically building principals and district superintendents, during times of dramatic change. This was the premise of the qualitative survey, and the semi-structured interview questions. The original intent was to explore leadership qualities during the implementation of a new KSBoE initiative, the Kansans Can School Redesign Project. However, during my time as a redesign coach for several school districts, the nationwide pandemic began in March of 2020. This unprecedented event changed the context of my research and provided the opportunity for me to consider these leaders as they navigated both a volunteer change process and a forced change caused by the pandemic.

However, the research questions, grounded in a methodological framework of interpretivism, remained the same.

1. How do school leaders navigate challenges during change processes?
2. How do leaders determine the skills and dispositions most beneficial during rapid change, including during the COVID-19 pandemic?
3. Why do school leaders perceive certain skills and dispositions as valuable during change processes?

If indeed, the greatest leader is not the one who does that greatest things, but the one who can inspire others to do the greatest things, this body of research showed evidence of leaders who were able to lead and inspire during times of great difficulty.

Revisiting the Research Questions

It is safe to assume that since March of 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has touched every part of our world. For educational leaders, the challenges that were presented provided an opportunity for school leaders to practice their personal navigation skills like no other time in history. Bringing children to the school doors became a new challenge; entering the building became a new adventure; sitting next to peers became a struggle; and wearing a mask to prevent the spread of disease became a political and social situation for school leaders to navigate. As evidenced by the continuation of new educational learning environments, post-March 2020, implementing remote, hybrid and continued onsite learning spaces became a source of new learning for all school leaders. Although these elements impacted this research, the driving theme, to discover the skills and dispositions needed by school leaders during a change initiative, remained constant.

An interesting personal development occurred when I began the process of interviewing school leaders. Although I felt it was difficult to ask these leaders to take time for each interview, all four were willing participants who wanted more than anything to assist me. To that end, each of these leaders gave of their time and engaged in meaningful conversations that provided insight about their leadership roles. These conversations occurred via Zoom technology and lasted anywhere from 30 minutes to 60 minutes for each session. Early in the interview process, I noticed that each of these leaders was quite capable of listing the many things they did to maneuver the changes; however, they were not as eager to talk about themselves. It was more difficult for them to discuss the personal skills and dispositions they relied on during the change events prompted by the Kansans Can School Redesign Project and to discuss the personal skills they have used since the pandemic.

Interestingly, because I worked to build rapport with each participant, each participant agreed to further exploration and conversation. This was helpful, as our earlier conversations did not articulate the specific skills and dispositions they used. One participant said “you just do,” relative to how you meet the needs of staff and students. I did not expect an educational leader to have this level of difficulty in articulating their personal skills. Another stated, “I never think about what skill I need. I simply listen, rely on my team, and move forward.” However, the original interviews made apparent the list of things that each leader had done during times of stress, including communication through written outlets, via social media and uploaded on the district’s website. The literature review indicated that a component of turnaround leadership skills is communication and targeting support. All of these leaders knew that clear communication was paramount for all stakeholders. Finally, a deeper conversation brought each

to the conclusion that listening and communicating were quite definitely skills they needed, and they each learned more fully to develop these skills to successfully maneuver the challenges.

The last research question was designed to understand the perceived value of certain skills needed during a dramatic change process or event. However, each leader again struggled with specificity to think about themselves as singularly effecting any change. Another component of instructional transformation included removing barriers and providing opportunities. The leaders noted their role was to listen, to remove obstacles, and to provide secure and safe opportunities for staff and students to continue learning. In doing so, these leaders connected to another component of instructional transformation: allowing for rigorous instruction to continue.

Before the field survey I held a preconceived idea that communication was a valuable piece of a change process; and the survey responses solidified my thinking on this topic. Throughout my time supporting the Kansans Can School Redesign Project I have stated repeatedly the importance of communicating with stakeholders. This disposition is supported by these research findings. As a former school and district leader, I can certainly see that given the opportunity to do that kind of leadership work again, I would place much more emphasis on communication and varying the types of communication necessary to reach all stakeholders. The survey indicated a strong need to provide intentional communication in a variety of ways.

Another critical area of note is the creation of a culture of change and the knowledge to lead relative to the culture of the school building or district. In this research, culture became narrowly focused on the emotional and physical care of each individual in the school setting. At times, the political ramifications of the COVID-19 pandemic, were evident and forced changes and opportunities that may or may not have been considered under “normal” circumstances.

Implications

The results and findings of this study provide some indication about the skills and dispositions necessary for school leaders during times of major change. It is important to note that my role as a redesign coach began prior to the pandemic, however, the proposal and final research was conducted in the midst of the pandemic. Conflicting as those opportunities may appear, school and district leaders noted that having had the experiences of the Kansans Can School Redesign process, helped them lead during a pandemic. The implications of the pandemic can not be denied as an impact on the final findings.

Impacting Change

As a school system works to develop and implement sustainable change, two considerations may lead to success. Heifetz & Linsky (2004) define these two considerations of a change process as (a) the technical facet and (b) the adaptive facet. Leaders should deeply understand these facets of change. However, during this research, a global pandemic forced school leaders to make rapid changes. Investments are made in school leadership; however, also necessary is a look at the impacts of an equal investment in teachers as leaders, in school board members as leaders, and in how districts might further engage other stakeholders as leaders of school learning environments. Deep adaptive change asks people to change personal beliefs and values and requires people to alter their practices; it is when these deeper changes take place that lasting change can occur. It is important to note that forcing changes in personal beliefs may not lead to lasting change; however, the pandemic created opportunities for forcing school leaders to reconsider effective practices.

Local Leaders and School Boards

Communication arose as the common thread of each domain in the *Four Domains for Rapid School Improvement: An Implementation Framework* (Jackson et al., 2018). This research indicated communication as a tool for success. Further, the communication necessary occurred and should continue to occur at all levels and by all stakeholders, including teachers and school leaders, parents, local school board and community leaders. This means that district and school leaders must consciously focus to develop common talking points and communication tools that can be used in a variety of ways. However, that alone will not create success in relation to student achievement, which is the ultimate end goal of the KSBoE. Additionally, common goals related to responding to student learning needs must drive these common communication tactics. Simply saying it over and over is not enough; successfully leadership in schools comes from simplifying and not clouding the message.

Deeper analysis in the domain of turnaround leadership (Jackson et al., 2018) drives home the urgency needed when communicating the priority of improvement leading to greater student achievement. School leaders need to engage in a concise and meaningful communication effort to routinely communicate the focus and goals of the school system. Many board members would like to believe that they do support student achievement for each student. However, especially during the pandemic, this focus was clouded by the need to care for and to protect students and staff members. Furthermore, the need to create school board mechanisms and policies related to focused, succinct and clear communication about the school district goals for student achievement is imperative for school change to happen.

District and Building Education Leaders

The common thread found in this research is that district and school leaders must be effective communicators and must attend to the culture of their districts. Fullan (2011) states that leaders must have the needed knowledge to provide guidance through any change process. Communication can be generally defined as the imparting and exchanging of ideas and beliefs. That being said, it can be inferred that good relationships between leaders and those being led furthers successful communication. Also, it could be reasoned that prior positive relationships help cultivate success in times of change or crisis. Furthermore, a culture where positive relationships and continuous consistent communication lack might also create an environment where improvement and student achievement founder.

Significance of the Study

Most of the findings of this study are not necessarily surprising, novel or new, and they confirm current literature regarding change management in educational leadership. Over many years, there have been significantly larger studies relative to educational leadership and leading. However, significant to this study is the leading of a change effort during a global pandemic. Most importantly, the impact of this study lies in the simplicity of the findings. Creating positive relationships, opening the doors of communication, and strengthening the culture seem to be the most positive outcome of the study findings and may have significance for future leaders. Insight into how and what skills and dispositions leaders need may encourage and lessen the intimidation of others who which to take an educational leadership journey.

The significance of this study lies in the willingness of school leaders to be open-minded about how their role as a leader impacts the achievement of students. The findings articulated the need for strong communication skills, and were powerfully evident as the leaders were

working to share information with others. Communication, as a powerful tool for leaders also creates an aspect of transparency and trust that can facilitate positive relationship among all staff. It is significant that during times of change and challenge, communication is the key to success.

This study, contained rich conversations from current educational leaders, and showed the impacts of strong communication skills and a leader's ability to build relationships that allow for the continued gathering and exchanging of thoughts and ideas. This major finding should be considered when reflecting on what was learned during the pandemic. However, moving forward, leaders may see research opportunities and the value of leading simply, as the overall finding suggest. Perhaps knowing that communication, culture, and targeted and timely support are the key leadership skills during times of major change, may move the work of school leaders forward in positive and important ways that ultimately improve student learning and achievement.

Limitations and Opportunities for Further Research

This study adds to the large body of literature on educator leadership, but it was uniquely conducted during an unprecedented time. Thus, some limitations do exist. For example, my ability to be face-to-face with the interview participants was limited because of the safety concerns of the COVID-19 pandemic. I can think of no other time in my 35-year career as an educator when personal health and safety concerns during a lengthy time prevented me from being with other educators. The environment of the pandemic did instill fear and increased political frustrations that might have hindered the depth of study that could have been done under more normal circumstances. Indeed, not having the ability to be on school grounds and to truly see and feel the environments and cultures of these sites may have limited the findings. Perhaps, because of the pandemic situation, less was learned about talent development, which also

includes staff recruitment and retention. However, some details were provided regarding the professional development needs of teachers, which can also be tied to retention. Focused research regarding retention patterns following the conclusion of the pandemic could yield interesting results. These examples provide insight into the nature of the pandemic and its effect on what might have otherwise been considered differently during the survey and interview processes.

This study provided an in-depth look at one school site. Additional areas of further study might also include finding schools with higher demographic representations. For example, the leaders of this study were of similar age and racial backgrounds; conducting this same research with leaders of varying background might produce different results. As well, conducting this research in other parts of Kansas might as well have concluded with somewhat different results to determine if geography was a factor in how change was managed. As a country we have seen how the effects of the pandemic have influenced the learning environments of students and how some students have fallen off the school system radar. These drastic levels of difference may have a dramatic effect on education moving forward.

In their early work, Heifetz and Laurie (1997) noted that leaders who work collectively with others and create opportunities for shared decision-making were much more successful at adapting and creating lasting change. This study presents an opportunity to look at how educator staff, beyond building and district leaders, might become more fully involved in the decision-making process. Further, Heifetz and Laurie (1997) stated, “the collective intelligence” (p. 126) of all employees leads to success in meeting adaptive challenges. As noted in this research, these school leaders worked with not only direct building and district staff members, but they reached out to all stakeholders, including all teaching staff and community and health partners to meet

the needs of the school community. An opportunity exists for more study on how our teachers and others can lead deep adaptive challenges.

Further opportunities exist to look deeper at school boards of education and the role they play in facilitating and supporting change efforts. These elected leaders are placed in positions of leadership, and asked to solve demanding issues and make meaningful change. Perhaps, further opportunities exist to study how the boards of education might be able to direct their support in the areas of communication and culture to more fully impact student achievement. A deeper dive might also exist in how these boards of education can work in partnership with district and school leaders to communicate support during challenging times.

Additionally, this study purposefully examined school leaders. They had their students' best interests at the heart of their decisions. However, it would be interesting to study other perspectives concerning the dispositions that helped educators effectively manage this unprecedented change. Other perceptions could include classroom teachers, students, board of education members, parents and community stakeholders.

Finally, there are implications for higher education school leader preparation programs and new school leader mentorship programs. These programs may be able to use these findings in order to prepare our new building and district leaders to be effective leaders in schools. The ability to use communication to target short and long-term goals can be a successful tool regarding rapid change initiatives. Further, skill development centered on how to create school cultures of learning and growth for students, and teachers, may result in positive outcomes for student growth and academic achievement. Both higher education new leader preparation training and new leader mentor programs may benefit from the findings of this study.

Conclusions

At the beginning, I noted that Ronald Reagan said, “the greatest leader is not necessarily the one who does the greatest things. He is the one that gets the people to do the greatest things.” This moment in our history relative to the work of education is like none we have seen before. School leaders must develop communication with staff members that allows for the comfortable and collegial exchange of ideas in an open and honest way. These moments of sharing with a common targeted goal, providing timely support, and a culture where indeed the greatest things can be done for our students, have been challenged beyond belief—and all occurred during the time of this research. Fullan (2002) in his early work with chaos theory or what is now known as complexity theory, questioned what the larger education system would look like if it was unknown what it looked like and what it was doing. That being said, the COVID-19 pandemic may have forever changed perceptions of what the educational system should look like and what it should be doing.

During the course of this research opportunity school leaders found themselves focused on survival. In the end, I discovered the simplicity of using communication, targeting short and long-term goals and focusing on a positive culture to be the most important skills and dispositions leaders use during times of dramatic change. Words, like flexibility, positivity, empathy and grace came to the forefront of the research and were fully supported during the semi-structured interview opportunities. It became evident that when circumstances are present that magnify the difficulties in raising student achievement, these skills and dispositions may serve school leaders well.

In July of 2021, the work of the Kansas State Board of Education will continue with the start of the Kansans Can Success Tour, led by Kansas Commissioner, Dr. Randy Watson and

Deputy Commissioner, Dr. Brad Neuenswander. The purpose of this 50 city Kansas tour is to reengage Kansans to determine if the work of the Kansas Department of Education, to lead the world in the success of each student, is still the right path. At each of the locations, attendees will be asked to provide feedback as to whether or not the direction of the Kansans Can Redesign Project should continue as a primary focus. This data will be analyzed and distributed to all attendees, and to the Kansas State Board of Education, and a determination will be made to continue driving the current work forward, or whether a new vision is necessary. Whatever the outcome of the data, it remains evident that Kansas school leaders should be equipped to move forward, communicating and creating cultures of learning, for each Kansas student.

My goal in this research process was to determine the skills and dispositions necessary for school leaders during times of major change. Thankfully, the leaders who participated in this study thoughtfully considered their work, took time away from very difficult day-to-day situations to respond to my questions, and ultimately guided my thoughts on this topic. At my core, I believe sometimes we make things too hard, and in some ways, this was an attempt to simplify the work of school leaders. However, as I found, nothing was simple during the era of the pandemic, and moving forward with the knowledge of this research may not be as simple as I had hoped. My intention, however, is to share what I have learned with new leaders and perhaps help them to do the greatest things possible for their students and staff. Streamlining the skills and dispositions into a simple nugget—having the vision to see, the faith to believe, and the courage to do—may be the answer to leading success for each student in Kansas.

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Appendix A - Kansas Leader Survey

Kansans Can School Redesign Leadership Survey

The following survey seeks feedback from Kansas principals and superintendents participating in the Kansans Can School Redesign Project, launched by the Kansas State Department of Education in 2015. Your perceptions and descriptions of accomplishments at your school or district are important for the state's overall assessment of progress and future planning for School Redesign in Kansas.

Demographics:

Q1 Please indicate which type of administrator you are.

- ☐ Principal (1)
- ☐ Superintendent (2)

Q2 Which of the following best describes your school's/district's level of engagement in the Kansans Can School Redesign Project?

- ☐ We are interested, but not engaged in the Kansans Can School Redesign Project. (1)
- ☐ Mercury 7 (2)
- ☐ Gemini 1 (3)
- ☐ Gemini II (4)
- ☐ Apollo (5)
- ☐ Apollo II (6)

Q3 How many schools at each level in your district participate in the Kansans Can School Redesign Project?

- ☐ Elementary (1) _____
- ☐ Middle/Junior High (2) _____
- ☐ High School (3) _____

Leadership

Q4 Please indicate the extent to which you have communicated to you school/district personnel the benefits of the Kansans Can School Redesign Project for student learning.

- ☐ Large Extent (1)
- ☐ Moderate Extent (2)
- ☐ Some Extent (3)
- ☐ Little Extent (4)
- ☐ No Extent (5)

Q5 To what extent have you communicated to your school/district community the importance of the Kansans Can School Redesign Project?

- ☐ Large Extent (1)
- ☐ Moderate Extent (2)
- ☐ Some Extent (3)
- ☐ Little Extent (4)
- ☐ No Extent (5)

Q5a What specific actions (e.g., writing policies, sharing resources, recruiting personnel) have you taken to communicate the need for redesign?

Q5b Have you developed a school/district leadership team to address redesign challenges?

- ☐ Yes (1)
- ☐ No (2)

Q6 How would you rate your school's/district's progress in developing a redesign plan?

- _____ No Progress (1)
- _____ Little Progress (2)
- _____ Some Progress (3)
- _____ Moderate Progress (4)
- _____ Plan Pending (5)
- _____ Plan Completed (6)

Q6a Which of the following elements are prioritized in your Redesign plan?

- ☐ Monitoring short-term goals (1)
 - ☐ Monitoring long-term goals (2)
 - ☐ Timelines (3)
 - ☐ Identified appropriate interventions (4)
 - ☐ Other Priority (please specify): (5)
-

Q6b What types of data have you identified to inform decision-making and progress-monitoring with your planned reform?

Q6c Has your school/district completed a Redesign Self-assessment for Schools to identify prioritized needs? (If no, then skip to Q7)

- ☐ Yes (1)
- ☐ No (2)

Q6c1 Has this process been effective for informing progress toward meeting priorities?

- ☐ Yes (1)
- ☐ No (2)

Talent Development

Q7 To what extent has your exposure to the Kansans Can School Redesign Project increased your capacity for recruiting, developing, and retaining TEACHER talent for you school/district?

- ☐ Large Extent (1)
- ☐ Moderate Extent (2)
- ☐ Some Extent (3)
- ☐ Little Extent (4)
- ☐ No Extent (5)

Q7a To what extent has your exposure to the Kansans Can School Redesign Project increased your capacity for recruiting, developing, and retaining LEADER talent for your school/district?

- ☐ Large Extent (1)
- ☐ Moderate Extent (2)
- ☐ Some Extent (3)
- ☐ Little Extent (4)
- ☐ No Extent (5)

Q7b What specific skills do you look for when recruiting talented teachers and principals to work within a Redesign setting?

Q8 To what extent have you and your Redesign Team taken measures to ensure that professional learning experiences are aligned with the Kansans Can School Redesign Principles?

- ☐ Large Extent (1)
- ☐ Moderate Extent (2)
- ☐ Some Extent (3)
- ☐ Little Extent (4)
- ☐ No Extent (5)

Q8a Please provide an example of professional learning aligned to you school's/district's Redesign Principles.

Q9 To what extent has your professional development focused on improving school/district leader relationships?

- ☐ Large Extent (1)
- ☐ Moderate Extent (2)
- ☐ Some Extent (3)
- ☐ Little Extent (4)
- ☐ No Extent (5)

Q10 To what extent do staff members' performance expectations include responsibilities reflective of your school's/district's Redesign Plan?

- ☐ Large Extent (1)
- ☐ Moderate Extent (2)
- ☐ Some Extent (3)
- ☐ Little Extent (4)
- ☐ No Extent (5)

Q10a Please provide any examples of performance expectations.

Instructional Transformation

Q11 To what extent does your school/district emphasize the use of student-focused strategies to respond to student learning needs?

- ☐ Large Extent (1)
- ☐ Moderate Extent (2)
- ☐ Some Extent (3)
- ☐ Little Extent (4)
- ☐ No Extent (5)

Q11a Please provide any examples of changes in student support and instructional interventions.

Q11b What instructional supports are available to teachers to assist them in meeting the students' individual needs?

Q12 To what extent does your school/district provide access to rigorous and relevant instructional practices for ALL students?

- ☐ Large Extent (1)
- ☐ Moderate Extent (2)
- ☐ Some Extent (3)
- ☐ Little Extent (4)
- ☐ No Extent (5)

Q12a Please provide any examples of access to these rigorous and relevant instructional practices.

Q12b Are these practices aligned to curricular standards, and do they provide real-world application experiences? Please describe.

Q13 To what extent have you been successful at removing policy and practice barriers to student learning in your school/district?

- ☐ Large Extent (1)
- ☐ Moderate Extent (2)
- ☐ Some Extent (3)
- ☐ Little Extent (4)
- ☐ No Extent (5)

Q13a What community resources have you leveraged to support your school/district?

Q13b How has the redesign project provided opportunities for academic improvement?

Culture Shift

Q14 To what extent have you been successful in building a school/district culture focused on student-centered learning?

- ☐ Large Extent (1)
- ☐ Moderate Extent (2)
- ☐ Some Extent (3)
- ☐ Little Extent (4)
- ☐ No Extent (5)

Q14a How has your system promoted social-emotional growth?

Q15 To what extent have you as a leader been effective in promoting an improved school culture of cooperation among staff?

- ☐ Large Extent (1)
- ☐ Moderate Extent (2)
- ☐ Some Extent (3)
- ☐ Little Extent (4)
- ☐ No Extent (5)

Q15a Do you feel effective in promoting cohesion? Please describe.

Q15b Do you feel effective in leading the shared vision? Please describe.

Q15c Please describe some of your school's/district's outcomes that demonstrate how you have built a shared school culture.

Q16 To what extent have you solicited stakeholder input from your school/district community on the redesign effort (e.g., surveys of parents, school personnel, community members, board members)?

- ☐ Large Extent (1)
- ☐ Moderate Extent (2)
- ☐ Some Extent (3)
- ☐ Little Extent (4)
- ☐ No Extent (5)

Q16a What community partners have been your strongest support and how have they provided support?

Q17 To what extent has your school/district engaged students, families, and communities in pursuing college and career pathways?

- ☐ Large Extent (1)
 - ☐ Moderate Extent (2)
 - ☐ Some Extent (3)
 - ☐ Little Extent (4)
 - ☐ No Extent (5)
-

Q18 Having been part of a planned change event such as Redesign, please take a moment now to reflect on how the unplanned change event during the pandemic impacted your system's progress of continuous improvement.

Appendix B - Informed Consent

TITLE OF STUDY

Leading Educational Redesign Change

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

Debbie Mercer, Dean

Mischel D. Miller, Graduate Student

Kansas State University

3209 SW Arrowhead Rd

Topeka, KS 66614

620-272-4950

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PURPOSE OF STUDY

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Before you decide to participate in this study, it is important that you understand why the research is being conducted and what it will involve. Please read the following information carefully. Please ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information.

The purpose of this study is to understand the leadership qualities or dispositions evidenced by leaders in schools that are redesigning their educational system and who are involved in the Kansas State Board of Education's Kansans Can School Redesign Project.

STUDY PROCEDURES

Participants will be asked to engage in three recorded qualitative interviews approximately 30 minutes long, and the results of the completed study will be shared via the final documentation. Participants may also be asked to complete a quantitative study, and the results will be shared upon completion.

RISKS

You may decline to answer any or all questions and you may terminate your involvement at any time if you choose to.

BENEFITS

There will be no direct benefit for your participation in this study. However, the information obtained from this study may inform the work of future superintendents and principals in Kansas as they redesign schools.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Your responses to the interviews and survey will be anonymous. Every effort will be made by the researcher to preserve your confidentiality, including the following:

- Assigning a code name to each participant to be used in all research notes and documents.
- Notes, interview transcriptions, and any other identifying participant information will be kept in a locked file cabinet in the personal possession of the researcher and password protected on personal devices.

Participant data will be kept confidential and password protected on the researcher's personal computer.

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have questions at any time about this study, or if you experience adverse effects as a result of participating in this study, you may contact the researcher whose contact information is provided on the first page. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, or if problems arise that you do not feel you can discuss with the Primary Investigator, please contact the Institutional Review Board at (865) 354-3000, ext. 4822.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this study is voluntary. It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part in this study. If you choose to take part in this study, you will be asked to sign a consent form. After you sign the consent form, you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a

reason. Withdrawing from this study will not affect the relationship you have, if any, with the researcher. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed, your data will be returned to you or destroyed.

CONSENT

I have read and I understand the provided information and have had the opportunity to ask questions. I understand that my participation is voluntary, and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and without cost. A copy of the consent form is available to me. I voluntarily agree to take part in this study.

Participant's signature _____ Date _____

Investigator's signature _____ Date _____

Appendix C - Interview Protocol

There will be three semi-structured interviews conducted with three school building leaders and one district leader. Each interview will be 30 minutes to 60 minutes in length. The questions will be used to support the data found in the literature review and the Kansas Leader qualitative survey. The intent of this research is to explore responses that address the research questions to determine the skills and dispositions needed by school leaders during times of major change. It will be imperative to create a natural conversational environment for the semi-structured interview process. Themes will result based on the answers given by the participants. The following questions were used for the interview process:

Appendix D - Interview Questions

1. These crazy times have certainly caused a need to communicate with stakeholders. How have you all used communication, and what strategies were most effective. What were your philosophies around communicating? What did you value?
2. Teacher leadership has certainly been challenged. What situations have they faced, and as building and district leaders, what personal skills have you been able to use to support your staff?
3. What difficulties did you face while working to implement short- and long-term goals of redesign, or issues that came out of the pandemic? What personal strengths did you rely on to get through the difficult times?
4. When you have time to reflect, what personal skills did you notice as you move/moved through these times that were most effective?
5. Currently, districts have been given some flexibility for professional learning opportunities. How has professional learning changed in your system?
6. How have you navigated the expectations of your staff during this time? What did you value from your staff in relation to expectations, what drove the changes that occurred.
7. Have you altered student learning expectations and experiences during this time? And what examples can you share about that process?
8. What barriers have you seen that would create issues for implementing student learning expectations?
9. I know our communities are divided about how school should look right now. Have you had to negotiate some difficult conversations with stakeholders, and what skills did you rely on to have those conversations? How did you show your community that you were available, you cared about students, and that you were listening?
10. We all know the social and emotional needs of our students has changed dramatically during these past few months. What examples can you provide about the challenges in meeting those needs? How have you managed these needs of your staff, and of yourself?

Appendix E - Institutional Review Board Approval



University Research
Compliance Office

TO: Dr. Debbie Mercer
College of
Education 3 18
Bluemont Hall

Proposal Number: 9966

FROM: Rick Scheidt, Cham

Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects

DATE: 12/09/2019

: Approval of Proposal Entitled, "Leading Educational Redesign Change."

The Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects has reviewed your proposal and has granted full approval. This proposal is approved for three years from the date of this correspondence.

APPROVAL DATE: 12/09/2019

EXPIRATION DATE: 12/09/2022

In giving its approval, the Committee has determined that:

There is no more than minimal risk to the
subjects. There is greater than minimal risk to
the subjects.

This approval applies only to the proposal currently on file as written. Any change or modification affecting human subjects must be approved by the RB prior to implementation. All approved proposals are subject to continuing review, which may include the examination of records connected with the project. Announced post-approval monitoring may be performed during the course of this approval period by URCO staff. Injuries, unanticipated problems or adverse events involving risk to subjects or to others must be reported immediately to the Chair of the IRB and / or the URCO.

203 Fairchild Hall, Lower Mezzanine, 1601 Vattier St., Manhattan, KS 66506-1 103 | 785-532-3224 | fax: 785-532-3278 comply@k-state.edu | k-state.edu/comply

TO: Dr. Debbie Mercer
College of Education
Bluemont Hall

Protocol Number: 9966

FROM: Rick Scheidt, Chair



Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects

DATE: January 13, 2021

RE: Approval of Your Proposal Entitled, “Leading Educational Redesign Change.”

Federal regulations stipulate that human subjects protocols can be approved by IRB’s for only one year, and require “continuing review” and approval to continue past the expiration date.

On the basis of the IRB “continuing review,” your project is classified as follows:

Active. The activity is pending or in progress, and there have been no changes that have occurred or are contemplated that would affect the status of human subjects.

EXPIRATION DATE: 12/9/2022

If the activity persists, it will be eligible for continuing review several months prior to the new expiration date.