BOSTON COLLEGE

Lynch School of Education Department of

Education and Higher Education Professional School Administrator Program (PSAP)

TRUST IN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP IN TIMES OF CRISIS:

DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION: LEADERSHIP, WORK, AND TRUST

Dissertation in Practice by

RUTH H. EVEE

with Katherine Grassa, Kelly M. Hung, Karen L. McCarthy, and Gregory B. Myers

submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education

MAY 2022

Copyright Page

TRUST IN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP IN TIMES OF CRISIS: DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION: LEADERSHIP, WORK, AND TRUST

by Ruth H. Evee

Dr. Raquel Muñiz (Chair)

Dr. Erin Nosek and Dr. Patrick McQuillan (Readers)

Abstract

Educational leaders are being called as activists to achieve equity in schools and transform inequities through social justice initiatives. Whereas research exists in support of social justice leadership in education, research that intersects the work of current DEI leadership and the relevance of trust to pursue DEI initiatives is wanting. Trust in this context is important because relationship-building is a large component to implementing DEI work, which needs the support, buy-in, and active engagement from the entire community, requiring stakeholders' trust in the process. In this study, I take a deep dive into the role of DEI leadership by exploring the practices and perspectives that are common in the role and the work two decades into the 21st century. I conducted four semi-structured interviews with DEI leaders, during which participants reflected on many collective practices central to their daily work. These practices fell into three different categories encompassing similar characteristics: support, development, and resource. Through further analysis, I found that DEI leadership served four separate areas: families, students, adult staff, and the institution. Above all, a core practice of building

relationships was found to be essential to achieving all said practices. In addition, the analysis revealed three common perspectives that impact DEI leadership work: the role is larger than a single person, the role must have trust and support from power positions, and the leader must have a deep connection with the work through experience and/or training. Finally, I found that benevolence, reliability, and openness are essential facets of trust impacting DEI work, as is the importance of time. The study's results are valuable for the development of DEI leadership and achieving equitable access and inclusive environments in schools.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I thank God for giving me the ability, strength, and wisdom to complete not only this dissertation but an amazing doctoral program among outstanding educators who are dedicated to the future of academics. I feel humbled and Blessed to have been part of Cohort VI.

An enormous amount of support was needed for me to arrive at this personal and professional achievement, and I am deeply grateful to all who have played a part in my journey. I first want to thank the amazing staff at Boston College for pushing my thinking and skills as both a practitioner and a researcher. Specifically, I would like to express many thanks to my chairperson, Dr. Raquel Muñiz for her patience, guidance, and support as she helped me navigate this research project. Additionally, I want to thank my readers Dr. Erin Nosek and Dr. Patrick McQuillan for their feedback and support as well.

Along the way, I have had the distinct honor and pleasure to learn and grow in the company of so many brilliant educators. I want to recognize and thank all the members of Boston College PSAP Cohort VI. Every class we took together you humbled me with your intellect and passion for education and equity for all students. I want to thank my "reading group", my friends/brothers, Mario Pires and Marc Banks. I am Blessed to have gained amazing friends that helped each other push through and not give up. Finally, I cannot express enough gratitude to my research team, Katie Grassa, Kelly Hung, Karen McCarthy, and Greg Myers, aka "Fancy Homework" for their friendship and caring through the most difficult times of this experience. We experienced so much emotion

during our journey that you are now family to me. We came together naturally as an effective team, and I learned a great deal from each one of you.

I would like to thank the Boston College High School community for supporting me through this process. Also, to all the amazing professional Black women in my life who I am Blessed to call my *sistah* friends, thank you for being authentically you and showing me that we are strong, smart, leaders, and change makers. We are *Black Women Who Rock* with plenty of Black Girl Magic! ~Lynn B., Joan W-B., Kim B-T., Kim B., Kim R., Jess K., Toiya F., and the list goes on….

Finally, I would like to thank my family. To my mom, Margaret, and sister, Evelyn, for the unconditional love and words of confidence. To my heartbeats: my sons, Travis, and Ben, I hope I have inspired you to accept the challenge and not only chase your dreams but to conquer them. Finally, and most of all, to my amazing husband, Gary, thank you for loving all of my insecurities, uncertainties, and indecisions – you accept me for me, and I love you and thank you for that. You are truly my gift from God, and I will cherish you always.

DEDICATIONS

I was that student who was told I wasn't college material and that I wasn't smart enough to graduate from my high school. I was told I was not a serious student and that I was too loud. Such an experience drives my passion to find true equity and inclusion in education and care for all students. I want to first dedicate this work to all Black and Brown children that don't always experience support and motivation during their educational experience. Please know you are loved, seen, valued, and believed in. You can and will be anything you dream of, the world is yours no matter your background or barriers. Second, to my Heavenly supporters who I miss dearly, and wish were here to share in this achievement. Special mention to my dad, Kingston, who would have looked at me with that proud expression on his face that always made me feel invincible and protected. You instilled confidence in me and let me know I was special – always Daddy's little Girl! Also, to my *sistah* friend forever, Dr. Kellye, you inspired me and told me I could be Dr. Ruth and I did – we did, I miss you girl!

"Not because you want to, but because you can." -Ally Love

"Education can't save us. We have to save education." -Bettina Love

Table of Contents

Chapter 1 4

Statement of the Research Problem 4

Conceptual Framework 8

Five Facets of Trustworthiness 9

Benevolence 10

Reliability 11

Competence 11

Honesty 12

Openness 12

Literature Review 14

Conceptualizing Trust 14

Organizational/Collective Trust 16

Power Asymmetry and Trust 17

What Influences the Willingness to Trust? 18

Why is Trust Important? 18

Trust in Leadership Practices 23

Trust in Leadership During a Time of Crisis 25

Chapter 2 28

Methods 28

Study Design 28

Site Selection 29

Participant Selection 29

Data Collection 31

Interviews 31

Observations 32

Document Review 33

Survey 33

Data Analysis 34

Positionality 35

Conclusion *36*

Chapter 3 *38*

Statement of Purpose and Research Problem *38*

Conceptual Framework *40*

Literature Review *42*

Defining Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion **42**

The Perceived Work of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion **43**

The Role of Trust in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion **45**

Conclusion **48**

Methods *49*

Data Collection **50**

Coding and Analysis **51**

Limitations **52**

Positionality **53**

Findings *54*

Leadership Practices and Perspectives that support DEI Work **56**

Common Practices that compromise the work of DEI leadership 57

Common Perspectives regarding effective implementation of DEI work **63**

The Role of Trust and the Impact on the Implementation of DEI Work **64**

Discussion and Conclusion *69*

Complexity in DEI Leadership **70**

Characteristics of DEI Leadership **71**

Chapter 4 *74*

Discussion *74*

Benevolence **76**

Shared Purpose **78**

Trust and Time **83**

Identity and Trust **87**

Recommendations *91*

Limitations *94*

Conclusion *94*

References *97*

Appendix A *108*

Appendix B ***109***

Appendix C ***111***

Appendix D ***112***

Appendix E ***113***

Appendix F ***114***

Appendix G ***117***

Appendix H ***118***

Chapter 1[1]

Statement of the Research Problem

In a complex system of education, improvement is an ongoing pursuit requiring educational leaders to have trusting relationships across stakeholders. The pursuit of improvement typically involves disrupting the status quo, which can often elicit both resistance (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002) and grief (Hearney & Hyle, 2003) from members of the changing organization. Resistance and grief can be a reaction to change that often results in vulnerability to risks, some of which may not be within an individual's control (Mayer et al., 1995). Change requires new practices which leads to some level of vulnerability on behalf of the people involved. Such vulnerability requires trust.

In addition, society expects school districts to serve many functions for children, requiring collaboration among different groups. This collective work is most effective with relational trust as a foundation, as a variety of stakeholder groups must work interdependently to achieve goals. Forsyth et al. (2011) define interdependence as "the condition wherein the organization's success hinges on the efforts of two or more groups" (p. 106). Such interdependence requires effective relationships. Forsyth et al. (2011) assert that, once trust is established, stakeholders feel more confident and demonstrate a greater willingness to take risks. Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2015) note that "Interdependence means that trust must be present to some degree in order to facilitate the constant, innumerable interactions that occur among people in a school" (p. 68).

[1] This chapter was written in collaboration with the authors listed on the title page and reflects the team approach of the dissertation in practice: Ruth H. Evee, Katherine Grassa, Kelly M. Hung, Karen L. McCarthy, Gregory B. Myers

Furthermore, research suggests that trust is also important when developing district-level initiatives and implementing buy-in across stakeholders (Johnson & Chrispeels, 2010).

Moments of crisis in particular require an abundance of trust; if common beliefs are shared, those working through the crisis may be more likely to trust each other's actions, allowing systems to operate more effectively. Rosenthal and Hart (1991) characterize a crisis as a disruptive situation initiated by a triggering event and evolving over a long period of time. Mishra (1996) identifies four components that define a crisis: a significant threat where survival is at question, limited time to respond, challenges in response structures, and limited resources for coping. Mishra explains that crises are characterized by urgency of decision, significant uncertainty, system restructuring, and stress.

The impact of a crisis adds another layer of vulnerability and deepens the importance of trust in leadership. For example, the COVID-19 pandemic has jolted school systems into a time of intense difficulty, rapid change, and ongoing vulnerability, requiring essential decisions to be made. Reopening schools at this time posed a variety of risks to teachers, from changed routines and instructional practices to an increased risk to teacher health, each of which creates vulnerability and the potential for loss (Gaffney et al., 2020). We believe that the ability for districts to work interdependently and respond effectively to community needs during a crisis may be influenced by trust at varying levels. While COVID-19 has been a clear crisis since 2020, we expect that various types and severities of crises, from Hurricane Katrina to systemic racism, have and will continue to impact school systems. The literature suggests that established trust can make the response to change, and transitions during a crisis, more manageable, thereby

allowing schools to maintain effective school communities and remove barriers to continue the pursuit of achieving student academic success and a positive learning and working environment (Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Daly, 2009; Louis, 2007; Olsen & Sexton, 2009).

Importantly, school districts serve an outsized function in society (Trujillo, 2016; Honig, 2017). They are expected to align curriculum, instruction, resources, social-emotional learning, physical health needs for students, and implement government policies. To implement these initiatives, educators must prioritize relationships and work together effectively. Trust is a factor in school districts, especially during times of crisis because, when a crisis occurs, swift actions and changes must be enacted. Social trust among teachers, parents, and school leaders is a key resource for change (Bryk & Schneider, 2003). One must trust in the systems, leaders, and one another to move through a crisis collectively. A deeper examination into various aspects of trust may further expose its relevance during a time of crisis, provide additional focus for leadership development, and support leadership during the implementation of change initiatives, particularly those implemented during a crisis. In addition, our study hopes to draw attention to the levels of trust within a school district that may create barriers or open doors to informing practices that create high-achieving, equitable schools.

Current research contains a wealth of theorizing and empirical research around the trust between teachers and principals (Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999, 2003; Louis, 2007; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015; Tschannen-Moran et al., 2015; Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008). This research has discovered links between trust, job satisfaction, and positive school climate, as well as increased

academic success. While trust has been widely studied, trust research beyond identifying the qualities or behaviors which engender the trust of teachers in their principals is limited. Through a qualitative case study of a school district in the northeast of the United States, we sought to understand trust among multiple educational stakeholders: teachers, principals, central office staff, union leaders, and the superintendent. This area of research is important because organizational improvement toward student success frequently depends on how much people in an organization trust one another, with that trust built through relationships (Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Tschannen-Moran, 2014; Benna & Hambacher, 2020). Additionally, there is a gap in the research regarding how educational stakeholders build relationships and enact practices during times of crisis. To our knowledge, this study is the first to examine trust-building perceptions and practices across multiple educational stakeholders in one district during the COVID-19 crisis.

Our collective study examines relationships and practices across a school district during a crisis to understand how trust plays a role in this work. Specifically, this study addresses the following research question: *How, if at all, does trust influence the relationships and practices of educational stakeholders during times of crisis?* Using a qualitative case study method, we explore the relationships and practices among the following stakeholders during a time of crisis: principals; teachers; central office members; union leadership; diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) leaders; and the superintendent.

Schools play a sizable role in society as they prepare generations by teaching them skills needed for adulthood. In addition, as places of connection and centers of activity, they may provide structure and stability for entire communities, especially

during a crisis. Our study identifies the role relationships and trust play across various levels of schools during times of crisis, specifically the COVID-19 pandemic, in order to aid the development of more productive and effective districts.

Conceptual Framework

In this qualitative case study, we grounded our conceptual framework in relational trust theory. Mayer et. al (1995) define relational trust as "...the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party" (p. 712). Building upon this definition, we relied on Hoy and Tschannen-Moran's (1999) "five facets of trust" (benevolence, reliability, competence, honesty, and openness) to operationalize the presence of trust within the relationships and practices of educators across the district. The facets refer to characteristics research has shown help to foster trust-formation. People may demonstrate these characteristics through their behaviors, which help them to be perceived as trustworthy. Using this framework, we note when a trust-forming characteristic, or a behavior associated with it, is present in our data. Lastly, we integrate Rosenthal and Hart's (1991) definition of crisis to frame the context in which agents perceive a change initiative. Rosenthal and Hart characterize a crisis as a disruptive situation initiated by a triggering event and evolving over a long period of time. Crises are characterized by urgency of decision, significant uncertainty, system restructuring, and stress (Mishra, 1996). Together, the concept of relational trust, five facets of trust, and crisis definition serve as the conceptual framework through which we designed our study and analyzed our data.

Five Facets of Trustworthiness

Below, we define Hoy and Tschannen-Moran's (1999) five facets of trustworthiness: benevolence, reliability, competence, openness, and honesty. In our research, we identify where these five facets exist, or do not exist, within various relationships throughout a single school district during a time of crisis. There are many actions that can conceptually overlap across the five facets. For example, a leader's action may demonstrate openness by sharing a vulnerability, while also demonstrating honesty with their community, or demonstrating care and support (benevolence) for others who may share a similar vulnerability. Figure 1 visually represents how each of the five facets of trust influences relationships among key stakeholders during times of crisis. It also shows how each of these facets can stand alone or be connected within the actions of a person and the perceptions of the receiver.

Figure 1

Five Facets of Trust in Times of Crisis

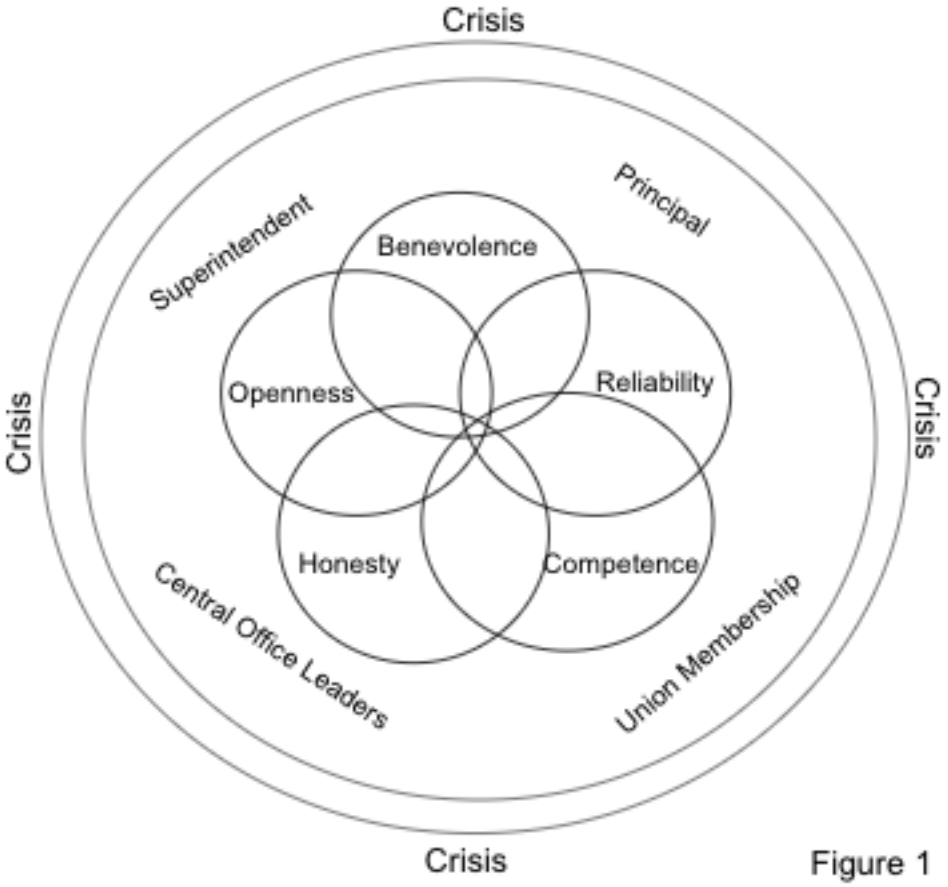

Figure 1

Benevolence

In the context of trust, benevolence is one's demonstration of goodwill toward another. Mayer et al. (1995) describe the benevolent person as one who "...[places] others' interests above his or her own interests" (p. 300). At the very least, the benevolent trustee does not knowingly or willingly do harm to another (Currall, 1992; Tschannen-Moran, 2014). In relationships where trust exists, benevolence manifests in the form of genuine care and respect. Some may say that this is the most important facet

of trust (Benna & Hambacher, 2020) and the foundation on which the remaining facets build. A benevolent trustee will waive personal gain if it brings possible harm to the trusting party (Benna & Hambacher, 2020). Benevolent leaders demonstrate care, concern, and respect for others, showing that they value the needs of others over their own personal gain (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999). Benevolence has been linked to greater job satisfaction and longevity (Chapman, 2012; Hatchel, 2012), both of which are factors in building a trusting relationship.

Reliability

Acting reliably means that the trustee is consistent in their behavior and follows through on commitments (Bhattacharya et al., 1998; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015). Reliability is the consistent and predictable nature of a person's response. One must trust that a person takes the steps necessary. “Reliability in following through on decisions and promises...contributes in substantive ways to… trust [between agents]” (Tschannen-Moran, 2014, p. 60). Educational stakeholders want to know they can rely on one another for support and for seeing tasks through to fruition. Reliability within a relationship will further develop trust between parties.

Competence

The knowledge and skill needed for success in a particular domain is considered competence (Benna & Hambacher, 2020). Trustors continually check to see whether the trustee’s behavior indicates that he or she is competent to perform according to expectations in a particular context (Six, 2007). This facet is particularly important when building trust with a supervisor; one must believe that their leader is competent enough to

do the actual job in order to be willing to follow and work alongside them toward a common goal.

Honesty

Trustees demonstrate honesty not only by telling the truth, but also by acting in accordance with expressed values and with authenticity (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015). Honesty is the act of believing someone's word and trusting they have integrity of character (Benna & Hambacher, 2020). One must believe that an individual is telling the truth when they make a promise or share the state of a situation. Humans "require truths to negotiate their way effectively through thickets of hazards and opportunities that all people invariably confront in going about their daily lives" (Frankfurt, 2006, pp. 34–35). These truths are especially important during times of crisis. Leaders must know that dishonesty can destroy or erode a trusting relationship.

Openness

The characteristic of openness manifests itself through information-sharing, considering the ideas of others, and sharing influence over decision-making (Bijlsma & Koopman, 2003; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015). Openness is the willingness to show vulnerability to others as a way to extend trust to another person first. This can be shown by the leader modeling and sharing their own vulnerabilities. Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (2003) describe openness as the "….extent to which relevant information is shared; a process by which individuals make themselves vulnerable to others" (p.185). Sharing your vulnerabilities creates an environment where it is safe to share and learn collaboratively. Another way to be open is through communication. Information should

be transparent, truthful, and set out in a timely manner. Tschannen-Moran (2014) notes that a "….collegial leadership style, in which a leader is perceived to be approachable and open to the ideas of others, has been linked to greater...trust in the [leader]" (p. 59). When a leader extends openness, it creates an environment where others want to share ideas and vulnerabilities, and where people understand the purpose behind decisions being made.

As the five facets of trust are foundational to building trust in relationships, each individual researcher in our group study used relational trust and Hoy and Tschannen-Moran's (1999) five facets of trust in their conceptual framework. This conceptual framework helped us explore various relationships within a school district during times of crisis to see if trust was a factor within these relationships, as well as to explore the practices that contributed to trust-building. While some team members integrated additional concepts and/or theories to frame their individual studies, all frameworks connected back to the relational connections between educational stakeholders. Table 1 breaks down the research questions for each individual study, as well as the conceptual frameworks that each employed.

Table 1

Overview of Individual Studies

Researcher	Conceptual Framework	Research Question(s):
Evee	Relational Trust (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999) & Social Justice Leadership (Theoharis, 2007)	How do leadership practices and perspectives support DEI? How, if at all, does the role of trust impact the implementation of DEI work and during the COVID-19 pandemic?
Grassa	Relational Trust (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999) & Collective Trust (Forsyth et al., 2011)	How do principals view their relationship with the superintendent and their schools during a crisis? What practices influence the role of trust in this relationship?

Hung	Relational Trust (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999) & Inclusive Leadership Behaviors (Edmondson, 2012)	What central office leadership practices, if any, support inclusion and collective trust on teams during times of crisis? How do these practices support teaming across boundaries? What role, if any, does trust play in those leadership practices?
McCarthy	Relational Trust (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999)	How do teachers and their principal experience and build trust with each other? What influences their perceptions of the trustworthiness of each other?
Myers	Relational Trust (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999) & Interpersonal Trust Building Theory (Six, 2007).	How, if at all, does trust influence relationships between superintendents and teacher union leaders during times of crisis? Which, if any, leadership practices of the superintendent impact perceptions of trust during times of crisis?

To answer the research questions, we collected data through interviews, observations, document reviews, and a survey. Notably, because trust is derived from ongoing interactions between two or more agents over time (Six, 2007), we also relied on relational trust to connect our individual chapters and guide our thinking about how trust between school district agents either strengthens or erodes.

Literature Review

Conceptualizing Trust

Trusting behaviors are characterized by the conscious decision to place oneself in a position of vulnerability to another party (Mayer et al., 1995; Zand, 1972), or, as Currall and Judge (1995) explain, trust is "an individual's behavioral reliance on another person under a condition of risk" (p. 153). Perceived risk is central to the concept of trust since, without the existence of risk, there is no need for trust (Bhattacharya et al., 1998; Kramer,

1999; Mayer et al., 1995; Zand, 1972). For example, in environments with clearly defined expectations and accompanying consequences, the presence of trust is far less salient. In their review of 105 empirical studies spanning 40 years, Dirks and Ferrin (2002) describe such environments as "strong situations," since clear direction and incentives/deterrents mitigate risk and, therefore, the likelihood of one's trust being betrayed. Environments governed by precise management-labor contracts, for example, that clearly outline working conditions, responsibilities, and similar expectations, reduce the need for trust between parties (Forsyth et al., 2011). By removing risk, these strong situations not only reduce the need for trust between parties but can also limit the development of trust. "Weak situations," on the other hand, provide much less structure, abound with ambiguity, and lack clear incentives/deterrents to moderate behavior. This uncertainty creates risk for the parties involved, especially when interdependence is required of individuals and teams in order to achieve organizational objectives (Bijlsma & Koopman, 2003; Dirks & Ferrin, 2002;). Organizations undergoing crisis, for example, may lack the clear information, direction, and structure necessary to maintain strong, interdependent relationships between working groups, instead relying on trusting relationships to achieve outcomes.

Further, trust is neither static nor stable. Rather, it is a fluid and reinforcing loop that strengthens incrementally over time based on observed behaviors, third-party information, and positive interactions (Benna & Hambacher, 2020; Bijlsma & Koopman 2003; Luhmann, 1979; Zand, 1972). While trust requires time to develop gradually, it can be destroyed relatively quickly since negative experiences are more noticeable and impactful than positive ones (Kramer, 1999; Slovic, 1993). While trust may be repaired,

it can be “difficult and time-consuming” (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000, p. 578). Hurley (2012) explains that repairing trust is more difficult than building it, as it requires overcoming more negative emotions and the commitment from both sides to repair the relationship. While literature suggests that the level of betrayal affects the level of work needed to repair trust, the same four steps may be used: admit the violation, apologize, ask for forgiveness, and publicly change the behavior that caused the harm (Tschannen-Moran, 2014). This process of trust-development and trust-erosion based on experience, outlined first by Zand (1972) and later refined by Six (2007), is the hallmark of relational trust.

Lastly, one’s willingness to trust is based on certain perceived characteristics of the trustee, which are constantly assessed, often simultaneously, as the trustor makes judgements about the trustee (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; Six, 2007; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015). While researchers use a variety of terms to describe these characteristics, the characteristics themselves are remarkably consistent across the literature, generally categorized to include benevolence, honesty, competence, openness, and reliability, otherwise known as the five facets of trust (Mayer et al., 1995; Tschannen-Moran, 2014; Six, 2007).

Organizational/Collective Trust

Interdependent relationships exist not only between agents, but also across organizations. Like individuals, organizations require interdependence from their members in order to achieve desired outcomes, and therefore a climate of trust is necessary for the organization’s success (Forsyth, et al., 2011; Mayer et al., 1995). In their 1989 book, *Getting Together: Building Relationships as We Negotiate*, Fisher and

Brown contend that trust might be "the single most important element of a good working relationship" (p. 107). This is due, in part, to the influence trust has in reducing competitive behaviors and increasing collaborative ones (Butler, 1999). Organizational trust manifests itself through increased cooperation, improved performance, and a greater willingness to accept managerial decisions (Kramer, 1999).

Trust is especially important in organizations where direct supervision and control of behaviors is either impossible or inefficient (Forsyth et al., 2011; Mayer et al., 1995). For example, the shift from in-person task completion to working remotely in response to the COVID-19 pandemic presents managers with far fewer opportunities to directly supervise employees. In these cases, managers must trust that individuals and teams are fulfilling their responsibilities to the organization without management's ability to monitor or control team behaviors.

Power Asymmetry and Trust

Trust between two or more agents is stronger and more reciprocal when perceived risks are shared relatively equally (Butler, 1999), with both parties inclined to show vulnerability since they both have just as much to lose if trust is violated. However, when perceived risks are not equally shared, the trusting relationship can become unbalanced. Agents who hold an advantage, such as positional authority, may be insulated from some risks in relations with a subordinate (Currall & Judge, 1995). On the other hand, an agent with fewer advantages, such as a workplace subordinate, will avoid vulnerability from risk-taking when interacting with someone of greater authority (Currall & Judge, 1995). These dynamics may come to play in school districts, which are typically organized in hierarchical structures complicated by multiple internal and external stakeholders often

vying for influence. The inclination to avoid vulnerability has organizational consequences, typically manifesting in low information-sharing, limited cooperation, and fewer extra-role behaviors, all of which affect the organization's performance (Kramer, 1999).

What Influences the Willingness to Trust?

Hurley's 2012 book, *The Decision to Trust,* synthesizes over 20 years of research across the fields of economics, psychology, and sociology, along with his own experience working with teams, to explain what influences a person's decision to trust. His work resulted in the creation of a 10-factor "Decision to Trust" model. Seven of the factors in this model are "situational" (situational security, similarities, interests, benevolent concern, capability, predictability/integrity, and communication). Situational factors are most easily controlled by the leader of the organization. Three of the factors are dispositional; Hurley labels these "trustor factors." They include risk tolerance, adjustment, and power, which in Hurley's model means the perception of one's ability to control a situation. Trustor factors are more difficult for the leader to influence as they are unique to a person's background, experiences, and personality. However, Hurley explains that when a leader understands the 10 factors, he or she may be able to influence them in ways that may offset another's low propensity to trust.

Why is Trust Important?

The role of education in our society has increasingly been linked as a determinant of life outcomes for our children. If we return to the grounding theory that John Dewey espoused in the 20th century, education was viewed as a means for social reform, such

that if we fairly distribute the knowledge and social intelligence among the people, it will serve toward the common good for society as a whole, ultimately providing for the betterment of our democracy (Sikandar, 2016). In the 21st century, many school districts and educators are charged with mitigating the effects of hundreds of years of institutionalized and systemic oppression, while reducing the effects of the resulting economic disparities now present in many communities across the United States. When faced with this overwhelming charge, distrust in our schools and school systems results from public concern that schools are not enacting change on behalf of students with the sense of urgency required to produce different life outcomes for students (Tschannen-Moran, 2014). This begs the question: Why is trust important in achieving that goal?

There are examples cited in the literature where the concept of trust has been linked to positive outcomes for students and schools. For example, Bryk and Schneider illustrate in their book *Trust in Schools: A Core Resource for Improvement* (2003), and summarize in a shorter article (2003), their 10-year longitudinal study conducted on 12 Chicago elementary schools, representing mixed student and community characteristics and demographics, through intensive case studies, with each case study spanning approximately four years. Using interviews, focus groups and observations, they found that the students in schools with higher levels of relational trust, as measured by respect, personal regard, competence, and integrity, demonstrated a higher rate of improvement when it came to reading and mathematics performance. As such, they defined trust as a "core resource" for improvement in schools.

Daly (2009) examined trust and school improvement through a study of over

400 teachers and 53 administrators in 14 schools in California, eight of which were labeled “program improvement” (PI) schools because they failed to meet adequate yearly progress (AYP) for two consecutive years under No Child Left Behind (NCLB). He examined the predictive nature of trust and the concept of threat-rigidity through surveys in all schools, as well as focus groups and interviews at two of the schools. Threat-rigidity occurs among educators when schools are under intense pressure and accountability to improve. Educators under these circumstances can experience a perceived threat condition which can impact their ability to be open to change, complicate collaboration, disrupt clear communication, and impact decision-making. Daly found that higher levels of trust were associated with lower levels of a threat-rigidity response. One can make the argument that the circumstances and reactions described in this study are similar to those experienced in times of crisis. To this end, educational policy on both federal and local levels has framed the current state of education in the United States as “failing.” Researchers Olsen and Sexton (2009) have called this framing “the crisis of education” (p. 16).

When districts attempt to enact systems in order to support change efforts, the success of those efforts is also impacted by the level of trusting relationships at the school level. Louis (2007) conducted a study of five high schools in five different rural and urban districts with populations ranging from 2,000 to 17,000 students. Each district had implemented quality management (QM) principles as part of school improvement efforts. Schools that were characterized by high trust were those where teachers cited the QM principle of “doing the right thing” as applied to the district's capacity to be fair. Through interviews and focus groups, Louis found that in those schools with high trust, QM

principles were more easily introduced and implemented, as opposed to those schools with low trust, where implementation was more difficult. Further it appeared that relational trust was the key mitigating factor as to whether teachers had a positive association with the change initiative.

Trust is a feature in both the success of technical and adaptive leadership, as well as in the capacity-building of school leaders. Adaptive and technical leadership skills are necessary for managing day-to-day change in a school district and are even more necessary during a time of crisis. Daly and Chrispeels (2008) examined leadership for change and the role trust plays in the effectiveness of those efforts. In their study they define technical leadership as those leadership problems that are more easily resolved and addressed, whereas adaptive leadership changes are more deeply embedded, typically requiring a shift in an organization's values and norms. They surveyed 292 site and district administrators across four school districts in California asking respondents to examine their own school site leadership and trust behaviors, as well as those of other members of the organization. Gathering data on both internal and external perceptions of technical and adaptive leadership dimensions as they connect to trust, they found that three core aspects of trust (respect, risk, and competence) have the highest predictive relationships with both technical and adaptive leadership change.

As districts seek to build the capacity of principals, Cosner (2009) found that collegial trust was a central feature of the capacity-building work. This study was undertaken with 11 high school principals in Wisconsin with three or more years of experience, who were nominated by professional leadership organizations as successfully building capacity in their schools. Through interviews linking principals' leadership

perceptions about their school reform efforts and questions specific to trust, Cosner (2009) examined the concept of collegial trust in trying to understand what made principals strong in the area of capacity building. Collegial trust is similar in definition to collective trust, which is often critical in complex task environments where cooperation and coordination are key. Cosner (2009) describes collegial trust as interactions between individuals and group or team members, seeing collegial trust as laying the foundation for increased cooperation, team satisfaction, and commitment.

The literature around the role of trust at the central office level is far less extensive. In reality, the success of district goals relies heavily on the success of individual schools. Therefore, it makes sense that the role of trust in the success of schools, and as a central feature of school leadership, has been the primary focus of much research. However, trust is also an essential aspect for the effectiveness of central office administrators and the ability to establish trust with schools. In a study of a small district north of Los Angeles consisting of 12 elementary schools, four middle schools, an alternative school, and a community day school, Chhuon et al. (2008) set out to observe how central office administrators enhanced trust with its school site leaders. Through three rounds of qualitative interviews, the authors found explicit trust-building efforts, such as shifting the content of management meeting activities to focus on trust building, incorporating central office visits to school sites, and implementing districtwide summits. As a result, school leaders and their leadership teams reported that the district increased aspects of trust, specifically, openness, risk, and communication. Although trust was not the only factor to be studied, nor the only factor at play, across these studies, it is clear

that trust remains critically important for educational leaders as they undertake school reform efforts.

Trust in Leadership Practices

Educational leaders are charged with understanding the importance of trust in relationships and practices to accomplish necessary school reform and improve learning opportunities for all students. Bryk and Schneider (2003) captured the powerful influence of social trust in meaningful school improvement, with their findings indicating that the absence of trust provokes sustained controversy around resolving even relatively simple problems, making larger tasks, such as school reform, nearly impossible. Such a study supports the need for leaders, including superintendents, DEI directors, principals, supervisors, teachers, and union officers to understand how trust can be built and lost within their communities (Tschannen-Moran, 2014). Tschannen-Moran (2014) notes that "school leaders bear the largest responsibility for setting a tone of trust….it is time for school leaders to become knowledgeable about cultivating trust because trustworthy leadership is at the heart of successful schools" (pp. 13-14).

For the purpose of this study, we draw on Leithwood and Riehl's (2003) definition of leadership as "those persons who provide direction and exert influence in order to achieve the district and/or school goals" (p. 9). Leaders have high levels of dependency as many of the functions they encompass are performed by other people in different roles throughout the district. This interpersonal dependency and vulnerability helps us understand that leadership is more a function than a role of formal authority (Leithwood

& Riehl, 2003). Due to their position, leaders play a critical role in the culture of their organizations. Dirks and Ferrin (2002) found that trust in leadership appears to have a significant relationship with each of their studied outcomes, such as work behaviors, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and, most strongly, correlated satisfaction with the leader. As such, leaders have power and influence on trust-formation.

While the research literature on trust cuts across multiple relationships within schools, including those between teachers and parents, the principal and parents, and within groups of teachers (Forsyth et al., 2011; Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999), it places a heavy focus on the role of the principal in fostering trust. Much of the work is limited in its focus on the perceptions of teachers and its omission of the principal's experience of trust-building. Furthermore, the majority of trust research focuses on quantitative methods that do not examine how teachers and principals make sense of their interactions with each other, or what experiences, "schemas, cognitions, and emotions" (Daly et al., 2015) affect their perceptions of each other or their propensity to trust. In addition, the principal-teacher ecosystem is not the entirety of a school district. Schools function with many interdependent players (Benna & Hambacher, 2020) who engage in various types of trust formation, much of which remains unexamined in the literature.

In her book, *A Matter of Trust*, Tschannen-Moran (2014) introduces leaders who were negligent in demonstrating care, competence, balanced responsibility, and reliability to build trust within their schools. Damaged trust ultimately resulted in their inability to effectively lead, and further negatively affected trust in various relationships within the community. In contrast, the leader who performed well showed high levels of competence through demonstration, care through listening well, and consistency through

active visibility within their school community. That leader also "understood that the work of the school happens primarily through relationships, so she invested time and resources in maturing those relationships" through traditional events that built good rapport (Tschannen-Moran, 2014, p. 7). Such effective leadership was rewarded with the common goal of high performance on measures of student achievement. Through these examples, educational leaders may learn the importance of earning the trust of stakeholders in their community to achieve success. Understanding the role of trust and how it moves through relationships and practices is essential for a school community's effective day-to-day functioning as well as for leading through a crisis.

Trust in Leadership During a Time of Crisis

The importance of trust becomes intensified during a time of crisis. As Tschannen-Moran (2014) noted: "These days, trust in our society does indeed seem to have been damaged and is in scarce supply" (p. 9). From the continued unfair treatment and murder of unarmed Black and Brown people at the hands of law enforcement to the ongoing inequities within healthcare for People of Color during the COVID-19 pandemic, trust is essential to finding justice and making necessary changes during such societal crises. Those societal crises directly affect the educational experience of all students, especially those who are marginalized. In practice, we see this revealed through lack of fair access to remote learning, limited support for student achievement, inconsistent attendance, and a decline in students' mental and physical health. During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, Asian, Latinx, and Black children were far more likely than White children to be exposed to school closures and distance learning, potentially worsening the opportunity gap found along racial lines (Parolin, 2021). The

strength of trust within school systems becomes essential as society looks to education to respond in a way that not only protects our children but impacts their future educational and economic potential (Tschannen-Moran, 2014). It is the responsibility of educational leaders to create a culture of trust before a crisis occurs, in order to minimize possible destruction.

Considering that trust is needed during times of risk and vulnerability (Handford & Leithwood, 2013; Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999), it follows that times of change or crisis especially require trusting relationships. As change is a constant in schools, there is always a need for trust. However, during periods of rapid change due to a crisis, educators are generally expected to adopt new practices or systems quickly, and as a result one of the key trust-forming characteristics, reliability, will be disrupted. Louis (2007) explains that "planned change decreases institutional trust because it disrupts the 'taken for granted' aspects of the organization's functioning" (p. 4). Louis explains that increased uncertainty during times of rapid change, which may occur as staff build common understandings over multiple aspects of their work, may contribute to the breakdown of trust. Further, Louis suggests that the demands of rapid change may undermine institutional expectations and challenge "the traditional ecology of the administrator-teacher relationship" (p. 2). As a result, trust appears to be emerging as a clear factor for school improvement, with the body of literature suggesting that principals must address situations of low trust if systemic change is to occur successfully (Louis, 2007). Less is known, however, about the levels of trust needed for broader systemic change across a district.

Overall, this literature highlights the need to better understand the relationships and practices of educational stakeholders who build trust across a K-12 school district. This study provides an opportunity to contribute towards filling this gap. By examining trust among various educators in one district, we better understand the dynamics and characteristics needed in leadership practices in order to redress systemic inequities and live up to societal expectations of schools. Overall, leaders must not only acknowledge but enter into school reform with the mindset that change creates risk—and risk requires trust (Handford & Leithwood, 2013).

Chapter 2[2]

Methods

Our collective study examines how trust influenced interdependent relationships across one school district in the northeast of the United States during the COVID-19 pandemic. Given the importance of schools in society, the expectation for multiple stakeholders to work interdependently across them, and the need for trust during times of risk and vulnerability (Handford & Leithwood, 2013; Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999), the study helped us better understand the influence of trust on relationships and practices during times of crisis. The pandemic required stakeholders to adapt and change practices quickly, providing a unique opportunity to study the role of trust in relationships during crises, which may have implications for other high-stress school situations. The following section provides an overview of the processes and protocols used across our five studies, including the study design, site selection, participant selection, data collection, and analysis.

Study Design

Our collective study is a bounded case study of one district in the northeast region of the United States during the COVID-19 pandemic. Given that our research is exploratory, qualitative methods were best suited to our collective question (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019): *How, if at all, does trust influence the relationships and practices of educational stakeholders during times of crisis?*

---

[2] This chapter was written in collaboration with the authors listed on the title page and reflects the team approach of the dissertation in practice: Ruth H. Evee, Katherine Grassa, Kelly M. Hung, Karen L. McCarthy, Gregory B. Myers

As we studied one school district, in depth, and with multiple levels of stakeholders, a case study method was used for our group project (Merriam &Tisdell, 2016). We gathered evidence through the use of interviews, document review, observations, and a survey. Throughout our process, we worked collaboratively, collecting data in pairs, when necessary, and sharing all individually collected data with the research team for secondary coding and reliability checks. As explained in Chapter 1, we analyzed our group findings through the shared conceptual framework of relational trust and the five facets of trust (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999).

Site Selection

As our team studied multiple leadership levels in a district, we sought a unionized public school district in the northeast region of the United States, made up of several schools with at least 5,000 students. The size of the district helped to ensure a sufficient number of staff, both at the school and the central office level, who could participate in the study. We purposefully selected a district whose superintendent had a tenure of more than three years and a union leadership that had been relatively stable throughout that tenure. This longevity helped to ensure that the superintendent and the district's union leaders had sufficient opportunity to interact in ways that either develop or erode trust. In addition, we also selected a racially diverse district which was currently conducting DEI work, as one of our sub-studies focused on DEI work during times of crisis.

Participant Selection

Participant selection was in accordance with Institutional Review Board (IRB) requirements, including the use of informed consent and honoring participant privacy and

confidentiality. We used purposeful sampling across our five studies to identify subjects for interviews. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) explain that purposeful sampling is appropriate when a researcher "wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (p. 96). We were interested in how trust functions in specific settings and between specific groups. As a result, purposeful sampling was needed.

In addition, two of our studies used snowball sampling. Creswell and Guetterman (2019) explain that, "In certain research situations, you may not know the best people to study because of the unfamiliarity of the topic or the complexity of the event" (p. 209). We used snowball sampling to identify individuals experienced with the phenomena we are studying, such as individuals serving on central office-initiated and/or supported teams. Table 2 lists interview subjects. These include the superintendent and key central office leaders, principals and teacher leaders, members of the teachers' union executive board, and leaders of DEI initiatives. We contacted all participants by email (see Appendix A), and they provided consent to participate in an interview (see Appendix B).

Table 2

Participants

Educational Stakeholder	**Number of Participants**
Superintendent of Schools	1
Teacher Union Leader	1
Central Office Leaders	6
Principals	5

Teachers	4
Leaders of DEI Initiatives *Includes 5 from similarly-situated districts	6
Total Participants	23

Data Collection

Case study research has the goal of expanding or generalizing theories (Yin, 2018). Our study intent was to expand the current theories on trust by examining the role trust plays throughout a school district, including its influence on various leadership roles during times of crisis. Yin (2018) explains that case studies rely "on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion" (p. 17). To understand the role trust may play for educational leaders during the COVID-19 pandemic, we collected data in the form of semi-structured interviews, observations, document reviews, and a survey. We collected data between August 2021 and January of 2022. We created systems to organize and label our data, removed identifiers, and maintained password-protected files, all in accordance with IRB.

Interviews

Interviews are common in qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) because they help to draw out participant experiences. Semi-structured interviews were a primary source of our data. Trust, as explained in our prior chapter, is complex. It involves relationships, vulnerability, feelings, and interpretation (Daly et al., 2015; Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999; Hurley, 2012). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) explain that "interviewing is necessary when we cannot observe behavior, feelings, or how people interpret the world around them" (p. 108). Our research set out to learn how participants

experience and understand trust across their school and district-based relationships, and its impact on those relationships and their practice.

In order to understand the influence of trust on the relationships and practices across and among various leaders and staff within a district, we completed several semi-structured interviews, grounded in a guiding tool based on Hoy and Tschannen-Moran's (1999) five facets of trust, with the following participants: superintendent, central district office staff and leaders, principals, district union leaders, and teachers. Our team determined who was best suited to interview our participants based on professional positionality, and, if needed, two researchers were present for an interview to support accuracy in data collection. As we conducted exploratory research, we remained open to our participants' "perspectives and understandings" (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016, p. 109). Therefore, we used a semi-structured format. This enabled us to work from a set group of interview questions central to our studies, while maintaining the flexibility to be responsive to our participants. We recorded and transcribed each session via Otter.ai, Inc., an audio recording and transcription software, to turn our recordings into text. Questions sought to operationalize aspects of trust through asking about concrete experiences. Our interview protocols may be found in Appendix C.

Observations

Our team gathered data via observations, which serve many purposes. For example, they may reveal information about the dynamics of team members, which may not be revealed in an interview (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Our research team observed a school committee meeting as well as a district level meeting using a structured protocol.

We reviewed and finalized our observational notes soon after the meetings, recording and transcribing the notes via Otter.ai, Inc. See Appendix D for our observation protocol.

Document Review

We conducted a document review to gain an initial understanding of the context of the district. We reviewed the district's current strategic plan, the most recent accountability plan, which was available on the district website, for the school where we conducted research, and school climate data aggregated by level (elementary, middle, high school). Documents revealed district and school goals and priorities, and teachers' perception of their school's climate, which served as a proxy for trust. Documents added a layer of complexity to our data by providing context for observations and interviews, which helped to triangulate our findings.

Survey

We sent an anonymous web-based survey to all teachers in one school via the Qualtrics® XM survey platform, which allows the user to create surveys and generate reports. The complete survey questions are found in Appendix E. We adapted the questions from the Omnibus T-Scale (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 2003), and used a 7-point Likert scale survey based on the five-facets of trust (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999). Questions solicited each teacher's opinion of the trustworthiness of their principal, as well as the general climate of trust in the principal among the school's teachers. Approximately 56% of the teaching body of the school completed the survey. We used this data to gain a sense of the school climate at a single site and to triangulate the teacher interviews with the larger body of teachers in the school.

Data Analysis

All data was password-protected, with individual identifiers removed. Interviews were recorded with signed consent (Appendix B) and transcribed via Otter.ai, Inc. We organized our data by type: interview, observations, document review, and survey. We used the software program Dedoose*,* a cross-platform application for analyzing qualitative and mixed methods research to organize our data as we coded it. We coded our data multiple times in an iterative process, noting patterns and themes. When we had questions about the analysis and meaning of the data collected, we used peer-coding, examining pieces of data together for the purposes of enlarging our analytical lens on the data gathered (Saldaña, 2021).

We conducted our first round of coding using an *a priori* codebook derived from Hoy and Tschannen-Moran's (1999) five facets of trust: benevolence, reliability, competence, honesty, and openness (Appendix F). Through another round of coding, we labeled our data with words or phrases that reflected aspects of our conceptual framework, key themes from our literature, and connections to our research questions. We used a third coding iteration to label phrases and ideas that stood out repeatedly. To reduce bias and support the integrity of our research, we shared data from across all five studies among team members.

To build the trustworthiness of our findings, we met weekly to discuss our data and share preliminary findings. At times, we co-coded and cross-checked each other's interpretations and continued to use the *a priori* codebook to support if there were discrepancies (Appendix F). We coalesced the codes around categories, identifying trends across our categories and codes. We also identified trends across the five sub-studies.

This further helped us see connections between the studies, which led to our collective group findings discussed in Chapter 4.

Each researcher maintained a detailed process memo documenting the researcher's work, including action steps, observations, and items for further study throughout all aspects of data collection and analysis. This allowed each of us to remember which data or findings led us in various directions or pushed us to narrow, widen, or adjust our focus along the process. In addition, these process memos will allow our study to be more easily replicated by subsequent researchers, thereby increasing its reliability and strengthening its potential impact to the field.

Positionality

Trust is a sensitive topic with which we all have experience. Qualitative researchers believe that personal views can never be kept separate from interpretations, which are based on hunches, insights, and intuition (Creswell and Guetterman, 2019). As a research team, all five members are currently educational leaders. Within our leadership roles, we acknowledge that each member has developed beliefs regarding the importance of trust and how it affects our daily work with stakeholders. To support the integrity of our research, we disclosed our professional positions and districts to each participant and came to a consensus about how to apply the codes we established in our *a priori* codebook. See Appendix F.

Further, we acknowledge that our team composition, which includes four members who identify as female, one who identifies as male, and a single person of color, might have added assumptions and differing sensitivities while collecting and

analyzing data. Finally, because trust is a word that might produce a guarded response, we started by asking participants to define and share examples of trust in their own work. We intentionally selected team members to lead interviews who shared similar professional roles, as well as racial and gender backgrounds, with the interviewees. Ultimately, we believe that the composition and passion of our research team added valuable experiences and perspectives to enrich our research, which is grounded in our commitment to enhance the practices of educational leadership and creation of equitable schools for students.

Conclusion

Schools play a sizable role in society. They prepare generations by teaching them skills needed for adulthood. In addition, as places of connection and centers of activity, they may provide structure and stability for entire communities. Due to their importance in society, schools must be able to function effectively through times of calm and crisis. Our study identified the role relationships and trust may play across various levels of a school district during times of crisis, specifically the COVID-19 pandemic.

Through our study, we worked to make sense of levels of trust and how those levels may aid the development of more productive and effective school districts. We sought what may be universal about trust formation as well as the nuances of how trust may function differently given the varying positional roles and responsibilities across a school district. In addition, our study adds to the understanding of how trust may influence the relationships and practices of educational leaders during a crisis. Our findings expand upon the body of trust research on schools beyond the teacher's view of the principals to delve deeply into the experiences of those who work in and across

school districts, furthering our understanding of how a crisis may impact the way in which trust is formed, practiced, and used—and its implications for leadership practice during times of rapid change. Findings may inform the practice of how we train, coach, and mentor school leaders; how school districts respond to crises; and even how leaders effectively work in high-change environments such as turnaround schools. Furthermore, we believe that organizations which foster trusting relationships are healthier workplaces. As such, we hope that the findings of our study contribute to the well-being and resilience of leaders across school districts.

CHAPTER 3[3]

Statement of the Purpose and Research Problem

Equity work looks to undo and heal societal violence, trauma, and inequities to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to reach their full potential (Love, 2019). Educational leaders are being called as catalysts to help achieve this and transform inequities through social justice initiatives. Wang (2018) suggests that transformative leadership includes leaders transforming their beliefs and values into practice to address social values such as democracy, inclusion, justice, and equity. Cambron-McCabe and McCarthy (2005) argue that school leaders should question the assumptions that drive school policies and practices, while leadership programs must better prepare educational leaders to critically inquire about norms that often pose insurmountable barriers for many students' academic success. Breen (2016) supports this proposition in finding that social inequities declined most in countries where leadership implemented several system policy changes to promote equitable access to education. Recognizing that there are many purposes of schools, he notes that the potential to improve societal inequities through schooling is considered the most essential (Stanford Center on Poverty and Inequality, 2016). In comparison, diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) work is being increasingly implemented within the corporate sector and is said to be the driving force behind business successes (The Business Journals, 2021). Research in the corporate sector has presented effective ways to maintain the momentum of DEI work, and I found facets of trust mentioned often throughout the studies. The research reveals that to gain buy-in from all stakeholders within the business, leaders need to be honest about progress,

[3] This chapter was written by Ruth H. Evee

transparent and consistent with DEI efforts, open about change, and make the progress visible internally and externally (The Business Journals, 2021). Since honesty, consistency, openness, and visibility are all components of trust, the education sector should take a close look at how trust affects the implementation of DEI work. The findings from such a study can then be applied to DEI initiatives to improve the possibility of academic success.

During a time of crisis, vulnerability can increase, potentially forcing stakeholder perceptions of leadership to shift. This shift can then test the trust stakeholders have in their leadership, resulting in barriers to DEI work in schools. In the face of the current COVID-19 pandemic, educators and policymakers insist upon "getting back to normal," although Gloria Ladson-Billings (2021) suggests this is the wrong approach for youth who were unsuccessful and oppressed in our schools before the pandemic. She suggests that "normal" is where the problems reside. In her view, the COVID-19 pandemic gives us the opportunity to rethink the "doomsday machine we have built for ourselves" (p. 68). In Massachusetts, for example, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have exposed and contributed to the widening of the opportunity gap for low-income Black and Brown students in several ways (Toness, 2021; Fernandes, 2021). For instance, chronic absenteeism has increased by 5-8% since 2020, reaching 30% across all K-12 grades in fall 2021, with severe economic challenges forcing many students to take on jobs to help support their families. A crisis can expose and enhance the inequities in schools, and such times make a strong case for the need for a trusted focus on DEI work in all educational settings to ensure we do not return to the "norm" of inequities for any student. The educational system must build trust in these communities such that an equitable education

is the priority and will offer all students an equal opportunity to succeed. Lack of trust in the commitment of school systems to provide a fair opportunity to particularly low-income students of color within Black and Brown communities has been long-lived and is the reason for a "hard reset," described as a fresh start free of those policies that created the inequities (Ladson-Billings, 2021).

While there is ongoing research on the importance of and proposals to prepare school leaders to be social justice advocates, to improve equity in our schools, we need additional research and understanding that intersects the work of current DEI leadership and the relevance of trust to pursue DEI initiatives (Abusham, 2019; Shaked, 2020; McKenzie et al., 2008; Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005). The purpose of this study is therefore to explore the experience of DEI leadership and uncover how, if at all, trust influenced their DEI work during a time of crisis. Taking a deep dive into the role of DEI leadership during the year of 2021 (during the COVID-19 crisis) and exploring the perceptions and expectations in the role and the work, are imperative if the answer to education inequities is to fill our schools with such leadership. Thus, this study was guided by the following research questions:

- How do leadership practices and perspectives support DEI work?
- How, if at all, does the role of trust impact the implementation of DEI work during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Conceptual Framework

For the purpose of this study, I integrated relational trust and Social Justice Leadership as a conceptual framework to analyze the practice of those leading DEI

initiatives in an urban school. Further, this study investigated the phenomenon that DEI work is not just the work of a single leader, as introduced in the National Association of Independent Schools 2019 study of DEI Directors within Independent Schools, but possibly a position adopted and embedded in the collective community of leaders and stakeholders. Due to the sensitive nature and call for vulnerability in DEI work, a high level of trust is needed in the daily work of DEI leadership.

As previously defined, relational trust is, "...the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party" (Mayer, 1995, p.712). Social Justice Leadership, as defined by Wang, is about engaging in democratic, inclusive, and transformative practices to change social structures and influence all stakeholders to collegially promote justice and equity in schools. (2018) Further, Foster argues this type of leadership to be apparent not in the individual leader but in the relationships with stakeholders collectively working towards a social vision and change (1989). Using Foster's argument that leadership is about relationships, combined with Wang's implications of engagement with people to be an influence in promoting equitable school structures, this study brings forth evidence of the complex nature of DEI leadership by focusing on the practices and perspectives of such leadership. To build and extend on this work, I focus on the impact of trust as an important component to implement such multidimensional practices.

Social Justice leaders make issues of race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and other historically and currently marginalizing conditions in the United States central to their advocacy, leadership practice, and vision (Theoharis, 2007).

Although this study is intended to focus primarily on race as a component of DEI, it is worth acknowledging that Theoharis (2007) also includes inclusive schooling practices for students with disabilities, English language learners (ELLs), and other students traditionally segregated in schools as embedded in his definition. I grounded my work in Theoharis's description of Social Justice Leaders as I investigated leaders in various districts and schools who worked on DEI initiatives.

While exploring the experiences of such leaders, I focused on evidence of how trust influenced their implementation of DEI work. Theoharis (2007) analyzed Social Justice leaders (principals) and their common leadership traits, discovering that these leaders embody a complicated mix of arrogance and humility, as they lead with intense visionary passion while maintaining tenacious commitment. I build on this and similar studies that have identified common traits in social justice leadership by focusing on necessary practices and how trust and/or other factors are interwoven in the work of DEI.

Literature Review

Defining Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Diversity, equity, and inclusion are all different aspects of social justice initiatives, but, when accomplished in a unified way, they can create a socially just community that dismantles systemic inequities. As defined by many practitioners in the field, diversity has an outcome which accounts for the presence of individuality and uniqueness of every person in a single community. Inclusion also has an outcome and is apparent when each unique person feels valued and welcomed into a single community. Finally, equity does not have one outcome but is ongoing. Equity is an approach that ensures everyone has

access to the same opportunities. It recognizes that advantages and barriers exist, and that each unique person can have a different starting point. Further, to define equity, Joseph Levitan shares that equity acknowledges the different needs of individuals and how they all require specific support to be able to reach a goal, such as achieving proficiency on standardized tests. He goes on to say that educational equity ensures that schools help all students achieve, even if that means distributing resources "unequally" (2016). Yet, inclusion isn't as simple to define as Ane Qvortrup and Les Qvortrup introduced in their definition of inclusion, revealing that inclusive education must be differentiated and operationalized according to three dimensions: levels of inclusion, types of social communities, and degree of being included in and/or excluded from those social communities (2018). Their study reminds us that inclusion can be complex and goes beyond the reference towards special education students but refers to all students.

The Perceived Work of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

"At the institutional level, the work of DEIJ (as some have added justice to the acronym) attempts to eradicate the structures and policies that entrench and reproduce racism deep within the fabric of schooling" (Solomon, 2002, p. 176). Dismantling the systemic problems associated with racism requires school leaders to do more than simply acknowledge racism exists, by identifying and redressing any systemic biases ss a necessary next step to defeating racism (Swanson & Welton, 2019). The work of all three facets is essential and sensitive work that requires a heightened sense of awareness and fearless persistence.

In Wang's study (2018) of how leaders (i.e., principals) promote social justice to redress marginalization, inequity, and divisive action that are prevalent in schools, he

found that the work of social justice leadership is embedded in having student-centered leadership, developing people for social justice, and building a positive school community. Wang's qualitative study used semi-structured interviews of 22 principals in Ontario, Canada. The leaders he studied were committed to social justice and prioritized the needs of students, "proactively using various approaches to solicit student input, educate them on issues of justice, empower them, and work with them to reverse inequitable practices" (p. 480). They also recognized that leading for social justice is not a one-person task but involved the collective efforts of school-wide stakeholders. Wang found that placing great importance on developing leaders with strategies such as "equitable hiring practices, encouraging staff to take risks, educating and communicating with staff on justice issues, and empowering staff to work collaboratively toward school goals" is essential (p. 482).

Further studies have taken a closer look at preparing educational leaders to do DEI work and become social justice leaders. After studying 72 journal articles on social justice leadership, Capper et al. (2006) found that only 11 offered explicit suggestions for preparing school leaders for social justice. Caper et al.'s framework is based on the perception and expectation of leaders to exhibit critical consciousness, knowledge, and practical skills focused on social justice. To achieve these skills requires that their curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment be oriented toward social justice with students.

The Role of Trust in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion work

In order to properly address the inequities in schools, some level of risk is involved, and leaders must seek trust from all stakeholders to effectively bring forth sensitive topics and uncomfortable awareness. Trust is an integral part of all successful relationships and the cornerstone for effective school communities (Handford & Leithwood, 2013). Bryk and Schneider (2003) disclosed the four "vital signs" for identifying and assessing trust: respect, competence, personal regard, and integrity, in comparison to Tschannen-Moran's five facets of trust as described in Chapter One of this study. Within my individual study, I investigate the possible "vital signs" found to be drivers of trust by identifying Tschannen-Moran's five facets of trust within the implementation of DEI leadership work.

Benevolence is characterized by a generalized spirit of goodwill and a willingness to extend oneself in support of the well-being of others (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015). All stakeholders entrust their most important objective, the experiences of all students, to be in the best interests of the entire school community. In addition, DEI leaders must not only clearly articulate the vision of an equitable and inclusive school, but also model the desired behaviors and coach faculty to pursue that vision. The sensitivity and complexity of DEI work indeed requires them to successfully mediate any inevitable conflicts that emerge. When leaders demonstrate the ability to get the job done, whatever the job may entail, stakeholders are most inclined to trust in the leader (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015). To be trusted, leaders must also be honest in their interactions with the school community (Tschannen-Moran and Hoy, 1998) about inequitable findings and how internal and external factors affect the student experience and inclusivity of families.

Openness is the extent to which relevant information is not withheld; it is the process by which individuals make themselves vulnerable by sharing information with others (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999). Having an honest and open approach requires an authentic character, and the ability to be truthful to one's own beliefs and feelings. Findings in the ExploElevate 2021 study reveal that DEI leadership includes a component of authenticity and openness, as such leaders are also learners on this journey. They must reflect heavily on their personal beliefs and feelings while leading the fight for justice. Leaders are comfortable with being open and honest when they are aware and transparent with their own journey within DEI work and how it has affected them personally. Tschannen-Moran & Gareis (2015) assert that "Principals (leaders) who come across as too guarded can be suspected of hiding something, either about themselves or concerning their attitudes towards others, thus making teachers (followers/stakeholders) less willing to put themselves in a position of vulnerability to the principal" (p. 69).

Reliability is the extent to which one can count on another to come through with what is needed. As dedicated leaders of social justice, stakeholders expect a level of consistent and fair responses with necessary decision-making. Hanford and Leithwood (2013) concluded that acting consistently and using tools to reduce uncertainty were the most important practices associated with consistency for leaders, followed by working hard, pressing for results, setting standards, and being diligent.

In a study regarding race and leadership of 15 Black principals engaged in DEI work in the New England area, Vinzant (2009) found that authentic leadership and vulnerability were practiced methods they used to break down the barriers of perceived doubt about their competence held by their faculty, parents, and students. In interviews,

participants also expressed their sensitivity to educational inequities and the ability to communicate in a culturally sensitive manner. This study exposed examples of how leaders of color navigate perceived trust by others, allowing them to effectively perform while reconciling their interpretations of others' perceptions of their abilities. In addition, Swanson and Welton's (2019) cross-case study illustrates how two White male principals introduced the topic of race with their predominantly White staff. The findings suggest that both principals had a hard time leading their staff in conversations about racial awareness and were not prepared to effectively respond to the staff's resistance. Both principals admittedly felt unprepared to raise the consciousness needed to move the work forward because they had inadequately explored their own levels of racial awareness. It is noted that one principal who was new to his school needed to spend more time on trust and relationship-building with staff before tackling conversations about race. Whereas this principal's openness and honesty was apparent, he had not been given time to demonstrate respect and consistency to earn the trust of the stakeholders. Trust was clearly a key element, in Swanson and Welton's (2019) findings, to effectively introduce race with vulnerable stakeholders and collaboratively work towards implementing effective DEI initiatives.

The work of DEI requires an overwhelming amount of vulnerability, given the many inequitable practices to which racially marginalized students will be exposed. If the vision for a school system is to provide an equal opportunity to all students, the DEI leader may be expected to articulate the mission, exemplify the work, and navigate stakeholders to meet that vision. The community may also rely on the honesty and communication of the DEI leader to move the school system towards a trustworthy

culture through their own actions and interactions with stakeholders. These relational dependencies create a foundation for the importance of analyzing the intersection of trust and the work of DEI.

Conclusion

In this study, I explore the experience of a specific type of leadership, one which goes beyond the historical practices of a district or school leader. Further research is needed to go beyond understanding practices and perspectives to understanding the knowledge, vision, and passion each DEI leader brings to the role to accomplish such sensitive work. DEI leaders can bring to the table a skillset of conscious racial justice awareness, not yet developed in traditional leadership, that can assist with not only identifying but addressing the systemic inequities that persist in education. Implementing change to combat those inequities requires a high level of relational trust, which can be built by focusing on the facets of trust with an emphasis on DEI leaders exhibiting benevolence, openness, and reliability to secure buy-in from the entire community. The work of DEI leaders is imperative to the growth of truly equitable and inclusive schools that service all students in all districts despite their identities and abilities. Further, while trust can be strong, institutional constraints may not allow for true DEI objectives to be met. Next, I describe my study methods and findings in detail, and discuss how the study contributes to the body of research I introduced above.

Methods

This study is part of a larger study examining relational trust among various leadership roles within one school district during a time of crisis to answer the following research question: *How, if at all, does trust influence the relationships and practices of educational stakeholders during times of crisis?* While Chapter 2 provided a detailed description of the overall study design, site selection, and data collection used as a collective, in this chapter, I focus on my sub-study.

This sub-study focuses specifically on semi-structured interviews to explore how, if at all, trust affects leaders' practices in DEI work during a time of crisis, along with exploring their practices and perspectives. I used qualitative research methods to shed light on the lived experiences of DEI leaders and their practices and perspectives. I used a case study approach to understand the phenomenon of DEI leadership starting within the primary district of the research team, then expanding to five additional leaders outside the district engaged in leading DEI work (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). By taking this approach, I gained an in-depth understanding of DEI work in the primary district of focus and built the depth and trustworthiness of my findings by comparing/contrasting the district leader's experiences with other DEI educational leaders in the area.

Important to this sub-study was that the primary district of study has a racially diverse student body, making it more likely that race influenced social relations in the district, which emphasizes the importance of DEI work in the district. Also, the DEI work in the district was actively evident and included a leader who is exclusively dedicated to working on DEI goals and initiatives, with a staff person focusing full-time on the district's DEI goals and initiatives. Such work includes those purposefully identifying and

dismantling any inequities in the policies and practices within the school district and/or actively creating an inclusive environment for any student not reflective of the majority.

Data Collection

As Merriam and Tisdell (2016) note, “Interviewing is the best technique to use when conducting intensive case studies of a few selected individuals” (p. 108). Given my focus on a few DEI leaders, the main source of data I use in this study are one hour-long semi-structured virtual interviews to capture common practices and perspectives, along with facets of trust shared among a majority of the participants. I also draw on the interview data my research team gathered to the extent that the data were relevant to my study’s DEI focus.

The initial interview I conducted began with the primary district Executive Director of DEI, who I identified through the district website. I contacted this participant through the use of email and phone. Through snowball sampling, I received the names of other leaders who work on DEI initiatives within the primary district to gain a pool of participants. Snowball sampling was an appropriate technique for the study because it allows researchers the opportunity to recruit large numbers of participants by asking current participants to identify other potential eligible participants (Creswell and Guetterman, 2019). Unfortunately, however, although the leaders played an instrumental role in the district’s DEI initiatives, none were able to participate in this study.

To deepen the findings regarding the role of trust in DEI practices during a crisis, I recruited five additional similarly situated DEI leaders from three outside schools/districts. Using purposeful sampling, I contacted them through email and interviewed them using the same protocol. I employed purposeful sampling because it

allows researchers to retrieve and include additional comparable data by selecting "typical" participants who fit the profile of the initial participants and are data-rich (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016).

All six participants identified as Black and/or Latinx with greater than three years of experience in social justice efforts. Of the six DEI leaders interviewed, I conducted three interviews individually, with the remainder part of a focus group interview consisting of a team (one manager and two assistants) focused on DEI initiatives for one district. I used a semi-structured interview format with open-ended questions (Appendix G) for all interviews to allow for a deeper exploration of the respondent views and to investigate new ideas on the topic (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I audio recorded and transcribed each of the interviews, saving the data on a secure password-protected network.

Coding and Analysis

I reviewed and coded transcripts for commonalities and evidence of practices related to building trust with stakeholders and the experience of DEI leadership. I coded data collected from semi-structured interviews multiple times by what some researchers call *ordinary themes* (Creswell and Guetterman, 2019, p. 251) in relation to each research question set within two categories. Category one used open coding to identify themes of practices and perspectives of DEI work. I first extracted all the practices from each interview which revealed 22 predominant practices shared by the majority of participants which I then coded into three distinct categories: support, development, and resource. In further analyzing those categories, I discovered four different stakeholder groups being served by DEI leadership: families (parents or guardians), all students (marginalized and

majority), adults (teachers and school leaders), and the institution (district-level or senior-level administration).

Category two used *a priori* coding to identify evidence of the five facets and/or four vital signs of trust that supported DEI work. To do this, I first extracted the actual behaviors from examples of practices participants shared. Then, through an iterative process, I referenced my *a priori* codebook, (Appendix F) created by the research team and matched the coded data with the deductive descriptions of the facets of trust. To avoid unfocused and repetitive data while helping to possibly refine further investigations, analysis was done simultaneously with data collection (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Limitations

This qualitative study included two significant limitations. First, due to the limitation of time to collect such sensitive and complex data, the depth and scope of the research was restricted. In many instances, DEI initiatives take time to build trust among stakeholders before implementation is in an active state by the leader. However, the heightened sense of urgency for change and hesitancy among stakeholders to buy-in to new initiatives during the COVID-19 pandemic made this a great time to analyze the role of trust among leadership. Second, since DEI leadership is a fairly new administrative role in many school districts, it can vary in assigned responsibilities to best individually suit the achievement of specific vision, mission, and objectives designed by that organization. Demographics of the district contributed to the focus of district DEI initiatives. The student population in the district was predominantly of color, which might make it difficult to apply findings from this study to districts which include different

student and teacher populations. However, this study can inform the practices of school districts with similar demographics. Moreover, the value of a single district study is that it allows for an opportunity to narrow in and individualize the study to discover very focused findings and create unique best practices tailored to that district's characteristics, vision, and goals, which can be applied to other districts similarly situated. Of course, all districts are different and, just as we practice equity for students, we should do the same for districts since equity is meeting the needs of the individual, not conforming all to the same.

Positionality

As a current practitioner in this work, I shared my position with all DEI leaders I interviewed. It was essential that leaders being studied understood that I am experienced in this work and therefore understand the importance of such leadership being explored and shared to grow the achievement of equitable schools. It was my intent to reduce any presence of discomfort and to build rapport with participants regarding the sensitivity of DEI work by revealing my closeness in this research. I thoroughly documented actual data collected and maintained a journal of all personal perceptions of DEI work that could possibly influence my collection or analysis of the data.

Further, while I bring a DEI leadership mindset, I also realize that being the only person of color (Black) on the research team can influence my interpretations of data being collected, creating a different analysis than the individual interpretations of other team members who are influenced by their own racial identities. This dynamic did allow

for a wider perspective during the collection and analysis of the research as well as interpretation of the findings.

As a DEI leader with personal experience, I am passionate about this work and respect the unavoidable challenge of removing predetermined opinions. To reduce bias, I attended to guidelines to implement credible data analyses and interpretations (Mills & Gay, 2019). The findings revealed from this research contribute to previous studies of social justice leadership and support the importance of certain DEI leadership practices to accomplish equity in education.

FINDINGS

I found in this study that DEI leadership is complex, as is the work they have embarked upon to improve equity in education. The study revealed that DEI leaders have a hard task of helping to achieve equity in education, and districts are creating space for the many complex practices being implemented on a day-to-day basis. In response to my first research question, the findings revealed numerous collective practices that DEI leaders adopted to achieve equity in education. Those common practices, as participants shared, were analyzed, and categorized to three distinct areas of engagement: support, development, and resource. Further, while implementing those complex practices, this study revealed DEI leaders have a responsibility of assisting multiple unique groups of educational stakeholders: families, students, adult staff, and the institution. In addition, the findings revealed collectively shared perspectives by all participants: the phenomenon that the role is larger than a single person; the role must have trust and support from those

in power positions; and DEI leaders must have a deep connection with the work through experience and/or training.

In response to my second research question, the data revealed the impact trust has on implementing this complex work generally and during the COVID-19 pandemic specifically. The most prevalent facets I found to be important in implementing the complex work were benevolence, reliability, and openness. The focus on these three facets of trust were specifically present in the responses of the DEI of the primary district. These findings can help us to understand the role of DEI leadership and how to support DEI work to be truly effective in schools during the 21st century.

Overall, the collective findings of this study make it apparent that DEI leadership is a complex job that warrants separate leadership skills than your traditional educational leaders (e.g., principals, superintendents, etc.) to truly identify and address the inequities that continue to negatively affect the educational experience of marginalized children. In addition, as we listen to the voices of DEI leaders in this study, traditional educational leaders charged with hiring and retaining DEI leaders can learn how to best support DEI leaders to accomplish the district strategies and goals being sought in any educational district or school. With support, development, and resources being the main areas of engagement with various stakeholders, the need for relationships with strong trust while implementing the work of DEI lends itself to the importance of understanding the role of trust if we want to successfully accomplish DEI work. It is important to note at the outset that while the focus of the study remains on the primary district of interest, I present the findings below through aggregate patterns I found across all participant responses, noting the primary district only where necessary. This approach ensures that I preserve the

confidentiality of the DEI leader in the primary district of study and honors my participants' vulnerability in sharing insights into their sensitive work.

Leadership practices and perspectives that support DEI work

This study was designed to better understand the important DEI work and those who lead it, since an increasing number of school districts and institutions have added this role in an attempt to help develop equitable schools. As research Question One explored practices and perspectives related to implementing DEI work, the goal was to hear individual experiences and uncover common practices that construct the work of DEI leaders. Also, to understand their perspectives of what is most essential in forming the role and effectively implementing this heavy work with high expectations, the participants reflected on many practices that were central in their daily work of DEI leadership (Chart 1). As reflected in the Chart and sections below, the practices and perspectives painted a complex picture of DEI leadership, one which requires attention to multiple stakeholders and support that cuts across skills.

Chart 1

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Common Leadership Practices (BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS)			
	SUPPORT	DEVELOPMENT	RESOURCE
Families (parents/guardians)	• Assisting in the navigation of the school/district • Communicating with marginalized families (liaison)	• Building Awareness of DEI (presentations/workshops)	• Being active in community DEI issues and social justice movements
Students	• Leading reflections and discussions after DEI-related incident (national or school) • Mentoring for students of color and other marginalized groups	• Overseeing Affinity Groups • Leading awareness training and life skills of DEI	• Providing Safe Spaces • Advocating • Consulting in emergency DEI-related issues

Adult staff (teachers/leaders)	• Advising leadership and faculty on next steps after a DEI-related incident (national or school) • Coaching best practices for inclusive classrooms and beyond	• Overseeing Affinity Groups • Leading Professional Learning Groups in DEI topics • Overseeing training for inclusive classrooms and beyond	• Serving on various councils/committees with a specific lens of DEI • Supporting mentors and overseeing mentoring programs
Institution (district/senior administration)	• Shepherding the charge of strategic DEI strategic goals set by power figures (Hiring people of color)	• Building a curriculum that is inclusive and equitable in collaboration with varied leadership	• Maintaining and understanding the most current DEI content • Networking with other districts/schools

Common Practices that comprise the work of DEI leadership

The category of support includes those practices in which participants were available to others in a one-on-one or face-to-face context. DEI leaders provided support for multiple constituencies, including students, families, school leaders, and staff. In providing support to many, they emphasized that trust in these relationships was critical to achieving institutional goals. The support DEI leaders gave to each group of constituencies was critical to the furtherance of DEI work and the awareness of inequities that were possibly heightened during the COVID-19 pandemic. The work in this area of support allows for stakeholders to trust that the educators are invested in the development and success of every student, allowing for all stakeholders to comfortably focus on teaching and learning. For instance, these moments of support included direct communication during which one participant, who was tasked with communicating the institutional focus to multiple constituencies, reflected on a practice of support within the school community, describing the importance of trust:

> I am responsible for shepherding the overall commitments around diversity, equity, and inclusion, and belonging…. a lot of interfaces with all sorts of constituencies to make sure we work collaboratively to meet

> our goals and live our mission. I not only have to communicate well, but they have to trust me as the liaison.

Further discussion revealed that as relationships developed between the participant and various constituencies, trust in the participant increased and buy-in of constituencies grew stronger.

A primary strategic goal common among all participants regarding the institutional group was supporting efforts to retain and hire people of color to improve the diversity of the adult community. Participants felt that creating a more diverse staff was an expected priority in DEI work to best be seen as a community advancing in DEI efforts. Another participant described their work supporting adults and how it ties into the institutional-level goal of hiring more staff of color:

> Working with all our adults to make sure they have the skill set capacity disposition towards effectively teaching across lines of difference, and making sure that they're creating inclusive classroom environments, not just in the classroom. That also means hiring an adult body that attempts to mirror the diversity of the student body.

In addition to the examples above, this participant shared that they spent an abundance of time helping staff address DEI-related concerns as they arose and interacting with families as they navigated concerns throughout the district and school.

The participant who also serves as Title IX coordinator and Equal Opportunity Officer, however, did not strongly agree with prioritizing hiring people of color, but rather prioritized hiring people with proper experience and reflective culture to the community and the students. This participant stated, "They (senior administrators) think that just because someone is of a particular race students can relate to them, but not everyone comes from the same background….so we have to be careful about making a blanket statement and stereotyping our colleagues or our children…because they don't all

come from the same experiences." The perception that educator race will "solve the district problems" is a belief that this DEI leader is challenged with introducing while supporting adults. Whereas this participant did believe that the adult community needs to be more diverse and that hiring more diverse staff should be a priority, they argued that approaching it from simply a race-based angle is not the most effective path. This participant also deeply reflected on what they referred to as an eye-opening experience when middle-school students expressed their concerns in a meeting, inquiring, "how come there are not many people (adults) of color in this district….we don't see anyone unless they are in the cafeteria or janitors." This led the participant to take a closer look at the district's culturally responsive hiring practices, as well as its support of current colleagues of color. This example revealed the trust students may have had in this DEI leader to address the racial diversity problem the students perceived. In a similar fashion, the DEI leader must establish trust with administration to bring forth the leaders' concern that focusing on hiring people of color, rather than people with relevant culture/experience, is not ideal in their opinion.

The category of development encompasses practices that oversee creating an environment that allows space for communal awareness, opportunities for personal and professional growth, and a safe space for identity development in each constituency group. DEI leaders in the study engaged in advocacy measures to promote and create environments that developed the growth of their constituencies and made them feel included. For example, a participant spoke of the importance of establishing an adult Affinity Group program specifically for educators of color: "I think part of the challenge is building trust, that the DEI office is really going to help teachers of color particularly

feel safe and really develop them to use their voice and exercise [a] sense of agency in their roles." With this challenge in mind, the participant was able to create an opportunity for employees of color to participate in SPOC, a district program designed to support staff of color. Similar to a buddy system, SPOC allows about 20 to 40 employees of color to check-in with a partner to offer support and mentoring. This participant referred to statistics showing that most educators of color leave a district early on due to lack of support or transparency; an opportunity like SPOC was implemented by the participant to address retention before the strategic goal of hiring more people of color. Another participant spoke of development practices with adults as "giving them an opportunity to develop their teaching practice, the awareness of different students' background and their capacity to work with students who are like them as well as students who aren't like them in terms of background."

Further, at the student level, development took two angles: that of developing confidence among marginalized students and that of teaching effective communication among student peers who are different from themselves, which included increasing awareness of different ways of being. This DEI practice of developing students tackled larger systemic issues, including creating a shift in the culture towards one that centered equity. This work advanced all students in the district and was hyper-focused to "make sure that they [students] are able to access their education, that offerings of the schools are in equitable ways." The data among participants revealed the belief that growth and advancement of DEI awareness, personal and/or professional, directly ties to appropriate opportunities of honest communication and trust-building to develop an environment inclusive for all students. According to participants, the DEI leader must build a

relationship of understanding, specifically with adults and students of color (or groups who feel marginalized), to create a safe community space that allows DEI leaders to gain information of the community's needs and develop programs that allow for collective progression towards equity as a district or school.

Finally, the resource category refers to the practices of networking, advocating, and being visibly reliable to all groups of stakeholders within and outside of the community. The practices were quite expansive in substance, as well as being time intensive. Participants noted these practices as part of the work where they most have to prove competence and reliability. Through these practices, they stayed connected to local and national social justice movements to bring that information back to their districts or schools. In addition, participants felt that their seat at the table in a wide range of disciplines (curriculum-building, DEI-related incidents, cultural competence) was important to constantly see topics and decisions through a DEI lens. The importance of their leadership as a constant resource of knowledge in DEI issues was crucial to meeting their strategic equity goals and to building trust among stakeholders. Participants discussed a barrier in the work when their attendance was not requested at the table of high-stakes meetings before emergencies arise and the harm when the DEI leadership voice is absent from topics and decisions. For example, one participant noted, "At times, those of authority just don't understand the role and how it can help decision-making. I think those are the times when it can be a more challenging role to execute." The relationship DEI leaders must cultivate with those making final decisions is crucial to be not only invited but heard and valued at such meetings.

Overall, the one core practice that all participants shared as cutting across all categories and groups was building relationships. Having trusting relationships was essential for DEI leadership to effectively implement the work and take a collaborative approach to achieving DEI goals. Having an established and authentic relationship with stakeholders creates honest communication and comfort in seeking support and development when needed. Yet, such a relationship must be authentic and include trust from both sides to collaboratively succeed in the work of DEI. Those ideals are revealed and supported in a study by Rivera-McCutchen and Watson (2014), which highlights the challenges faced by a White male principal of a school within a community filled with tension due to the fast-changing racial demographics. After stakeholders of color in the study reached out and gained support in private, the principal failed to publicly acknowledge race as the underlying cause of the tension, which diminished the trust the stakeholders of color previously established. The relationship was damaged and turmoil led to his resignation, leaving a school in disarray with no progress towards racial equity in their school. Similarly, Wang (2018) argued that principals who are social justice advocates must focus on people by "fostering positive relationships with families and communities" (p. 478). As with adult stakeholders, student relationships were also presented in this study as an important component of DEI work. As one participant stated in reference to implementing DEI work: "A big piece is focusing on building trusting relationships with students because students really should be at the center of everything, those relationships also help adults trust you in a different sort of way." Based on the research and the findings in this study, it is clear that relationship-building is crucial for all leaders but essential for those dealing with the sensitive work of DEI.

Common Perspectives regarding effective implementation of DEI work

In addition, the analysis revealed three common perspectives of what it takes to effectively implement DEI work: the phenomenon that the role is larger than a single person, the role must have trust and support from those in power positions, and DEI leaders must have a deep connection with the work through experience and/or training. These three perspectives collectively elucidate the complexity involved in DEI leadership—including the importance of having resources, such as support from those in power and additional human capital to execute the work, as well as commitment and personal engagement in DEI work. The phenomenon of having a multi-person team approach to tackle the work of DEI was also found in a study of DEI directors within independent schools, revealing that "Having a team serves multiple purposes: distribution of tasks and limiting the level of isolation the practitioner may be feeling as the sole person managing all components of a very multifaceted job. A team-based structure supports long-term sustainability and impact" (ExploElevate, 2021). A cross example of such perspectives became evident as I analyzed the responses of participants across two of the four districts of most resemblance. Both are considered large districts (5,000+ students) of similar demographics with their office being newly added to the district (within six months). Yet, one district has a single DEI leader who has a title of chief diversity officer with no supporting staff. This participant was very vocal about the need for "partners" and the challenge of being productive as a "one-person show." Although the participant did express that the work is moving along due to support of district and political administration, they still feel overwhelmed. The counter district has a team of

DEI leaders which includes a Director and two reports (team of three) who each have a unique focus to contribute to the overall work. Common practices presented in this study were divided among this team, allowing space to develop new initiatives quickly and effectively. Although they spoke about the work being busy, they seemed pleased and motivated about the progress of their office and the team. They also expressed feeling supported in their work by district administration.

Lastly, all participants shared emotional stories that fueled their passion to do this work. Those stories were all of their personal experiences or witnessing of racial discriminatory behavior that impeded access to an equitable education. All participants in this study identified as people of color (Latinx and Black) and all had personal stories of being marginalized and treated unfairly while a student and/or a professional. All participants referred to a lived connection to the work because of their race contributing to their passion and desire to continue the push for racial equity in schools. One participant referred to their ethnicity as one of the reasons stakeholders trust them, saying "they believe I understand them so they trust me enough to voice their issues." This finding emphasizes the need for districts to really analyze why they are hiring DEI leadership, while first identifying the need and mission of the district. If indeed this perspective that the lived experience of the leader can affect the implementation of the work, stakeholders should be aware of this to find the perfect fit for achieving equity in that individual district.

The role of trust and the impact on the implementation of DEI work

Whereas the preceding section describes the actual practices and perspectives of DEI leadership and work, the essential role of trust in accomplishing the practices as

shared by participants was evident. As stated in previous findings, the collective practices gathered are relationship dependent, and that caveat allows people to be open and honest (vulnerable), creating an act of trust as needed to implement DEI work. When asked about barriers and accomplishments, each participant spoke of trust directly and indirectly as being an important piece in the ability to successfully lead in the growth of DEI district/school goals. One participant stated: "Establishing trust is a major part of my job; without it, I can't get things done and we don't move forward with what needs to be done." The relevance of trust being essential to accomplish equitable schools can and will help educational leaders understand the complex role of DEI leadership and the characteristics needed. For this study, the role of trust primarily focused on the district of study DEI leadership. Further information from the additional participants was used in a comparative or supportive manner to that which was gathered from the primary district of study.

Research has identified five facets of trust: benevolence, reliability, competence, honesty, and openness (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999). Revealed in this study were three of the five facets of trust most commonly described by participants as necessary to successfully implement the work of DEI: benevolence, reliability, and openness. The remainder of the facets—honesty and competence—were lightly mentioned as also being imperative to building those relationships.

There was also an additional layer of trust commonly shared by each participant—the impact of time on the ability to accomplish the work of DEI without many barriers and pushback. Time was referred to in two classifications: the length of time the leader has worked in the district, and the length of time the district has filled the

position of a DEI leader. The various characteristics and skills as described by the primary district participant were identified and coded within the three most-referred facets of trust (Appendix H). Some researchers consider benevolence to be the most important facet of trust (Benna & Hambacher, 2020) and that held true in the data from this study. All participants described benevolence numerous times as the most essential facet in building trusting relationships with stakeholders and other leaders. Benevolence was described most as caring for others and being able to interact and relate to everyone, especially those who have been marginalized. Listening skills was another big piece of expressing benevolence and a way to successfully bring in diverse voices as needed to implement the work. Revealed is that benevolence is a characteristic essential to the work, and one who leads must be comfortable expressing benevolence to be productive for any school or district.

Although this study was conducted during a time of crisis, the participants did not consider the COVID-19 pandemic a major impact to their DEI work. As a research team, we define crisis as a significant disruption, based on a triggering event, that comes with a sense of urgency and the need to redefine the status quo (Rosenthal & Hart, 1991). The COVID-19 pandemic definitely fits into that category. One participant mentioned the impact of the pandemic as “slightly more difficult” when having to earn trust with others through virtual conferences using the video platform Zoom, rather than being physically together in person. This participant spoke of the insecurity of stakeholders not being able to see who is in the room listening and their own inability as a DEI leader to read the body language during communication when not physically together.

Although this participant did not feel like the job was greatly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, they did reference another crisis as positively helping to increase conscious awareness of societal inequities: the uprising against racism that swept across our country after the murder of George Floyd. Participants referred to this crisis as not changing the shared practices and DEI mission/goals but enhancing the importance and need for the work overall. Nonetheless, not all educational leaders shared this perspective. For instance, a district leader of authority to one of the DEI director participants who was interviewed by a team member revealed that responding to the COVID-19 crisis needed to take priority over developing the work previously done on Cultural Competence, suggesting that DEI initiatives be placed on pause instead of understanding the connection and the importance during the crisis. This view is contested in the literature and in the findings in this study. Arguably, the necessity for DEI leadership to achieve equity in education did not change from past research, it just became more relevant within the current state of society and the wide-spread awareness of systemic inequities and how education is affected.

The data revealed that DEI leadership engages in many practices to passionately create an environment of equitable education and inclusivity in schools, with trusting relationships at the center of it all. Such leaders connect to the work on a personal level and operate with a deep passion. They are expected to do this tough, demanding work with compassion and authenticity. A participant summed it up by noting:

> "It is important for DEI leaders to bring who you are to the table. It is important to reflect and take inventory of who you are and how that shapes how you show up for work, how you execute the work, and how you are received at work. That matters in the ways that people either support you or push back against you. It is important for all educators to spend some time grappling with this."

Those words reinforce the importance of trust in DEI leadership to effectively implement the complex work of social justice in schools and to model what it means to lead with an authentic voice.

There is an additional finding not directly related to the initial research but justifiably important to this study—the more fitting title of the role. Preliminary exploration regarding the phenomenon of whether DEI leaders feel comfortable referring to themselves as social justice leaders was introduced. I inquired about this topic because I noticed a shift in the title from the one I proposed in the research to one current participant preferred. Also, while recruiting participants for this study, I noticed variations in titles. All three of the single participant interviews revealed a strong opinion that DEI leadership and social justice leadership are different and therefore they are not comfortable referring to themselves as social justice leaders. Participants shared that, as DEI leaders, they have a much narrower focus, particularly in terms of handling sensitive matters within their school/district. The matters specifically consist of diversifying, meeting the needs of, and embracing all differences of stakeholders within their school/district. Whereas a social justice leader covered a wider lens, advocating for all those marginalized in society, and fighting for policy changes that include more than education. Also, referring back to that common practice of "shepherding" specific DEI goals for the district/school would create a narrower lens for DEI leaders than of social justice leaders. One participant stated: "Social justice is all about a sort of redistribution of power, ultimately working towards a greater societal place of justice across differences, that may not be necessarily what your school is working towards." Participants who believed in the difference also stressed that they actively support social

justice initiatives and believe it is part of their job to be updated, aware, and visible with social justice initiatives in their community as a representative of education. Examples given were involvement in statewide groups to pass bills regarding curriculum and strategizing an increase of people of color in education, a Latinx group in the city of the school district, and other focused DEI leaders within the community.

On the contrary, during the focus group interview, all three participants considered themselves social justice leaders. One participant responded: “I identify myself as a social justice educator and activist. Justice is really the goal, what we’re trying to do, equity is a system to create balance so that we are getting to justice.” Another described being a social justice leader as part of their beliefs and personality: “It’s actually always been a part of who I am. Even as a kid, I would beat up the bully. It’s just part of my upbringing as well. I feel it’s actually a calling of mine, not just an occupation.” This group did reiterate to the opposing single interview participants that remaining “centered around social justice issues” and “staying knowledgeable on policies and structures that impact young people” was a practice that is part of their role as DEI leaders.

Discussion and Conclusion

Previous studies have researched the demand, characteristics, and practices of social justice as part of educational leadership. Wang shared in his Ontario study that “Efforts to better understand the nature of social justice leadership would do well to begin with a focus on the characteristics of leaders and the specific actions that leaders take to achieve their social justice goals” (2018, p. 490). Such is the case with this study where I analyzed common practices and perspectives of current DEI leaders during the

COVID-19 pandemic as their sole duty in education. Efforts to better understand this modern educational leadership role of DEI and the difference of promoting existing leadership, such as principals as social justice leaders, is vital to find the most efficient way to accomplish the goal of equity in our schools. This study looked at the common practices, perspectives, and trust embedded in the work, revealing not only the complex nature of the role but the possible impact the characteristics of the person in that role has on the implementation of the work. Further research would do well to deeply compare personal characteristics and collective practices of both styles of leadership as they relate to successfully accomplishing equitable education for all students.

Complexity in DEI Leadership

A salient theme evident in the study was the complex role of DEI leaders and the importance of relationship-building and trust to achieve equity in their districts. I found that DEI leaders supported the entire community, including students, families, staff, and the institution as a single entity. The overwhelming number of common practices exposed in this study were narrowed to categories of support, development, and being a resource of internal and external information and knowledge. When DEI leaders supported the community, they often found themselves largely mediating and communicating with multiple stakeholders, helping students and families in navigating the district. While developing, they had to lead sensitive training and foster awareness while adjusting to the level of the audience as the topics were often personable and emotional. Further, as described in the findings, as a resource they are expected to not only be knowledgeable about the data and research but also about public policy that affects similar communities. These findings revealed a substantial load on this imperative role, suggesting that DEI

leaders need more support. In fact, one of the participants noted that they needed more support and resources to be effective and achieve the change the district desired. In sum, DEI work cannot be a one-person show and still be expected to make meaningful progress toward equity.

This concern for lack of resources and support is consistent with prior studies, including the most recent study conducted by ExploElevate (2021) among private schools which have long been filling the role of DEI leadership. Not only did they acknowledge the need to clarify the possibilities of a single person to achieve set DEI goals, but they went a step further to explicitly declare that due to such lack of support "practitioner burnout is real, and schools can provide additional supports that promote self-care and are energy restoring." All such information is important to understanding the complexity of the position so that best practices are in place to realistically accomplish the essential goal of education equity for all students.

Characteristics of DEI leadership

As mentioned in the findings, when participants were challenged to respond to what drives their passion to do this work, all referred to a personal experience in education that was unacceptable. This brings forth other questions regarding the identity of the DEI leader. Does the race and/or ethnicity of DEI leadership matter to effectively implement DEI work? With relationship-building as the core of common practices, does the race of leadership matter in earning the trust of stakeholders? Racialization of the DEI role is a characteristic that presents itself across all three themes, possibly impacting the ability to build relationships. Race dynamics seemed to influence the DEI leader's ability to create meaningful change as they acted as support for everyone in the community.

Vinzant revealed that Black principals thought that race was an underlying reason people questioned aspects of their leadership. In his study that focused on Black principals' perceptions of how their racial identities affected their leadership, participants "believed that if they were White many of their decisions would go unchallenged" (Vinzant, 2009). Race dynamics seemed to also influence the DEI leaders' perspectives as they spoke of their personal experience contributing to their passion for the work and having a deep connection to stakeholders allowing them to be able to distribute authentic benevolence with stakeholders. Issues of racialization can be a challenge when considering reform or change in schools. Related research has shown that this remains an issue for communities where leaders are predominantly White and student populations are predominantly of color. This dynamic is seen in the previously mentioned study of Rivera-McCutchen and Watson (2014) where the White principal had a hard time re-establishing trust with stakeholders of color when he failed to publicly acknowledge that race was a factor of the issues being experienced after having gained their trust in private. Further analyzing racialization in DEI leadership can help educational administrators to thoroughly understand what is needed as characteristics and competence to solidly hire DEI leaders and get the most from such an important role.

In conclusion, as the media continues to reveal the inequities in education in the 21st century, the importance of the role of leadership committing to DEI to achieve equity in education is imperative. From a student post of a race-hate video on social media that "helped spark a wave of student activism against discrimination" (Martin, 2021, p. 3), to the disproportionate decline in standardized test scores of those communities of color being hardest hit by COVID-19 (Vaznis, 2021), inequities continue

to plague education and remain an interruption in the academic process specifically targeting students of color. If DEI leadership is part of the answer to help bring awareness and navigate towards equitable schools, we must give this position the same research attention as that of teaching and learning. The practices and perspectives shared by all the study participants revealed the complexity and needed development of this role and the work. This study suggests that trust in DEI leadership is crucial if we want to witness real change in academic equity and want to give our most marginalized students a fair experience in education.

Chapter 4[4]

Discussion

The purpose of this study is to explore the various ways that trust may be important for schools and districts by examining the relationships and practices of educational leaders. We collectively address one overarching research question: *How, if at all, does trust influence the relationships and practices of educational stakeholders during times of crisis?* Specifically, our intent was to examine trust between educational stakeholders across a school district during COVID-19 to understand what role, if any, trust played in these relationships. We sought to determine if trust, when present, functioned differently across roles, as well as if aspects of trust influenced the quality of relationships between educators. To do so, we examined the degree to which trust influenced the relationships and practices of principals and teachers (McCarthy, 2022); central office team leaders (Hung, 2022); union leaders and the superintendent (Myers, 2022); diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) leaders (Evee, 2022); and the superintendent and principals (Grassa, 2022). While studies have explored trust within schools (Benna & Hambacher, 2020; Johnson & Chrispeels, 2010; Reiss & Hoy, 1998; Sarikaya et al., 2020; Tschannen-Moran, 2001), this study may be one of the few, if any, to determine how trust impacts the work across an entire school district. Through our study, we aim to further clarify the nature of trust formation among various levels of leadership in the context of a K-12 district.

[4] This chapter was written in collaboration with the authors listed on the title page and reflects the team approach of the dissertation in practice: Ruth H. Evee, Katherine Grassa, Kelly M. Hung, Karen L. McCarthy, Gregory B. Myers

Our methodology consisted of a qualitative case study of one school district of over 5000 students in the northeast region of the United States. As described in detail in Chapter 2, we used purposeful sampling (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) to include teachers, principals, central office leaders, the district superintendent, the teachers' union leader, and DEI leaders. For data collection, we employed semi-structured interviews, document reviews, an online survey, and observations. We used the coding software *Dedoose* to identify patterns and themes. Relational trust, defined as the willingness of one party to be vulnerable to the action of another (Mayer et al., 1995) is the analytic lens tying our work together. Each study was further framed by five facets of trust (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999): benevolence, reliability, competence, honesty, and openness. We used the five facets to determine the degree to which they were present, or most valued, in a relationship and to analyze their impact on educational leader practices. In addition, we conducted our research during the COVID-19 pandemic crisis. We define crisis as a disruptive situation initiated by a triggering event, characterized by a great deal of uncertainty, and evolving over a long period of time (Rosenthal & Hart, 1991).

In response to our overarching research question, we collectively found that trust was present within each of the relationships and practices we studied. More specifically, benevolence was a consistent and important facet of trust formation across all relationships. In addition, we found that having a shared purpose, which the data and analyses suggest starts with shared values, made trust less risky, while the absence of shared purpose negatively affected relationships. Also, we found that the increase of time within a relationship increased the amount of trust with our participants at all levels. Finally, the collective data and analyses suggest a sense of shared identity accelerates the

trust-building process among educational leaders. The following sections present our synthesized findings, discussion of these findings in relation to the literature, and recommendations for future research and practice.

Benevolence

Some researchers consider benevolence to be the most important facet of trust (Benna & Hambacher, 2020), and that holds true in the data from this study. All participants across each sub-study described benevolence numerous times as an essential facet for building trusting relationships with stakeholders during the COVID-19 pandemic. As described in previous chapters, benevolence may be defined as the demonstration of good will toward others with no gain to self; the trustee desires to do good on behalf of the trustor (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis 2015). Guided by this definition, we found participants displaying many examples of benevolent behaviors. Across studies, those behaviors included listening and supporting, as well as treating others with dignity and showing concern for others beyond the job. Benevolence was also described by participants as caring for others and being able to interact and relate to everyone. The act of deep listening was another example of benevolence and a way to successfully bring in diverse voices as needed to implement the work of educational leaders. The research reveals that benevolence is a trust-forming characteristic essential to the work of education, and that leaders must be comfortable demonstrating benevolence to further build trust during a time of crisis.

The established importance of benevolence to build relationships and create a trusting environment is evident in our study and consistent with prior research. For instance, Bryk and Schneider (2003) found benevolence foundational for high levels of

relational trust in a school community, which creates an environment where people felt supported enough to take risks to improve the educational experience of students. We found that nearly all stakeholders expressed deep appreciation for leaders' benevolent behaviors, which led to a feeling of support and contributed to perceptions of trust. The end goal for every academic institution is a positive academic experience that leads to student achievement; meeting that goal in an ever-evolving society means revisiting procedures, which can result in frequent reform. Reform includes risk and risk is more easily applied when trust is present (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999). Leading with benevolence may create an atmosphere of trust, which can then generate high levels of buy-in towards new initiatives or institutional change present during reform. When school professionals trust one another and sense support from stakeholders, they feel safer to experiment with new practices (Bryk & Schneider, 2003). New practices are often results of reform, and ongoing reform is necessary in the pursuit of the best educational experience for all students. Overall, leading with benevolence is beneficial not just for the professionals to do their best but for students to be their best.

Further, specifically during a time of crisis when society is plagued with the COVID-19 pandemic, it is likely that people are in an emotional state and desire benevolence from those with whom they are most vulnerable. Groysberg and Seligson, in their research arguing that good leadership is an act of kindness, state: "The pandemic has challenged managers as never before, but one powerful leadership strategy is being overlooked: Be kind" (2020). With leadership implementing rapid change in response to COVID-19 to keep students focused on learning, acts of benevolence can help build the relational trust needed to swiftly gain community buy-in (Kwatubana & Molaodi, 2021).

This study suggests that, during this COVID-19 crisis, educational leaders tended to focus more on caring for others by authentically asking about the health and well-being of those they support before discussing professional issues and tasks. This act of kindness, showing care for the whole person, can help employees feel seen, valued, and supported, all of which were referenced by stakeholders throughout this study as components of trust they desired from their leaders.

Shared Purpose

A shared sense of purpose is defined as having a clear sense of direction, noting that this is one of the nine conditions that increase educator efficacy toward improved student learning (Seashore et al., 2010). It is important to note that a shared sense of purpose is a critical first step in realizing a vision; to achieve that shared vision, leaders must also effectively communicate and create organizational alignment in service of that shared vision (Kantabutra, 2010). In this district, we found a sense of shared purpose established in pockets, between the superintendent and teacher union president (Myers, 2022), for example, and between some teachers and their principal (McCarthy, 2022), as well as between some district leaders and their teams (Evee, 2022; Grassa, 2022; Hung, 2022). Findings, however, do not indicate the existence of a shared sense of purpose across the majority of the district. While a sense of shared purpose appears to have positively influenced the formation of trust within some groups, the absence of shared purpose limited trust-formation in many others.

Educational stakeholders across all levels of the district we studied articulated a need for a shared sense of purpose in their work, with the stakeholders expressing shared purpose in various ways. Proxy phrases included shared values, mission, vision, and

goals. The superintendent and teacher union leader spoke of shared values which were connected to their personal backgrounds and work experiences, the foundation of which led them to believe they were part of the same mission in the work (Myers, 2022). Teachers also spoke about shared values while referencing trust with the principal (McCarthy, 2022). Meanwhile, both district leaders and principals articulated the challenges present when a shared understanding of vision and goals is missing in relationships (Evee, 2022; Grassa, 2022; Hung, 2022). Below, we discuss the ways that the common thread of shared purpose influenced the formation of trust across relationships in this district.

A shared sense of purpose impacts the facilitation of knowledge transfer within an organization (Li, 2005). Li explains that, as relationships become longer term and more cooperative, there is an increasing need to coordinate communication, build trust and a shared understanding. A shared sense of purpose impacts the ability of educational stakeholders to enact and carry out the work as defined by the district leadership. Therefore, an organization's success rests in part on the ability of leadership to facilitate this knowledge transfer for stakeholders, by defining a shared purpose and providing clarity around key decisions within an organization.

For example, in one interview a principal stated that a shared sense of purpose influenced the principal's judgement around the superintendent's decision-making (Grassa, 2022). In this case, a shared purpose was referred to as having the same vision and goals. The importance of shared vision and goals was also brought up several times as a means for the principal to more deeply understand why the superintendent made certain decisions. Having a deeper understanding of the superintendent's decisions

allowed the principal to maintain a good relationship with the district's most senior leader because the principal felt that the decisions made represented alignment with the vision and goals set forth. As such, even in cases where the principal may have disagreed with the particular decision being made, there was an understanding and sense of trust that the superintendent was making the decisions in a consistent and predictable manner, both hallmarks of trusting behavior.

At its best, a shared sense of purpose creates a strong bond between key stakeholders in the district, resulting in greater collaboration and open communication, behaviors dependent upon trust. This was especially true in the relationship between the teacher union leader and the superintendent, where a sense of shared purpose was articulated in terms of a shared mission (Myers, 2022). The union leader stated that he and the superintendent were "on the same team," working toward the same interests: "We're just looking out for the best interests of everybody, the best interests of the kids in the community." Thus, rather than being adversarial, the union leader and the superintendent felt like they were "in it together" and had the interests of the district in mind, even when they might disagree over a particular issue. Their positive relational dynamic, marked by trust, allowed the superintendent and union leader to address problems directly and collaboratively, often resulting in more efficient and effective resolutions, including during the COVID-19 pandemic.

At the heart of shared purpose, educational stakeholders in the district spoke about shared values and the ability to form trusting bonds if they believed another party shared those same values (McCarthy, 2022; Myers, 2022). Again, examining the relationship between the superintendent and the teacher union leader, their positive

working relationship was bolstered by a sense of shared values, due in part to similar teaching roles in the past. For example, they both worked as special educators and, for the superintendent, special educators have unique values when it comes to caring for students; namely, the belief that all children can be successful if given the opportunity. This fostered an assumption between the superintendent and the teacher union leader that both parties were acting in the best interest of all students (Myers, 2022).

A teacher at one elementary school in the district also spoke about the importance of shared values, making a connection between shared values and a tangible feeling of inclusion within the school community (McCarthy, 2022). While the presence of shared values can influence a person's disposition to trust (Tschannen-Moran, 2014), this teacher noted that holding explicitly different values can also create animosity and feelings of being ostracized within a school community. She explained how her principal chose to display her values directly with teachers, allowing this teacher to feel trusted and supported. Underscored in our study's findings is that one's values must be explicitly communicated and known for others to feel their values are in alignment.

Absent a shared purpose, educational stakeholders in this district articulated feelings of misalignment, misunderstanding, and distrust. As district leaders spoke of the presence of shared purpose, they acknowledged that departments within the central office were functioning from different perspectives, with each department navigating the work a little bit differently (Hung, 2022). This meant that, while a single department or school might have a clearly articulated purpose, that purpose was not necessarily aligned to a district mission, vision, or goals. As a result, the work was not as strong in their alignment of collective outcomes.

The challenge of creating alignment with a shared purpose was recognized, but left unaddressed. One district leader reflected that unaddressed difference in the way different departments approach the work led to "working around the problem[s] and not addressing them directly." Such misalignment, when allowed to persist at the district level, impacts schools' ability to directly align their work in the service of district goals, undermining collaboration and creating confusion (Hung, 2022). Aligned people and support systems is a critical component to realizing a shared purpose or vision (Kantabutra, 2010). For principals experiencing this disconnect between central office departments and schools, one principal interpreted the disconnect as "distrust" resulting from misunderstandings about the direction in which to go as a district (Grassa, 2022). Implied here is a lack of clear and unifying mission and vision coming from district leaders. Principals also articulated a lack of coherence and purpose during monthly principal meetings, resulting in missed opportunities for deeper collaboration and learning.

In this district, we experienced pockets of shared purpose and areas with misalignment. While the pockets of shared purpose were defined by stronger relationships and deeper understanding of the work, where there was misalignment, educational leaders struggled to both define the purpose of the work themselves and see a clear purpose in the work of others. Any time districts are misaligned around purpose, opportunity exists for educational leaders to define their own, which may or may not align with the district's goals.

Furthermore, Fullan et al., (2009) argue that not only should districts have a clearly defined shared purpose, but that a shared purpose should be grounded in a moral

imperative. Fullan explains that it is not enough to simply understand a shared purpose in terms of work-related goals, but rather, as a moral purpose. Educational leaders should deeply understand that what we do each day is either accelerating or hampering our goal of improving society by improving educational systems and the learning outcomes of all citizens. As established, K-12 districts are places of high complexity (Cosner, 2009) and ambiguity (Hung, 2022), requiring individuals and groups to work interdependently (Forsyth et al., 2011). For K-12 districts to successfully navigate the complex work of educating all students, they must unite individuals and teams toward common goals. This may be done through a shared purpose, grounded in a moral imperative. In doing so, the conditions for trusting relationships may improve.

Trust and Time

Research establishes that trust between parties cannot develop without the benefit of time. Indeed, one's decision to trust requires sufficient and ongoing interactions in order to observe another party's behavior and reach conclusions about their trustworthiness (Zand, 1972; Six, 2007). Our findings strongly support the role that time plays in developing trusting relationships.

In Pre-K-12 school organizations, trust is developed over time and is based on the actions and interactions among multiple relationships including superintendent/principal relationships and principal/teacher relationships (Bryk & Schneider, 2003). Nearly all of the study's participants cited the role that time played in their decision to trust others. In fact, both Chapman (2012) and Hatchel (2012) determined that the length of time principals and superintendents collaborate has the greatest impact on their trust development. In addition, many of the district's principals had working relationships with

the superintendent for five or more years, with some knowing the superintendent far longer, including from her years as a principal in the district. As a result, they had had ample opportunity throughout the years to witness her behaviors and make conclusions about her trustworthiness. Based on those observations, they trusted the superintendent because they knew who she was and what she stood for (Grassa, 2022). More than one principal cited their long history of working with the superintendent as one of the reasons why they trust her: “I think based on our previous experience, I trust that she cares about kids, and I know that she's a very hard worker and she'll do the legwork to produce positive outcomes for kids.” They also felt that this length of time promoted the superintendent's trust in their work as principals, as evidenced by the strong support she showed them over personnel decisions or difficult parental interactions.

Principals’ perceptions of teachers’ trustworthiness were based almost exclusively on their history of past experiences, a phenomenon requiring time (McCarthy, 2022). One principal referred to a teacher’s “established pattern of behavior” as a determining factor in whether they will generally perceive their behaviors as trustworthy. The reference to observing a “pattern of behavior” reflects almost exactly the definition of relational trust in the literature. For example, Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2000), citing Zucker (1986), explain that “knowledge-based trust emerges on the basis of the quality of the social exchanges in recurring interactions between trustor and trustee over time” (p. 562). Likewise, Bryk and Schneider (2003) explain that trust is formed over time in a series of social exchanges characterized by the expectations and obligations of one’s role in relationship to each other. As people have experiences together over time, their behavior becomes more predictable, hence lessening risk. Therefore, while one cannot replace the

factor of time, a leader can intentionally create experiences to maximize interactions and demonstrate trustworthiness.

The teacher union leader also cited time as an important factor in his decision to trust the superintendent, noting that they had been in their roles together for nearly six years, during which they have developed a strong working relationship (Myers, 2022):

> …we've both been here for five years, we're in our sixth year, and I think we're able to discuss [issues] amongst ourselves. And then I go to my team, she goes to her team…and we can kind of work things out so that it's not so messy and get a good resolution…

The superintendent also noted the tenure of her relationship with the teacher union president as a reason for trusting him, pointing out that because they have known each other for quite some time, they discuss issues openly and frankly. They also both trust the other's decisions, even if they disagree, because they perceive the other as having the best interests of students in mind. Their ability to trust is important because, as Hurley (2012) explains, without trust you lose cooperation. In many ways, the functioning of the district depends on these two leaders' cooperation; the school superintendent and the teacher union president are, according to Currall (1992), "critical group representatives" (p. 296), whose working relationship most directly affects the overall experiences of students and teachers alike.

The district's DEI work was also affected by the role that time plays in developing trust between key relationships (Evee, 2022). The sensitive nature of DEI work requires participants to genuinely reflect on their own beliefs and biases, causing them to be vulnerable, and demanding a great deal of trust. To this end, participants specifically cited the length of time that DEI leaders had been in the district as significantly impacting others' willingness to trust them and engage in the work. DEI leaders needed time to

build trusting relationships to demonstrate their trustworthiness with oftentimes sensitive issues. Consequently, findings suggest that retaining people in these important roles is essential for their success.

However, while time is required for trust to emerge in a relationship, the mere presence of time does not necessarily result in trust formation. Indeed, participants referenced some longstanding relationships in the district lacking trust. Relationship history between employees, which largely resulted in higher levels of trust for many participants, was also seen as potentially negatively impacting trust for some. This finding supports prior research showing that, while time can aid the formation of trust, it is the actions and behaviors within relationships that create a trusting dynamic (Six, 2007; Zand, 1972).

In short, the collective findings supported what other studies have found: time is critically important to allow for the kinds of interactions that may build trust. In addition to the necessity of time, findings also show that the quality of each party's interactions and behaviors during that time ultimately determine whether trust forms. This evolving relational dynamic raises questions about how school districts can retain leaders over time so that it allows for trust formation, a pressing issue given that the current tenure for superintendents is only 3.2 years on average (Will, 2014), while principal tenure is just four years (Learning Policy Institute, n.d.). In light of our collective findings, it is especially important to foster opportunities and create time for educational leaders to engage in quality interactions that can build trust. In high stakes contexts and times of crises, this may prove a greater challenge.

Identity and Trust

Several participants in this study not only referenced the length of their relationship as a reason for trusting, but also cited one or more characteristics of another party as a reason for their trust. These characteristics had little to do with the five facets of trust, instead aligning with the attributes of group membership. For example, principals referenced the superintendent's long tenure as a principal in the district, an identity that made her a member (albeit a former member) of their group, leading them to assume she understands the importance and difficulty of their work (Grassa, 2022). This assumption directly reinforces the trust they have in her leadership because, as a member of their identity group, they believe she understands and supports them.

Leaders of the district's DEI efforts also cited identity as a key element in trust formation (Evee, 2022), with one participant pointing to their shared ethnicity as one reason stakeholders trusted them, since "they believe I understand them, so they trust me enough to voice their issues." Because the DEI leader and the stakeholder group shared an important identity characteristic, they assumed a joint understanding of the other's experience and a trust that they had the other's interests at heart. Another leader in the district's DEI work stressed the importance of hiring employees who reflect not only the racial demographics of the district, but the students' experiences as well. This participant stated, "... not everyone comes from the same background….so we have to be careful about making a blanket statement and stereotyping our colleagues or our children…because they don't all come from the same experiences." This nuanced understanding of diversity acknowledges a layer of identity that both includes and reaches beyond race, possibly engendering greater levels of trust. While this participant

believes the adult community needs to be more diverse and that hiring a more diverse workforce should be a priority, approaching it from a purely racial angle might not be the only path.

Perhaps the strongest example arising from this study is the shared identities of the superintendent and the teacher union leader (Myers, 2022). This relationship is notable not only for its longevity and many shared experiences, but also for the shared sense of identity that emerged over time. Both the superintendent and the teacher union leader take pride in being lifelong residents of the community, noting they both have spent their careers in the same district and, for a period of time, at the same school. As a result, there exists in their relationship a palpable sense of what the teacher union leader referred to as "being on the same team" and "being in it together." When defining what it means to "be on the same team," the union leader and superintendent cited their shared commitment to the best interests of students and of the district. Their shared identities also extend into their personal lives, where their daughters, who are the same age and are friends, attended the same high school and played on the same sports teams. On more than one occasion, each party commented on the importance of these commonalities, stating that the other "gets it," in large part because they are so similar in many ways.

This shared identity emerged as an important factor allowing each party to assume certain positive characteristics about the other. Research shows that having a sense of shared identity within a social group helps to define who one is and how one should behave (Hogg, 2014). As a result, a shared identity allows one to make assumptions about the other's future behavior based on membership in the same group (Hogg, 2001; Reid & Hogg, 2005). However, while research highlights the important role that time

plays in allowing trust to emerge (Six, 2007; Zand, 1972), our study shows that time may not always be the most important factor for developing trusting relationships. Instead, a sense of shared identity can serve as a proxy for time, providing a shortcut to assessing another's behaviors and establishing trust. Both the superintendent and the teacher union leader, for example, strongly identify as members of the same in-group, producing a level of certainty about who the other is. The importance that both the superintendent and the teacher union leader place on being lifelong residents of the community and lifelong employees of the district, for example, allows each to make assumptions about who the other is and how they will behave; namely, that the other has the best interests of the district's children at heart. Leaders in the district's DEI work also noted the importance of hiring employees who reflect both the racial and cultural experience of the district's students, since sharing identities with students and their families would engender trust more quickly (Evee, 2022).

Just as having a shared identity can produce positive perceptions between members and further trust formation in the relationship, members with different identities may generate negative perceptions (Hogg, 2001). In this context, the superintendent and the teacher union leader viewed each other favorably for being members of the same identity group (Myers, 2022). However, their references to out-group members were less positive. The superintendent negatively categorized the state-level teacher union representative as coming from a different community and therefore not understanding the district. The teacher union leader lamented the possibility that the new superintendent search committee would recruit candidates "from across the country" who likely won't understand or appreciate the history and nuances of the community. Such perspectives

present a clear barrier to trust-formation by assuming a lack of the newcomer's competence, a key trust-forming facet, due to their lack of history with the district, its people, and its values.

Some participants viewed membership outside their identity group as hindering the trust-development process. Specifically, participants holding supervisory responsibilities for teachers—namely principals—were not necessarily viewed as trustworthy by teachers (McCarthy, 2022). In this case, principals appeared to be categorized by teachers as members of a separate identity group and therefore less likely to understand and support teachers. One principal acknowledged a tension in her dynamic with teachers, explaining that being seen as a principal was a barrier to trust. This barrier was so significant, in fact, that she trains fellow principals to prepare for their relationships to change as a result of their role change. Furthermore, teachers remarked strikingly as to how strongly they perceive their principal as different from them. In the eyes of teachers, the role of principal takes away some of the leader's humanity. One teacher shared her surprise at seeing her principal feel nervous during a district walkthrough: "Wow, you are human, and you feel like all the classroom teachers do when they are being observed." Another spoke about her fear of her principal, adding, "If I think of my principal as a human, I'm not scared of [her]." In this case, group identity serves to delay or derail the development of trust; a person's identity as a principal has a chilling effect on a teacher's propensity to trust, likely because of the teacher's negative assumptions about members of the principal's "group."

Our findings reflect existing research, which indicates both negative and positive impacts of identity grouping for trust-formation (Reid & Hogg, 2005). For example, as

stated above, among our participants, a sense of shared identity enabled trust between the superintendent and teacher union leader, while its absence hindered trust between the principal and her teachers. The conflicting ways in which perceiving a shared identity impacted participants speaks to the complexity of this phenomena and raises the need for further study. For instance, if leaders become aware of this dynamic, they might intentionally work to foster a sense of shared identity, which could then build stronger trust and impact loyalty, retention, and dedication to the organization. Researchers may want to examine if such dynamics are at play in other groups who build a sense of shared identity from diverse members, such as sports teams, while also applying these dynamics to school staff, or teams within central office or entire districts. Leaders must also be aware, however, of a potential for unearned distrust within their organizations due to in-group biases, since the simple fact of sharing or not sharing identity might lead members of organizations to mistrust people they should not, creating an array of negative consequences, including limiting collaboration on teams or failing to hire the strongest candidates. Ultimately, as schools both consist of and serve diverse populations, educators must build strong relationships across groups. While the concept of shared identity on trust-formation is not widely examined in the literature on trust in schools, our study findings suggest it has a strong potential to impact the work in school districts, thereby warranting further examination.

Recommendations

Findings suggest that to build a high-functioning organization, school districts should use the five facets of trust as a framework for building relational trust within their

organization. This should start at the central office and principal level, with leaders reflecting on and learning about benevolence, reliability, competence, openness and honesty, while identifying which systems and behaviors may best foster those facets of trust. Creating collective trust across the school district must start from the top and be modeled, practiced, and tracked, possibly through the use of climate surveys.

Given our finding that the facet of benevolence is highly valued across all district leadership levels, we recommend starting with this foundational facet. District leaders should spend time learning how to recognize and practice benevolence, including how to foster relationship-building between and among staff members, teams, schools, and the greater community. Benevolent actions may include taking time to get to know the people in the organization on a personal level, listening actively, validating the thinking of others, and leading with compassion. Our recommendation to focus on relationship development may be achieved with the use of professionally-trained speakers, shared readings, and/or structured workshops— or by simply making space for district leaders to ask the same questions we did of the people they directly support, such as: “How do you define trust?” and “Can you share an example of what trust looks like in your work?” Learning about the importance of benevolence, and the facets, at the district level can contribute to improved relational trust within the community, leaving employees feeling supported (ExploElevate, 2021). Key to that recommendation is to increase district leader understanding of the need for benevolence and the other facets of trust (reliability, competence, openness, and honesty). Further, district leaders should consider these facets in terms of how they show up in their management style, as well as how they can incorporate the facets into daily interactions.

Given the importance of shared purpose as a cornerstone to trust-building, we also recommend that districts increase trust by clearly defining and reinforcing a shared purpose across institutional roles. Defining a shared purpose may begin with a review of the district's mission and vision, identifying how each educational stakeholder in the district is working toward that shared purpose. While defining a shared purpose is the first step, in order to realize a vision, additional, critical steps must be taken to communicate and align this vision across the organization, while also empowering and motivating educators charged with carrying out the shared purpose (Kantabutra, 2010). Achieving a shared purpose can also deepen trust within a school district by ensuring that staff can rely on how and why decisions are made.

With a clear shared purpose, a district can then shape a shared identity for those who work within it by explicitly defining what it means to work for the district. What does it mean to be a member of this district? What are we about? Why are we here? What are we doing and why is it important? Creating an overarching group identity based on district mission and values may transcend other identity-based memberships and support trust-formation. This shared identity could further reinforce a sense of shared purpose and provide clear guidelines for what it means to work for a particular school district, creating a cohesiveness among staff and facilitating a stronger sense of belonging. This can lead to better recruitment of staff and more streamlined hiring practices. A sense of belonging or shared identity can also contribute to longer tenures for teachers and administrators alike.

Limitations

In examining trust across an entire district, our study expands upon the previous research on trust that is more narrowly tailored by contributing to the understanding of trust among educational stakeholders across an entire school district. However, it has several limitations. Trust is a complex phenomenon that develops and changes over time. Given that trust is a sensitive topic, participants may have withheld information if we, ironically, did not gain their trust as researchers. Additionally, the short time frame of our project may have limited our ability to gain sufficient data to provide richer conclusions. Furthermore, we recognize that working in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic presented challenges not typical in prior qualitative research, since all our work was completed over Zoom, a video-call platform. Observations of Zoom meetings, in contrast to in-person observations, removed access to meaningful data such as participant body language, seating choice, or side interactions. Despite these challenges, our study is likely the first of its kind to look at relational trust during the COVID-19 pandemic through the perceptions of teachers, teacher union leaders, principals, central office staff, DEI leaders, and the superintendent, and therefore helps build an understanding of how trust functions within larger educational organizations.

Conclusion

Trust plays a critical role in relationships, allowing educational stakeholders to effectively collaborate and take risks, all of which is necessary for achieving goals, and perhaps more so during times of crisis. COVID-19 forced a variety of hardships upon all schools in March of 2020. Districts had to manage the impacts of a global health crisis on their schools amid significant uncertainty and implement wholesale changes to how K-12

educators could best meet student needs. Such change required new and unfamiliar practices, which led to a degree of vulnerability on behalf of everyone involved. Amid this context of change and uncertainty, trust became even more imperative. Prior research suggests that established trust can make the response to change and unexpected transitions during a crisis more manageable, allowing schools to maintain effective school communities and remove new barriers in the pursuit of student well-being and academic success (Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Daly, 2009; Louis, 2007; Olsen & Sexton, 2009). Our study sought to better understand this dynamic across multiple roles and relationships within a single district.

This study extended our understanding of trust by revealing how trust functions across a district. To successfully respond to change initiatives (both voluntary and involuntary), educators must prioritize relationships and effective collaboration. In this study, trust played a significant role in a K-12 school district, especially during times of crisis. Specifically, our data analysis concluded that benevolence is a consistent and important facet of trust formation across all relationships. In addition, we found that having a shared purpose, which we suggest starts with shared values, makes trust less risky, while the absence of shared purpose negatively affects relationships. Further, we found that the increase of time within a relationship increases the amount of trust with our participants at all levels. Finally, the collective data suggests that having a sense of shared identity serves to accelerate the trust-building process. These findings will be useful for district and school leaders who want to establish trusting relationships more intentionally and may also inform the preparation, induction, and learning of district leaders.

Pre-K-12 school organizations play a sizable role in society. They prepare generations of children with an array of skills needed for adulthood, college, career, and beyond. Due to their importance, schools must function effectively through times of both calm and crisis. History has proven that school districts will continue to experience crises that impact staff, students, and families and, therefore, it is essential that trust serves as the foundational element for success.

References

Abusham, J. (2019). Preparing school leaders to advocate for social justice. *Multicultural Education*, *27*(1), 4-6.

Benna, J. V., & Hambacher, E. (2020). Foundations of superintendent trustworthiness: Perspectives of elementary school principals. *Journal of School Leadership,* https://doi-org.proxy.bc.edu/10.1177/1052684620980357.

Bhattacharya, R., Devinney, T. M., & Pillutla, M. (1998). A formal model of trust based on outcomes. *Academy of Management Review*, *23*(3), 459-472.

Bijlsma, K., & Koopman, P. (2003). Introduction: Trust within organizations. *Personnel Review, 32*(5), 543-555.

Bryk, A., & Schneider, B. (2003). Trust in schools: A core resource for school reform. *Educational Leadership, 60*(6), 40-44.

Butler, J. K. (1999). Trust expectations, information sharing, climate of trust, and negotiation effectiveness and efficiency. *Group & Organization Management, 24*(2), 217–238. https://doi.org/10.1177/1059601199242005

Cambron-McCabe, N., & McCarthy, M. M. (2005). Educating school leaders for social justice. *Educational Policy*, *19*(1), 201-222.

Capper, C. A., Theoharis, G., & Sebastian, J. (2006). Toward a framework for preparing leaders for social justice. *Journal of Educational Administration, 44*(3), 209-224.

Chapman, J. E. (2012). *Elements of positive trust between superintendents and principals: Analysis of virtue theory and transformational leadership theory* [Doctoral dissertation]. Texas Tech University. http://hdl.handle.net/2346/50735

Chhuon, V., Gilkey, E. M., Gonzalez, M., Daly, A. J., & Chrispeels, J. H. (2008). The little district that could: The process of building district-school trust. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *44*(2), 227–281. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X07311410

Cosner, S. (2009). Building organizational capacity through trust. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *45*(2), 248–291. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X08330502

Creswell, J. W., & Guetterman, T. C., (2019). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research,* (6th ed.). New York, NY: Pearson, 143.

Currall, S. C. (1992). Group representatives in educational institutions: An empirical study of superintendents and teacher union presidents. *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science, 28*(2), 296-317.

Currall, S. C. & Judge, T. A. (1995). Measuring trust between organizational boundary role persons. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, 64*(2), 151-170.

Daly, A. J. (2009). Rigid response in an age of accountability: The potential of leadership and trust. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *45*(2), 168–216. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X08330499

Daly, A. J., & Chrispeels, J. (2008). A question of trust: Predictive conditions for adaptive and technical leadership in educational contexts. *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, *7*(1), 30–63. https://doi.org/10.1080/15700760701655508

Daly, A. J., Moolenaar, N. M., Liou, Y., Tuytens, M., & Del Fresno, M. (2015). Why so

difficult? Exploring negative relationships between educational leaders: The role of trust, climate, and efficacy. *American Journal of Education*, *122*(1), 1–38.

Dirks, K. T., & Ferrin, D. L. (2002). Trust in leadership: Meta-analytic findings and implications for research and practice. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *87*(4), 611–628. https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org.proxy.bc.edu/10.1037/0021-9010.87.4.611

ExploElevate Innovative Schools Cooperative. Making the Hidden Visible: The lived experience of the Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice Practitioner at Independent Schools (2021). https://explore.explo.org/hubfs/Elevate/Making%20the%20Hidden%20Visible.pdf?utm_referrer=https%3A%2F%2Felevate.explo.org

Fernandes, D. (2021, March 4). THE GREAT DIVIDE: High school seniors of color are behind on completing financial aid forms, a worrying sign for college enrollment. *The Boston Globe.*

Fisher, R., & Brown, S. (1989). *Getting together: Building relationships as we negotiate*. Penguin.

Forsyth, P., Adams, C., & Hoy, W. (2011). *Collective trust: Why schools can't improve without it*. Teachers College Press. https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.1.2673.1684

Foster, W. (1989). Toward a critical practice of educational leadership. In J. Smith (Ed.), *Critical perspectives on educational leadership*. London, England: Falmer Press, 39-62.

Frankfurt, H. G. (2006). *On truth*. Random House

Fullan, M., Cuttress, C., & Kilcher, A. (2009). 8 Forces for Leaders of Change. In *The*

Challenge of Change: Start School Improvement Now! (pp. 9–20). Corwin Press. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781452218991.n2

Gaffney, A. W., Himmelstein, D., & Woolhandler, S. (2020). Risk for severe COVID-19 illness among teachers and adults living with school-aged children. *Annals of internal medicine*, *173*(9), 765-767.

Groysberg, B., & Seligson, S. (2020, November 1). Good leadership is an act of kindness. Harvard Business Review. https://hbswk.hbs.edu/item/good-leadership-is-an-act-of-kindness

Handford, V., & Leithwood, K. (2013). Why teachers trust school leaders. *Journal of Educational Administration*, *51*(2), 194–212.

Hatchel, J. A. (2012). *Trust-building characteristics of superintendents and their impact on principals* [Doctoral dissertation]. California State University.

Hearney, K., & Hyle, A. (2003). The grief cycle and educational change: The Kubler-Ross contribution. *Planning and Changing, 34*, 32-57.

Heifetz, R., & Linsky, M. (2002). *Leadership on the line: Staying alive through the dangers of leading*. Harvard Business School Press.

Hogg, Michael. (2001). A social theory of leadership. *Personality and Social Psychology Review.* 5(3), 184-200.

Hogg, Michael. (2014). From uncertainty to extremism: Social categorization and identity processes. *Current Directions in Psychological Science.* 23(5), 338-342.

Honig, M. I., Venkateswaran, N., & McNeil, P. (2017). Research use as learning: The

case of fundamental change in school district central offices. *American Educational Research Journal*, *54*(5), 938–971. https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831217712466

Hoy, W. K., & Tschannen-Moran, M. (1999). Five faces of trust: An empirical confirmation in urban elementary schools. *Journal of School Leadership*, *9*(3), 184-208.

Hoy, W. K., & Tschannen-Moran, M. (2003). The conceptualization and measurement of faculty trust in schools: The omnibus T-Scale. In W. K. Hoy and C. G. Miskel (Eds.), *Studies in leading and organizing schools* (pp. 181-208). University of South Florida.

Hurley, R. F. (2012). *The decision to trust: How leaders create high-trust organizations*. Jossey-Bass.

Johnson, P. E., & Chrispeels, J. H. (2010). Linking the central office and its schools for reform. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *46*(5), 738–775. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X10377346

Kantabutra, S. (2010). Vision effects: a critical gap in educational leadership research. *International Journal of Educational Management*, *24*(5), 376–390. https://doi.org/10.1108/09513541011055956

Kramer, R. M. (1999). Trust and distrust in organizations: Emerging perspectives, enduring questions. *Annual Review of Psychology*, *50*, 569-598.

Kwatubana, S., & Molaodi, V. (2021). Leadership styles that would enable school leaders to support the wellbeing of teachers during COVID-19. *Bulgarian Comparative Education Society*. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED614047.pdf

Ladson-Billings, G. (2021). I'm here for the hard reset: Post pandemic pedagogy to preserve our culture. *Equity & Excellence in Education, 54*(1), 68-78.

Leithwood, K. A., & Riehl, C. (2003). *What we know about successful school leadership*. Temple University, Laboratory for Student Success.

Levitan, J. (2016, May 2). *The Difference Between Educational Equality, Equity, and Justice… and Why It Matters*. American Journal of Education Forum. Retrieved February 2022, from http://www.ajeforum.com/the-difference-between-educational-equality-equity-and-justice-and-why-it-matters-by-joseph-levitan/

Li, L. (2005). The effects of trust and shared vision on inward knowledge transfer in subsidiaries' intra- and inter-organizational relationships. *International Business Review*, *14*(1), 77–95. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ibusrev.2004.12.005

Louis, K. S. (2007). Trust and improvement in schools. *Journal of Educational Change*, *8*(1), 1–24. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10833-006-9015-5

Love, B. L. (2019). *We want to do more than survive: Abolitionist teaching and the pursuit of educational freedom*. Beacon Press

Luhmann, N. (2000). Familiarity, confidence, trust: Problems and alternatives. *Trust: Making and Breaking Cooperative Relations*, *6*(1), 94-107.

Martin, N. (2021, December 5). THE GREAT DIVIDE: After repeated racists incident at Quincy High School, students and parents mobilize, raising hopes that change is possible. *The Boston Globe,* p. 3.

Mayer, R. C., Davis, J. H., & Schoorman, F. D. (1995). An integrative model of

organizational trust. *The Academy of Management Review*, *20*(3), 709–734. https://doi.org/10.2307/258792

McKenzie, K. B., Christman, D. E., Hernandez, F., Fierro, E., Capper, C. A., Dantley, M., ... & Scheurich, J. J. (2008). From the field: A proposal for educating leaders for social justice. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *44*(1), 111-138.

Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* (4th ed.). Jossey Bass.

Mills, G. E., & Gay, L. R. (2019). Educational research: Competencies for analysis and applications (12th ed.). Pearson

Mishra, A. K. (1996). Organizational responses to crisis. In R. Kramer & T. Tyler (Eds.), *Trust in organizations: Frontiers of theory and research* (pp. 261-287). Sage.

National Association of independent Schools (NAIS), NAIS Research: 2019 State of the Diversity Practice. https://www.nais.org/articles/pages/research/2019-nais-diversity-practitioner-survey/

Olsen, B., & Sexton, D. (2009). Threat rigidity, school reform, and how teachers view their work inside current education policy contexts. *American Educational Research Journal*, *46*(1), 9–44. https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831208320573

Parolin, Z. (2021). What the COVID-19 pandemic reveals about racial differences in child welfare and child well-being: An introduction to the special issue. *Race and Social Problems*, *13*, 1-5.

Qvortrup, A., & Qvortrup, L. (2018). *Inclusion: Dimensions of inclusion in education.*

International Journal of Inclusive Education, *22*(7), 803–817. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2017.1412506

Reid, Scott A., & Hogg, Michael A. (2005). Uncertainty reduction, self-enhancement, and ingroup identification. *Society for Personality and Social Psychology.* 31(6), 804-817.

Reiss, F., & Hoy, W. K. (1998). Faculty loyalty: An important but neglected concept in the study of schools. *Journal of School Leadership*, *8*(1), 4–25.

Rivera-McCutchen, R., and Watson, T., (2014). Leadership for Social Justice: It Is a Matter of Trust. *Journal of Cases in Educational Leadership*, 17(4), 54-65.

Rosenthal, U., & Hart, P. (1991). Experts and decision makers in crisis situations. *Knowledge*, *12*(4), 350–372. https://doi.org/10.1177/107554709101200402

Saldaña, J. (2021). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. SAGE Publications Limited.

Sarikaya, S., & Keskinkiliç Kara, S. B.. (2020). Organizational trust and organizational support as a predictor of job satisfaction. *International Journal of Curriculum and Instruction, 12*, 435-67.

Seashore, K., Leithwood, K., Wahlstrom, K., & Anderson, S. (2010). *Investigating the links to improved student learning: Final Report of Research Findings* [Report]. The Wallace Foundation. http://conservancy.umn.edu/handle/11299/140885

Shaked, H. (2020). Social justice leadership, instructional leadership, and the goals of schooling. *International Journal of Educational Management, 34*(1), 81-95.

Sikandar, A. (2016). John Dewey and his philosophy of education. *Journal of Education*

and Educational Development, *2*(2), 191–201. https://doi.org/10.22555/joeed.v2i2.446

Six, F. E. (2007). Building interpersonal trust within organizations: A relational signaling perspective. *Journal of Management and Governance*, *11*, 285-309.

Slovic, P. (1993). Perceived risk, trust, and democracy. *Risk Analysis, 13*(6), 675-682.

Solomon, R. P. (2002). School leaders and antiracism: Overcoming pedagogical and political obstacles. *Journal of School Leadership*, *12*(2), 174-197.

Stanford Center on Poverty and Inequality. (2016, November 10). *Gaps in educational attainment: Richard Breen* (video file). Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0X2972bRuSQ

Swain, J. E. C. (2007). *The influence of relational trust between the superintendent and union president* (1307072) [Doctoral dissertation, Montana State University] https://scholarworks.montana.edu/xmlui/handle/1/2378.

Swanson, J., & Welton, A. (2019). When good intentions only go so far: White principals leading discussions about race. *Urban Education*, *54*(5), 732-759.

The Business Journals. (n.d.). *9 effective ways to maintain the momentum of your DEI efforts*. Retrieved February 2022, from https://www.bizjournals.com/bizjournals/news/2021/08/04/9-effective-ways-to-maintain-the-momentum-of-your-dei-efforts.html

Theoharis, G. (2007). Social justice educational leaders and resistance: Toward a theory of social justice leadership. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *43*(2), 221-258.

Theoharis, G. (2008). Woven in deeply: Identity and leadership of urban social justice

principals. *Education and Urban Society, 41*(1), 3-25.

Theoharis, G., & Causton-Theoharis, J. N. (2008). Oppressors or emancipators: Critical dispositions for preparing inclusive school leaders. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, *41*(2), 230-246.

Trujillo, T. (2016). Learning from the past to chart new directions in the study of school district effectiveness. In A. Daly & K. Finnegan (Eds.), *Thinking and acting systemically: Improving school districts under pressure* (pp. 11 – 48). American Educational Research Association.

Tschannen‐Moran, M., & Hoy, W., (1998). Trust in schools: A conceptual and empirical analysis. *Journal of Educational Administration,* 36(4), 334-352.

Tschannen-Moran, M., & Hoy, W. K. (2000). A multidisciplinary analysis of the nature, meaning, and measurement of trust. *Review of Educational Research*, *70*(4), 547 593. https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543070004547

Tschannen-Moran, M. (2001). Collaboration and the need for trust. *Journal of Educational Administration*, *39*(4), 308–331.

Tschannen-Moran, M. (2014). *Trust matters: Leadership for successful schools*. John Wiley & Sons.

Tschannen-Moran, M., & Gareis, C. R. (2015). Faculty trust in the principal: An essential ingredient in high-performing schools. *Journal of Educational Administration, 53(1), 66-92.*

Toness, B. (2021, March 10). THE GREAT DIVIDE: Struggling Boston teens find few support options, fueling record absentee rates. *The Boston Globe.*

Understanding and Addressing Principal Turnover: A Review of the Research. (n.d.).

Learning Policy Institute. Retrieved February 22, 2022, from https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/nassp-understanding-addressing-principal-turnover-review-research-report

Vaznis, J. (2021, September 21). THE GREAT DIVIDE: MCAS scores plummet during the pandemic. *The Boston Globe.*

Vinzant, J. C. (2009). *Black principals' perceptions of how their racial, cultural, personal, and professional identities affect their leadership*. [Doctoral dissertation, Boston College].

Wahlstrom, K. L., & Louis, K. S. (2008). How teachers experience principal leadership: The roles of professional community, trust, efficacy, and shared responsibility. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *44*(4), 458–495.

Wang, F. (2018). Social justice leadership—Theory and practice: A case of Ontario. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 54*(3), 470-498.

Will, M. (2014, November 6). Average urban school superintendent tenure decreases, survey shows. *Education Week*.

Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case study research and applications: Design and methods* (6th ed.). Sage.

Zand, D. E. (1972). Trust and managerial problem solving. *Administrative Science Quarterly, 17*(2), 229-239.

Zucker, L. (1986). Production of trust: Institutional sources of economic structure, 1840-1920. In B. M. Staw, & L. L. Cummings (Eds.), *Research in organizational behavior* (pp. 53–111). JAI Press.

Appendix A

Recruitment Email

Hello (Participant name),

My name is Ruth Evee, and I am a student researcher in Lynch School of Education and Human Development at Boston College. I am writing to invite you to participate in a research study regarding how trust may aid the development of more productive and effective school districts. My team seeks to learn what may be universal about trust formation as well as the nuances of how trust may function differently given the varying positional roles and responsibilities across a school district. **Along with trust, I will be focusing specifically on the work and perception of diversity, equity, and inclusion leadership and was referred to as a valuable resource in such work for the district.**

Participants will be interviewed during a mutually agreed upon 60-minute time block. In order to be eligible to participate, you must be over 18 years old and a current employee of the (School district name). Participating in this study is completely voluntary and you will always be free to stop your participation at any time. There is no compensation for participating in the study.

We hope to use our findings to better understand specific leadership behaviors for building and maintaining trusting relationships in schools, practices for supporting healthy school and district climates, and the strategies needed to redress systemic inequities.

If you are interested in participating, please respond to this email so we can schedule an interview time. For more information about being in this study, you can contact me, Ruth Evee. If you know someone who may be a good fit for this study, please feel free to forward this to them.

Sincerely,
Ruth Evee

Appendix B

Boston College, Lynch School of Education Informed Consent

Principal Investigator: Ruth Evee, EdD Student, Boston College, Lynch School of Education.

Introduction and Purpose: You are being asked to take part in a research study to explore the practices and perspectives of DEI leadership. The interview seeks to capture practice and professional perspectives related to the work of DEI leadership during COVID pandemic. You are invited to participate in this interview because Ruth Evee has identified you as a district level DEI leader in education. If you agree to participate, I ask that you complete 1 interview of up to 60 minutes. You may be invited to participate in a follow-up interview as well.

Benefits and Risks: There are no expected benefits from taking part in this interview. You may feel gratified knowing that you helped further the scholarly work in this research area that may provide insight into how to create strong, trusting relationships across diverse leaders, strong collaborative relationships and healthy school climates. **There are no known risks to taking part in this interview, but participation might entail risks that are not known at this time.** There could be questions that might cause discomfort or to which you would simply prefer to not respond. You may skip any questions.

Compensation: There is no compensation for participation.

Confidentiality: Ruth Evee will exert all reasonable efforts to keep your responses and your identity confidential. All electronic information will be coded and secured using a password-protected file. In any sort of report, we may publish or present, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. **The Institutional Review Board at Boston College and internal Boston College auditors may review the research records. State or federal laws or court orders may also require that information from research study records be released. Otherwise, the researchers will not release to others any information that could indicate your identity unless you give your permission, or unless they are legally required to do so.**

Consent: Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. If you choose not to take part in the study, it will not affect your relationships with the researchers or with Boston College. Anyone can discontinue the survey at any time without any negative consequences and everyone has the option to withhold information if they so choose.

Questions: If you have any questions or concerns or would like to seek more information regarding the interview process or this research study you may contact Ruth Evee at evee@bc.edu. If you have any concerns about your treatment and rights as a person in this research study, you may contact: Director, Office for Research Protections, Boston College at (617) 552-4778, or irb@bc.edu.

The Boston College Institutional Review Board (IRB) has approved this study in August 2021.

If you agree to the statements above and agree to participate in this study, please press "Consent Given" (if virtual) or sign the paper form (if in-person). **You may print or save a copy of this consent form to your computer or receive a copy of a paper consent (if in-person).**

Appendix C

Shared Interview Protocol (across all studies)

Note: Educational stakeholders will vary between our five studies. Therefore, while the same content of the questions below will be asked of all education stakeholders, questions may be tailored slightly to specific stakeholders (e.g., superintendent, principals, teachers, union leaders, DEI leaders, central office team-members).

1. Are there particular behaviors that you think build strong relationships more than others? How do they play out in your [workplace, team meetings, etc.]
2. Tell me about a crisis/situation/event that impacted your relationship.
3. How, if at all, has your relationship changed with "x" over the course of the past year?
4. How, if at all, have your practices changed….over the course of this year?
5. Can you provide an example of an interaction that strengthened your relationship with [educational stakeholder]?
6. Can you provide an example of an interaction that harmed your relationship with [educational stakeholder]?

Appendix D

Observation Protocol

Time		Setting	
Place		Observers Role	

Descriptive Notes	Reflections

Appendix E

Teacher Survey

Survey Questions: Adapted from the Omnibus T Scale (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 2003)

Note: This survey uses a 7-point Likert scale (strongly disagree, disagree, somewhat disagree, neither disagree or agree, somewhat agree, agree, strongly agree).

1. The teachers in this school trust the principal.
2. The principal can be counted on to address problems, no matter what it takes.
3. Teachers believe that the principal acts with integrity.
4. My principal has shown care and concern for staff.
5. The principal is dependable.
6. The principal manages the school well.
7. The principal knows what is happening in classrooms across the school.
8. The principal shares important information with teachers.
9. The principal admits when she/he/they make mistakes.
10. The principal solicits the perspective of others.

Appendix F

A Priori Codebook

Facet	CODE	Definition	Examples from Empirical Research	Example Behaviors by Trustee **Trustee: A person who exhibits the behaviors to engender trust**
BENEVOLENCE	BEN	The demonstration of good will toward others with no gain to self; the trustee desires to do good on behalf of the trustor. (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999)	• Benevolent leaders demonstrate care, concern, and respect for others (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999); • They value the care of others over their own personal gain (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999); • A benevolent trustee will waive personal gain if it brings possible harm to the trusting party (Benna & Hambacher, 2020); • Mayer et al. (1995) describe the benevolent person as one who "...[places] others' interests above his or her own interests" (p. 300); • At the very least, the benevolent trustee does not knowingly or willingly do harm to another (Currall, 1992; Tschannen-Moran, 2004).	Demonstrates care by checking in to see how people are doing, asking about family members, etc. Accommodates others / grants requests whenever possible and with no gain to self. Treats others with dignity, never disrespectfully. Demonstrates positive intentions. Supports others. Fair. Expresses appreciation. Guards confidential information.
OPENNESS	OPEN	The willingness to show vulnerability to others by sharing information and influence.	• The characteristic of openness manifests itself through information-sharing, considering the ideas of others, and sharing influence over decision-making (Bijlsma & Koopman, 2003; Tschannen-Moran, 2015);	Is approachable. Solicits and values the perspective of others. Engages others in collective problem-finding and problem-solving,

		(Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999)	• Tschannen-Moran (2014) notes that a "….collegial leadership style, in which a leader is perceived to be approachable and open to the ideas of others, has been linked to greater...trust in the [leader]" (p. 59); • Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (2003) describe openness as the "….extent to which relevant information is shared; a process by which individuals make themselves vulnerable to others" (p.185).	Shares the purpose behind the trustee's decisions, Communicates consistently with others, sharing accurate, relevant, and complete information whenever possible, Engages in non-task related communication, Delegates important work to others, Shares authority;

<u>RELIABILITY</u>	REL	The consistent and predictable nature of a person's behavior. (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999)	• the trustee is consistent in their behavior and follows through on commitments (Bhattacharya et al., 1998; Tschannen-Moran, 2015);
			• "Reliability in following through on decisions and promises...contributes in substantive ways to… trust [between agents]" (Tschannen-Moran, 2014 p. 60);
			• Behaving with consistency (aka in a predictable manner)
			  ◦ Regarding staff feedback
			  ◦ Regarding student discipline
				Is dependable,
				
				Demonstrates commitment,
				
				Is diligent;

<u>COMPETENCE</u>	COMP	The appropriate skill set in a given context. (Hoy &	• Performing expected behaviors for the role such as
			  ◦ Observing teachers
			  ◦ Engaging in meetings about instruction
				Demonstrates expertise,
				
				Fosters a compelling collective vision, modeling desired and appropriate behaviors, coaching faculty to align

		Tschannen-Moran, 1999)	○ Demonstrating strong knowledge about what was happening in classrooms across the school • The knowledge and skill needed for success in a particular domain is considered competence (Benna & Hambacher, 2020); • Trustors continually check to see whether the trustee's behavior indicates that he or she is competent to perform according to expectations in a particular context (Six, 2007).	their skills with the school vision, Manages organizational resources fairly and skillfully, Standing ready to mediate the inevitable conflicts that emerge as educators engage in the complex work of schooling
HONESTY	HON	Telling the truth, and acting in accordance with expressed values and with authenticity (Tschannen-Moran, 2015)	• Trustees demonstrate honesty not only by telling the truth, but by acting in accordance with expressed values and with authenticity (Tschannen-Moran, 2015); • Acting in accordance with expressed values • Willing to admit their own mistakes and not hiding behind formal authority	Accepts responsibility; admits mistakes. Tells the truth. Avoids manipulation. True to core values.

Appendix G

Semi-structured Interview Questions
DEI Leader interview questions

RQ: *How does leadership practices and perspectives support DEI work during a time of crisis?*

1. What is your perspective of DEI leadership work or social justice leadership?
2. What has been your role in leading DEI work in this district/school?
    a. What qualities do you have as a leader that best support your ability to lead DEI work?
3. How does your personal experience influence your DEI beliefs?
    a. What values do you believe are most important to implement DEI work?
4. What formal training have you had with regards to DEI and awareness?
    a. Do you think such training has added to your success as a DEI leader?
5. Has the district/school done work on race, cultural competence, bias behavior, or critical race theory?
    a. How have these initiatives been structured regarding leadership and implementation?
6. What are some barriers you have encountered while leading DEI initiatives?
    a. How do you handle resistance among stakeholders?
    b. What specific strategies do you use to get buy-in from stakeholders?
7. What is a crisis that the district has faced and how did it impact the DEI initiatives?
    a. How did you overcome the challenges of that crisis and implement DEI work?
8. Is there anything further you would like me to know regarding your leadership in DEI work in your district/school?
    a. Who in your district would you describe as a DEI leader?

RQ: *How, if at all, does the role of trust affect the implementation of DEI work?*

1. How do you communicate the DEI district/school vision to the community?
2. Describe how you build relationships with stakeholders when implementing DEI initiatives?
3. How do you show your own competency in DEI work to the community?
4. Tell me about a time you had to be brutally honest about an issue you found, how did you go about making the community aware of your findings?
5. How do you develop your school/district culture to advance DEI initiatives? Examples

Appendix H

Benevolence	Reliability	Openness
Care for others	Dependable	Comfortable in sensitive discussions
Active listening	Committed to DEI work	Vulnerable in sharing your own experience
Respect of others and diverse opinions	Committed to the district goals	Personable
Seek and see value in all voices	Visible and active within various areas	Embracing the learning process with others
Communicate cross culture	Constant DEI awareness (lens)	Engage in self-work (identify own biases)
Connect / understand cultures present		
Identify the good in people		