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TRUST IN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP IN TIMES OF CRISIS: TRUST BETWEEN THE SUPERINTENDENT AND PRINCIPALS DURING COVID-19

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Trust in Educational Leadership In Times of Crisis: Trust Between the Superintendent and Principals During COVID-19

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ABSTRACT

Trust is never more important than during a crisis. For years, researchers have been studying trust in organizations and schools, focusing on the principal and teacher relationship and its impact on school climate. The literature has been less focused, however, on the superintendent and principal relationship—and the role trust plays within that relationship. Moreover, given the recency and continually evolving nature of COVID-19, there is little research about the actions superintendents and principals are taking to lead their school communities through this pandemic and even less research on how this crisis impacts the relational trust between the superintendent and the principal.

The purpose of this study, therefore, is to examine how trust impacts the relationship between the superintendent and the principals in their district. Accordingly, this study will address the following research questions: *1) How do principals view their relationship with the superintendent and their schools during a crisis? and 2) What practices influence the role of trust in this relationship?*

To understand how principals view their relationships with their superintendent, as well as practices that influence trust, I conducted six interviews with five principals

and the superintendent, and I observed a School Committee meeting where a principal presented on behalf of all principals in support of the superintendent. Principals highlighted how working for a benevolent, competent, and reliable superintendent over a long period of time helps them build trust in their superior while also leading a school during a time of crisis. Practices that appeared to build and sustain trust during the COVID-19 crisis and that support a trusting relationship between the superintendent and principals include length of time working together; perceived trust from the superintendent in the principals' competence, which led to reciprocal trust; the ability to advocate for systems-wide change; and acts of benevolence. This research emphasizes that the relationship between principals and the superintendent matters. It is essential that trust is developed between principals and the superintendent to ensure a stable working environment for staff, ultimately leading to greater consistency for students during trying times in school and beyond.

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DEDICATION

For Mom, Dad and Beth - For instilling in me the passion to achieve my dreams, inspiring me to learn, modeling how to always do things to care for others, cooking me the most delicious meals and for loving me unconditionally.

For my beautiful cousin, Catherine Grassa Todd, a voracious reader and the kindest soul whose strength and heart continues to be felt by those who loved her the most.

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). Furthermore, research suggests that trust is also important when developing district-level

[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

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

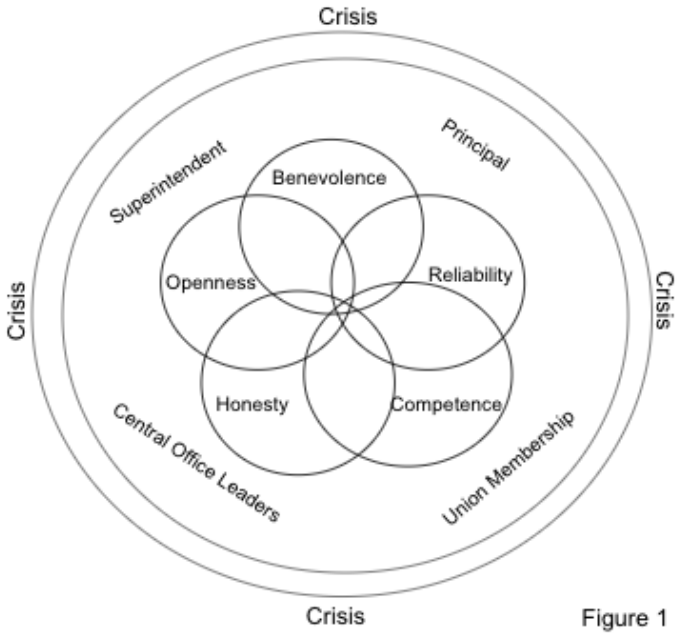

Figure 1

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?*

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[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 the 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 Research Problem

Trust is important to schools. Research about trust in schools, specifically between principals and teachers (Blumberg et al., 1978.; Price, 2012; Tschannen-Moran, et al., 2015) and how this leads to greater job satisfaction and longevity, as well as a more positive school climate, can be found in abundance. It is incumbent upon the leaders of organizations to develop trust between and among the teams they lead and set the vision for the future. Trust is the foundation of this vision and leads to successful work (Johnson & Chrispeels, 2010). In Pre-K-12 school organizations, trust is developed over time and is based on the actions and interactions among the superintendent and principals, and principals and teachers (Bryk & Schneider, 2003). A strong foundation of trust among adults leads to a more positive working environment and a greater likelihood of longevity for staff staying in their professional roles (Bryk & Schneider, 2003). Longevity can directly lead to more consistent practices in school districts and ultimately greater student outcomes. However, if trust is absent, it can have the opposite effect and destroy plans, no matter how well developed (Bowers, 2016). Without trust, well-intentioned leaders can develop dysfunctional patterns that lead to a lack of buy-in from the necessary stakeholders to successfully implement a plan.

Trust is never more important than during a crisis. Since March 2020, we have dealt with a global crisis—the COVID-19 pandemic—and history has proven that school districts are never spared from a crisis or its impact on staff, students, and district, with the COVID-19 pandemic being no exception. Other school crisis examples include

[3] This chapter was written by Katherine Grassa

school leaders tasked with leading their schools in the aftermath of 9/11 in New York City, leading the Parkland High community after the 2018 mass school shooting, and countless principals leading their schools through the turnaround process. Whenever a crisis impacts a school district, there is a reaction and changes are implemented. While some of these changes may happen immediately (e.g., closing in-person schooling in the spring of 2020), others may be more gradual (e.g., planning for in-person learning during the 2020-2021 school year).

There is little research exploring the actions of superintendents and principals as they lead their school communities through the COVID-19 pandemic and even less research on how this crisis impacts the relationship between the superintendent and their principals. Superintendents must honestly reflect on the level of trust that exists between principals and the central office; this is an important relational linkage (Johnson & Chrispeels, 2010; Honig & Rainey, 2020), especially during times of crisis. Although many call for increased trust between the superintendent and principals (Daly, 2012), there is a gap in research about how principals perceive trust with their superintendent and the impact that perception has on their work. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine how trust influences the relationship between the superintendent and the principals in their district. Accordingly, this study will address the following research questions: *1) How do principals view their relationship with the superintendent and their schools during a crisis? and 2) What practices, if any, influence the role of trust in this relationship during a crisis?*

Conceptual Framework

For this study, I use the lens of relational trust and collective trust theory to help me further understand the perspectives of principals, both individually and collectively, and their relationship with their superintendent. In doing so, I illuminate how principals and superintendents work together, and what practices contribute to or hinder their working (trusting) relationships during a crisis.

For the purpose of this study, I define relational trust as a relationship built through regular exchanges which facilitate accountability for shared commitments (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999; Six, 2007; Mayer, 1995); our research team describes this framework in detail in Chapter 1. Relational trust can be fostered through the five facets of trust as defined by Hoy & Tschannen-Moran (1999): benevolence, honesty, competence, openness, and reliability. In Hoy & Tschannen-Moran's (1999) view, benevolence includes the act of caring for the person or group you are interacting with. Honesty involves the ability to lead with transparency and being perceived as telling the truth. Competence is the ability to do the job you have been hired to complete, while openness might mean the act of revealing your vulnerabilities to a person or group. Finally, reliability involves relying on the fact that a person who made you a promise to do something will follow through on their word. Together these facets create the basis for relational trust between individuals and are foundational to any trusting relationship (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999). In this study, I examine where, if at all, relational trust exists between school principals and their superintendent.

One extension of relational trust is collective trust. Forsyth et al (2011) define collective trust as the behaviors a person exhibits that are perceived as trustworthy by a

group. Interdependence, as we define in Chapter 1, is one condition in which collective trust builds as group success hinges on "the cooperation, expertise, and efficacy of another group because the other group's success is essential to the first group's success and ultimately that of the organization" (Forsyth et al., 2011, p. 106). In other words, to achieve interdependence there must be effective relationships within and among these groups. Practices that may help build collective trust through interdependence could include the superintendent having principals take part in the decision-making process and/or design of a strategic plan. Practices that may exhibit collective trust among the principals in response to the superintendent could include principals asking the superintendent to support them in leading racial affinity groups for those in leadership positions. These practices may lead to greater trust, and "Trust is the glue that holds the organization together" (Forsyth et al., 2011, p. 111). Here, I focus on where, if at all, collective trust exists across a district between principals and the superintendent and how their perspectives affect their actions. Next, I review literature on relational and collective trust in school districts.

Literature Review

While trust is a widely studied topic, there is not a plethora of research regarding the relationship between principals and their superintendents. Several authors have referenced the importance of this relationship (Honig, 2012; Chhuon, 2008; Daly, 2012) but do not actually study the degree to which trust exists or matters within this relationship. In 2020, however, two dissertations and one article were published that begin to examine this relationship. Using quantitative methods, Chapman (2012) interviewed principals while Hatchel (2012) surveyed principals, finding that the length

of time the principal and superintendent collaborated had the greatest impact on the development of trust. Benna and Hambacher (2020) conducted a qualitative study and found that trust between the superintendent and principals was cultivated on the superintendent's ability to follow through on actions and commitments over time. All three studies named the tenets of Hoy and Tshannen-Moran's (1999) Five Facets of Trust, noting that relational trust is the foundation of a trusting relationship.

Trust between the Principal and Teachers

There is a plethora of research regarding the trust between teachers and principals and the impact it has on school climate and student performance. In school buildings where trust is present, there is evidence of an overall positive climate, which has been found to lead to better student outcomes (Price, 2012; Bryk & Schneider, 2002). For instance, Price (2012) used nationally representative data from the School and Staffing Survey, while Bryk and Schneider (2002) conducted a longitudinal study of 400 Chicago elementary schools through interviews and observations. They concluded that when staff and students work together in collegial ways, staff enjoy greater job satisfaction, remain in their roles longer than average, and are willing to work towards a collective purpose.

At the school level, the principal is responsible for building a trusting environment with the staff. When relational trust exists between teachers and the principal, it can lead to building the foundation necessary to improve school climate (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). Through observation and interviews, Bryk and Schneider (2002) note that social exchanges—the individual interactions between parties or the interactions between an individual and a group or a group interacting with another group (Cook et al, 2013)—can build trust between two parties. These exchanges may include

meetings, informal interactions such as greeting a person you pass in the hallway, or formal interactions such as a feedback session. Each one of these interactions offers an opportunity to cultivate trust.

This means the more social exchanges that lead to trust development between the parties, the greater chance initiatives will be more broadly adopted and engaged in by staff and the greater the likelihood of staff taking risks and being vulnerable. Successful implementation of initiatives leads to more school cohesion towards a common goal. Trust at the school level has proven to be an essential component of school success and to further create a safe and inclusive environment for adults to take risks, which subsequently can yield innovation and school improvement (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). Typically, though, superintendents do not have as many social exchanges with principals as principals do with teachers, resulting in fewer opportunities to build trusting relationships.

Superintendent Trust

The body of literature focusing on the superintendent and the trust they foster within the school district touches on the importance of the foundation of relational trust with school boards and the wider school community, as well as the importance of trust with principals, with most of the research focusing on the importance of a trusting relationship between the school board and the superintendent (Bowers, 2016; Davidson & Hughes, 2019; Nestor-Baker & Tschannen-Moran, 2001), emphasizing the importance of time in developing trust and noting the challenge that arises when school board members must be reappointed or reelected on a short cycle while a superintendent's average tenure

lasts 3.2 years (Will, 2014). This limited time hinders the development of trusting relationships between these educational leaders.

How do educational leaders develop trust over time when most superintendents do not have the time needed to build this foundation? The research suggests the answer is a focus on relational trust with key stakeholders. Nestor-Baker & Tschannen-Moran (2001) conducted an exploratory study by interviewing two experienced superintendents on how they rebuilt shattered trust within a district where they were newly hired. The authors asserted that superintendents need tacit knowledge, as well as relational trust, to develop trust. They view tacit knowledge "as a manifestation of practical intelligence, encompassing interpersonal and intrapersonal skills and insight into goal-achievement" (Nestor-Baker & Tschannen-Moran, p. 8), which is rooted in personal learning experiences over time. They claim that both are necessary for superintendents to successfully cultivate trusting relationships with those they lead.

Davidson and Hughes (2019) used qualitative methods to interview 12 superintendents, all of whom received state recognition for leadership by peers. The authors assert that "superintendent-principal relationships can have a substantial effect on trust in the organization" (Davidson and Hughes, 2019, p. 51). This is because the principal is the face of their school community and has more interactions with teachers and families than superintendents typically do. If a principal has established trust within their community, there is a greater likelihood that they can see through the implementation of a district initiative, lead during a crisis and improve a school community. While trust with principals is important, it is also necessary to build trust with school boards. Bowers (2016) used a qualitative case study method to study two

newly hired superintendents and how they built trust with their school boards. Her dissertation found that Bryk and Schneider's (2003) work on trust in schools in many ways mirrors superintendent trust within districts. Bowers notes that trust-building takes time, and relational trust is essential for any district reform process.

Trust between the Principal and the Superintendent

While trust between a principal and the superintendent has not been widely studied, it is a significant and essential part of the working relationship (Benna & Hambacher, 2020; Chapman, 2012, Chhuon et al, 2008; Hatchel 2012). Superintendent reliability was named in all these studies as a tenet that led to a trusting relationship between the superintendent and the principal. Did they do what they said they would do? Were their actions aligned with their goals? Forsyth et al. (2011) asserts, "a common vision, mission and set of core values are distilled through genuine and repeated interaction over time" (p. 116). These interactions matter to principals and can lead to developing the trust necessary to work collaboratively towards achieving district goals.

Hatchel (2012) found that the higher the trust between the principal and superintendent, the greater the principal's job satisfaction, as well as the increased likelihood of principals taking a risk. Risk is necessary in times of crisis where change is happening rapidly and where leaders must adapt to meet these ever-changing times. Risk-taking requires vulnerability and is fostered when both sides are willing to show their strengths and weaknesses and share their reflections. When the superintendent models his or her own vulnerability, it creates space for the principal to take a risk and open up as well (Benna & Hambacher, 2020). The ability to be vulnerable together deepens the trusting partnership between principals and the superintendent and might be exhibited, for

example, by the superintendent admitting when they make a mistake or asking principals to help them solve a district problem.

People do not lead by exposing their vulnerabilities; it takes time to build a relationship where vulnerabilities might be shared in a psychologically-safe setting. Trust is developed and earned through a series of social exchanges, which take place over an extended period of time (Cook et al, 2013). The more time the relationship has to grow, the more opportunities there are to generate such outcomes. With time, one can learn how another's personality, habits and characteristics might contribute to each interaction, resulting in a more trusting relationship. During these social exchanges, trust can form if the person experiences one or more of the facets of trust. However, since principals and the superintendent do not typically have as many social exchanges as do a teacher and principal, cultivating trust between these two parties may take longer. The opposite is also possible, with more time worsening a relationship if trust is breached. Ahern and Loh (2020) believe that, during a crisis, trust can be built through communication, the use of data, and the ability to adapt an organizational plan and see the plan through to fruition. This means that the first actions taken by a new superintendent matter—and can set the foundation of trust if those actions are perceived as competent by principals.

Trust and Educational Leaders During Times of Crisis

Trust is also essential while leading an organization through a crisis. When a crisis occurs, organizations become vulnerable and stakeholders immediately turn to their leaders for support. Leaders can use this vulnerability to chart a new course forward and further build trust. One way to do this is through regular communication, which is crucial for building or sustaining trust within an organization and the greater community (James

& Wooten, 2010). Communication is a way to share information, goals and messages to others. One will assess if what is communicated is actually practiced, thus allowing a person to assess the honesty and reliability of the communicator. Aherna and Loh (2020) support this assertion, adding that it's the leader's responsibility to be transparent with constituents. In order to show their authenticity, leaders must regularly communicate the actions they take, the reasons for those actions, and the ownership of mistakes along the way.

While leadership during times of crisis is most important, research shows that an organization was dysfunctional before a crisis, it is likely that such dysfunction will continue throughout the crisis (James & Wooten, 2010). The opposite is also true. If an organization is well-managed and functions effectively before a crisis, it is more likely that the leader and organization will gain positive praise during the crisis (James & Wooten, 2010). Ahern and Loh (2020) believe there is a chance to build trust during a crisis through communication, the use of data, and the ability to adapt an organizational plan and see the plan through to fruition. It is incumbent upon the leader to act competently, instill hope within the organization, and set a clear path on how they will move forward during a crisis.

Conclusion

The literature reviewed for this study highlights the importance of time when building trust, as well as the need for social exchanges and tacit knowledge to do so successfully. Without these opportunities and skillset, it may be hard to cultivate trust between principals and the superintendent. Trust needs to be cultivated over the course of time as a way to develop and deepen a relationship. The literature highlights the

importance of relational trust as the foundation for a trusting partnership as the five facets of trust are essential for forming relational trust. As Benna and Hambacher (2020) note, *"*As vulnerability underpins trust, shared values of educational leadership are foundational to building principals' perceptions of superintendent trustworthiness" (p.16).

Methods

Design of the Study

This is a bounded case study of a district in the Northeast region of the United States during the COVID-19 pandemic in fall 2021. Given that the research is exploratory, qualitative methods were best suited to answer my research questions (Creswell & Guetterman, 2016): *How do principals view their relationship with the superintendent and their schools during a crisis? What practices, if any, influence the role of trust in this relationship?* Because I studied one school district, a case study method allowing me to examine the district in depth was appropriate for this research (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). I conducted six interviews and one observation of a school committee meeting. As previously noted, I analyzed my findings through the conceptual framework of relational trust (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999) and collective trust (Forsyth et al., 2011).

Sample and Sampling

The research data I collected is part of a qualitative case study with purposeful sampling, a method appropriate when researchers seek to use data-rich cases that illuminate the phenomenon of interest (i.e., trust between principals and their superintendent) (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Purposeful sampling also allows researchers to explore a phenomenon through multiple data sources (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Using this method allowed for opportunities to observe, interview and make sense in-depth the connections between the information I collected, given that the participants offered data-rich perspectives. For our study, the superintendent had a tenure of three or more years in the district. The longer the superintendent's tenure the stronger possibility that there has been an opportunity to establish trust as a superintendent within the district. The district was racially diverse, with at least 50% students of color, and 5,000 or more students, which ensured a larger number of schools which could participate in the study. The sample included a range of principal views, which, ironically, was based on how much trust I built with participants, affecting how vulnerable and honest they were about their perceptions. I recruited participants via email, inviting all the principals who had worked with this superintendent for at least three years (see Appendix A).

Participant selection was made in accordance with Boston College Institutional Review Board (IRB) requirements, including the use of informed consent, located in Appendix B, and honoring the privacy and confidentiality for our participants. Table 3 lists the number of interviewees, which includes the superintendent and a sample of principals with three or more years of experience working for this superintendent.

Table 3

Interview Participants

Participants	**Number of Participants**
Superintendent of Schools	1
Principals	5

Data Collection

To understand the perceptions of trust between principals and the superintendent, I completed several semi-structured interviews, grounded in a guiding interview protocol based on Hoy and Tschannen-Moran's (1999) five facets of trust. I also conducted an observation of a school committee meeting.

Interviews

I conducted six semi-structured interviews asking questions around aspects of trust; I did not, however, directly ask if principals trusted the superintendent. I took this approach because I wanted principals to share information regarding their interactions with the superintendent to understand if trust existed and what practices contributed to that perception of trust. In addition, I felt that asking principals directly if they trust the superintendent might yield a finite yes or no, thereby missing the nuances that build a trusting relationship. Interviews are common in qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), as they help draw out participant perspectives and experiences. I individually interviewed principal participants to allow for a level of comfort in sharing their experience with me, another principal. I recorded each session via *Otter*, an online audio recording application that also transcribes the audio into text. The questions sought to operationalize aspects of trust by asking about concrete experiences between the superintendent and principals. Interviews lasted about one hour and were conducted over a three-month period in the fall of 2021. My interview protocols may be found in Appendix C.

I also paired up with a team member to interview the superintendent. Appendix D shows the semi-structured interview questions for the superintendent which mirror those

questions asked of principals; these questions were created to elicit experience around the five facets of trust, which is the basis of this study's conceptual framework (Hoy & Tshannen-Moran, 1999). In my analysis, described below, I identified alignment and discrepancies in the responses between principals and the superintendent.

Observation

Using a protocol to document my descriptive and analytic notes (Appendix E), I observed one school committee meeting where a principal testified on behalf of all principals. The protocol was created to take descriptive notes and reflect analytically where, if any, the five facets of trust emerged during this observation. During the observation, a principal read a letter aloud that was written and signed by all district principals in support of the superintendent's leadership.

Data Analysis

Data was organized by type—interviews or observation voice recorded and transcribed using *Otter*. The data was coded multiple times using an iterative process, noting patterns and themes, and using co-coding in partners when we had questions about the meaning of the data and for the purposes of group calibration regarding group interpretation. Co-coding is otherwise known as coding collaboratively (Saldaña, 2013). Since each person can bring their own interpretation to the coding process, coding collaboratively allows us to ensure that we are interpreting the data in the same ways. Rereading and listening through this data multiple times allowed for systematic analysis to identify trends. I coded the data using Creswell and Guetterman's (2019) model for coding qualitative research (p. 244) and used *Dedoose* as a tool to code the data. *Dedoose* is a cross-platform application for analyzing qualitative research such as text.

In the first round of coding, I used predetermined codes from Hoy & Tschannen-Moran's (1999) five facets of trust: benevolence, openness, honesty, reliability, and competence. Coding involves the process of systematically analyzing the data and identifying trends. Appendix F was used as a tool to support in this coding process and to ensure more consistency in coding across my team.

In the second round of coding, I coded for areas of collective trust across principals' transcripts and then further broke up the codes for the five facets of trust into words or phrases that reflected aspects of my conceptual framework, key themes from my literature, connections to my research questions, and phrases and ideas that stood out repeatedly.

In the third round of coding, I broke all of the codes into categories that directly tied to my research questions: principals' perceptions of trust and for practices shared that foster a trusting relationship between principals and the superintendent. I then used *Dedoose* to look for patterns within these codes and identify themes.

Positionality

Trust is a sensitive topic with which we all have experience. As a researcher, I recognized that I am currently a principal experiencing the COVID-19 crisis like my interviewees, and therefore my personal views can never be kept separate from my interpretations (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). I acknowledge that I have developed beliefs regarding the importance of trust in schools and how that trust affects my daily work with my superintendent. To support the integrity of my research, I disclosed my role to each participant. The research team also created a rubric to aid in the calibration of

coding the data we collect (Appendix F). This allowed us to ensure we were coding our data consistently throughout this process across each study.

Further, I acknowledge that I identify as a white female which could cause the presence of assumptions and differing sensitivities while collecting and analyzing data. I decided to interview principals one-on-one, since I shared positionality in terms of my current position with them. For the superintendent interview, however, I selected a team member as a partner because he is also a superintendent, thinking this may alleviate any uncomfortable feelings that might surface for our participants due to differences in interviewer/interviewee professional positionality.

Conclusion

The purpose of the overall collaborative study was to answer the question: *How, if at all, does trust influence the relationships and practices of educational stakeholders during times of crisis?* In this individual study, I answer: *1) How do principals view their relationship with the superintendent and their schools during a crisis? 2) What practices, if any, influence the role of trust in this relationship?* This individual study contributed to the larger group study by providing data about the relationship between the principals and the superintendent and the role that trust plays, or does not play, within that relationship during times of crisis. My recommendations, grounded on the findings, include aspects that can lead to successful relationships between principals and superintendents, in service of the students they educate. This study may further help district leaders build trust with principals, which can better support students when an unpredictable crisis occurs. I discuss the findings next.

Findings

Through my analysis, I found that principals viewed their relationship with the superintendent in a time of crisis as less important than the relationship with their school manager. Moreover, I found that superintendents influenced the role of trust in this relationship through the length of time of the relationship; how the superintendent perceives the principal's competence; the ability of principals to advocate for district-wide systems change, and how well superintendents show benevolence toward their principals.

To explain this phenomena in detail, in the following two sections I discuss the views of principals on their relationship with the superintendent, highlighting the importance of time, reliability, benevolence and the most important point person for principals in carrying out their work. I then highlight practices that appeared to build and sustain trust during the COVID-19 crisis and that support a trusting relationship between the superintendent and principals, such as length of time working together; perceived trust from the superintendent in the principals' competence, which led to reciprocal trust; the ability to advocate for systems-wide change; and acts of benevolence. There is also one finding consistently named as a practice that does not appear to help or erode trust: monthly principal meetings. These practices influenced principals' perceptions of their relationship with the superintendent, helping to deepen a trusting working relationship.

Principal's Views on their Relationship with the Superintendent

All the principals I interviewed had worked with the superintendent for five or more years, with some first working with the superintendent as principal colleagues. All principals agreed on two areas of alignment: that the superintendent is not the most

important person to them in their role as school principal, and that they wanted the superintendent to continue as their leader because they believed in her vision and efforts to support the district through a global pandemic. However, while the principals valued the superintendent and the work that she did to set a vision for the school district, they all said they rely more on the assistant superintendent in their day-to-day work.

Despite the tenure they had with the superintendent, principals said the superintendent was not the most important person with whom to have a relationship as they carried out their daily tasks. When asked to share an example of what strengthened the relationship with the superintendent, they all first mentioned the support they received from the school manager, saying that the school manager's relationship mattered more to them than the relationship with the superintendent. As one principal said when asked about the regularity of communication with the superintendent, “I communicate with my [school manager] much more frequently [than the Superintendent]. . . I think this structure is in place for me to be able to get to the superintendent, if I needed to.” This data suggests the size of this district impacted those sentiments, since it was a district with over 5,000 students. In smaller districts, principals report directly to the superintendent, and therefore it is more likely they have regular communication and touchpoints. In this district, there was a layer between the principal and the superintendent (i.e., the school manager) and that layer had more communication and touch points with the principals.

Additionally, each principal expressed that while the superintendent was not the most important person in their work, they did have access to the superintendent through monthly principal meetings, calling or emailing the superintendent for help with a

situation at school, and school visits by the superintendent. Each leader shared that the superintendent would return their calls and emails and that the superintendent wanted to know if there were issues arising at schools. For example, one principal shared: “She [the superintendent] will herself personally send me an email or call to say hey [in response to a principal reaching out].” Principals said they do receive support and a response when they need access to the superintendent.

Principals expressed a desire to work with a superintendent who “had their back” when they needed support, and they expressed that this superintendent did. They gave examples about personnel issues and managing difficult family issues:

> The Superintendent called me into a meeting and said, ‘Hey I've read the reports. I trust them, I know everything you've done here is on point.’ But she said, ‘Tell me, is this an educator that we can put in another capacity in the district?’ I responded, ‘They should not be in front of kids, and here's why,’ and I gave them very specific reasons.’ And she proceeded with dismissing that person. So that to me is trust.

Knowing that the superintendent supported them with hard decisions and did not question their competence fostered trust between the principal and the superintendent. This assertion by all principals is an example of reciprocal trust; the principal trusted the superintendent would have their back and the superintendent trusted the principal’s competence in their decision-making.

Principals also expressed empathy towards the superintendent, acknowledging the difficulty of the job during a pandemic and the impact the pandemic has had on the

superintendent's communication. When asked about the impact of her interactions with the superintendent, one principal stated:

> I think that this year with the pandemic, it's changed a little bit. I think it's been hard for me to call up and say what's going on here, because I think there's so much with a pandemic. . . I think that part has been really hard, the inability to directly call up and just ask those questions. As in the past, I would have been comfortable calling and saying, 'Hey, this is happening like what's going on.' I don't feel that I have that luxury right now.

This is an example of reciprocal trust where the principal showed care for the superintendent and was cognizant of the load the superintendent was carrying.

Principal perspectives on the communication during the pandemic varied. Three principals talked about how much they appreciated the increase in communication and meetings led by the superintendent. One principal said the communication did not change during the pandemic and this did not impact the superintendent/principal relationship because this person knew if they needed the superintendent she would respond, as she had prior to the pandemic. One said that there was "not enough communication" during the pandemic. One principal stated, "I agree with every single decision the superintendent made [regarding the pandemic], I would have made those exact same decisions." Principals stated it was not easy to be a superintendent during a pandemic and recognized that it changed their district and relationship with the superintendent. Some of that change involved the principals having more empathy for the superintendent's role during this ever-changing time. While the literature supports the importance of communication during a crisis, this was an area where the data I collected showed mixed results

regarding the principals' perceptions of empathy towards the superintendent's communication (Ahern & Loh, 2020). The data and analysis suggest that there likely was a foundation of relational trust at least between some of the principals and the superintendent prior to the pandemic, given that there were mixed responses from principals on the quality of communication/decision-making with the superintendent during the pandemic; at least for some principals, that pre-established trust and empathy appeared to carry into the pandemic.

In fall 2021, the principals collectively advocated in support of the superintendent, illustrating the trust they placed in her. Every principal in the district signed a letter advocating for a one-year extension, sharing that letter with the school committee chair. The letter directly mentioned trusting the superintendent's judgment and praised the superintendent's leadership during the pandemic. When the school committee meeting took place, one principal volunteered to read the letter aloud. She emphasized the need for a leader who supports the challenges the district is facing and who continues to hold adults to the high expectations necessary for students to grow and learn. She also stated that this letter was signed unanimously by all the district's principals.

The letter does represent the collective trust of principals in the superintendent's leadership. Their advocacy and support of the superintendent was evident in their letter and the push to have it read publicly exemplified how deep their trust was in the superintendent's leadership. This finding complicates the fact that principals have said the superintendent is not the most important person in their work. Although the superintendent was not the most important, she was important enough for the principals to take a public stance supporting her leadership during the current pandemic when

principals are enmeshed in multiple competing demands to lead their schools through crisis.

Practices that Influence the Role of Trust in this Relationship

Whereas the preceding section describes principals' views of their relationship with the superintendent, research question two relates to the practices that influenced the role of trust within this relationship. Four practices evidently contributed to a trusting relationship between the principal and the superintendent: length of time of the relationship, perceived competence of the principal from the superintendent, the ability to advocate for system-wide change, and showing benevolence. One practice, however, did not aid in building a trusting relationship between the superintendent and principals: monthly leadership meetings, which principals specifically cited as neither useful nor helpful to their work. These findings highlight that there are practices that can support building trusting relationships between principals and the superintendent during the COVID-19 crisis.

Every principal noted the length of time they had worked with the superintendent as a positive factor. They felt that she understood the district and the roles they played each day for students. They all talked about how she was previously a principal and therefore understood the work they were doing at their schools. For instance, one noted, "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." All participants referenced time as a part of the trust they had formed with the superintendent, with their relationships ranging from five to more than 20 years. They felt this contributed to their belief in the superintendent's decisions because they knew what

she stood for; even if they did not like a decision, they trusted it was made in the best interest of students. They also felt this length of time aided in the superintendent's belief in their work at their schools, and, ultimately, their belief in the superintendent.

Principals also stated that they felt the superintendent trusted their leadership and decisions, saying they were never micromanaged by either the superintendent or her team. “I'm left alone to make decisions within my building and I think that feels good in the sense of trust. . . ‘We trust that you know what you're doing, if you need us, we are here.’” Principals believed this shows that the superintendent trusted their competence to make the best decisions for their communities. Principals felt empowered to make decisions for their own schools and believed they would be “backed up” by the superintendent and the assistant superintendent. Two principals felt the superintendent trusted them when she asked them to lead a project for the district or take on a school in need of transformation. For instance, one principal stated,

> I was asked to come to this school. . . As the school was deemed in crisis . . . so I left a very stable environment to take on this role. I'll never forget the phone call or the commitment. And I'll never forget the superintendent’s words, ‘I will never leave you alone.’ I'll never forget it to this day, and the superintendent never did, never left me alone.

This principal felt a reciprocal trust from this interaction, noting that the superintendent’s belief in her competence as a principal was a powerful moment in her career. It also speaks to the superintendent’s reliability. The superintendent backed up her words with actions, allowing the principal to feel like she could push back on the district and question decisions being made.

During our superintendent interview, she noted, “trust means that you have confidence that person is going to make the right decisions. And that you believe that that person makes a decision based on solid knowledge, and from a system of really solid ethics.” This aligns with the principals’ view of the facet of trust around reliability.

Several of the principals felt empowered to advocate directly to the superintendent for system-wide change. In one case, a principal expressed concern about the development of professionals within the district.

> I asked, ‘Hey, what are we doing with mentorship for our other district leaders?’ And they're like, ‘Listen, you are exemplary across the board, why don't you create it?’ . . . I appreciate they feel confident that I would follow through with this.

The third principal said she tends to avoid advocating for system-wide change but said that several principals do and their ideas are heard. Although she is not afraid to advocate and believes the superintendent will support her, she does not currently have the bandwidth to advocate for changes outside of her own school building.

Additionally, principals stated feeling cared for by the superintendent. One principal mentioned the benevolent actions of the superintendent when she experienced loss in her personal life. “The superintendent called and said, ‘I just heard. I'm here for you.’ And in a district this size, it was important that she took the time to just say, ‘I'm here. If you need to, take some time.’” Although the two already had established trust, this phone call deepened that relationship. The principal felt at this moment that the superintendent cared for her as a human being and not just as a principal. The superintendent showing benevolence strengthened the principal’s perception that the

superintendent had her best interests at heart, which led to deeper feelings of trust in the relationship.

One finding does however complicate the above narrative. Monthly principal meetings were mentioned by all participants as a time they interacted with the superintendent. While this practice began pre-pandemic and has continued throughout, participants' responses suggested the meetings could benefit from change. Each participant felt the structure of these meetings is not conducive to learning, instead feeling like more of a lecture from the superintendent or her designee about state requirements which schools are held accountable for upholding. One principal noted, “They're very procedural and honestly like a complete waste of time.” Another principal mentioned that sometimes they get into groups and problem solve and that the meetings where they work collaboratively are much more useful to the work they do at schools and help them feel part of the process. Although principals do not feel these meetings hurt trust between the superintendent and principals, they said they do not help to build trust either. Principals, however, have not been asked to share feedback or their reflections on these monthly meetings. While principals did not perceive these meetings as eroding trust, it does highlight the challenges of planning meaningful learning opportunities for principals which might ultimately strengthen the relationship with the superintendent if improved. Most principals felt the meetings were more predictable and reliable and you could ask questions and get some answers.

Discussion

This study underscores the importance of trust between the superintendent and principals, particularly during a time of crisis. It also revealed that principals individually

may not view the superintendent as the most important person in their work. Principals in the study perceived that trust is mostly developed through acts of benevolence and perception of competence and reliability on the part of the superintendent. Also, when principals perceived they were trusted by the superintendent, they also perceived a deepening of the trusting relationship between both parties. These findings point to four key aspects in building trusting relationships between principals and superintendents: (1) length of working relationships, (2) reciprocal trust between principals and the superintendent, (3) working for a benevolent leader, and (4) vulnerable leadership. I describe each in detail next.

Length of Working Relationship

Chapman (2012) and Hatchel (2012) both found in their dissertation research that the length of time the principal and superintendent collaborated had the greatest impact on trust. This was noted both by the principals, as well as by the superintendent interviewed for this study. The superintendent noted she has had a long tenure in this district and has known her principals in various roles throughout her career. The length of time they have worked with the superintendent increased the number of social exchanges between them, and in this case that led to a deeper understanding of the superintendent and, ultimately, a more trusting relationship.

Knowing the importance of the length of time to build trust is important, but unfortunately this time is not often afforded to principals and superintendents, since the average superintendency is just 3.2 years (Will, 2014). The superintendent in this research study was in her sixth year and had long-standing relationships within the district that were built prior to being a superintendent. This raises a tension between

valuing trust and how much time superintendents will have to be able to cultivate trusting relationships with principals. If trust matters for the working relationship between principals and the superintendent, and time is an important factor in building trust, then superintendents will likely need more than three years to build trusting relationships with their principals.

The superintendent has been in her role for almost twice the national average and each principal interviewed had a range between 5-20 years in the principalship within this district. One may connect this tenure of principal to the increased tenure for teachers in the Price (2012) study. Additionally, Bowers (2016) used a qualitative case study method to study two newly hired superintendents and how they built trust with their school boards. Her dissertation found that Bryk and Schneider's (2003) work on trust in schools in many ways mirrors superintendent trust within districts. Bowers notes that trust-building takes time and relational trust is essential for any district reform process. These studies of superintendents and districts mirror that of my findings: trust takes time to cultivate and the length of your working relationship impacts the depth of your trusting relationship. However, while length of working relationship time between principals and the superintendent appeared to build trust, other leadership characteristics and practices were also important to building trust. That is, while trust can be strengthened across time, it is not sufficient to build trusting relationships between educational leaders. Next, I describe other important dimensions to building trust.

Reciprocal Trust Between the Superintendent and Principals

The principals in this research study perceived that the trust between them and the superintendent deepened when the superintendent showed a trust in the principals. This

led to reciprocal trust between the principals and the superintendent, meaning both sides trusted one another. Principals highlighted wanting to work for a leader who they could rely on to "have their backs." For a superintendent to "have [the principals'] backs" they would need to trust in the work the principals are doing and the decisions they make at their school. Benna and Hambacher (2020) found that, over time, trust between the superintendent and principals relied on the superintendent's ability to follow through on actions and commitments. Reliability is the consistent and predictable nature of a person's response. One must trust that a person will take the steps necessary. Educational stakeholders want to know that they can rely on one another for support and for seeing tasks through to fruition. This takes a level of reciprocal trust where both parties trust the other person's actions.

To trust one's decision making, you must also view the person making the decision as competent. The knowledge and skill needed for success in a particular domain is considered competence (Benna & Hambacher, 2020). 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. When principals and the superintendent have reciprocal trust, they view each other as competent and therefore respect and support decisions made by both parties. One school leader spoke to the impact of when she was asked to lead a new school. She felt the trust deepened between her and the superintendent when she felt the superintendent viewed her as a competent leader in return. 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). To be

able to know if both parties are reliable and competent takes time and requires many social exchanges between the superintendent and principals to achieve this level of trust.

Through observation and interviews, Bryk and Schneider (2002) note that social exchanges can build trust between two parties; a follow-up study by Price (2012) concluded that when staff and students work together in collegial ways, staff evidence greater job satisfaction, remain in their roles longer than average, and are willing to work towards a collective purpose. When reciprocal relational trust exists between teachers and the principal, it can lead to building the foundation necessary to improve school climate (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). This research connects to my study where both parties, superintendent and principals, noted aspects of reciprocal trust for one another and all remained in their roles for significantly longer than the national average. There are consistent findings across my study and other studies on the importance of reliability and competence on behalf of the superintendent for principals to cultivate reciprocal trust.

Working for a Benevolent Leader

This study found that the benevolence of the superintendent was also an important facet noted by all principals. This may be due to the nature of leading schools during a global pandemic. The principals all shared a time they felt cared for by the superintendent since March 2020 and in return they showed care for the superintendent and advocated for her contract extension in a public manner in fall 2021 by citing how competent she was as a superintendent during the COVID-19 crisis. 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 care of others over their own personal gain (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran,

1999). The principals modeled their care for the superintendent, feeling she has shown care and concern for them through this challenging time leading schools during a global pandemic.

Some argue that benevolence is the most important facet of trust (Benna & Hambacher, 2020) and the foundation on which the remaining facets exist. In relationships where trust exists, benevolence manifests in the form of genuine care and respect. There was not an assumption of care on behalf of the superintendent towards the principals. Each principal shared a time they felt cared for by the superintendent and described it as an action that exceeded the roles expectations. Benevolence has been linked to greater job satisfaction and longevity (Chapman, 2012; Hatchel, 2012), which are both additional necessary factors in building a trusting relationship.

Vulnerable Leadership

The research around risk and the importance of vulnerability is articulated by Benna and Hambacher (2020) when they note, *"*As vulnerability underpins trust, shared values of educational leadership are foundational to building principals' perceptions of superintendent trustworthiness" (p.16). Risk is necessary in times of crisis where change is happening rapidly and where leaders must adapt to meet these ever-changing times. Risk-taking requires vulnerability and is fostered when both sides are willing to show their strengths and weaknesses and share their reflections. When the superintendent models their own vulnerability, it creates space for the principal to take a risk and open up as well (Benna & Hambacher, 2020). The ability to be vulnerable together deepens the trusting partnership between principals and the superintendent.

Knowing the importance of vulnerability in a time of crisis led me to assume I would be able to elicit examples from the participants of a time they were vulnerable with the superintendent. Instead, I found that the principal participants had difficulty naming times they took a risk or were vulnerable with the superintendent, as evidenced by the absence of such findings above regarding vulnerability. Hatchel (2012) found that the higher the trust between the principal and superintendent, the greater the principal's job satisfaction as well as the increased likelihood of principals taking a risk. These same principals stated that they trusted the superintendent and publicly testified to this belief, but as a researcher I was unable to uncover these examples. This led me to question if I was able to build enough trust with my participants that they were willing to share their vulnerabilities with me. It is also possible they were unable to remember a time when they were vulnerable with the superintendent or maybe they have never been vulnerable with the superintendent.

Trust is essential while leading an organization through a crisis. When a crisis occurs, organizations become vulnerable and stakeholders immediately turn to their leaders for support (James & Wooten, 2010; Ahern and Loh, 2020). Leaders can use this vulnerability to chart a new course forward and further build trust. Through this study, it appears that the superintendent was able to build this trust with her principals but that they may not have the deepest level of trust which is necessary for one to feel safe to share their vulnerabilities.

Limitations

This study explored the relationships and practices that build trust between principals and superintendents during the fall of one school year across a K-12 school

district. Since the window for collecting data was fairly short, only a narrow picture was obtained. Follow-up interviews may have added additional depth to understanding the relationship between the superintendent and principals. Adding more observational data may have been another way to add depth. For example, observing the monthly leadership meetings between the principals and the superintendent may have shown differences or similarities in how the principals perceive that practice. Similarly, observations could have added information to understanding how trust is built between the superintendent and principals. Observations could also have identified additional leadership practices not reported in interviews.

Another variable that should be weighed in interpreting this study's findings is a potential self-selection bias of the participating principals, with more experienced principals volunteering and reporting their time working with this superintendent impacting their working relationship, although attempts to recruit all principals were made. Thus the findings from this study may be more representative of more experienced principals. Also, this was a superintendent who spent her career in one district and therefore has the benefit of time and pre-existing relationships to build relationships with the seasoned principals.

Finally, there were some limitations due to the safety protocols this district had in place during the data collection period in fall 2021. This meant that all data had to be collected via *Zoom* instead of in person, and I may have lost important interaction connections, such as body language. Also, in connecting with many principals across the district, there was a collective notion of being overwhelmed as a principal in fall 2021, as they were managing the return of in-person learning, dealing with an increase in student

mental health concerns, and managing the health and wellbeing of a community during the extended COVID-19 crisis, all of which led to fewer interviews than anticipated. However, it is important to note that my findings were consistent across all principals who participated in this study, noteworthy trends for other similarly situated principals.

Implications for Future Research

While there has not been much research done on the relationship between principals and superintendents, further research could benefit the education field in this area. Since this study did not include a large number of participants, replicating it on a larger scale would indicate if the results could be generalizable to other educational leaders. Furthermore, looking into the reciprocal trust between principals and superintendents might be worth researching in connection to how it impacts student outcomes. Since principals and superintendents work to serve communities, it is beholden to them to improve academic outcomes for their students. If trust exists between the principals and the superintendent, it is important to note the impact trust has on student academic outcomes, school climate and staff retention. While several authors reference the importance of this relationship (Honig, 2012; Chhuon, 2008; Daly, 2012), few have actually studied the degree to which trust exists or matters within this relationship. Therefore, this is another area to further investigate.

Conclusion

This study explored the relationship between principals and the superintendent, along with the practices that support or erode trust during a time of crisis. Principals and superintendents build trusting relationships over time and during instances when the superintendent displayed facets of benevolence, competence, and reliability both before

and during the pandemic. While principals relied more on their direct supervisor for daily and weekly support and interactions, they did note that the superintendent set up these structures of support and was available if the principal required access. Principals unanimously supported the superintendent's contract extension, illustrating high levels of trust in her work and a way to reciprocate the benevolence at a public forum. When the superintendent showed trust in the principals, they noted that this deepened the trusting relationship. This was done through giving them a leadership role within the district, allowing them to be the lead decision makers within their school community, and supporting them when hard decisions needed to be made. The trust between principals and the superintendent matters to principals and may contribute to their level of job satisfaction and retention in their roles (Hatchel, 2012).

This study underscores the importance of trust between the superintendent and principals. Principals perceive that trust is developed particularly when it comes to acts of benevolence and perception of competence and reliability on the part of the superintendent. Also, when principals perceive that they are trusted by the superintendent, principals note this deepens a foundation of trust, feeling that not only do they trust the superintendent but that the superintendent trusts them in return.

In Pre-K-12 school organizations, trust is developed over time and is based on the actions and interactions between the superintendent and principals (Bryk & Schneider, 2003). A strong foundation of trust among adults leads to a more positive working environment and a greater likelihood of longevity for staff staying in their roles (Bryk & Schneider, 2003). This can directly lead to more consistent practices in school districts and ultimately greater student outcomes. Trust is never more important than during a

crisis. History has proven that school districts are never spared from crisis or its impact on staff, students, and the district, with the COVID-19 pandemic being no exception. It is essential that trust is developed between principals and the superintendent to ensure a stable working environment for staff, ultimately leading to greater consistency for students during trying times in school and beyond.

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 (2020), 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" (para.1). 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 differences 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 more intentionally establish trusting

relationships 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.

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Appendix A

Recruitment Email

<DATE>

Dear < INSERT NAME>,

My name is <RESEARCHER'S NAME> 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. Specifically, I seek 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. I also seek to understand how trust may influence the relationships and practices of educational leaders during a crisis.

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 X Public Schools. 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, <RESEARCHER'S NAME>, at XXX-XXX-XXXX. If you know someone who may be a good fit for this study, please feel free to forward this to them.

Sincerely,

<RESEARCHER'S NAME>

Appendix B

Informed Consent

Boston College, Lynch School of Education Informed Consent

Principal Investigator: Katie Grassa, 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 role of trust during the COVID-19 pandemic. The survey seeks to capture practice and professional changes related to the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on the school system in the Northeast. You are invited to participate in the survey because you are a principal in a school. We hope to interview the superintendent as well as the principal. If you agree to participate and you are eligible, we will ask you to 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 groups of teachers and principals and foster 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: This Principal Investigator will exert all reasonable efforts to keep your responses and your identity confidential. We will not ask for your name and 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. **Although the survey will not prompt you directly to identify yourself, responses to certain demographic questions, such as your years of experience, the counties in which you practice and your race and ethnicity, could suggest your identity in some circumstances. Regardless, please know that the researchers will make no purposeful effort to discern your identity based on such information. 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 Katie Grassa. 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 the "Consent Given" button (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 Questions (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).

7. The teachers in this school trust the principal.
8. The principal can be counted on to address problems, no matter what it takes.
9. Teachers believe that the principal acts with integrity.
10. My principal has shown care and concern for staff.
11. The principal is dependable.
12. The principal manages the school well.
13. The principal knows what is happening in classrooms across the school.
14. The principal shares important information with teachers.
15. The principal admits when she/he/they make mistakes.
16. 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	• The characteristic of openness manifests itself through information-sharing, considering the ideas of others, and sharing influence over	Is approachable; Solicits and values the perspective of others; Engages others in collective problem-

		and influence. (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999)	decision-making (Bijlsma & Koopman, 2003; Tschannen-Moran, 2015); • 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).	finding and problem-solving; 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;
RELIABILITY	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;

COMPETENCE	COMP	The appropriate skill set in a given context. (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999)	• Performing expected behaviors for the role such as • Observing teachers • Engaging in meetings about instruction • 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).	Demonstrates expertise; Fosters a compelling collective vision, modeling desired and appropriate behaviors, coaching faculty to align 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 Principal Interview Questions:

What is your current role? How long have you been in your current role? How long have you worked with your current superintendent?

The focus of my work is about the role of trust in relationships and I'm curious about which aspects of trust matter to people. How would you define trust? (Can you share an example of what trust looks like in your work with the superintendent?)

The pandemic has been an incredible challenge for everyone in so many ways… (a.) Do you think the unique challenges of the pandemic have impacted your relationship with the superintendent over the course of this past year? (b.) How and/or why? (c.) Tell me what that change looks like. Have behaviors changed?

Consider particular behaviors that you think build strong relationships and how they play out in your role?

Can you provide an example of an interaction that strengthened your relationship with the superintendent?

Can you provide an example of an interaction that has challenged your relationship with the superintendent?

Describe how you communicate with the superintendent. How often do you communicate? When do you communicate? Why do you communicate with them?

How are decisions made within the school district? What is your role in these decisions or in the process of making a decision? How are you informed when a decision is made?

Describe a time you took a risk or were vulnerable with the superintendent. How did this impact your working relationship?

How do principals and the superintendent interact with one another? How often? What impact do these interactions have on your working relationship?

Describe a time when you allowed principals (or were allowed) to take the lead on a project. What led to this leadership? What were the results?

Describe a time you advocated for system wide change and shared a new/process/or way of thinking with the superintendent. How was your idea received? Were you able to act on it?

Is there anything else you want to share with me?

Appendix H

Semi-Structured Superintendent Interview Questions:
What is your current role? How long have you been in your current role?

The focus of my work is about the role of trust in relationships and I'm curious about which aspects of trust matter to people. How would you define trust? (Can you share an example of what trust looks like in your work with the superintendent?)

The pandemic has been an incredible challenge for everyone in so many ways… (a.) Do you think the unique challenges of the pandemic have impacted your relationship with the principals over the course of this past year? (b.) How and/or why? (c.) Tell me what that change looks like. Have behaviors changed?]

Consider particular behaviors that you think build strong relationships and how they play out in your role?

Can you provide an example of an interaction that strengthened your relationship with the principals?

Can you provide an example of an interaction that has challenged your relationship with the principals?