

A Sample of Selected Secondary School Leader Perceptions of Necessary Skills  
Before, During, and After the Coronavirus Pandemic

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**Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of principals from around the world regarding the perceived skill set necessary for success before, during, and after the coronavirus pandemic. While many school facilities closed during the public health crisis, the learning continued. During the pandemic, educational leaders were tasked with creating environments that allowed students to thrive academically, behaviorally, and emotionally from beyond the classroom walls. By identifying the perceived skill set required to lead an effective school building before and then during the pandemic, a greater understanding of the future of education can be ascertained.

The study involved interviewing fourteen school leaders from around the world (seven from the United States and seven internationally). The interview questions probed the perceived necessary skills for the functioning of successful school buildings prior to, during, and then after the coronavirus pandemic.

The outcome of the study provides opportunities for school leaders and human resource personnel to identify characteristics essential for success in a world changed by the global pandemic. By analyzing the perceptions of necessary skills to lead successful schools during the coronavirus crisis through a comparative approach, a dedication of resources for improving the quality of the leadership within school buildings moving forward can be adapted.

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**General Audience Abstract**

The global coronavirus health crisis greatly impacted schools, learning, and leadership. Through a comparative approach, we have an opportunity to learn from each other and make crucial changes moving forward to garner more success. The influence of comparative education on school leadership preparation was identified in the review of literature. American and international school leaders who were impacted by the coronavirus was the specific area the researcher focused on for this study. This qualitative study focused on the perceptions of school leaders on the skills necessary for success before, during, and then after the health crisis. Data was collected through the interviews of fourteen school leaders (seven from the United States and seven from around the world). Through this study, the researcher identified seven findings and four implications. One limitation for this study was the small sample size. A suggestion for future research would be to investigate how important the vision of a school building is to the overall leadership attributes by interviewing the leadership teams and then the teachers they serve to discover if there is alignment by triangulating student assessment data, staff climate surveys, and student climate surveys.

## Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my grandfather, Donald Strittmatter. Your belief in me has always been endless. I fully acknowledge how blessed I am to be able to call you my grandfather, my supporter, and my friend.

Growing up, family always held a sacred place. Having a family first mindset enabled my heart to grow large. Empathy, compassion, and selflessness are three attributes I acknowledge as both the most influential and meaningful for me in my life.

As a child and even into adulthood, I vividly remember your insistence on giving others credit. You see something in other people, and you are determined to make sure they see and *feel* a sense of joy, promise, and success. Grandpa, I can't thank you enough for all you have done for me. I am so proud to be called your grandson.

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## **Chapter One**

### **The Problem**

The role of educational leadership has evolved. On top of the managerial responsibilities, the importance of the academic supervisor role, especially in an age of accountability, has come to the forefront. To do the job well, most specifically in the more challenging regions (poverty, language barriers, etc.), a tremendous amount of energy is involved. To further prove the aforementioned statement, the International Successful School Principalship Project (ISSP) “survey results consistently highlight the high expectations of successful principals” (Gurr, 2015, p. 138).

In countries where education systems are highly regarded and often studied, a focus on leadership, and sustainment of those leadership qualities, are paramount. The coronavirus pandemic has highlighted school leadership and the skills necessary to be successful. The manner in which leadership skills were utilized prior to, and then during the pandemic, are different, thus lending to a scenario in which schools (and the manner in which they are led) will change forever.

#### **Assessment Data Paints the Picture**

The world is changing. Therefore, so too, must the educational systems in order to ensure students are prepared for the world they “graduate” into. When looking at various models, many nations tend to focus on the efficiency of the education system. The efficiency of education focuses on input versus output. The ideal scenario purports the smallest amount of resources being pumped in with the greatest output.

According to the Pew Research Center, as of 2019, “10% of U.S adults do not use the internet” (Anderson, Perring, Jiang, & Kumar, 2019). Although that number has not changed significantly over the past four years, since 2000, that number has changed drastically: “When the Center first began to study the social impact of technology, nearly half (48%) of American adults did not use the internet” (Anderson, Perring, Jiang, & Kumar, 2019). In contrast, “a new report from a United Nations agency says that 47 percent of the world's people now use the Internet” (Taylor, 2016). Although the internet usage percentage gap between the United States and the world is rather large, the global internet usage did show “an increase from just one year ago, when the same agency estimated that just over 43 percent of the global population were

Internet users” (Taylor, 2016). Thus, both the United States population and the global population are becoming more frequent internet users and, therefore, opportunities to learn both in person and virtually are becoming more frequent.

While the opportunity to connect with one another via the internet is growing rapidly, it is still not anywhere near what is necessary. This paints a disturbing picture as it relates to the distance-learning platform that has engrossed the vast majority of the educational field during the latter part of the 2020 school year and into the 2020-2021 academic year. Moving forward, how do school building leaders utilize their skill set to ensure all students have access to learning opportunities?

As the world grapples with the coronavirus pandemic, a focus on comparative education should drive the conversation. Learning from each other, in a world that is rather small as it pertains to the capabilities of communication, should have been realized prior to the current situation; however, the pandemic’s assault on “normal” society brings this notion to the forefront. In order to consistently promote high expectations for all students, it is imperative to learn from one another. By regarding, learning, and analyzing how others are grappling with the current state, successful outcomes can arise.

### **Charge to Education Leaders**

More opportunities for connection at a global level have presented themselves. School leaders will be presented with a threefold challenge as we enter a society grappling with and overcoming a global pandemic: a) communicate with leaders from around the globe to identify strengths and weaknesses of educational systems during the pandemic, b) promote a sense of understanding and unity at a global level, and c) prepare all students to live, work, and make a contribution to our shrinking global community. This non-experimental qualitative study examines the perceptions of the skills school building leaders needed both before and during the pandemic to ensure effective outcomes for students. To gather a range of perceptions, principals from schools around the United States and the world were interviewed.

### **Context of the Study**

Policy makers desire output from extra expenses placed into education. Therefore, “most attention to the value of schooling focuses on the economic returns. These studies have uniformly shown that more school is associated with higher individual earnings” (Hanushek &

WoBmann, 2007, p. 2). However, it is not the amount of time one spends in school that is significant; rather, it is the quality of the education that is most important. Hanushek and WoBmann (2007) stated that “the quantity of schooling is statistically significant related to economic growth in a specification that neglects educational quality, but the association between years of schooling and growth turns insignificant and is reduced to close to zero once the quality of education is included in the model” (p. 7). Providing students with access to a quality education can have positive outcomes for not only those individuals, but also the country’s economy as well. Therefore, the school leader’s role not only influences individuals but also an entire community and nation as well, which is why “it is widely believed that a good principal is the key to a successful school” (Branch, Rivkin, & Hanushek, 2017, p. 1). A good principal is able to “improve the quality of education by raising the quality of teachers, either by improving the instruction provided by existing teachers or through teacher transitions that improve the caliber of the school’s workplace” (Branch, Rivkin, & Hanushek, 2017, p. 4). Thus, the school building leaders’ influence, especially during a pandemic, have great impacts on future outcomes.

### **Overview of the Study**

An educational leader’s perception of the skills necessary to ensure an effective system both before and during the coronavirus pandemic is important. Many leaders are grappling with what can be done to ensure all students have access to educational resources. Through queries about the perceptions that principals and other central office and building leaders hold about their roles in ensuring effective educational opportunities for all students during the pandemic, the objective was to determine how much the pandemic has changed the skills necessary to be an effective educational leader.

The study involved interviews with global school leaders with varying levels of diversity. Interviews were audio taped, transcribed, and hand-coded. The identities of participants were protected by assigning codes.

### **Research Questions**

The three over-arching research questions are as follows:

1. What were the perceived top leadership skills needed prior to the coronavirus pandemic?

2. What are the perceived top leadership skills needed during the coronavirus pandemic?
3. What are the perceived top leadership skills that will be needed post the coronavirus pandemic?

In the analysis and synthesis of the information gleaned from the interviews, a fourth topic presented itself, which is embedded within the findings portion of the study. This topic involved differentiating international school leader's perceived skills with the perceptions of school leaders from the United States of America.

At the completion of the study, school system human resources personnel will have the added benefit of viewing qualities deemed necessary through the perceptions of other leaders prior to interviewing and subsequently hiring future school building leaders.

## **Statement of the Problem**

### ***The Shrinking World***

Living full, successful, satisfying lives depends more and more on citizens possessing knowledge, awareness, and appreciation of other cultures and their responses to educational needs. Long gone are the days when world events affected isolated pockets of the globe. Every action we promote today has a reverberating effect on the rest of the world. Purposeful dedication to establishing effective educational systems during the pandemic and then beyond it, at a global level, is now possible.

### ***Social Justice***

Jenlink (2009) explicitly stated the problem of social justice when she wrote that even before the pandemic "the question of equity for all students pervades schools today, and the answer is not forthcoming without committed educators taking the lead in acknowledging that schools are not now places where all students experience equity." Equity is defined as the process (same opportunities), and equality is regarded as the intended outcome for all. In the midst of a pandemic, this is even more essential.

### ***Economics***

In his book *The World is Flat* (2006), Friedman prompted education leaders to meet the needs of students through curricula and culture. Friedman promoted the concept of our children needing a high level of world-mindedness to compete in an ever-flattening world because "our

children will increasingly be competing head-to-head with Chinese, Indian, and Asian kids . . .” (p. 388). During a pandemic, this has become even more important for all nations. The global economy is in a dire situation; the education provided now will have long-lasting impacts for the future.

### **Definitions of Terms**

**Efficiency of Education.** Simon Marginson, Professor of Higher Education at the University of Oxford, UK, and Director of the Centre for Global Higher Education at the UCL Institute of Education, University College London, UK, defines efficiency within education as “spending less while producing the same level of output” (1991). In the education world, this is the quotient of money poured in divided by the academic (and behavioral) outcomes that arise from the effort.

**Global Education.** Banks and Banks (2007) in the glossary of their book *Multicultural Education: Issues and Perspectives* defined global education as a study of “the interdependence of human beings and their common fate, regardless of the national boundaries within which they live” (p. 473). Comparative education provides opportunities for collaboration between national and international colleagues to better meet the ever-changing demands of the educational world in these unique circumstances.

**Global Pandemic.** Defined as a crisis that is not bounded to only a few nations; rather, it is one that grips the entirety of the world. During the 2019-2020 school year, a global pandemic, known as COVID-19 or the coronavirus, gripped the entire world. The ease in which the virus spreads has caused, among other things, the closure of many school buildings around the world. Instead of learning in school buildings, students have now been provided resources via a digital device through the internet or through printed paper packets made available for pickup at school buildings, especially in the hardest hit regions.

### **Limitations and Delimitations**

The limitations of the study, elements that could not be controlled, include the following:

- School leaders could have been less than forthcoming with their responses. This limitation could have resulted from participants’ fears of being labeled for their opinions or lacking confidence in the confidentiality of the study.

- Participants could have failed to take enough time to respond to the questions in a thorough and thoughtful manner.
- Participants were from a variety of locations around both the United States and the world.
- The school leaders were selected based on their location (within the confines of the pandemic) and, therefore, not all experiences were garnered.

The delimitations of the study, elements that could be controlled, include the following:

- The perceptions of fourteen school leaders were included. The small number of participants presented limited findings.

### **Organization of the Study**

The study is organized into five chapters. In the first chapter, an overview of the problem, including the research questions and a brief description of the methodology are presented. In the second chapter, the literature related to the study of global education is reviewed. In the third chapter, a detailed description of the methodology is presented. In the fourth chapter, the findings of the study are presented. In the fifth chapter, a summary of findings, as well as implications for practitioners, recommendations for future studies, and reflections, are presented.

## Chapter Two

### A Review of the Literature

Comparative education is at the crux of every aspect of future instructional practices. In order to improve the quality of our systems and our global community, especially as the world grapples with the coronavirus health crisis, an emphasis on education practices has come to the forefront. Chapter two of the dissertation reviews the literature related to the different educational practices in various parts of the world. The search process was funneled through four searches: (1) the historical information associated with comparative education, (2) educational practices found around the world, (3) the role of school leadership, and (4) how educationally successful countries view school leadership. The review of literature covers articles searched for specifically related to public information regarding the methods in which educational leaders can utilize each other's experiences with academic practices in order to create a more opportunistic, equitable world. The vision of the search was to identify literature that spoke to educational leadership within educationally successful countries.

The literature review is divided into four major sections: (1) Comparative Education Origins, (2) Global Views of Education, (3) The Role of School Leadership in Education, and (4) The School Leaders' Role in Educationally Successful Countries. The first section of the literature review focuses on the history of comparative education, beginning with its origin and progressing through present day. The second section reviews literature stemming from views on education from different nations across the world. The third section describes the school leader's role within education. The fourth section focuses on educationally successful nations, specifically Singapore and Finland, and how they view school leadership. Following the final section of the literature review, a summary section provides a conclusion of the resources analyzed during the search process.

#### **Search Process**

The *Virginia Tech University Library* website was utilized to conduct the search. Electronic databases such as Ebscohost, JSTOR, and SAGE Journals were used to find articles. Keywords or phrases used for the search included *comparative education*, *PISA*, *instructional leadership*, *global views on education*, and *school leadership in different parts of the world*. Recent articles (within a 10-year period) were regarded more favorably; however, in order to



provide a comprehensive literature review, scholarly articles older than 10 years were also reviewed and included in order to share background information related to comparative education. The search for literature led to 66 articles being read and carefully reviewed. Thirty-five articles were used to construct the literature review.

### **Background Information on Comparative Education**

The much more transparent global economy has led to educational opportunities to move beyond only the wealthy. An emphasis on an impactful education for all people has come to the forefront: “Education has spread rapidly in the last two centuries, becoming a compulsory, essentially universal institution. It has even expanded greatly in the poorest countries” (Bray, 2017, p. 471). A direct connection between the financial status of a nation and the education of its people has created a situation in which all countries desire to lead the way academically: “It has been argued in the 50 years or so since the end of the Second World War that educational development has a major spin off on economic growth.” (Watson, 2006, p. 241). Prior to the end of the Second World War, most nations were isolated in how they prepared youth for adulthood, with specific attention towards how an educational setting would prepare children to become contributing members to that specific society: “There are relatively few sources available from this period (prior to 1939) which represents comparative education prior to the formation of most formal structures (e.g., journals, societies)” (Innes, 2008, p. 346). Therefore, “before World War II, research on teacher and teacher education was largely a national endeavor” (Dolby & Rahman, 2017, p. 693). Post World War II, however, comparative education started to take precedence with “the dominating paradigm of the phrase being that of structural functionalism and its derivate Modernization Theory” (Wolhuter, 2017, p. 21). The belief was that “every system performs a function and contributes to the smooth, successful functioning of society as a whole” (Wolhuter, 2017, p. 21).

After the events of World War II, however, nations became interested in the structures of education and the pipeline that was created to connect academic knowledge during one’s youth to economic participation during adulthood: “In the 1950s and 1960s, international research on teaching and teacher education was situated within the context of reconstruction of Europe, the beginning of the Cold War, and the birth of independent states in Africa” (Dolby & Rahman, 2017, p. 693). The end of the war marked a turning point for all nations, not just the countries located in Europe. Whereas the countries most impacted by the effects of the war would

ultimately need to pick up the pieces both educationally and financially, other countries, like the United States, observed the implications of a restructuring of government: “In some cases, the U.S. researchers looked to other nations’ problems to contextualize their own and to be able to better respond to growing national pressure to raise standards in the profession, particularly in comparison to the Soviet Union” (Dolby & Rahman, 2017, p. 694). The end of the Second World War sparked the comparative analysis aspects of education. Researchers began studying education at a global level and the impact that it creates at not just the national level, but the global level as well. The post-war era, therefore, saw copious amounts of research and much more of a focus on educational outcomes of academic settings: “This period (1949-1959) is interesting because it begins with the publication of Hans’ *Comparative Education: A Study of Educational Factors and Traditions* (1949) and includes the formation of the Comparative Education Society in the US and the commencement of publication of *Comparative Education Review*” (Innes, 2008, p. 346).

Post World War II, the focus was twofold: how would powerful nations maintain its stranglehold on the rest of the world? And, how would developing countries begin its education formation or resurrection? In order to grapple with the notion that developing nations needed to compete in order to get to at least halfway to the point of where the stronger nations were located, a focus was on mimicking the strategies implemented by those countries. Thus, a reproduction of long standing academic traditions arose, protected with funding by some of the more powerful nations. Inevitably, a more “western” traditional approach magnetized these countries as a more “current” theory established itself: “Modernization Theory held that the developing countries needed economic, social, and political development; and the fastest and cheapest way to effect these developments would be to just supply the people in these countries with more education” (Wolhuter, 2017, p. 21).

The period of simple reproduction of educational practices, however, would be met with resistance as a variety of human rights organizations, most specifically found within the United States, began to reject the notion of the one size fits all approach: “This period (the 1970s) is also of interest because the scientific dominance of the 1960s was challenged by the critical, feminist, and neo-Marxist approach of the 1970s” (Innes, 2008, p. 346). It was no longer an approach predicated upon past behavior; instead, it was about finding the proper way, whatever that may be, to instill upon a nation a successful means to creating a positive outcome: “In the 1970s, the

idea of knowing, improving, and solving problems in education systems recurred” (Innes, 2008, p. 348). During the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, many experts rejected the modernization theory. Instead they following a post-modernism approach which “rejects the notion of one perspective/paradigm containing the entire truth, but advocates an awareness and acknowledgement of a multiplicity of knowledge perspectives” (Wolhuter, 2017, p. 22). The focus, therefore, is not a simple problem to solution commitment; instead, most scholars became intentional in their approach regarding the need to fully evaluate the characteristics that make up a group of people and how their behaviors, actions, and thoughts impact the greater whole: “Modern society is a society confronted, effected, and shaped by present-day developments in all the different sectors of human existence at local, national, and international levels” (Steyn, Vos, & Louw, 2018, p. 11).

In setting the stage for a more “modernized” society, it is important to identify rationales, common and differing beliefs, and an overall sense of direction holistically: “A modern society can be explained, similar to previous definitions, as an organized group of people associated for some specific purpose and on account of a common interest, generating distinctive cultural patterns and institutions and developing a sense of communal identity and activities, usually in a particular geographic area within the context of present day societal trends” (Steyn, Vos, & Louw, 2018, p. 11). Essentially, what comes about is the notion that “education and modern society are mutually dependent” (Steyn, Vos, & Louw, 2018, p. 17).

Following the human rights era, the Vietnam War, and the Cold War, a true global phenomenon took place with regards to technology and the evolution of instantaneous transparency. During this time period, it was not only imperative to learn from others, but for the first time, it was possible. What those in the education field began to realize is that “most countries of the world have identical problems in their educational perspective. Therefore, it is possible for them to learn lessons from each other or how they resolved a particular problem” (Innes, 2008, p. 10). Comparative education, therefore, allows people to learn from the mistakes of others and extend upon the effective strategies implemented by others. `

Though “it is some 40 years since the launch of the North American Comparative Education Society (1956) renamed the Comparative and International Education Society (CEIS) in 1959, the Comparative Education Society in Europe (CESE) (1961), and the Japan Comparative Education Society (1964)” (Watson, 2006, p. 234), as we continue our journey

through the technology age and the “know-all-all-of-the time world,” comparative approaches to education continue to remain a focus. While spending towards education has continued to decline in many nations, the primary goal is to gain the most effectiveness as it relates to comparable academic data with the least amount of money. However, there is a concern related to less government funding with more academic pressures. When governments put forth money towards education, they expect (and often predict) the outcomes that arise. This creates a situation in which the government both mandates and enforces the educational outcomes of all students:

While governments are no longer so ready to commit ever increasing funds to education they are concerned that they get value for money for their investment. Hence, the strong emphasis on school improvement and school effectiveness on research that will apparently provide easy answers to complex problems. The dangers of this approach to research are that too much state funded research is expected to provide arguments to justify government policies. At the same time international agencies are perceived as dominating much of the research in developing countries (Watson, 2006, p. 235).

Moreover, “given the financial pressures brought about by globalization and the need to remain competitive in world markets, many governments are seeking ways of cutting back on social services expenditure, including that of education” (Watson, 2006, p. 238).

When government policies, along with a decline in educational funding, directly impact the academic landscape, differences in the child’s life situations become ever more transparent. Most notably, the socioeconomic differences begin to play a primary role in academic outcomes. People in financially unstable situations often do not have the same advantages, specifically as it relates to the extra learning that can take place outside of the school building:

Some families feel that they really cannot afford supplementary education and in that sense have lost the race even before they have begun. They set their sights low, enduring the demands of schooling and, subsequently, expecting to join the labor market in low income occupations that require little schooling success (Bray, 2017, p. 482).

It is not just the poorer families whose children lack the educational functionality as predetermined to indicate success. It can be those with various levels of special needs requirements that can also be left behind: “Students who are low-achieving because of a

mismatch in curriculum or unfulfilled learning needs with unsympathetic teachers may be subjected to repeated hours with ‘more of the same’” (Bray, 2017, p. 477).

Ultimately, the comparative approach to education that began after World War II, continues to reinvent itself today. Learning from and with others is vital: “The global knowledge economy is a ‘game changer’ with policy makers, in different countries, seeking ways to significantly improve their education systems” (Harris & Jones, 2018, p. 195). Educational leaders are consistently looking for ways to reinvent and reinvigorate our education systems through research and various designs. PISA has also fueled a propensity among policy-makers to look at the countries where there is superiority.

More than ever, school leadership approaches have become a growing part of the discussion: “In 2012, a research study commenced with the core purpose of exploring how leadership preparation and development in schools were approached in very different education systems” (Harris & Jones, 2018, p.196). The study was called “The 7 System Leadership Study,” and it analyzed the structural-functional approach to education systems at a global level: “The 7 system leadership study was informed by two interrelated theories. The first is human capital theory, and the second is social capital theory” (Harris & Jones, 2018, p. 198). The differences between human capital and social capital are different, yet connected. Whereas human capital focuses on the innate purpose of the individual, social capital looks at the manner in which an individual can impact society and vice versa:

Human capital theory, therefore, underlines the importance of developing human capability to achieve set goals or outcomes. Closely related to the idea of human capital theory is social capital theory. It has been proposed that social capital is important because, like human capital, it has the potential to make a positive difference to organizational performance and system improvement”  
(Harris & Jones, 2018, p. 199).

Combined, the “human capital theory and social capital theory both reinforce how the development of, and interactions between individuals, lead to better economic outcomes and performance” (Harris & Jones, 2018, p. 199).

The 7 System Leadership Study found that globally there was a focus on preparing, maintain, and continuing the advancement of educational leaders:

Evidence from the 7 System Leadership Study highlighted that all systems were investing in leadership development and training as a clear improvement study. It also showed, however, that we are at very different stages. In Hong Kong and Singapore, for example, policy makers clearly subscribe to the belief that school leadership is key to system transformation and put this into practice through well-designed and centrally implemented programs” (Harris & Jones, 2018, p. 200).

Moreover, the “study highlights more similarity than difference, concerning the policy choices relating to leadership development and training in schools, and also some direct borrowing from other countries. The study found that all systems have introduced or are in the process of producing national leadership qualifications programs” (Harris & Jones, 2018, p. 201). The focus now surrounds maintaining the momentum: “going forward, the challenge for those working within education reform and policy will be to anticipate, understand, and factor in the unique cultural and contextual dynamics that shape any education change process” (Harris & Jones, 2018, p. 204).

Trends will continue to be monitored at a global level in order to compare the successes and/or failures that exist within each nation. Currently, “the most striking difference is the tendency for American universities to provide preservice preparation (e.g., master’s degrees, licensure, and certification programs), whereas professional associations and school districts are responsible for the ongoing professional development and support for educational leaders. This demarcation is not as evident in other countries because formal university pre-accreditation (pre-service) coursework often is not required to become school administrators” (Barnett, 2005, p. 1).

Although this has been occurring for several years in the United States, international research has indicated a global change based on the positive impacts in America as it pertains to the preparation and maintenance of the profession. A recent study indicates that there is “a growing number of principal induction programs are being implemented to support novice administrators as they enter the profession” (Barnett, 2005, p. 1). The professional development and school leadership curriculum based opportunities are not singular in nature; rather, “these programs focus on instructional leadership, school improvement, change management, and skill development, encouraging professional reflection through self-assessment and on the job support with the assistance of a mentor or coach” (Weindling, 2004). Internationally, “recent examples of government-sponsored induction programs include the SAGE Mentoring Program (Australia),

Head-teacher Induction Programme, New Visions Programme, and Leadership Pathways Programme (England), Professional Headship Induction Programme (Wales), and First Time Principals Programme (New Zealand)” (Barnett, 2005, p. 2). Whereas “the norm in the United States is for individual teachers and administrators to attend professional development sessions. In Australia and England, professional development for teams appears to be gaining momentum” (Barnett, 2005, p. 3). Thus, there is evidence that national education systems are studying one another and implementing what they believe to be effective for their specific country.

If school leadership has a direct impact to education outcomes, so too do the teachers that lead the classrooms. Comparative analysis as it pertains to teacher preparedness and ongoing development continues to grow. As it pertains to the publication of articles related to comparative education has grown tremendously in recent years. One of the patterns shows that a focus on higher education has had the most focus in recent years. Within that category, “teacher education has 119 articles. However, despite the growth, the evidence of international education as a part of nationwide teacher-training programs is still not evident.” (Raby, 2009, p. 420).

Thus, more analysis of teachers in various countries is important in order to solidify that which is working versus that which is not. There exists a “gap [that has been] created by the lack of comparative knowledge of the effectiveness of teacher education at the time made it difficult to understand macro and micro level dynamics, such as how the global diffusion of knowledge affected school of education, schools, and classrooms” (Tatto, 2011, p. 497). Student outcome, ultimately, like those found on PISA assessment characterize the successes and failures of teachers: “The current model is for the state to set educational goals and priorities and evaluate outcomes.” (Arnove, 2005, p 84). However, the process of instruction and academic outcomes is lacking: “Most research on the effects of teacher education on teaching and, thus, on pupils’ learning outcomes included a number of variables that served as indicators of teacher characteristics, such as gender, years of school, and degrees obtained, but, for the most part, they ignored the process of teaching and learning.” (Tatto, 2011, p. 503).

As we continue to move into the future, a continued focus on how education best prepares people to be contributing members of society will remain at the forefront. It is the responsibility of the nation, at a minimum, to best enhance the learning experience of all. This can best be attained through comparative analyses: “Comparative education is a fully established academic field of study that examines education in one country (or group of countries) by using

data and insights drawn from the practices and situation in another country, or countries” (King, 2006, p. 1).

Known as one of the well-informed researchers within the field of comparative education, “Michael Sadler, in a well-known lecture which he delivered in 1990, contended that in studying a foreign system of education it should not be forgotten that things outside the school matter even more than things inside; and that an education system is the outcomes of (societal) forces which have been operated over an extended period of time” (King, 2006, p. 2). Thus, education must encompass all of the elements of a given society, including but not limited to culture and religion. Similarly, another representative of the comparative education field, “Isaac Kandell took up Sadler’s view that comparative education should not emphasize only educational set up, organization, administration, methods, curriculum, and teacher but also the causes behind educational problems of different countries and attempted solutions in the light of their social, political, cultural, and national ideologies. It is not sufficient to know that education systems are different than one’s own education system. It must explain as to why this difference is there” (King, 2006, p. 3).

Discovering the “why” prepares systems for the future, which will ultimately best enhance the societal conditions of all: “The basis of the belief that the provision of education results in economic growth and increased economic productivity” (King, 2006, p. 11). Without a deep understanding of the purposes, reasoning, and successes or weaknesses of all, we cannot fully grasp the intentionality behind education systems: “International understanding is a central purpose for studying comparative education” (King, 2006, p. 12). In order to take that next step of understanding, it is important to develop a transparency with all nations globally: “If comparative and international education is to have any hope of impacting on the challenges facing education into the next century then not only must those involved in the field take stock of its current position but they must be less exclusive and they must be prepared to build new alliances, or to build upon existing alliances, with the wider educational community and with researchers in other disciplines such as economics, political science, international relations, and sociology.” (Watson, 2006, p. 237).

Ultimately, “chief among the concerns of nation decision-makers is the international competitiveness of their economies and the products (the graduates) of their educational systems (as measure by standardized tests” (Arnone, 2005, p. 81). Comparisons between nations is



inevitable: “Comparative has become rather ‘international’ because the ambition of comparing national education systems to facilitate “loans” from one to another is not more to be taken in account and, to compare so many aspects issues, differences, as they are now, is not possible without being wrong eventually” (Ungureanu, p. 5). It is about “scanning the present as a final “picture of the past” (“present is always the next coming past”), but what we can postmodernism has changed both of them; the past is vanishing; the sense of history is diminishing, we live in an endless present being too much concerned and focused on the future” (Ungurean, p. 5).

However, research continues to reiterate the importance of going beyond the economic impact of a nation (for various reasons) and the statistical analysis of global assessments (i.e. PISA scores): “Comparative approach has to go beyond facts, figures, actual schools and structures (meaning everything can be presented as it is described), accessing what is not to be seen, but still exists as a consequences of what already exists (effects, impacts, trends, influences, and so on” (Ungureanu, p. 6).

The complexities related to education systems will grow exponentially in the future, which makes the notion of comparative education ever more important: “Both growth and diversification continue to characterize the annual body of comparative and international education periodical literature” (Easton, 2013, p. 599). Regardless of background, societal norms, or cultural traditions, “the civic dimension connects learning to life in the promotion of an ethic responsibility to use knowledge for the betterment of the world around us” (Long, 2012, p. 29). There should be “three global commons: we all have only one planet, we all desire peace, and we all should enjoy the right to pursue life, prosperity, and happiness” (Wolhuter, 2017, p. 23).

### **Global Perspectives on Education**

After World War II and, more recently during the technology boom of the late 1980s through today, comparative analysis as it relates to the performance of students in school has become more transparent. Competition leads to nations being not only aware of the performance of others but also striving to be better when compared. One assessment has become the trendsetter within the field of comparative education: “The Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) provides education rankings based on international tests taken by 15-year-olds in math, reading, and science. The tests, run by the OECD and taken every three years, have become increasingly influential on politicians who see their countries and their policies

being measured against these global school league tables. Asian countries continue to dominate, with Singapore rated as best, replacing Shanghai, which is now part of a combined entry for China” (Coughlan, 2016, p. 2). In fact, “Finland, Estonia, Canada, and Ireland are the only non-Asian nations to get into any of the top five rankings across all three subjects” (Coughlan, 2016, p. 4).

The international assessment provides countries with information related to how they compare to others around the world: “PISA gives scores to participating countries so they can be ranked from best to worst for the skills measures, as well as measuring how they stand globally over all skills” (Saltelli, 2017, p. 3). In all of the years that the assessment has been given, Asian countries dominate the rankings: “Asian countries again topped the rankings across all subjects, and Singapore was the top performing country across all three subjects” (Jackson & Kiersz, 2016, p. 2).

While the United States has put a lot of time and money towards education, the results are not near the top globally: “Two decades ago the U.S. spent more money on education yet performed worse on tests of 8<sup>th</sup> grade mathematics” (Heyneman, p. 74). Singapore, on the other hand, is a relatively new nation that began relatively poor, yet devoted much of its energy towards establishing an education system that would thrive in the ever changing world: “The small Asian country (Singapore) focused relentlessly on education as a way of developing its economy and raising living standards. And from being among the world’s poorest, with a mix of ethnicities, religions and languages, Singapore has overtaken the wealthiest countries in Europe, North America, and Asia to become the number one in education” (Coughlan, 2016, p. 6).

Efficiency, therefore, of education has become a topic of great interest to politicians around the world. Ensuring the monies being provided are having positive outcomes has been and will continue to be a point of contention. While the United States spends an exorbitant amount of money when compared to other nations around the world, the output (i.e. the success or failure) is not good.

While financial investment of education does not appear to have a conclusive correlation, it cannot be ignored. One of the major areas of thought recently surrounds the notion of income inequality rather than national financial prominence: “Within the academic world there is a vigorous debate about consequences of income inequality for people’s health” (Rozer, Kraaykamp, & Huijts, 2016, p. 258). Gaps in financial attainment can provide deep rooted

problems as it relates to health and future outlooks. In fact, “it has been theorized that national income inequality has an effect on health mainly by effecting people’s psychosocial quality of life” (Rozer, Kraaykamp, & Huijts, 2016, p. 247). When financial attainment gaps exist, they become more prevalent and transparent. In places like America, “income differences and class distinctions are larger and therefore more visible” (Rozer, Kraaykamp, & Huijts, 2016, p. 247).

Economic disparities and class distinction, as research continues to point out, could have rather large implications on the overall society of the nation, including educational organizations. When disparities are easy to see, an issue of equality is realized, especially in the public education forum where there is a belief that all students will have similar access to the resources needed to obtain academic success. This may be the reason behind the United States’ struggles as it relates to academic performance: “Domestically, income inequality is among the worst of the major advanced economies (in the United States)” (Loo, 2018, p. 2).

In turn, an issue of trust as it relates to those in power and those who run the organizations comes about. The term “trust” is defined “as a glue that keeps society together, or in less magical terms, a rational process enabling or supporting cooperation between individuals. Social trust is thought to represent a wide variety of interrelated aspects” (Rozer, Kraaykamp, & Huijts, 2016 p. 248). When trust of the larger organization is broken, the same can be said of the trust between each other (social trust): “Social trust is often seen as the link between citizens and institutions, making citizens trust their institutions more, and by facilitating social exchange making institutions actually function more effectively” (Rozer, Kraaykamp, & Huijts, 2016, p. 248).

In a nation where this disparity exists, “governments would invest less in public facilities that promote health, such as health care, education, and housing. As a consequence, facilities that promote health may be of a lower quality and less easily accessible” (Rozer, Kraaykamp, & Huijts, 2016, p. 247). Conversely, “having social trust causes people to feel related to an enhance interactions with others, which augments the provision of support, companionship, and feelings of belonging, and this may lead to better health” (Rozer, Kraaykamp, & Huijts, 2016 p. 249). Thus, the thought process of many Asian nations as it surrounds working collectively to ensure success for all is thought to create optimal opportunities for more than just those who have more resources: “What makes the Chinese educational system distinct from many Western countries is a centralized governing system, where collectivity has supremacy over individual

interests, a legacy from the cultural heritage of the past” (Johnson, Moller, Jacobson, & Cheung Wong, 2008, p. 417).

Both the United States and many Asian countries like China are invested in international assessments such as PISA. There is a desire to compare and, ultimately, compete with the rest of the world: “In countries with high accountability measures such as the USA and China, (as well as the UK and Australia), student performance on external tests of literacy and numeracy has become a key measure of school success. In challenging, high poverty US schools, for instance, this often determines whether the school will remain open and the principal will retain his or her job” (Johnson, Moller, Jacobson, & Cheung Wong, 2008, p. 419). The difference, however, stems from the “centralization” of education. In Asian countries, the government dictates curriculum and expectations creating a stricter adherence to the academic expectations for all. For example, “responsibility is assumed by the national government in Japan. (Stevenson & Nerison-Low, 2002, p. 28).

In the United States, conversely, the states are tasked with ensuring curriculum standards are met with the school divisions within those states having much of the say as it relates to delivery of instruction: In the United States, it is accomplished by several different agencies” (Stevenson & Nerison-Low, 2002, p. 28). In fact, “the United States Constitution makes no explicit mention of education, but the 10<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the Constitution state that all powers not specifically delegated to the federal government are delegated to state governments. As a result, the 50 states, as well as the District of Columbia and the territories, are directly in charge of their own education systems, results in tremendous diversity of education nationwide” (Loo, 2018, p. 11).

As it relates to school performance in the United States, “one hypothesis is that American school children express a lower “demand to learn” than do school children in countries with high efficiency in their school systems” (Heyneman, p. 76). Many argue that “one reason why the U.S. economy continues to perform in spite of the low ranking in science and mathematics performance may be associated with the rather good job of the American schools in influencing citizenship” (Heyneman, p. 79). However, the other side to this argument concerns itself with what will become of education if the economy does not do as well as it has done in the past. Research suggests that “China and India are projected to overtake the U.S. in terms of economic output by 2050” (Loo, 2018 p. 2). When economic output is no longer at or near the topic in the

United States, what forms of comparative analysis will be utilized to get our nation back on track.

Comparative studies have been going on for several decades at this point. Stevenson and Nerison-Low point out that “the education system of every country is embedded within the culture of the country” (Stevenson & Nerison-Low, 2002, p. 142). The manner in which the culture views education within a given area has profound results as it pertains to the academic outcome of its students. Those in leadership positions either have or have access to the necessary information to ensure successful opportunities for all students is readily available. Lethwood and Riehl (2005) define leadership as the “work of mobilizing and influencing others to articulate and achieving the school’s shared intentions and goals.” Taking this to a more global level, educational leaders need to note the work being done globally and influence others to ensure the same opportunities are present for all. School leaders, although not directly in front of students on a daily basis, do have a strong influence of the academic, social, and economic success of entire nations, which is why organizations have been established to realize the good and the bad of educational organizations and make changes where necessary.

One such organization is the International Successful School Principalship Project (ISSPP) which “began with the notion that the quality of principal leadership makes a difference in student learning and school improvement and that the characteristics, processes and effects of successful school leadership can be identified and compared across national contexts” (Johnson, Moller, Jacobson, & Cheung Wong, 2008, p. 407). Comparison information is readily available and should be utilized by leaders at both the political and educational organizations.

### **The Role of School Leadership in Education**

Through the work of John Hattie and others in the field, most research around school leadership has led to the understanding of the importance to that position: “The pivotal role of the school leader as a factor in effective schools has been corroborated by findings of school effectiveness research for the last decades. Extensive empirical efforts of the quantitatively oriented school effectiveness research, mostly in North America, Great Britain, Australia, and New Zealand, but also in the Netherlands and in the Scandinavian Countries, have shown that leadership is a central factor for the quality of a school” (Huber, p. 669). The school leader creates an optimal learning environment that is conducive to both academic and behavior success. According to John Hattie, collective teacher efficacy promotes the most successful

learning outcomes within schools (1.57), follow by the principal's leadership ability (0.32) and the school climate (0.32). (Hattie & Clarke, 2019).

With the amount of research pointed conclusively to the influence of the organizational leaders within education, a shift from simply managerial to a more intentional academic has become commonplace: "The instructional leadership paradigm is visible in many countries, though in some much more than others" (Schleicher, 2011, p. 218). Within the framework, administrative personnel are tasked with more than simple monitoring of teachers: "The role of school evaluation has changed in recent years. Historically, in most countries, it focused on monitoring schools to ensure adherence to centrally established procedures and policies and attended to administrative issues" (Schleicher, 2011, p. 208).

Instead of solely ensuring proper protocols are put in place, "school evaluation with a view to school improvement can provide information for making and monitoring improvements that may support school principals and teachers. Appraisal of teacher and subsequent feedback can seek to help stakeholders improve schools through more informed decision making" (Schleicher, 2011, p. 208). Securing the best people to teach children and then providing them with resources to be successful can lend itself to academically successful outcomes. Visibility, respect, appreciation, and a more coach oriented approach have been deemed very successful. The idea surrounding "both school evaluation and teacher appraisal and feedback are designed to influence the development and improvement of schools and teachers" (Schleicher, 2011, p. 209). In reflective responses, "teachers' report that appraisal and feedback have contributed to their development" (Schleicher, 2011, p. 209). Leaders must maintain "a focus on supporting, evaluation, and developing teacher quality" (Schleicher, 2011, p. 217).

Beyond the day to day responsibilities, leaders are also community oriented: "Leadership engagements beyond the school, in partnerships with other schools, communities, social agencies, and universities to foster greater cohesion among all those concerned with the achievement and well-being of every child" (Schleicher, 2018, p. 208). Inevitably, a building leader is accountable for the building of not just a school, but a community as well. The perception of the school building has major implications as it relates to stakeholders invested in the well-being of the educational organization.

Thus, the role of the principal is not that of a dictator; instead, conclusive evidence points towards a more democratic and servant based leadership approach that is much more effective:

“The core principle of leadership action is “democracy” and “cooperation”, both as an aim and a method (Huber, p. 675). The focus is on building leaders within a school so that more effective approaches are followed. The school leader should be “about empowering others as viable partners in leadership. Some colleagues call this “cooperative leadership” or “democratic leadership” (Huber, p. 680).

Creating an environment in which decision making is not vertical but rather horizontal optimizes the professionalism felt by faculty and encourages innovative thinking. An effective school leader is one who can make decisions with the input of others while also having a deep understanding of the functionality of the school building and its major facilitators: “Professional school leadership is described as firm and purposeful, sharing leadership responsibilities, involvement in and knowledge about what goes on in the classroom” (Huber, p. 669). The focus is to create “problem solving, creative, self-renewing schools that have sometimes been described as learning organizations” (Huber, p. 670).

It should be noted, however, that while research suggests democratic leadership is essential for building a learning organization that is optimized by all, the responsibility for the decisions will fall solely on the head of the school building: “For all phases of the school development process, school leadership is considered vital and is held responsible for keeping the school as a whole in mind, and for adequately coordinating the individual activities during the improvement processes” (Huber, p. 670).

The field of comparative education as it pertains to school leadership is important in understanding the perceived strengths and weaknesses of an organization. By analyzing and comparing supposed successful approaches to educational leadership, one can note similarities and differences between them. Depending on the nation and, most importantly, the cultural mindset of education in that given place, a variety of approaches exist: “International school leadership research already features a number of different alternatives for classifying school leadership tasks. Various approaches allocate school leadership action within various ranges of duties and assign responsibilities and activities to these” (Huber, p. 671). David Willis and Carol Bartell researched the similarities between two perceived successful nations as it pertains to education and economic influence, Japan and the United States of America. A striking similarity between these two countries is the “considerable public concern for high achievement among high school students” (Willis & Bartell, 2006, p. 107). Thus, much pressure is placed upon

ensuring students exit secondary school with the ability to effectively impact the nation and its economy.

There are similarities and differences as it relates to the role of the school leader or school principal in both of these countries. For example, the amount of time as a classroom teacher prior to educational leadership differs greatly between the two nations: “Japanese principals as a group have been teachers for a far longer period of time before moving into a principalship (a mean of 19.75 years vs 7.33 years for American principals). The Japanese leader has also had more preparatory administrative experience and has assumed the position at a later age” (Willis & Bartell, 2006, p. 110). Moreover, because principals in Japan do not consist of people looking for a job change, but rather those who have provided positive impact to many during their time in the classroom, “the formal study of administrative roles is quite recent. Indeed, there is still no formal preparatory path for becoming an administrator separate from that for becoming a teacher” (Willis & Bartell, 2006, p. 108). In Japan, therefore, becoming a teacher is the primary focus and, if successful after many years of service, you may be asked to join the administrative ranks.

This is far different from the American approach in which those who seek administrative leadership opportunities within a school or division are required to earn a separate endorsement. However, one characteristic that is widely accepted in both nations surrounds the understanding and belief in hiring the best teachers and ensuring that they have access to the resources necessary to be successful: “The importance placed on relations with teacher among both groups indicates that this is a key factor in the leadership role in both societies. Both groups feel that good teachers are essential to learning, and that it is important to select good teachers, encourage and facilitate their performance, and lead them toward sound educational goals” (Willis & Bartell, 2006, p. 119-120).

Another leadership comparison can be found between the countries of Sweden and the United States. It is essential to “creat[e] community-centered organizations” as a building leader” (Merchant et al, 2012, p. 434). There are “some societies [that] value collective forms of expression, such as Sweden, others, such as the USA, emphasize individualism and competition. Collectivism, however, is important when observing underserved areas, especially in understanding the students’ context and background” (Merchant et al, 2012, p. 434). Different countries value individual competition very differently: “Whereas Americans espouse a



philosophy of personal responsibility in which individuals are held primarily responsible for their own successes or failures, the Swedes emphasize the collective responsibility of individuals with respect to providing for the well-being of all” (Merchant et al, 2012, p. 429). While individualism is not viewed as inherently negative, it may be important to “find a middle ground between these two extremes in order to create an environment that is characterized by shared values about the goals of education and the pursuit of these goals through common projects, while also accommodating diverse approaches to achieving these goals” (Merchant et al, 2012, p. 435).

A similar study analyzed leadership characteristics between the countries of Sweden and the United States of America, two countries who have held powerful roles on global education but also vastly differing approaches. Similar to the United States, “the Swedish national curriculum describes the responsibilities of principals and specifies goals and objectives associated with effective school leadership. The principal is responsible for assuring that the school meets these national objectives, and is ultimately responsible for the performance of the school” (Merchant et al, 2012, p. 430). The manner in which students perform on comparative assessments ultimately depicts the success or failure of the school leader. This has become increasingly more obvious in the United States as common core curriculum has been implemented in many states and, even in those where this is not the case, an emphasis on proficiency levels as a minimum have become increasingly more transparent. Therefore, the primary focus on academic outcomes directly relates to the instructional leadership style of the building leader: “studies conducted in North America, especially in the field of school effectiveness, have emphasized the relevance of “instructional leadership” since the 1980s” (Huber, p. 673).

However, much like the current approaches to most workplaces around the globe, while the school success (academically) directly reflects the leadership of the building, it is not the job of the principal to meet high academic success from an authoritative approach; rather, the Swedish education system promotes a “democratic leadership” style that “serves as the umbrella for successful Swedish principals” (Merchant et al, 2012, p. 430). The principal is thus required to create a system in which all stakeholders within an organization have necessary input opportunities to garner external success.

This is not different from the new, highly regarded transformational leadership style utilized by up and coming principals in the United States and other around the globe: “Transformational leadership is considered to point the way. Transformational leaders do not simply administer structures and tasks, but concentrate on the people carrying these out, that is on their relationships and on making deliberate efforts to win their cooperation and commitment. They try to actively influence the culture of the school so that it allows and stimulates more cooperation, coherence, and more independent learning and working” (Huber, p. 672-673). Leaders in the ever-changing world need to be able to “interact with agents and with such things as tasks, resources, knowledge, and beliefs” (Marion & Gonzales, 2014, p. 197). The belief system of a transformational leader is rooted in the notion of people to create optimal outcomes, and sometimes this requires a change in previously attempted or thought behavior: “For an individual, a nation, and human kind to survive and progress, innovation and evolution are essential” (Serdyukov, 2017, p. 5). It becomes increasingly more vital, therefore, to have leaders who are ready and willing to take the necessary risks and go against the norm (those practices that have not led to successful outcomes: “to create innovations, we need innovators and many of them” (Serdyukov, 2017, p. 6). Without those leaders, the status quo will remain leading the way to a “lack of innovation [that] can have profound economic and social repercussion” (Serdyukov, 2017, p. 6). Changing the educational landscape requires leaders “to look beyond what [we] are currently doing and develop a novel idea that helps us to do our job in a new way” (Serdyukov, 2017, p. 8).

One of the major differences between the two nations in the past has been the amount of cultural diversity that has existed since the implementation of desegregation in America versus the lack of differences present up until recently in Sweden. However, more recently, there has been an influx of people from other parts of the world into Sweden, thus leading to a need for school inclusion activities to exist: “The creation of successful inclusive schools in a diverse context requires that principals maintain a focus on academic accountability while also working consciously to address social and civic issues” (Merchant et al, 2012, p. 439). However, regardless of the differences, “principals in both countries held high expectations for their students, regardless of their socioeconomic status, race, or ethnicity” (Merchant et al, 2012, p. 435). A school leader implements opportunities for teacher learning on the topic to exist and consistently monitors the progress: “Principals also need to engage their teachers in active

conversations about inclusion in which traditional values are discussed in relation to the challenges associated with identifying common values within a growing multi-cultural and multi-lingual society” (Merchant et al, 2012, p. 437).

Ultimately, it is “the way in which teachers and principals work and the issues that become important in their schools reflect the extent to which they believe in the importance of engaging with students and their families, hold high expectations for student achievement, and genuinely respect the students and their families” (Merchant et al, 2012, p. 437). Perception of the school building from the community can have great impacts on the overall effectiveness of the academic on processes of the institution. By utilizing instructional strategies that allow students to reflect on schools, leadership, and their own current and future practice within a safe environment” (Oliver, Gordon, & Oliver, 2017, p. 15), helps to create and sustain high academic expectations.

Through comparative analysis of educational organizations, all countries, not just the United States come to very similar conclusions: “Tools such as the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMMS) and the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) remind us that we will have significant progress to make when it comes to educating our secondary students” (Houlihan, 2005, p. 218). By analyzing the strengths and weakness of education systems at a global level, an approach to consistently show growth arises. Leaders are able to “Look[ing] at how other countries deal with these same issues allows for creative approaches to problem solving” (Houlihan, 2005, p. 218). It requires a transparency never truly seen before, especially since the dawn of the digital age in which information is available at all times and instantaneously: “The world is offering educational leaders ways to learn from data, gain a fresh perspective, and engage in dialogue around policies and practices” (Houlihan, 2005, p. 218).

Some suggestions that have arisen between comparatives studies on school leaders surround the support of a building leader mentorship program, consistent professional development opportunities that are differentiated to fit the different needs of the professionals, and a consistent and stringent focus on teaching and learning. It begins with a leadership program that prepares the school leader for the basic demands of the position. It is noted that “effective leadership preparation programs can be recognized by the instruction they provide, their influence on aspiring principals, and most importantly, the performance of graduates as

school leaders (Oliver, Gordon, & Oliver, 2017, p. 15-16). Once appointed to the position, the training should not cease to exist: “Initial school leadership training can be voluntary or mandatory, and this can depend on governance structures and funding strategies” (School Leadership: From Policy to Practice by Beatriz Pont, p. 22). Wide-ranging “induction programs are valuable to prepare and shape initial school leadership practices and they provide vital networks for principals to share concerns and explore challenges” (Pont, 2014, p. 22). More often than not, a mentor for the new leader is supplied at this point. This person becomes the point of guidance for the new school leader as he or she navigated the position during the first year.

Moreover, the development opportunities should not be stagnant; instead, “in-service program needs to be seen in the context of prior learning opportunities for school leadership” (Pont, 2014, p. 22). As part of the in-service process, a major focus on instructional leadership and teacher evaluation becomes the focal point. As noted earlier, school buildings are designated as successes or failure based on the academic progress of the students. Therefore, there is consistently dedication to ensuring the environment is conducive for academic success to arise: “Leadership focused on supporting, evaluating, and developing teacher quality is widely recognized as a core component of effective leadership” (Pont, 2014, p. 11). A school building leader who “concentrates on setting learning objectives and implementing intelligent assessment systems has been found to help students develop their full potential” (Pont, 2014, p. 11).

David Willis and Carol Bartell (2006) note the characteristics that define a successful school leader by stating the following:

An effective school has a positive school climate. Students feel good about attending such a school and teachers feel good about teaching there. The entire staff works together to foster a caring attitude. There is a safe and orderly environment. The role of the administration is to support the faculty and the staff and to serve students. There is a wide involvement in decision making, which includes input from faculty and staff as well as parents and the community. The school has clearly established goals. Everyone works together to achieve these goals. There is frequent monitoring and feedback to keep everyone on task, although the manner in which this is carried out is rather different in each culture. Everyone knows what is expected of him or her. The school is dynamic and changing, constantly striving to do better. High expectations are set for all students.

Students will show both academic and personal growth. There is an attention to meet the needs of all students and prepare them to be successful in life. The school provides the best education possible for all with the resources available (p. 121).

Research continues to point to the importance of school leadership as it relates to student academic and behavioral achievement: “There is increasing evidence pointing to the fact that from the different factors that are policy amenable to school improvement, after teaching, school leadership has been found to be the most important school level factor in improving learning outcomes” (Pont, 2014, p. 10). There has come about “a clear consensus emerging on the fact that a principal’s leadership impacts student learning and that different types of leadership behavior impact student achievement” (“Leadership Matters”, p. 11). Therefore, the importance placed upon selection and progress of school building leaders matters greatly.

### **School Leaders Role in Educationally Successful Countries**

The role of the principal has changed over time. On top of the managerial aspect of the position, the academic supervisor role, especially in an age of accountability, has come to the forefront. To do the job well, most specifically in the more challenging regions (poverty, language barriers, etc.), it requires a lot of energy. In fact, to further prove the before mentioned statement, the “ISSP results consistently highlight the high expectations of successful principals” (Gurr, 2015, p. 138). With all of the expectations, it is imperative to ensure leadership responsibilities are not confined to just the administrative team but rather as much of the school as possible: “For [these] successful school leaders, distributed leadership is almost assumed as they will openly say that the success of their school is due to the leadership of many, and they genuinely value the contribution of teachers, parents, and students” (Gurr, 2015, p. 138).

Building an effective leadership team requires a foundation of care and trust: “Successful school leaders are people centered. They obviously get enormous satisfaction from seeing students develop, but they are also concerned to develop the adults in a school community, and core to this is their interest and ability in building the capacity of teaching and non-teaching staff to be better at what they do” (Gurr, 2015, p. 139). Because of these attributes, these successful school leaders “are respected and trusted by their school communities” (Gurr, 2015, p. 139).

In countries where education systems are highly regarded, a focus on leadership, and sustainment of those leadership qualities, are paramount: “High-performing school education systems in East Asia have received increased attention as numerous countries attempt to match

their success” (Jensen & Clark, 2013, p. 3). Singapore, for example, provides insight into the notion that “Highly effective schools are often characterized by high leadership stability. Unlike many countries, principal development is a high priority in Singapore’s education policy agendas” (Jayapragas, 2010, p. 102). School principals are not application based positions; instead, the development of “confident and effective school leaders begins with the selection of school principals” (Jensen & Clark, 2013, p. 14). Successful teachers who possess leadership traits deemed effective by the Singapore ministry of education are admitted into the Leadership Education Program, which is a government established leadership program that was established back in 2001: “The LEP is a six-month milestone executive program for specially selected vice principals and ministry officers in Singapore to prepare them for school leadership” (Jayapragas, 2010, p. 93).

The downside to the program, however, is the cost, but “policy makers could build on best practices within the LEP to create a stronger and more holistic system of leadership preparation that is scalable and sustainable” (Jayapragas, 2010, p. 101). Then, when school leaders are placed in school buildings, the tenure at that specific building is no longer than 5 – 7 years: “A school principal rotation policy in Singapore aims to build confident and effective school leadership and spread it throughout the system. School principals are rotated through different schools every five to seven years. It is considered that this is the period in which school principals will have reached the maximum impact they can have on their school” (Jensen & Clark, 2013, p. 17).

Finland, another country with success as it relates to educational attainment of its students, prides itself on the fact that it “transformed itself into a high performing economic powerhouse” by altering the manner in which instructional settings are created and learning material is delivered. (Hargraves, Halasz, & Pont, 2007, p. 12). One of the fundamental and often controversial differences of expectations in Finland surrounds its required (or lack thereof) assessments: “Though its scores are outstanding in reading and mathematics, it has no regular tests for reading and mathematics achievement, it does not consume large parts of the curriculum with the separate teaching of these skills and subjects, and it does not download structures reading and mathematics programs to younger age groups to enhance skill development” (Hargraves, Halasz, & Pont, 2007, p. 14). Therefore, “Finland’s high performance seems more attributable to a conceptualization, commitment to and widespread culture of learning in school

and society more widely” (Hargraves, Halasz, & Pont, 2007, p. 14). School leadership, therefore, plays a central role in ensuring processes, visions, and missions are kept at the forefront throughout the academic journey:

Leadership currently contributes to Finnish high performance not by concentrating or perseverating on performance outcomes, particularly measurable ones, but by paying attention to the conditions, processes, and goals that produce high performance – a common mission; a broad but unobtrusive steering system; strong municipal leadership with lots of local investment in curriculum and educational development; teachers who already are qualified and capable at the point of entry; informal cooperation and distributed leadership; principals who stay close to the classroom; their colleagues, and the culture of teaching; and (from the principal’s standpoint) being first among a society of equals in the practical and improvisational practice of school based improvement” (Hargraves, Halasz, & Pont, 2007, p. 26).

School leaders are, therefore, tasked with remaining diligent to the mission and creating vast opportunities for student success by providing teachers with everything they need to be successful. Even “Within the overall sphere of school leadership, teacher leadership has more significant effects on student achievement than principal leadership” (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000). Teachers are the direct line of communication with students and, therefore, more direct impact occurs at the classroom level. The leaders’ impact on “learning occur largely because leadership strengthens teachers’ engagement in the professional community, which in turn, promotes the use of instructional practices that are associated with student achievement” (Wahlstrom, Louis, Leithwood, & Anderson, 2010). What this looks like “In top-ranked nations, [are] supports for teaching tak[ing] the form of universal high quality teacher education, equitable, competitive salaries, mentoring for all beginners, extensive opportunities for ongoing professional learning, and teacher involvement” (Darling-Hammond, Chung Wei, & Andree, 2010, p. 1).

Providing professional development opportunities that are high quality are also important to ensuring adequate growth of teachers. Currently, this is one area where the United States consistently falls below successful education systems: “Whereas U.S. teachers generally have from 3 to 5 hours a week for lesson planning in most of these countries, teachers spend from 15 to 25 hours per week on tasks related to teaching such as working with colleagues on preparing

and analyzing lessons, developing and evaluating assessments, observing other classrooms, and meeting with students and parents” (Darling-Hammond, Chung Wei, & Andree, 2010, p. 2). In fact, “in Singapore, the government pays for 100 hours of professional development each year for all teachers” (Darling-Hammond, Chung Wei, & Andree, 2010, p. 5).

Some of what is being discovered as effective at the global level is not new to other nations; however, the difference stems from the clear and consistent vision that is followed: “The strategic steps to improve school leadership taken in high performing systems in East Asia are the same as those taken by effective schools throughout the world. For these systems, it is imperative to paint a clear but detailed picture of what learning and teaching in systems and schools should be” (Jensen & Clark, 2013, p. 9). There is “a need for a detailed picture of what learning and teaching should be in schools and classrooms emphasizes that education strategy is trying to achieve sustained behavioral, and often cultural, change” (Jensen & Clark, 2013, p. 9). The processes followed by countries who have found success include the following: (1) “Change requires clarity, (2) “Clarity needs to be coupled with brevity, and (3) “Prioritization is essential” (Jensen & Clark, 2013, p. 11). Policy makers desire output from extra expenses placed into education. Therefore, “most attention to the value of schooling focuses on the economic returns to different levels of school attainment for individuals. These studies have uniformly shown that more school is associated with higher individual earning” (Hanushek & WoBmann, 2007, p. 2).

From the examples of both Finland and Singapore, it is clear that “education can increase the human capital in the labor force, which increases labor productivity and thus leads to a higher equilibrium level of output” (Hanushek & WoBmann, 2007, p. 3). However, it is not just about the amount of time one spends in school; the quality of the education must be highly revered as well: “The quantity of schooling is statistically significant related to economic growth in a specification that neglects educational quality, but the association between years of schooling and growth turns insignificant and is reduced to close to zero once the quality of education is included in the model” (Hanushek & WoBmann, 2007, p. 7). Providing students with access to the very best education can have positive outcomes for not only those individuals, but also the country’s economic situation as well. Therefore, the school leader’s role not only impacts individuals but also an entire community and nation as well, which is why “It is widely believed that a good principal is the key to a successful school” (Branch, Rivkin, & Hanushek, 2017, p. 1). A good principal is able to “improve the quality of education is by raising the quality of



teachers, either by improving the instruction provided by existing teachers or through teacher transitions that improve the caliber of the school's workplace" (Branch, Rivkin, & Hanushek, 2017, p. 4).

### **Summary**

To conclude, the importance of comparative analysis of educational practices has become from and center because of the visibility of the successes and failures of academic organizations at a global level: "As the world becomes more and more globalized, national education systems are shedding their uniqueness and gaining a more universal, homogenous look" (Serdyukov, 2017, p. 21). Inevitably, all nations have begun to or should begin to look at the national implications of a deteriorating educational system. The goal is to create an optimal learning environment for all people. The focus is on efficiency in order to eliminate such barriers as time, resources, and money: "learning is more efficient if we achieve the same results in less time and with less expense" (Serdyukov, 2017, p. 8).

The purpose of a focus on education at the global level is inherently obvious because "it is widely believed that countries' social and economic well-being will depend to an even greater extent on the quality of their citizens' education" (Cornali, 2012, p. 255). If we are to look solely at the financial implications of education and deem that academic success lends itself to economic prosperity, then looking at those countries at the top of the PISA results list suffices: "The Finns, Singaporeans, South Koreans, Hong Kongers, and citizens of other nations consider education the best way to improve their country's economy and it has worked" (Serdyukov, 2017, p. 22). Their focus on education has not only allowed for rankings on the PISA assessment to rise significantly, it has also allowed for economic growth to take place. While the United States has remained at or near the top as it pertains to the global economy, what will happen when that too begins to decline? Research continues to point in that direction; a change is therefore warranted.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Methodology**

School building leaders' perceptions of skills necessary for effectiveness before, during, and after the pandemic were sought. The findings provided an understanding of the future of school based leadership. Moreover, the study helped educational leadership identify how to advance their schools beyond the coronavirus pandemic. This qualitative study involved school leaders from around the world. CITI certification, which is a program designed to educate people about issues involving human subject research, has already been accomplished as noted in Appendix A.

This chapter details the methodology used to conduct the study. First, the study's design is explained. Then, decisions regarding sampling participants, as well as data collection and analysis, were explained. This chapter also includes an explanation of the steps taken to ensure validity and reliability of the study.

#### **Research Design**

Because of a desire to explore school leaders' perceptions of the skills needed to be successful before, during, and after the coronavirus pandemic, the qualitative method was most appropriate. According to Marshall and Rossman (2011), qualitative studies possess the following characteristics:

- They “take place in the natural world;”
- “Multiple methods that are interactive and humanistic” are used;
- The studies “focus on context;”
- The research “is emergent rather than tightly prefigured”; and
- The research “is fundamentally interpretive” (p. 3).

Furthermore, Merriam (2009) portrays qualitative researchers as “interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (p. 5). Merriam went on to write that when desiring to understand experiences, qualitative methods are valid. A qualitative approach, therefore, was appropriate for this study.

This analysis of school building leadership perceptions of skills needed before, during, and after the pandemic took on a grounded theory study. Strauss and Corbin (1998) (as cited in

Creswell, 2007) defined grounded theory as qualitative research that uses inquiry to produce “a general explanation (a theory) of a process, action, or interaction shaped by” participants’ views (p. 63). Strauss and Corbin (1998) (as cited in Creswell, 2007) explained that the concept behind grounded theory is that the development of theory “does not come ‘off the shelf,’ but rather is generated or ‘grounded’ in data from participants who have experienced the process” (p. 63). Merriam (2009) explained that building grounded theory occurs by constantly comparing data from multiple sources, such as interviews, documents, and field notes.

### **Research Questions**

The three research questions, which formed the basis of the interview protocol, included sub-questions. The over-arching research questions are as follows: What were/are the perceived top leadership skills needed prior to, during, and then after school building closures due to the coronavirus pandemic and how do international school leader’s perceived skills compare with leaders from the United States of America?

Upon receiving Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval (See Appendices A and B) from Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, contacting the selected secondary school leaders to obtain permission to conduct interviews was the next step. Each school leader was interviewed via Zoom after initial communication took place and the consent form was signed. First, a request email was sent to principals utilizing the script in Appendix C. When participants agreed to partake in the interview, the consent forms in Appendix D and Appendix E were sent to the school leader. They were signed and sent back prior to any involvement with the study.

Following the consent of the participants, a date and time was selected, and the interview protocol found in Appendix E was subsequently followed.

The purpose of this study was to identify the most important perceived leadership skills needed to lead a school building prior to, during, and after the coronavirus pandemic. The goal of this comparative study was to identify the differences of leadership skill requirements before and during the pandemic, and the impact this will have on school leadership moving forward. The qualitative study derived data from interviews of educational leaders from around the world.

The implications of the study included both how school leadership can best be developed and supported to promote effective school buildings during a crisis that forces the closure of school buildings and how the role of the principal impacts school success during a crisis.

Moreover, the study will provide superintendents, school board members, and human resources personnel insight when selecting school leaders in the future.

### **Purposeful Sampling**

Purposeful sampling was used to choose participants. The sample was selected by areas deemed to have been greatly impacted by the coronavirus pandemic, both nationally and internationally. According to Merriam (2009), “purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (p. 77). The participants for this study included seven school leaders from the United States and seven from around the world. They were selected because of the required shutdown of their specific school buildings due to the coronavirus pandemic. Interviewing school-building leaders from both the United States and international settings contributed to the acquisition of insight of a variety of perceptions and experiences.

To include school leaders from a wider range of school systems, reexamining the sampling method became necessary. A wide range would include leaders of schools set in various types of geographical areas, such as urban, suburban, and rural, and be made up of various ethnic groups, both nationally and internationally.

This method of purposeful sampling resulted in schools from various school districts and geographical areas, as well as schools made up of students from various cultural and international backgrounds. The reason for choosing school leaders both from within the United States and internationally was to verify themes as they pertain to leadership skills required to lead school buildings through the coronavirus pandemic. Hagaman and Wutich (2016) assert “that 16 or fewer interviews were enough to identify common themes from sites with relatively homogeneous groups.” By interviewing seven school leaders within the United States and seven internationally, emerging thematic experiences, as it relates to perception regarding necessary skills leading a school building before, during, and after the coronavirus pandemic, came to the forefront.

## **Data Collection**

### ***Interviews***

Before conducting interviews, the protocol was field-tested with three colleagues--one middle school associate principal, one middle school principal, and one high school principal.

To explore school leaders' stories—their reflections, beliefs, philosophies, and practices—about identifying skill sets both before, during, and after the pandemic, one-on-one interviews were deemed crucial. Rossman and Rallis (2003) described the qualitative method as “knowledge obtainable only by direct experience with the physical senses” (p. 6). Seidman (2006) expressed that “the goal is to have the participant reconstruct his or her experience within the topic” (p. 15). Therefore, interviews provide information about people's behaviors and personal constructs about the purposes of their behavior (Seidman, 2006). Learning from others occurs as participants talk about perspectives acquired because of individual experiences during the pandemic. Tapping into the philosophies and motivations of interviewees through interviews can contribute to building a grounded theory and enhance effective outcomes of the proposed study.

The interview protocol consisted of open-ended questions. The questions were designed to avoid leading the participants while inviting them to tell their stories. When responses were unclear, asking the participants to clarify was practiced. By following the advice of Seidman (2006) to “listen more, talk less” (p. 84), disjointed answers were kept to a minimum. Whenever possible, asking the same questions in the same order to every participant to give everyone the same opportunities to voice their opinions, thoughts, and perceptions unaffected by biases was the objective.

Appointments for interviews were made utilizing zoom to individually connect with the fourteen participants. Each participant was asked to sign a consent form, according to IRB protocol. Interviews were conducted from July through November of 2020. Some interviews were conducted during the workday; others involved meeting participants at their convenience.

Each interview was recorded on a laptop using the Zoom application's feature to capture the conversation. The transcript of the interview was then saved to a google spreadsheet where it was carefully reviewed. Labeling the files with pseudonyms, for example Participant 1, Participant 2, Participant 3, etc., guarded the school leaders' identities from the transcriptionist. Nowhere on the laptop does the participants' true identities appear. The only categorization

involved distinguishing international participants from the United States in order to determine differences in their responses.

Precautions were taken to ensure the anonymity of all participants by assigning code names during the analysis process. During the entire data gathering and data analysis process, confidentiality protocol was followed carefully to protect the participants' privacy. Neither the names of the participants nor the school names appeared on any records except one document that remained secure.

Member checks--participation validation— were used to ensure credibility and rigor. Rossman and Rollis (2003) pointed out that member checks might be accomplished with interview transcripts to elicit additional information. Therefore, transcribed interviews were provided to the participants for review.

### ***Reflexive Journal***

Merriam (2009) saw a reflexive journal as “related to the integrity of the qualitative researcher” (p. 219). Lincoln and Guba in their book *Naturalistic Inquiry* (1985), an early but much referenced work, encouraged maintaining reflexive journals to support the credibility of studies.

Entries were made in a journal after each interview, as well as at other times during the data analysis process. The entries took the form of notes about impressions of a participant's comments, or about a conversation after the audio recording stopped. In addition, entries were made about the data analysis process, sometimes in reaction to qualitative research practices or the act of maintaining a reflexive journal. Furthermore, writings in the reflexive journal were made about personal biases in an effort to maintain awareness about those biases and to remain as objective as possible during the interviews and data analysis process.

### **Data Analysis**

#### ***Interviews***

Reading through each transcribed interview occurred multiple times in order to become confident with the data. In addition, reading through the interviews while listening to the audio recordings was practiced. Notes were made in the margins of the transcripts during the coding process in order to identify any emerging themes. To aid in developing categories, the Google Spreadsheet was color coded by thematic category.

Merriam (2009) wrote that categories “should be answers to research questions, should encompass all data, should be mutually exclusive, meaning that a piece of data should fit in only one category, should be sensitive to capturing the meaning of the data, and should categorize data at the same level of abstraction” (Merriam, 2009, p. 186). Moreover, Merriam explained that the categories should make sense together. To help maintain focus for developing categories appropriate for the study, Merriam suggested writing the purpose statement at the top of displays or, in this study, the Google spreadsheet. Finally, Merriam explained that categories should be plausible and free of ambiguity. These practices in developing categories ensure reliability.

### ***Triangulation***

In drawing from three data sources—transcriptions of interviews, analysis of prior research, and entries in a reflexive journal--creating grounded theory in a trustworthy manner took place. This triangulation, according to Merriam (2009) “means comparing and cross-checking data collected through observations at different times or in different places” (p. 216). Triangulation is a means of ensuring validity and reliability (Merriam, 2009).

### **Validity and Reliability**

The importance of ensuring validity and reliability was recognized in order to conduct the study in an ethical manner. Good qualitative practices, based on scholarly publications, were at the forefront of this study at all times. Merriam (2009) pointed out that validity refers to the degree to which findings can be considered credible and reliable; a study’s findings must be consistent with the collected data. Reliability refers to the extent to which a study and its findings can be replicated (Merriam, 2009).

Rossmann and Rollis (2003) referred to peer debriefers as “intellectual watchdogs,” an important element in insuring internal validity (p. 69). For that reason, using peers to review the research questions, interview protocol, and as sounding boards during the ongoing process of data analysis was important. Four peer doctoral candidates in their third year of studies, as well as a professional colleague in an administrative role, reviewed the interview protocol and offered feedback. Three peer debriefers pointed out that two sub-questions in the protocol seemed to be overlapping. As a result, one sub-question was omitted. These peer debriefers also offered thoughts on the ongoing data analysis process and voiced reactions to tentative findings. During these face-to-face meetings, peers discussed findings without revealing confidential information.

The peers used each other for sounding boards by asking questions and examining findings to help each other avoid ambiguity or lack of plausibility based on the data. Merriam (2009) recognized using peer debriefers as another means of ensuring internal validity.

To ensure validity and reliability, the following was practiced: a) triangulating the proposed study with interviews, prior research, and a reflexive journal; b) seeking a range of participants and, thus, a range of responses to the interview questions; c) using member checks to validate the interview data by returning the transcribed interviews to participants for their feedback; d) making use of peer debriefers during the data collection and analysis processes; and e) providing rich descriptions when reporting analysis and findings, as evidenced in Chapters Four and Five.

### **Summary of Methodology**

In this chapter, the methodology of this qualitative study to explore the perceptions of fourteen school leaders (seven from the United States and seven internationally) regarding the skills necessary for success before and during the coronavirus pandemic has been described in detail. Every effort was made to carry out the study in an ethical manner. The protocol set out by the Institutional Review Board of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University was followed. Triangulating the study, field-testing the protocol, inviting participant validation through member checks, making use of peer debriefers, and seeking a range of perceptions from participants was practiced. The identity of the participants was protected by assigning pseudonyms at first and coded later.

In Chapter Four, the findings (the results of the study) will be presented. In Chapter Five, an interpretation of the data to present a summary of findings will be presented. Moreover, implications for practitioners, recommendations for future studies, and reflections will be presented in Chapter Five.



## **Chapter Four**

### **Results**

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of secondary school principals regarding the impact of the coronavirus on school leadership. A total of fourteen high school and middle school leaders were interviewed. Seven school leaders were from the United States and seven school leaders were from international schools. The international school leaders worked in Spain, England, Argentina, Ecuador, and Kuwait. The seven school leaders from the United States worked in New Jersey, Florida, California, Washington State, and Michigan.

The seven school leaders from the United States were chosen based on the fact that their states had been deemed high impact areas because of the coronavirus by the Centers for Disease Control. The international school leaders were selected in a similar manner. The sampling included schools in various settings—urban, suburban, and rural, which allowed for a range of perceptions and administrative experiences to exist.

#### **Research Questions**

The research is based on three over-arching research questions:

1. What were the top leadership skills needed to be a building level leader prior to the pandemic?
2. Now that we are in the midst of the pandemic, what are the top leadership skills needed to be a building level leader?
3. What do you perceive to be necessary skills of a school leader after the coronavirus pandemic?

#### **Codes**

Codes were assigned to represent the following:

- An “I” designates the seven international school leaders
- An “A” designates the seven American school leaders

#### **Research Question One**

##### **What were the perceptions of school leadership prior to the coronavirus pandemic?**

**School leadership before the coronavirus pandemic.** When asked about school leadership prior to the coronavirus, participants drew from their beliefs and experiences in the profession.

### *International Participants (I)*

- Participant I1 drew upon knowing the school building and the teachers by stating that “the most important thing is you really need to know exactly what are the abilities of your teachers.” (ll. 22-23)
- Participant I2 focused on the need to be consistent and unified in his response of the importance of having “the same vision” (ll. 26).
- Participant I3 referenced the roles of the school leader to ensure an effective day to day by stating that “educational leadership in a school is key in the implementation of the academic planning, organization, and management of all available resources.” (ll. 5-6)
- Participant I4, similar to Participant I2, referenced consistency within the leadership team by stating the importance of “creating a vision for your school that everybody engages so everybody’s on the same page.” (ll. 19-20)
- Participant I5, similar to Participants I2 and I4, stressed the importance of the need to “have good teamwork” (ll. 9).
- Participant I6, similar to Participants I2, I4, and I5, referenced the importance of “starting from the mission and vision of the school” (ll. 51-52).
- Participant I7 focused on bringing resolutions to certain matters by stating, “There are always conflicts on the subject of mediation and it seems to me that I always have, within my management, mediation opportunities and the seeking of a solution before it becomes more serious.” (ll. 8-10)

All seven international participants, at some level, voiced an agreement that the transparency of one’s vision and consistent implementation is important and necessary to the effective operation of a school building prior to the coronavirus pandemic, but the participants’ reasons for supporting vision varied. The responses included leaders being able to focus on the infrastructure, perspectives of all stakeholders, teamwork, and solution oriented responses. However, the common thread running through all of these reasons for a focus on the vision of the school building was to ensure an effective operation of the building.

**Vision.** A common term accessed by school leaders globally, the idea of possessing a “vision” has come to the forefront during the interviews with international participants. According to Rose Ylimaki, well-known researcher, “the term vision has had two primary

definitions: (a) a leader's image of the future and (b) change goals" (2006). Furthermore, Ylimaki, in her research, noted an interaction between three constructs that infiltrate visionary leadership: inner human resources (such as insight, intuition, and perception), outward perspective (such as research and ideals), and the context of a situation (2006). With all of that being said, the functional management of a building, the needs of the personnel, and the pandemic, have all led to the necessity of a vision as described by international participants. In fact, all seven international respondents, at some level, referenced the importance of a building leader being able to both establish and maintain the vision of the school building so that all stakeholders were readily aware of the focus of the school building.

**Communication.** Three participants referenced the communication style as an important tool when reinforcing the vision of the school. Participants drew from current practices, including a focus on mediation and resolution, along with a commitment to maintaining the current practice. Furthermore, communication about evaluation, collaboration, and the coordination of people to find a common purpose were noted.

#### *American Participants (A)*

- Participant A1 focused on the workload of a building leader by stating that "it's really critically important that a building leader be able to multitask because I have such a tremendous load of information processing and question answering and all the things that I've got going on; I've got to be able to first multi-task, second delegate." (ll. 35-38)
- Participant A2, similar to Participant A1, referenced the importance of synthesizing information regularly by focusing on "the ability to consume large portions of information quickly combined with organization." (ll. 26-27)
- Participant A3 drew from the relational aspect of the leadership position by reiterating that "open communication, the listening, the caring, the collaboration, taking time, the relationships..." (ll. 36-37) are all of most importance.
- Participant A4 referenced communication as a major skill necessary prior to the pandemic by pointing out that "communication skills [are] probably the biggest skills that you needed, pre-pandemic, both written form, as well as verbal and in person." (ll. 19-21)

- Participant A5 focused on decision-making and “the ability to go and figure out quick on your feet while also making rational decisions.” (ll. 19-20)
- Participant A6 drew upon the necessity of being an academic leader in the building by stating, “[the top leadership skill before the pandemic] was working with staff regarding best practices in the classroom.” (ll. 48-49)
- Participant A7, similar to Participant A6, focused on instruction with a statement of “the biggest challenge is to help teachers understand that you are not teaching kids, you are working with kids, you are working with the whole child and I think that, as a leader, I would want to be able to instill that in our teachers.” (ll. 29-32)

All seven American participants, at some level, referenced the growing workload of a building administrator and the need to multi-task, delegate, and make quick, rational decisions. The responses focused on leaders needing to distribute responsibility to members of the leadership team, communicate decisions clearly, and reflect daily. The common thread of American participants surrounds the management aspect of the school day.

**Communication.** Two participants referenced communication with staff as an integral part of the management of a school building. Participants drew from current practices, including a focus on being clear with staff on all decisions and maintaining an organization system that both worked for the leadership team and the teaching staff. Open communication, transparency, and consistent collaboration were all referenced as important aspects of leadership.

**Academic Leadership.** Participants A6 and A7 referenced the importance of academic leadership when in the role of school building leader. Both participants shared their experiences of working with staff regarding best practices in the classroom and the focus on teaching the whole child, with specific attention paid towards social-emotional learning. An emphasis on knowing the teachers in the building, pushing them, and getting them to have students take accountability for their learning, thus moving them forward, is an important trait of a school building leader.

**Decision Making.** Participants A4 and A5 spoke openly about the importance of making rational decisions in real time. A focus on being flexible and reflective in every decision that is being made in the building as vital to the overall growth of the system. The participants drew upon experiences of making poor decisions, reflecting, and then changing in order to allow the system to grow.

**What did principals regularly think about in terms of running an effective school building prior to the pandemic, and what were the reasons for the responses?** Participants' responses regarding the perception of skills necessary to be an effective school building leader prior to the global pandemic fell into three categories: a) communication (both American and international school leaders) b) Vision (international building leaders, c) instructional leadership (American building leaders), and d) decision making (American building leaders). All seven international school leaders focused on the common purpose of the building and communication with staff and the community. While this is also seen as a top priority in American schools, building leaders emphasized work-load and the ability to both multi-task and delegate in order to be effective. There was also a focus on academic leadership in the responses from American school building leaders

### *Summary of Research Question One*

#### **What were the perceptions of school leadership prior to the coronavirus pandemic?**

The fourteen participants' responses to the question based on both their personal beliefs and experiences indicated that there are similarities in that communication is seen as playing a pivotal role. However, the major difference lies in the perceived work-load of American principals versus their colleagues from around the world. American principals feel a burden of responsibility as it relates to the management and decision making processes that go into leading a school building not overly discussed by international school leaders. All fourteen participants agree that the guidance of the principal is crucial in a school being led effectively. However, the differences in perception lend itself to a situation in which more time is dedicated on the management aspects of the profession in America versus a more holistic approach as seen in the responses of the international participants.

### **Research Question Two**

**Now that we are in the midst of the pandemic, what are the top leadership skills needed to be a building level leader?**

Recognizing that the world is currently grappling with the global pandemic, secondary school leaders were asked to identify leadership skills necessary to lead a building. The participants were asked to discuss elements of leadership that they perceive to be necessary to ensure successful outcomes for students during the global pandemic.

### *International Participants*

When confronted with the nuances of a pandemic and the results oriented focus of a school building leader, three prominent and necessary skills came to the forefront: a focus on operations, communication, and adaptability. Within communication and operations, a focus on technology (and an enhancement of available technologies) also came to the forefront. One international participant, I2, also discussed the importance of communication with all stakeholders, particularly within the arena of health and well-being.

**Operations.** In order to ensure all staff and students are committed to learning and positive academic outcomes, international participants 1 and 4 (I1 and I4) indicated this as an important attribute of a school building leader. I1 stated the importance of “mak[ing] sure that all the classes had started,” specifically “when it comes to the set-up of classes” (ll. 42-44). International participant 4 (I4) noted the “operational day to day issues that you have to overcome to try and keep the students engaged” (ll. 48-49). A focus on engagement, according to I4, has made its way into the operations skill set of the building leader because of the many barriers that exist when one is not involved in face-to-face instruction.

**Communication.** Three international participants (I2, I4, and I6) spoke to the importance of having a strength in the skill of communication as a necessity when leading a school building during the coronavirus pandemic. Communication was viewed as the action item to keep students “seen” as described by I2. In particular, a focus on the soft skills within the realm of communication was deemed necessary as described by international participant 6 (I6). Maintaining emotions and involving perspective were both listed as important traits tied to communication as described by I6. Finally, I5 focused on communication as a means to document everything that was being done in the non-traditional setting. This resulted in the documentation of an increased number of telephone calls and meetings.

The use of technology within the skill set of communication is also seen as an important trait as related by international participant 5 (I5). Communication in a variety of platforms can ensure that all stakeholders are receiving the most up-to-date information.

**Adaptability of the School Leader.** Both international participants 3 and 7 (I3 and I7) noted adaptability as a necessary skill of a school building leader during the pandemic. I3 stated that “lead[ing] a school during a pandemic is a huge challenge that requires a lot of adaptability and creativity on the part of the leadership team. We must dare to innovate and develop strategic

actions appropriate to the socio-economic context of the school and encourage teamwork to develop a collaborative environment” (ll. 58-61). Maneuvering through difficult periods such as the global pandemic, according to both I3 and I7, require a school leader that is both flexible and adaptable.

International Participant 7 (I7) declared the importance of “hav[ing] this ability to adapt to the situation and always mediate” (ll. 23-24). In every decision that is made during a pandemic, argues I7, there is “always an opportunity to change and, more importantly, not everyone will immediately buy into what is being delivered” (ll. 25-26). Therefore, being both able to adapt and then mediate so that a reached consensus takes place was deemed important. Common decision making through a turbulent time in society is important.

**Health.** Within the focus of communication as a major skill necessary to be an effective school building leader during the pandemic, I2 focused the importance of the health of both the students and the staff. Understanding that health comes first will drive the communication. I2 noted the importance of remaining calm in situations and focusing on the health and well-being of staff and students through all forms of communication. This involves a focus on an empathetic response to all stakeholders as means to mediate any situations that may arise between the school, the student, and/or the teacher. Because nobody knew what all families were going through, I2 shared the importance of communicating with health and well-being at the center of the conversation.

**Table 4.1***Importance Skills of a School Leader during a Pandemic*

Participant	Skill Necessary	How to Implement the Skill
I1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Operations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monitor status and intervene if necessary</li> <li>• Implement check-points</li> </ul>
I2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication</li> <li>• A Focus on Health/Well-Being</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Various forms of communication (phone, email, and social media)</li> <li>• Empathetic responses to all stakeholders (keep health first)</li> </ul>
I3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adaptability</li> <li>• Teamwork/Collaboration</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain a shared vision</li> <li>• Self-consciousness</li> <li>• Growth mindset</li> <li>• Empathy driven</li> <li>• Student/family centered communication/education plans</li> </ul>
I4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Operations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensuring operations don't become barriers for students</li> <li>• Engagement focused</li> </ul>
I5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication</li> <li>• Technology</li> <li>• Decision-making</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Documentation</li> <li>• Multiple platforms of communication</li> </ul>
I6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Soft-skills focus</li> </ul>
I7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adaptability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Multiple platforms of communication</li> <li>• Understand changes will exist</li> <li>• Mediate</li> </ul>

*American Participants*

American school leader responses to the research question that asks for the most important skills necessary to lead during a pandemic were much more varied than their international colleagues. Six of the seven respondents spoke to the importance of communication. Other than that consistency, the remaining answers varied. American school building leaders spoke to the importance of developing leadership capacity, technology, empathetic responses to the community, the necessity of modeling expectations, patience, adaptability, and the need for a flexible approach to exist.



**Communication.** Similar to international school leaders, Americans spoke a lot to the importance of communication in their responses. American participant 1 (A1) noted “practicing techniques of repeating what they’re saying to make sure that they understand that I’m listening, I hear you, and that kind of thing” (ll. 49-51). American participant 2 (A2) stated that “communication has risen to the top because now you’re not just dealing with people who disagree with policy” (ll. 57-58). Instead, everybody has a stance on how things should be done, especially as instruction is being delivered right into the living rooms of all stakeholders. American participants 3 and 6 (A3 and A6) noted technology as an important tool that should be utilized when attempting to connect with the community. American participant 4 (A4) discovered that “communication and over communication and just repeating in different ways to try and just make sure I hammer home the point” (ll. 56-58) as an important step in ensuring transparency exists for all stakeholders. American participant 7 (A7) stated that “school leaders have to be amazing communicators because right now [we] are dealing with having to walk people through this crazy thing that we are dealing with” (ll. 45-47). Technology, for the majority of the respondents, is a means to be transparent with all stakeholders during a unique time in history.

**Adaptability.** Three of the seven American respondents talked to the importance of being flexible in the decision making process during the pandemic. Adaptability, as they saw it, was a necessary skill in a very unknown time period. American participant 3 (A3) discussed the important of being “open to adapt and change” (ll. 116). The process of reinventing things and rediscovering new opportunities were both seen as positive outcomes of living in a very different world according to A3. A5 noted the importance of “being able to have that flexibility all while maintaining the educational atmosphere” (ll. 42-44). Similarly, American participant 7 (A7) noted the importance of being flexible with stakeholders when reaching out with information regarding educational plans moving forward.

**Empathy Leadership.** American participants 2 and 7 (A2 and A7) focused on empathy as a leading factor in their leadership style. Similar to the response provided regarding adaptability, A7 noted the importance of understanding that people are going through so much during the pandemic and, thus, having that lens is an important skill of a school leader. Similarly, A2 focused on perspective and the need to understand that we, as a society, may all be

at different areas in our life and emotions. Recognizing that is important, according to A2, especially in how information is delivered to the community.

**Modeling and Patience.** American participant 3 (A3) shared his belief of delivering information and “content” in the same manner that one would expect from the staff. Modeling communication skills, technology, and the notion of patience came into the response from A3. Because this is new for everyone, being understanding is key. Patience, as stated by A3, is important because everyone, administration, staff, students, and parents, need to be patient with the process. Modeling how a leader delivers and responds to the nuances of a pandemic are perceived as important.

**Developing Leadership Capacity to avoid over multi-tasking.** American participant 1 (A1) spoke frequently about the need to decentralize the leadership by developing leadership capacity within the school building. According to A1, “it is critically important that a building leader be able to multitask because of the tremendous load of information processing and question answering and all of the things that are going on” (ll. 34-37). The school leader, according to A1, needs to be able to “first multitask and second delegate” (ll. 38). In order to ensure a successfully led school building even before the pandemic, the responsibilities of a school leader are vast and wide. In the pandemic, these responsibilities grow exponentially. According to A1, the manner one develops leadership capacity, thus not overloading the multi-tasking already occurring, will lend itself to a more successfully led school building.

**Table 4.2***Importance Skills of a School Leader during a Pandemic*

Participant	Skill Necessary	How to Implement the Skill
A1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developing Leadership Capacity</li> <li>• Technology</li> <li>• Communication</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Distributing leadership tasks to other leaders in the building</li> <li>• Utilize technology effectively within communication</li> <li>• Communicate clearly and often</li> </ul>
A2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication</li> <li>• Empathy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communicate clearly and often</li> <li>• Empathetic responses to all stakeholders (Perspective)</li> </ul>
A3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Modeling Expectations</li> <li>• Technology</li> <li>• Communication</li> <li>• Patience</li> <li>• Flexibility/Adaptability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lead by action (lead in the same manner you expect from others)</li> <li>• Utilize technologies effectively, especially within communication</li> <li>• Be prepared to change/alter plans</li> </ul>
A4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication</li> <li>• Technology</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Utilize technologies effectively, especially within communication</li> </ul>
A5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Flexibility/Adaptability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be prepared to change/alter plans</li> </ul>
A6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication</li> <li>• Technology</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Utilize technologies effectively, especially within communication</li> </ul>
A7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication</li> <li>• Flexibility/Adaptability</li> <li>• Empathy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Utilize technologies effectively, especially within communication</li> <li>• Be prepared to change/alter plans</li> <li>• Empathetic responses to all stakeholders (Perspective)</li> </ul>

*Summary of Research Question Two*

**Now that we are in the midst of the pandemic, what are the top leadership skills needed to be an effective building level leader?**

It is evident that there are some clear and distinct similarities between international school leaders and American school leaders. The most notable similarity is found in the perception of communication being one of the most important leadership skills necessary to be an effective building level leader during the pandemic. Transparency with all stakeholders and

ensuring adequate access to information fall within this category. Finding different ways to spread messages and ensure over communication occurs are seen as important by both international and American school leaders. The skill of adaptability also found itself within response from both groups of leaders. Thought not as frequent as communication in the responses, the ability of the school leader to adapt to change frequently was noted as an important skill. From there, however, the responses began to differ. International school leaders focused a lot on the operational aspect of the position in their responses while American school leaders predominantly focused on empathetic responses to the community and the newly discovered *real* importance and reliance on technology. Moreover, one of the American participants spoke a lot to the importance of delegating responsibilities as means to develop leadership capacity, which may speak to the many roles and responsibilities that lie on the shoulders of the school leaders.

### **Research Question Three**

#### **What do you perceive to be necessary skills of a school leader after the coronavirus pandemic?**

For the third and final question, participants were asked what they see to be necessary skills of a school leader. Functioning effectively beyond the pandemic requires reflection and progress. Some of the traits discovered to be effective during the pandemic may, in fact, become staples of school leadership in the future. Of the fourteen international and American school leaders who participated in this study, six of them (three from outside of the United States and three from within) spoke to the importance of reflection as a guiding principle. Beyond that, the focus on relationships, a re-establishment of the vision, collaboration, culture, celebration, technology, communication, empathy, and a focus on the new normal were themes that arose. While the responses yielded different themes, some were more consistent than others depending on which group was being interviewed.

#### ***International School Leader Responses***

International principals spoke predominantly to reflection, relationships, the re-establishment of the vision, collaboration, technology, culture, and the new normal in their responses. The majority of these themes surrounded the instructors and the management of the group.

**Reflection.** In order to progress in education, looking back on both the strengths and weaknesses of a period is imperative. Moreover, learning from how others in the field established themselves during the pandemic could yield positive results in the future. The necessary skill of being able to reflect found its way into the answers of three of the seven international school leaders. I2 talked to the importance of remembering what things were like and how they happened in order to move forward. I6 spoke to the notion of nothing ever going to be the same anymore, especially with the influx of technology and the ability for students to do individual work asynchronously. Finally, I7, in a similar manner, spoke to the idea that technology will never be abandoned and that which is discovered will present itself in the future regardless of how or when we get back to in-person learning.

**Relationships.** I1 stated that “the relationships between the students are vital. The friendship is important. That is why we want schools. You are restoring all the relations and the human interaction. [We] embrace in person learning because of the relations” (ll. 81-89). I1 sees socialization as one of the pillars of a positive school experience.

**Reestablish the Vision and Focus on Culture.** In their responses, both I2 and I4 focused on the importance of rebuilding the culture of the school building through a new realization of the vision and mission. I1 discussed the importance of reflection being utilized to promote moving forward. I4, on the other hand, stated that “it’s about the vision” and to “create that culture in your school” (ll. 61). Moreover, I4 went on to state that “it’s the underlying culture that runs your school and then it’s the skills of leading people...of taking people with you to get behind them so that they all have that vision” (ll. 61-64).

**Collaborative Efforts.** Both I3 and I5 noted the importance of collaboration in their responses. Because all educators have been through the pandemic, it is important to learn from others in order to move forward effectively. I3 noted that “it is important to realize that the collaborative work of teachers has a great impact on the improvement of schools. A school’s ability to improve and adapt to changes after the pandemic depends, to a large extent, on leaders who stimulate, support, and encourage continuous internal improvement” (ll. 97-100). I5, similarly, pointed to the importance of working as a team to make future decisions. There is great possibility when all individuals work together for the common good of others.

**Technology.** Amidst the pandemic, a major focus of all schools surrounded technology related resources. Post pandemic, therefore, these newfound resources will continue to be

accessed inside school buildings. I7 noted that technology “will not be able be abandoned from that of virtual [learning]” (ll. 45-46). Independent practice via the virtual platform will continue beyond the pandemic. Thus, understanding the different resources, and how they can be of a benefit to students, is something that will remain beyond the pandemic according to I7.

**The new normal.** According to I6, “nothing is going to be the same anymore” (ll. 148-149). When we think about how far we have come, according to I6, there is no way to disregard that which has worked. In particular, I6 noted the value in asynchronous work. The belief is that this type of learning opportunity will continue even after the pandemic.

**Table 4.3***Importance Skills of a School Leader after the Pandemic*

Participant	Skill Necessary	How to Implement the Skill
I1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Relationships</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure opportunities for socialization in schools when available</li> </ul>
I2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reflection</li> <li>Re-establish the Vision</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Take the positive from previous experiences</li> <li>Build a common vision</li> </ul>
I3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Collaboration</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Set up opportunities for teachers to learn from one another (technology)</li> </ul>
I4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Re-establish the vision and culture</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Build a common vision</li> <li>Engagement of staff focus</li> </ul>
I5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Collaboration</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Set up opportunities for teachers to learn from one another (technology)</li> </ul>
I6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reflection and the new normal</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Think about the strengths of what's been done and bring them into the new normal</li> </ul>
I7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Technology</li> <li>Reflection</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Utilize technology (especially to differentiate content)</li> <li>Take the positive from previous experiences</li> </ul>

*American Participants*

Similar to the international participants, American school leaders focused much of their answers to the question of reflection on what the world went through and the progression into the new normal. As noted by both international and U.S. participants, the present situation has indefinitely changed the future of the schooling process. The future of education has changed forever. In the interviews, American school leaders delved into the topics of communication, empathy, relationships, and the importance of building leadership capacity.

**Reflection and Progression into the New Normal.** Three of the seven American school leaders who participated in this study noted the importance of looking back at what the world went through and focusing on ways to bring the newly discovered strengths into the future of education. American participants two, six, and seven (A2, A6, and A7) all noted this as an

important skill of a building leader beyond the pandemic. A2 focused on embracing everything we learned, even the very different, and taking that with us into the future of education. A6 noted how the different methodologies of teaching switched during the pandemic and how some of them have actually had profound positive impacts. In particular, the focus on instruction and how it is delivered should continue in the future. Long gone should be the days of lecturing for hours on end according to A6. Instead, a focus on group work and collaboration within quick spurts of time should take center stage. A7's response brings everything full circle: "we can't forget where we came from with this whole thing because as we move forward I think it's better; it's prepared us for the future because we are now equipped on the drop of a dime to be able to switch to virtual" (ll. 83-86). We have added a tool to our repertoire, according to A7, in that we now have two fronts to perform our educational responsibilities.

**Communication.** The skill of communication, which became an extremely important skill according to nearly all school leaders in the midst of the pandemic, also finds itself in the responses of two American school leaders for traits necessary even after the health crisis. A1 and A6 noted the importance of maintaining a high level of transparency in their responses. In particular, A1 noted the importance of moving on as a whole but continuing to focus on the importance of being able to multitask and communicate.

**Relationships and Empathy.** A4 noted the importance of relationship building when moving into the post pandemic era while A3 focused on the more grace filled, empathetic approach in working with people. According to A3, "this whole thing has opened our eyes [that] it's not perfect for kids out there" (ll. 148-149). Now that we know what everyone could potentially be going through, A3 asserts that "we have the opportunity to be more empathetic to our kids" (ll. 158-159).

**Building Leadership Capacity.** A5 shared the implications that the coronavirus pandemic had on the stretching of the leadership of a school building and how it is now more important than ever to "have the ability to weigh your options and be able to find people and sources that you can trust whenever you're trying to make some decisions" (ll. 59-61). The notion of delegating leadership tasks in this ever-changing environment is vital, according to A5, to the overall success of the organization.



**Table 4.4***Importance Skills of a School Leader After the Pandemic*

Participant	Skill Necessary	How to Implement the Skill
A1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communicate clearly and often (transparency as key)</li> </ul>
A2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reflection and the New Normal</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reflect on the strengths of what's been done and bring them into the new normal</li> </ul>
A3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Empathy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learn about your community and enhance perspective/empathy</li> </ul>
A4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relationships</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consistently build relationships with your staff/team</li> </ul>
A5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build Leadership Capacity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build a team you can trust to assist with the decision making process (distributive leadership)</li> </ul>
A6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication</li> <li>• Reflection and the New Normal</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communicate often and clearly</li> <li>• Be Transparent in all forms of communication</li> <li>• Think about the strengths of what's been done and bring them into the new normal</li> </ul>
A7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reflection and the New Normal</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reflect on the strengths of what's been done and utilize them in the new normal</li> </ul>

*Summary of Research Question Three***What do you perceive to be necessary skills of a school leader after the coronavirus pandemic?**

Similar to the responses from research question two, there are some clear and distinct similarities between international school leaders and American school leaders. One of the found similarities between the two leadership groups surrounds reflection. School leaders from both groups believe in the importance of having the skills to reflect on the past in order to advance the future. The new normal establishes itself out of the reflective skill set of the school leader. Beyond that similarity of perceived skill sets needed beyond the pandemic, relationships, culture,

empathy, and collaboration came from both groups. This specific focus on personnel is perceived as an important skill in order to maintain adequate teaching staff and a team-oriented approach. International school leaders, much more so than their American colleagues, in their responses really honed in on the necessity of re-establishing the vision and mission of the school. American school leaders were more across the board in their responses with communication once again coming to the forefront in a couple of the participants' responses.

#### **Summary of Chapter Four**

All fourteen participants have wide-ranging views on the perceptions of the necessary skills needed of a school leader before, during, and after the coronavirus pandemic. The importance of communication rose to the top, especially during the health crisis. According to the participants, a great deal of leadership is necessary to ensure school communities are receiving information, staff are feeling supported, and students are growing academically, behaviorally, and emotionally. Whereas international participants focused a lot on management and operations, American school leaders spoke to building leadership capacity in order to minimize the multitasking facets of the job. Whereas there are different ways of getting there, moving beyond the pandemic, both groups of participants agree that a reflection of what has been done will be vital to the overall progression of education in the future. In Chapter Five, the findings are summarized, implications for secondary school leaders are presented, suggestions for future studies are made, and reflections are described.

## **Chapter Five**

### **Summary of Findings**

The study's purpose was to explore the perceptions of fourteen secondary school leaders regarding the skills necessary to be a school leader before, during, and after the coronavirus pandemic. Seven American school leaders were interviewed. One is from California, one is from Michigan, one is from Washington State, two are from New Jersey, and two are from Florida. These five states were chosen specifically because they have had to deal with due to the impact that the coronavirus has had on those locations. The other seven school leaders were from around the world, including one from England, one from Spain, one from Kuwait, one from Ecuador, and three from Argentina. The purpose of the study was to discover any similarities and differences between the leadership responses as they maneuvered through the pandemic and future obligations of both international and American school leaders.

### **Research Questions**

The research was based on three over-arching research questions and one sub-question for each (except the last one):

1. What were the top leadership skills needed to be a building level leader prior to the pandemic?
  - A) What led you to this belief or understanding?
2. Now that we are in the midst of the pandemic, what are the top leadership skills needed to be a building level leader?
  - B) What led you to this answer?
3. What do you perceive to be necessary skills of a school leader after the coronavirus pandemic?

### **Findings**

#### ***Finding One***

**Communication is the most important skill to lead both secondary international and American schools before, during, and after the coronavirus pandemic.**

The global pandemic, above anything else, has heightened the necessity of a school leader's ability to effectively communicate with all stakeholders. Information changes more

rapidly during a health crisis and, therefore, the ability to provide information to the community in real-time is a skill necessary for leadership. Even prior to the pandemic, school leaders responded that the ability to communicate was essential. During and then after the coronavirus pandemic, this belief was only heightened. The ability to provide information and make decisions is a vital component of leading a school building, regardless of the societal situation.

Each of the fourteen participants referred to communication as a vital skill in order to lead a school building before, during, and after the pandemic. The number of times the word “communication” or a reference to it was mentioned grew as we moved into the during and after phase of the pandemic, thus lending to an understanding of how the difficult and very different circumstances have initiated a heightened sense of a focus on the manner in which communication occurs from a school leader. When combining both groups of participants, a reference to communication was made ninety-nine times (forty-five by international participants and fifty-four times by American participants). Written, verbal, and even non-verbal forms of communication are profoundly recognized in all situations; however, the health crisis, especially with the ever-changing information that comes with it, has led to an even greater understanding of the importance of the manner in which information is produced to all stakeholders.

According to Stephen Covey (1990), communication is “the most important skill in life” (p. 237). With that being said, it makes sense that this theme was spoken repeatedly by leaders in both the United States and across the world. In nearly every interaction, school building leaders are, in some fashion, communicating. Elaine McEwan, in her 2003 book titled *10 Traits of Highly Effective Principals: From Good to Great Performance*, surveyed 108 individuals regarding this most important traits one would need to have to be an effective school leader. Resoundingly, the ability to communicate received more votes than any other trait. According to McEwan, the average school leader “conceivably communicates with thousands if not tens of thousands of individuals during a school year” (2003, p. 2). Therefore, the most important role of a school leader is “to communicate in appropriate, productive, meaningful, helpful, and healing ways with teachers, students, parents, colleagues, as well as a vast array of others, whether individually, in small groups, or en masse. If a principal can’t communicate, going to work every day will be both painful and unproductive” (McEwan, 2003, p. 2).

### *Finding Two*

#### **American school leaders perceive the skill of managing the personnel of the school as important.**

American school leaders spoke to the necessity of working with personnel in order to make sure instruction was taking place more than forty-four times before, during, and after the pandemic. This managerial style of management was not as prominent in the responses of international participants thus bringing into question the themes of trust and value.

According to Victoria Handford and Kenneth Leithwood (2012), “most available evidence indicates that trust is a core component of leadership” (p. 194). The research of Handford and Leithwood focuses on the connection between teacher trust to student achievement. Management of personnel, therefore, must be one that focuses on trust. There are many inferences that can be drawn from the participants’ responses involving personnel management. American school leaders, contrary to their international colleagues, were much more willing to talk about the following up with teachers in a more observation lens. In a vastly different response mechanism, international school leaders focused on support of teachers. They desired, largely, to ensure all teachers had what they needed to be successful. It was evident that they believed in the professional nature of the position and desired to provide them with whatever they needed to carry out their responsibilities. The same sentiment cannot be said for the manner in which American participants responded.

Teacher efficacy, according to Stephen Covey (1990), is the most influential factor to student achievement. Through the work of researchers like Covey, Handford, and Leithwood, by creating a culture of trust, positive teacher efficacy can exist. Thus, the participants responses indicate a need to manage personnel in a different manner, one that produces trust. In turn, the climate created will lend itself to positive teacher beliefs in him or herself and the students’ ability levels, thus creating high levels of engagement and consistent levels of student achievement.

Furthermore, John Hattie asserts that “collective teacher efficacy promotes the most successful learning outcomes within schools (1.57), followed by the principal’s leadership ability (0.32) and the school climate (0.32)” (Hattie & Clarke, 2019). Therefore, it is imperative for the management of personnel within a school building to promote positive climate. This, in turn, will create greater opportunities for student success.

### **Finding Three**

#### **Technology access and integration was identified as important with American participants.**

As we progress deeper into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the world continues to become “more and more globalized [and] national education systems are shedding their uniqueness and gaining a more universal, homogenous look” (Serdyukov, 2017, p. 21). The primary focus, therefore, becomes eliminating barriers, specifically related to educational opportunities such as money and resources.

In 2002, Barbara Means authored an article titled “Technology Use in Tomorrow’s Schools.” Nineteen years later and our present is the past’s tomorrow. In 2002, technology was changing rapidly and there was an intense belief that the world would be vastly different in the decades to come, specifically as it related to educational use. Even in 2002, “students and teachers [had] increasing access to almost limitless amounts of information on the World Wide Web” (Means, 2002, p. 57). The area of equity, however, then and now continues to permeate the conversation. Those that continued to have immediate access have the same fortune today. Those who did not have the access back then, may continue to struggle with the same access points today. Even with “great strides in incorporating technology into U.S. schools, we still fall short of providing a seamless, convenient, robust, and reliable technology support structure of all students and teachers” (Means, 2002, p. 57). Fast forward nineteen years later and the same equitable disparities still exist today. According to surveys of U.S. teachers and leaders, “among the most significant are gaps between the country’s poorest and wealthiest schools around access to basic technology and live remote instruction, as well as the percentages of students who teachers report are not logging in or making contact” (Herold, 2020). During a health crisis such as what has been endured during 2020 and 2021, the lack of instructional technologies, and sometimes just the necessities such as a computer and internet, have become much clearer.

Back in 2002, many projected “that brick and mortar schools [would] become obsolete” (Means, 2002, p. 61). While that has not yet come to fruition, the pandemic has resulted in a growing need to be able to learn remotely. The lack of preparation, from both an educational and infrastructure standpoint, has become increasingly evident.

### ***Finding Four***

#### **Building and maintaining relationships is a consistent necessary perceived skill of American school leaders before, during, and after the pandemic.**

Based on the responses from this study, the American school leaders interviewed are more focused on building and maintaining relationships with the community (referenced eighteen times compared to six by international participants) when compared to the international participants. Many American participants feel that the connection they have with stakeholders' results in positive experiences for all, thus building optimal opportunities for success. There is a clear connection between communication and relationships for the American school leaders interviewed for this study.

According to Rieg and Marcoline (2008), "the best administrators spend an intense amount of time developing, improving, and investing in relationships" (p. 3). Relationship building with staff creates a sense of trust, thus leading to positive student outcomes. Relationship building with students, specifically in the form of visibility, creates an aura of comfortability and connection. Relationship building with the community results in a transparent cohesion that perpetuates the ability for all stakeholders to buy into the vision and mission of the school building. When school leaders understand the value of relationships across the board, there is great opportunity that exists.

Willis and Bartell (2006) note that "an effective school has a positive school climate. Students feel good about attending such a school and teachers feel good about teaching there. The entire staff works together to foster a caring attitude. There is a safe and orderly environment. The role of the administration is to support the faculty and the staff and to serve students" (p. 121). By dedicating time and effort to improving relationships, teacher efficacy soars and student improvement occurs.

#### ***Finding Five***

#### **Building and maintaining relationships is a new perceived skill set of international school leaders both during and when looking beyond the pandemic.**

Prior to the pandemic, international school leaders did not mention the importance of relationships inside the school building or the community at large. However, as the study proceeded to perceptions both during and beyond the pandemic, more inclination towards a focus on understanding and building connections with people became a part of the discussion. Whereas not as frequently mentioned as their American counterparts, it was clear that focusing on the well-being of the school community was important both during and then especially beyond the health crisis.

When “administrators spend an intense amount of time developing, improving, and investing in relationships,” as mentioned in the previous finding, the school building and community become more connected and cohesive (Rieg & Marcoline, 2008, p.3). It is evident that the international school leaders interviewed during this study have noted the importance of building strong relationships with the school community.

### ***Finding Six***

**For both American and international school leaders, the skill set of instructional leadership was highlighted pre-pandemic more than during and after.**

Instructional leadership is a term often heralded when discussing the academic experience of all students. The ability to influence instruction so that all students have a positive experience with the content is embedded within the academic leadership definition. The pandemic, especially as it relates to the safety and well-being of both the instructors and students, has led to a dynamic shift in the delivering of academic material. This shift in practice has led to many different outcomes, some of which will remain in the future.

In chapter four, an American school leader noted how the different methodologies of teaching were altered during the pandemic. More importantly, the discovery of the profound positive impacts that the change has had is something all leaders should note. The adaptive approach and more differentiated opportunities that have come to light during the pandemic has enhanced both the creative and innovative landscapes of education. During the last year, “the COVID-19 pandemic has forced education innovation into the heart of almost every education system around the globe (Vegas & Winthrop, 2020). Beyond the traditional school methodologies, moving forward it will be imperative to “leverag[e] technology to help with educational continuity” (Vegas & Winthrop, 2020), and allow the teacher, in conjunction with the student and the family, to develop individualized plans.

The shift from managerial to a more intentional, individualized academic focus had become commonplace even prior to the pandemic: “The instructional leadership paradigm is visible in many countries, though in some much more than others” (Schleicher, 2011, p. 218). For both American and international participants, the idea of instructional leadership, however, took a back seat during the pandemic. While this was not an unexpected outcome, the continued decrease in the use of the term being described even beyond the pandemic was eye opening. The pandemic, therefore, seems to have made the teaching profession much more transparent. With



that being said, instructional leadership, and the manner in which we approach it, may be on a course to change for good.

Instructional leadership, as defined by Fowler and Walter, “is a concept drawn from the literature of educational administration to describe the role that a school principal plays in helping to create a culture of instruction and assessment in a school, placing student learning at the center of the instructional process, and fostering the professional growth of teachers as classroom instructors” (2003, p. 465). Following that definition, the school leader should focus on instruction and the manner in which support is provided to teachers. Evaluation of teachers is not found within this definition, unless one projects out that student growth correlates with teacher effectiveness. Prior to the pandemic, time allowed for instructional leadership, especially with an evaluation lens, to exist. However, as the health crisis grew more concerning, the focus on instruction, or at least how many school leaders view the concept, dwindled and a focus on support, empathy, and communication grew.

In analyzing the responses, it has become clear that instructional leadership did not subside during the pandemic. Pre-pandemic, both international and American participants referenced instruction twenty-four times. During the pandemic, this dropped to four references (during the pandemic) and three references (post-pandemic). Instead, what we thought of as being instructional leadership was eradicated. There was less teacher evaluation and more support. There was less structure and more creativity. There was less “end result” and more empathy with a focus on differentiation. In fact, the instructional leadership mindset shifted and what was once thought of as instructionally and academically sound leadership may have changed forever.

### ***Finding Seven***

**The skill of establishing and maintaining a vision was highlighted by international participants before, during, and after the pandemic.**

According to Marion and Gonzalez, leaders in the ever-changing world need to be able to “interact with agents and with such things as tasks, resources, knowledge, and beliefs” (2014, p. 197). The leader establishes a vision of a school building by “paint[ing] a clear but detailed picture of what learning and teaching in systems and school buildings should be” (Jensen & Clark, 2013, p. 9).

Responses from the international participants spoke of the vision and the transparency of working towards a common goal. Although it was not profound, international participants stated it often before, during, and after the pandemic as a necessary perceived skill (twelve times). Conversely, no American school leader utilized visionary leadership as a necessary skill before, during, or thinking beyond the pandemic.

American participants responded with important characteristics of leadership involving communication, relationships, management, and instruction; however, there was no explicit mention of vision being of necessary importance. According to Elena Aguilar (2017), “a visionary leader is clear about what he or she believes and knows is best for children – for their academic, social, and emotional learning.” Clarity is the most important adjective utilized when describing visionary leadership. Thus, whereas American participants spoke to communication and transparency, a connection to vision was not offered.

Two of the seven international respondents spoke openly about re-establishing the vision, implying that there was a previous vision that may need to be reflected upon and altered due to differing circumstances. It is clear, however, that the transparency associated within the vision of a school building, is directly connected to communication, a skill perceived to be necessary for all school leaders. Thus, the idea of transparent communication of the direction of the school building is a perceived necessary skill of international school leaders in effectively leading a school build through any period. According to international school leaders, the vision correlates with the overall success of the organization.

## **Implications**

### *Implication One*

**School leaders need to reflect on how instructional leadership can be maintained though times of a health crisis.** This implication is in response to finding six. The manner in which we approach instructional leadership may have changed forever, and that may not be such a bad thing. According to the data from this study, the surface approaches for becoming a more effective school leader starts with communication, and ends with support, involvement, and collaboration. The intangible elements of empathy, caring, and relating respectfully to others comes to the forefront concerning instructional leadership.

### *Implication Two*

**School leaders should provide professional development for school based leaders on the topics of creating and maintaining a vision, relationship building, and communication.**

This implication is in response to findings one, two, four, and five. Schools spend a lot of time and money focused on the next best thing. Unfortunately, the next best thing becomes the past thing very quickly. Communication and relationship building, however, are staples that are necessary regardless of the changing landscape. Therefore, school leaders should focus time, energy, and money towards relationships and communications.

### *Implication Three*

**School leaders should focus on equity and accessibility for all.** This implication is in response to finding three. Maneuvering through the coronavirus pandemic has shone a light on the inequities that exist across all of society. The education system is not immune to this. Depending on where you live and how much money you have has greatly influenced the resources available during the health crisis. Necessities, such as access to Internet and a computer, have been lacking in certain parts of the world. It is without question that a focus on ensuring that basic educational needs are met should be the top priority for school leaders moving forward.

### *Implication Four*

**School leaders should ensure that all school building leaders understand the importance of establishing and maintaining a clear vision.** This implication is in response to finding seven. International participants of the study shared that the establishment, maintenance, and re-establishment of the vision were important traits of a school leader before, during, and after the coronavirus pandemic. This implication is related to the finding connected to communication and relationship building as the vision of the building is collective in nature.

### **Recommendations for Future Studies**

In gathering data for this study, other topics for exploration were discovered. These studies would provide data for professional development sessions and help administrators move toward a more equitable and optimal environment for all students to succeed. Additional studies

on the topic may influence school, state, and national departments of education to adopt district and statewide practices.

- Create and build a longitudinal study that follows candidates from principal preparation programs through different levels of leadership to ascertain the effectiveness of programs both in the United States and internationally and compare findings
- Find homogeneous schools with school leaders who have spent time and energy on communication and relationships and correlating student academic outcomes
- Focus on international schools and American schools (a comparative approach to understanding) in order to assess instructional strategies and then building models to present at professional development sessions that would provide guidelines for school leaders of public, as well as private, schools.
- Investigate how important the vision of a school building is to the overall leadership attributes by interviewing the leadership teams and then the teachers they serve to discover if there is alignment by triangulating student assessment data, staff climate surveys, and student climate surveys

## **Conclusion**

Exploring the perceptions of fourteen secondary school leaders regarding perceptions of the necessary skills during, before, and after the coronavirus pandemic was the basis of this study. Gathering data from secondary school leaders of various school settings—international, public, rural, urban, and suburban—to determine their views on their views on necessary skills during the pandemic was sought. As we are still in the midst of the global pandemic, very few studies were found that looked at perceptions of skills necessary to be a school leader before, during, and after the health crisis. This study, therefore, is important, especially as we progress into the future.

Among the many challenges facing principals today, providing access to all and communicating with clarity and transparency has risen to the top. The pandemic has exacerbated the need for effective school leadership more than ever. The future of schools across the world is predicated on what we learn from that which we are currently experiencing. For the purposes of providing an equitable education for all children, to gather perceptions on necessary skills of

school leaders, and to prepare for life after the pandemic, administrators should reflect on what was previously thought of as important and elaborate on what they now know when working with school partnerships and developing school improvement plans. The charge to today's secondary school leaders is to learn from and embrace the changing landscape of education. More than ever before, the notion of a courageous leader has come to the forefront, and he or she must be ready and willing to engage in the unknown.

### **Reflections**

The interviews allowed me to gain some insight when comparing the responses of both American and international participants. I was surprised to find that a school's vision was spoken to often by the international participants but not by American school leaders. A focus on vision within the American education system may yield more opportunities to connect communication and relationship building as well.

It was also noteworthy that instructional leadership took a second seat as we progressed into and then, eventually, beyond the pandemic. This may have occurred for a variety of reasons but, most understandably, I believe that this was due to the hyper-focus placed on the social-emotional well-being of all students and families. The pandemic allowed for a window to exist into the lives of students. As such, the instructional leadership facet of administration took a second seat to ensuring the health and well-being of all stakeholders.

It is my plan to continue to work with aspiring school leaders so that they have all of the tools necessary to be successful in the changing educational landscape. The old ways of viewing education are gone. Evaluation, communication, relationships, instructional leadership, and vision all need to be rehashed, reflected upon, and changed. We are at a turning point. Great leaders will invite and embrace change. My goal is to work alongside those that are ready to engage with this new model of education. If we continue doing what we have always done, we cannot expect any changes. If we learn from where we were, however, there exists infinite possibilities.

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**Appendix A**  
**Institutional Review Board Certificate**



Completion Date 15-Jul-2019  
Expiration Date 14-Jul-2022  
Record ID 32438074

This is to certify that:

**Matthew Strittmatter**

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

**Social & Behavioral Research** (Curriculum Group)  
**Social & Behavioral Research** (Course Learner Group)  
**1 - Basic Course** (Stage)

Under requirements set by:

**Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University (Virginia Tech)**

**CITI**  
Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative

Verify at [www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w781d02ad-e0de-4a23-acca-e09216a3f779-32438074](http://www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w781d02ad-e0de-4a23-acca-e09216a3f779-32438074)

## Appendix B

### Institutional Review Board Approval Letter



Division of Scholarly Integrity and  
Research Compliance  
Institutional Review Board  
North End Center, Suite 4120 (MC 0497)  
300 Turner Street NW  
Blacksburg, Virginia 24061  
540/231-3732  
irb@vt.edu  
<http://www.research.vt.edu/sirc/hrpp>

#### MEMORANDUM

**DATE:** August 7, 2020

**TO:** Carol S Cash, Matthew James Strittmatter

**FROM:** Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (FWA00000572, expires October 29, 2024)

**PROTOCOL TITLE:** A Sample of Selected Secondary School Leader Perceptions of Necessary Skills Before, During, and After the Coronavirus Pandemic

**IRB NUMBER:** 20-578

Effective August 7, 2020, the Virginia Tech Human Research Protection Program (HRPP) determined that this protocol meets the criteria for exemption from IRB review under 45 CFR 46.104(d) category (ies) 2(ii).

Ongoing IRB review and approval by this organization is not required. This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these activities impact the exempt determination, please submit an amendment to the HRPP for a determination.

This exempt determination does not apply to any collaborating institution(s). The Virginia Tech HRPP and IRB cannot provide an exemption that overrides the jurisdiction of a local IRB or other institutional mechanism for determining exemptions.

All investigators (listed above) are required to comply with the researcher requirements outlined at:

<https://secure.research.vt.edu/external/irb/responsibilities.htm>

(Please review responsibilities before beginning your research.)

#### PROTOCOL INFORMATION:

Determined As: **Exempt, under 45 CFR 46.104(d) category(ies) 2(ii)**  
Protocol Determination Date: **August 7, 2020**

#### ASSOCIATED FUNDING:

The table on the following page indicates whether grant proposals are related to this protocol, and which of the listed proposals, if any, have been compared to this protocol, if required.

*Invent the Future*

**Appendix C**  
**Correspondence of Research to Interview Questions**

(Email to Interview Candidates)

Good Evening,

We are conducting interviews as part of a research study to increase our understanding of how the coronavirus pandemic is perceived and experienced by both school administrators. My hope is to glean knowledge from the interviews that will help to understand how school leadership has changed since the global pandemic required schools to operate in alternative ways.

As a school leader, you are in an ideal position to give us valuable first-hand information from your own perspective. The interview takes around 30 minutes and is very informal. We are simply trying to capture your thoughts and perspectives on the impacts of the coronavirus pandemic on school leadership.

Your responses to the questions will be kept confidential. Each interview will be assigned a number code to help ensure that personal identifiers are not revealed during the analysis and write up of findings. There is no compensation for participating in this study. However, your participation will be a valuable addition to our research and findings could lead to greater public understanding of the impact the coronavirus has had and will have on school leadership.

If you are willing to participate, please suggest a day and time that suits you and I'll do my best to be available. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to ask.

Thank you!  
Matt Strittmatter

**Appendix D**  
**Consent Form**

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University – Department of Educational Leadership

Title of the Study: The School Leader’s Perceptions of Necessary Skills Before and During the Coronavirus Pandemic

Researcher Name(s): Matthew J. Strittmatter (804-873-6620) (strittmj@vt.edu)

The purpose of this proposed study is to explore the perceptions of principals from around the world regarding the perceived skill set necessary for success before and during the pandemic. While many school facilities closed during the public health crisis, the learning continued. Educational leaders today are tasked with creating environment that allow students to thrive academically, behaviorally, and emotionally from beyond the classroom. By identifying the perceived skill set required to run an effective school building before and then during the pandemic, a greater understanding of the future of schools can be ascertained.

I hereby give my consent to participate in this research study. I acknowledge that the researcher has provided me with:

- A. An explanation of the study’s general purpose and procedure.
- B. Answers to any questions I have asked about the study procedure.

I understand that:

- A. My participation in this study will take approximately 30 minutes.
- B. The probability and magnitude of harm/discomfort anticipated as a result of participating in this study are not greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life or during the performance of routine physical or psychological examinations or tests.
- C. The potential benefits of this study include working collaboratively to find characteristics necessary collectively in order to lead schools after the public health pandemic.
- D. I will not be compensated for participating in this study.
- E. My participation is voluntary, and I may withdraw my consent and discontinue participation in the study at any time. My refusal to participate will not result in any penalty or disadvantage.
- G. My responses in this study will be kept confidential, to the extent permitted by law. The data will be stored in the secured location of a password-protected computer], will be available to the research and the participants, and research reports will only present findings on a group basis, without any personally identifying information.

Name (printed): \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix E

### Additional Consent Form for Recordings of Interviews

Title of the Study: The School Leader's Perceptions of Necessary Skills Before and During the Coronavirus Pandemic

In addition to agreeing to participate, I consent to having the interview audio recorded. I understand that the recording of my interview will be transcribed by the researcher(s) and erased once the transcriptions are checked for accuracy. Transcripts of my interview may be reproduced in whole or in part for use in presentations or written products that result from this study, but will not be linked to my name. Neither my name nor any other identifying information (such as my voice or picture) will be used in presentations or in written products resulting from the study, unless I give my explicit permission.

I consent to having the interview audio recorded.

Name (printed): \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_



## **Appendix F**

### **Interview Protocol**

Thank you for meeting with me this [timeframe]. The interview today surrounds the coronavirus pandemic and how it has shaped and will continue to alter the skills necessary for success as a school building leader. I am interested in understanding how educational leaders make sense of what is happening as a result of the coronavirus pandemic and perceptions on skills needed moving forward. The first question will begin with your own perspective or knowledge as it relates to skills needed as a school leader prior to the coronavirus pandemic. Questions will then move into how the pandemic has changed your perception on necessary skills as a school leader and how it will be altered moving forward. This interview will take approximately thirty minutes. Thank you in advance for the feedback you will provide.

1. What were the top leadership skills needed to be a building level leader prior to the pandemic?
2. What led you to this belief or understanding?
3. Now that we are in the midst of the pandemic, what are the top leadership skills needed to be an effective building level leader?
4. What led you to this answer?
5. What do you perceive to be necessary skills of a school leader after the coronavirus pandemic?