EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP DURING A PANDEMIC

A Thesis

Presented to the

Faculty of

California State Polytechnic University, Pomona

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

In

Education

Option in

Educational Leadership

By

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2021
SIGNATURE PAGE

THESIS: EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP DURING PANDEMIC

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is with immense gratitude that I acknowledge the expertise and valuable support from my Professor, Dr. Richard Navarro. Without your inspiration to study this topic, guidance, and passion, I could accomplish what felt the impossible during this pandemic.

I want to acknowledge my committee member, Dr. Betty T. Alford, whose expertise is invaluable in educational leadership. Your insightful feedback pushed me to sharpen my thinking and brought my work to a higher level.

I want to thank my colleague and friend, Estela Sterling Peregrina-Schubert. Thank you for opening your doors to me when times were difficult and found the time to guide, motivate, and reassure me that I will succeed. I would also like to single out my thesis partner, Felicia. Thank you for listening, discussing, and editing my writing throughout this journey.

I am indebted to my parents for all of the love and support they have given me throughout the last year. Thank you for taking care of my children, making sure I was ok, and letting us return to our haven, your home.

In addition, I would like to thank my family and friends. Thank you for lending me a helping hand, encouraging me that there is a light at the end of the tunnel, and ready to celebrate not just my accomplishment but ours together.

Finally, I dedicate this thesis to my two beautiful children, Christopher Jacob, and Alianna Rose. I hope that one day you look back and understand the sacrifice of missing time with the both of you but know that it was all worth it. I hope you are proud of me. I love you both and I am looking forward to seeing your life’s journey unfold.
ABSTRACT

In March 2022, the World Health Organization declared SARS-CoV-2 known as COVID-19, a worldwide pandemic. At that time California Governor ordered a "stay at home" order asking local education agencies to close campuses for in-person instruction. The closure left districts with little to no direction on how to reopen. A few studies explain the great significance of closing schools during a pandemic. Still, there is no evidence-based leadership supporting districts' educational leadership during a crisis. Therefore, within the surrounding counties, Los Angeles, Orange, and San Bernardino, school leaders were surveyed and interviewed to determine how district stakeholders were engaged in determining the best "return to school" teaching model. Also, identified leadership qualities school leaders were exhibiting during the decision-making process. The researcher analyzed the data with four themes emerging, engagement/input, decisions about reopening, leadership qualities, and leadership models. The findings indicated that district leaders that engaged district stakeholders through surveys and town hall meetings via web conferencing platforms included and valued their input for making more transparent decisions about reopening. Leadership qualities exhibited by district leaders consisted of problem solver, collaborator, communicator, and resilient. A new educational toolbox is necessary to navigate through a pandemic. The Authoritative Leadership model does not facilitate the decision-making process. An effective leader must encompass the skills of a relational, servant, and distributive leader. A protocol is needed to encourage engagement from all district stakeholders and the qualities.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

SIGNATURE PAGE ................................................................................................................ ii

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ................................................................................................. iii

ABSTRACT ....................................................................................................................... iv

LIST OF TABLES ............................................................................................................. vi

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION ....................................................................................... 1

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW ............................................................................ 9

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY .............................................................. 19

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH FINDINGS ........................................................................... 24

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS .................................... 34

REFERENCES ................................................................................................................. 41

APPENDIX A: SURVEY QUESTIONS .......................................................................... 45

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS .................................................................... 46

APPENDIX C: SURVEY RESULTS ............................................................................... 47

APPENDIX D: SURVEY RESULTS .............................................................................. 48

APPENDIX E: SURVEY RESULTS ............................................................................... 49
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Leadership Models.................................................................17

Table 2. Participants From Los Angeles, Orange, San Bernardino Counties........22

Table 3. District A-Survey Evidence and Interview/Stakeholder Comments ..........26

Table 4. District B-Survey Evidence and Interview/Stakeholder Comments...........28

Table 5. District C-Survey Evidence and Interview/Stakeholder Comments..........30

Table 6. Sliding Leadership Models Within All Three Districts..........................32
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a worldwide pandemic. "This is not just a public health crisis; it is a crisis that will touch every sector," said Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO's General Director (Ducharme, 2020). Within a few days, California Governor, Gavin Newsom, asked all public and private schools to close in-person instruction due to COVID-19. By July 2020, Governor Newsom had once again requested all public and private schools to reopen with online instruction in the fall of 2020 (Kandel, 2020). As a result, three teaching models for reopening schools became available, online, hybrid, and in-person. Districts had questions, "How will school districts decide which teaching model is appropriate to reopen schools during a pandemic safely?" In response, school districts within Los Angeles, Orange, and San Bernardino counties have chosen different models with different decision-making processes. The purpose of this study is to find out how school districts are engaging district stakeholders when it comes to determining the best "return to school" teaching model for students and identifying leadership qualities school leaders are exhibiting during the decision-making process.

The remainder of this chapter is an overview of the study conducted. The following section is the background information and it will lead to the problem statement. Next, the purpose of the study is explained while addressing the research questions in the survey and interview. Following this, assumptions are presented, along with limitations and delimitations from the study. The significance of the study is provided and explanation of key terms. Lastly, the chapter will end with a summary.
Background

During the 1918-1919 H1N1 "Spanish" influenza pandemic, the United States had adopted a range of public health interventions, just like how the Center for Disease Control has recommended for the current COVID-19 pandemic. “These measures, which were similar to those currently adopted, included the closure of schools and churches, banning of mass gatherings, mandated mask-wearing, case isolation, and disinfection/hygiene measures" (Pamucbian, Stefan 2020).

On March 13, 2020, California Governor Gavin Newson issued Executive Order N-26-20, stating that as of March 16, 2020, all schools in California would be physically closed for the remainder of the month. The next day, in coordination with the Department of Health and Human Services, the California Department of Education provided brief guidance for distance learning, meals, and access to Chromebooks and the internet. Public and private schools, including colleges and universities, were left to make decisions with no apparent response to when they would reopen. Also, all California standardized testing was suspended the following day for students. On Tuesday, March 31, 2020, State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tony Thurmond released a letter to all local education agencies to consider closing physical campuses through the end of the 2019-2020 school year. (www.cde.ca.gov)

With minimal guidance from the California Department of Education, Districts began working on how to provide distance learning, meals, and access to Chromebooks and the internet to their community. By June 8, 2020, the Department of Education published "Stronger Together: A Guidebook for the Safe Reopening of California's Public Schools" (www.cde.ca.gov). The guidebook provided few details supporting
instructional planning, mental health, and communication with community engagement. Local education agencies still had questions and concerns that the guidebook did not offer. "In California, health data will determine when a school can be physically open - and when it must close – but learning should never stop," Governor Newson said on July 17. He presented a plan around five key areas; 1. Safe in-person instruction based on local health data, 2. Strong mask requirements for anyone in the school, 3. Physical distancing requirements & other adaptations, 4. Regular testing and dedicated contact tracing for outbreaks at schools, 5. Rigorous distance learning programs (www.ca.gov).

Local education agencies needed decide which teaching model would be appropriate for their students. Therefore, three teaching models are considered for instruction; distance, hybrid (asynchronous and synchronous time), or in-person teaching models. A district can return to hybrid or in-person if their county is not on the watch list and has had 14 straight days of declining numbers in COVID-19 cases. As of July 16, 2020, thirty-one of the 58 California counties were on the red tier of high infection rates.

The hybrid and in-person teaching models will allow students to have staggering start times, different days of attendance, and either asynchronous and synchronous teaching. All students and personnel on campus would have to wear a mask at all times and maintain six feet apart. The distance learning model allows the students to learn from home. The student must be online with a teacher for a few synchronous and asynchronous teaching hours.
Problem Statement

Previous pandemics, such as the 1918 flu, did close schools to stop further spread of the flu, but little is known about how or if any teaching models continued during those closures. With school districts closed for in-person teaching, districts need to determine how to engage all district stakeholders in the decision-making process for the best “return to school” teaching model for students.

Purpose of Research

Based on the information from the prior sections, the purpose of this study is to examine the decision-making process that stakeholders engage in when it comes to determining the best "return to school" teaching model for students. In addition, identify leadership qualities that school leaders exhibit upon engaging stakeholders in the decision-making process. The study includes a literature review and the analysis of the leadership qualities and models in education.

The study examines the decision-making process that district stakeholders engaged in when determining the best "return to school" teaching model for students and the leadership qualities exhibited by school leaders. The research consisted of a survey and interview questions to 12 participants evenly distributed in three districts involved in the decision-making process of reopening schools safely. Based on this aim, the objectives are to:

- Examine the decision-making process that district stakeholders engage in when it comes to determining the best "return to school" teaching model for students during the COVID-19 pandemic;
- Identify leadership qualities exhibited by school leaders upon engaging district
stakeholders in the decision-making process during the COVID-19 pandemic;

- Establish recommendations of leadership models and qualities that can guide and support school leaders in engaging district stakeholders in the decision-making process.

**Research Question**

The research questions addressed in the study are: How are school district stakeholders engaged in the decision-making process that determines the best "return to school" teaching model for students? Which leadership qualities are school leaders exhibiting when engaging district stakeholders in the decision-making process?

**Assumptions**

The study has the following assumptions:

- All counties of California will follow the Executive Order N-33-20 issued by Governor Newsom;
- COVID-19 infection rates will increase, resulting in schools remaining closed while rates decrease, resulting in school reopening safely;
- Local education agencies will follow guidance from Local Health Agencies and the California Department of Education;
- District stakeholders face the challenge of making the necessary preparations during this crisis.

**Limitations and Delimitations**

The study has the following limitations and delimitations:

- Choosing only one school district in three nearby counties (Los Angeles, Orange, and San Bernardino);
● Closed-ended Likert scale in the survey;

● Two sets of interview questions – First interview set includes school district leaders. The second interview set includes teachers, classifieds, and parents.

● Additional executive orders issued by the California Governor during the study, COVID-19 infection rates, and recommendations for Local Health Agencies, Center of Disease Control, and US Coronavirus Task Force.

**Significance of the Study**

School closures do not happen very often because of a pandemic. Therefore, deciding how and when to safely reopen schools and determining the best "return to school" teaching models is very complex. Thus, the significance of this study will support district leaders in engaging stakeholders in the decision-making process and identify the leadership qualities that engage stakeholders in the decision-making process.

**Definition of Key Terms**

This section provides definitions of key terms and concepts.

*Local educational agency – LEA* - a public board of education or other public authority legally constituted within a State for either administrative control or direction of, or to perform a service function for, public elementary schools or secondary schools in a city, county, township, school district, or other political subdivision of a State (www.law.cornell.edu)

*Distributed Leadership* – Educational Leadership, is not held by one leader but distributed among multiple individuals (Robert, 2019).

*Authoritative Leadership* – Educational Leadership dictates policies, decides what goals are achieved, and with little to no input from others (Goleman, 2000).
Democratic Leadership – Educational Leadership is held by a leader who encourages creative participation by group members to solve problems and build consensus before taking action (Goleman, 2000).

Affiliative Leadership – Educational Leadership is held by a more sensitive and compassionate leader by character and based on pleasing their colleagues and ensuring satisfaction (Goleman, 2000).

Inclusive Leadership – a leader holds educational leadership with the capacity to manage and lead a group efficiently while respecting the uniqueness of members with empathy and a bias-free way (Tulshyan, 2020).

Relational Leadership – Educational Leadership is held by a leader with effectiveness has to do with the leader to create positive relationships (Bacal, 2018).

Servant Leadership – Educational Leadership held by a leader whose goal is to serve. A servant leader shares power, puts the needs of the employees first and helps people develop and perform as highly as possible (Sarros & Sendjaya, 2002).

Overview of the Remainder of the Study

Four chapters are remaining in this study. The second chapter, literature review, consists of previous research leadership competencies and models with theoretical and conceptual frameworks. The third chapter, methodology, provides the rationale, data collection, and process of recruiting participants and procedures utilized to obtain the results of the data analysis. The fourth chapter will describe how the data was analyzed, followed by report findings based on the methodology. Lastly, chapter five will consist of a synthesis of the results, findings, and conclusions. In the end, the implication and recommendation of the study will be presented with a concluding statement.
Chapter Summary

This chapter was beneficial for establishing the study's goal based on the background information. Most importantly, this study will examine the decision-making process that school stakeholders are engaged in when determining the best "return to school" teaching model for students. In addition, identifying those leadership qualities that school leaders exhibited upon engaging stakeholders in the decision-making process. The following chapter, the literature review, will provide information from primary sources and the theoretical framework of leadership models.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The impact of COVID-19 is currently affecting every aspect of daily human life. Teaching and learning practices have been dramatically altered, and schools' core functions have shifted while education leaders have been pushed to their very limit. "The inevitability of crisis is a given; however, how we intentionally hold our humanity in what can be a protocol-driven process is what separates leadership from business as usual" (Reddam and Azevedo, 2019). Even though evidence-based school leadership within a pandemic are non-existent, some practices are emerging and offering pointers and insight into how schools are functioning in this crisis (Harris, 2020). Therefore, a new toolbox is needed for educational leaders to travel through these uncharted waters.

Educational leadership takes shape in many different styles and competencies that can support leaders in a culture of change (Fullan, 2020). For example, there are authoritarian, affiliate, democratic, inclusive, relational, servant, and distributive leadership models.

As coronavirus continues to impact us, literature, journals, and studies are continuously being conducted, updated, and analyzed during the pandemic. Educational leadership is at a turning point and unquestionably is changing. This chapter will discuss different leadership styles and competencies leaders can exhibit during a crisis.

**Fullan**

Michael Fullan explains a framework for leadership that helps leaders confront complex problems that do not have easy answers. (Fullan, 2020). He states that leaders should have moral purposes, acting to make a positive difference in the lives of employees, customers, and society as a whole. Next, understanding the dynamics of
change requires a strategy, not as a two-step sequence but continuous feedback between thought and action. Most importantly, relationships are the single most common factor for successful change and how leaders commit themselves to constantly generating and increasing knowledge and deep learning inside and outside the organization (Fullan, 2020). Fullan also explains that a competent leader should build the following skills to mastery:

1. Challenge the status quo.
2. Builds trust through clear communications and expectations.
3. Creates a commonly owned plan for success.
4. Focuses on the team over self.
5. Has a sense of urgency for sustainable results
6. Commits to continuous improvement for self.

The leadership framework, along with the competencies, can lead schools to enhance student performance, increase the capacity of teachers, greater involvement of parents and community members, and engagement of students (Fullan, 2014). If these models and competencies are used to lead effectively, one must start slow to go fast. When decisions must be made instantly during a crisis, starting slowly to go fast is not ideal, as educational leaders must pivot from a traditional leadership model to responding to a crisis. "First, it is unlikely that a leader is going to master these competencies. Second, there are orientations and skills in the set that will take a very long while to master. Lastly, leading in a culture of change is about fulfillment and flourishing" (Fullan, 2001).
Therefore, becoming an effective leader takes time, but an effective leader must take action from learned knowledge and experience during a crisis.

**Leadership Models**

As California decided to transition to distance learning with the uncertainty of coronavirus, the decision has required new transformative learning for all stakeholders and serious adaptive work that has been stressful. Although, many districts are exhibiting excellent leadership, there are places that still operate within a traditional or authoritative leadership model.

**Authoritative Leadership**

Authoritative leadership maximizes commitment to the organization's goals and strategy. Leaders give people the freedom to innovate, experiment, and take calculated risk as a form of flexibility but limited to only enhance performance towards the district's vision. Its positive impact works well in most businesses because it sells people on a long-term vision. This style will not work in every situation (Goleman, 2000). For instance, traditional models of authoritative leadership are adequate when faced with technical problems, but when faced with complexities and uncertainties of the coronavirus that necessitates dealing with issues in real-time, resulting in a strategic disadvantage to schools. Therefore, an authoritative leader should avoid micromanaging and trust their network to be autonomous, self-managed, and empowered to make decisions through distributed leadership. (Fernandez & Shaw, 2020).

**Affiliative Leadership**

Affiliative leadership is a "People come first" type of leadership that revolves around people who value individuals and their emotions more than tasks and goals. They
share ideas, inspirations, and this style drives up flexibility because as an affiliative leader, they give people the freedom to do their job in the way they think is most effective. This type of leadership seems beneficial in empathy and compassion, especially during a pandemic, but this type of leadership should be used with other models. Affiliative leadership allows for inadequate performance to go uncorrected, mediocrity to be tolerated, and leaders rarely offer constructive advice on how to improve, leaving others to figure out how to do so on their own. "When people need clear directives to navigate through complex challenges, the affiliative style leaves them rudderless" (Goleman, 2000). With the problematic complexities of a pandemic and the decision-making process of reopening schools, the affiliative leadership leaves districts still trying to figure it out.

**Inclusive Leadership**

Like the affiliative, the inclusive leadership model serves as a sustainable mechanism to reduce psychological distress during pandemics (Ahmed, Zhao, and Faraz, 2020). Inclusive leadership is an "invitation and appreciation for others" (Newmbhard and Edmondson, 2006) while focusing on a practice that values employee diversity in the decision-making process. During the pandemic, leaders who are under extraordinary pressure are expected to make decisions quickly without having all of the information needed to make decisions. Inclusive leadership allows for a deep awareness of how implicit bias shows up in decision-making, making this an even more critical leadership competency (Tulshyan, 2020). This type of leadership should prioritize as organizations are much more likely to be innovative in the face of a crisis and seek input from a diverse group of employees who approach problems from various perspectives (Tulshyan, 2020).
In comparison to affiliative leadership, the inclusive leadership style must be accompanied by other types of leadership to better tackle the complexities of the pandemic. For instance, a district might not have enough time to research and look through bias in the organization to get everyone's input and delay the decision-making process of reopening schools.

**Democratic Leadership**

Another educational leadership model is democratic. Democratic leaders spend time getting people's ideas and buy-ins to build trust, commitment, and respect. These leaders let workers have a say in the decisions that affect their goals and drive flexibility and responsibility. This type of leadership operates realistically about what can and cannot be accomplished (Goleman, 2000). This style works best when a leader has a strong vision and generates fresh ideas and buy-in from employees by having several meetings before making a decision. During a crisis or pandemic, democratic leadership has its drawbacks. Mainly, the endless meetings where ideas are gone over repeatedly, with no clear consensus, and the need to reschedule another meeting. Also, democratic leadership makes less sense when employees are not informed or competent to offer guidance. Goleman states that, "It almost goes without saying that building consensus is wrongheaded in times of crisis."

**Relational Leadership**

According to Reddman and Azcevedo (2019), the first step during a crisis is centralizing the value of relational leadership. Relational leadership includes whole-person thinking, staying open during times of stress, expressing emotion and vulnerability, inspiring, motivating, and using praise and recognition. This type of
leadership can provide the necessary relational safety and predictably to decrease additional trauma and increase communication and cohesion for those impacted by the crisis (Reddman and Azcevedo, 2019). Relational leaders must also be aware of the drawbacks. Relational leaders, at times, struggle to make the tough decision because they do not want to hurt anyone's feelings. In a time of crisis, a relational leader can find it challenging to plan and create protocols out of fear and not trust other leaders to get the job done (Stephens, 2020).

**Servant Leadership**

Servant leadership is highlighted as a better practice for navigating an unpredictable crisis. Servant leadership emphasizes empowerment, involvement, and collaboration. This type of leadership also fosters emotional intelligence and stability that supports leaders to place the interest of others above their own (Doraiswamy, 2012). "While traditional leaders are at the top of the organizational pyramid, servant leadership inverts the pyramid with the leadership at the bottom of the pyramid and clients and employees at the top" (Walker, 2020). Servant leaders bring people together around key themes, make decisions and promptly communicate them. The leader's role may take on more than his or her share of the weight, but a true servant leader encourages others to be a part of the journey and share the burden of charting the best course, "You should not and cannot do it all yourself" (Walker, 2020). Servant leaders, at times, can be perceived as weak and not having formal authority to get things done. With this type of leadership, it may take longer to make decisions, and leaders must do whatever the staff asks of them (Hales, 2018).
Distributed Leadership

Distributed leadership style encourages collaboration and inclusivity that attributes to an effective leader. Distributed leadership essentially means a weakening of traditional leadership roles and a move towards a flatter, more decentralized, network leadership culture (Harris, 2011, 2013). The practice is fundamentally about capacity building rather than control. It relies on the embolization of others to lead through a collective engagement and action (Harris, 2020). Distributing leadership is more effective than any other leadership approach in a crisis, improving decision-making quality (Bejarjaoui and Karami-Akkary, 2010). Fernandez and Shaw explain in great detail about establishing the importance of connecting with all stakeholders as individuals, creating mutual trust, distributing leadership responsibilities to situationally aware teams, and communicating with clarity and regularity. Academic leaders can relax because they are not expected to be perfect. Distributed leadership can create difficulty in holding other members accountable. Along with accountability, distributed leadership generates uncertainty that is not beneficial during a crisis. Lastly, distributed leadership requires leaders to have specific experience that most leaders do not possess during a pandemic (Miller, 2021).

Harris

The current crisis of the pandemic has shifted leadership dramatically towards distributed, collaborative, and network practices (Harris, 2020). Leadership associated with a position, a role, as having authority, making sure that schools functioned effectively and efficiently, kept things on track, answering to parents, and is responsible for school's performance was the norm and with the idea of distributed leadership in the
future. Due to the current pandemic, the situation "demands messy, trial-and-error, butterflies in the stomach leadership where there is no predictability, no certainty and potentially no end in sight" (Harris, 2020).

School leaders are currently influencing each other and exercising leadership through multiple platforms and networks, becoming the way of the now. As this pandemic continues, the changing leadership that is emerging is distributive, collaborative, and networked. It is simply the collective glue keeping everything and everyone going (Harris, 2020). The best practice for school leaders is to focus on distributive leadership. This leadership style moves attention away from the actions of individual leaders to their interaction with others, resulting in joint activity and practice. Distributed leadership practice simply gets the job done (Harris, 2020).

**Theoretical Framework**

Educational leadership plays a crucial role in refining school outcomes by influencing the teachers' motivation and capabilities and the school climate and environment (Kapur, 2018). The responsibilities of educational leadership should be adequately defined by understanding the practices required to improve teaching and learning. Educational leaders should possess capabilities, competency, proficiency, effective decision-making skills, leadership skills, and resourcefulness. (Kapur, 2018).

Educational leadership has a goal of leading with the empowerment of other individuals to make significant decisions when the accountability mechanism includes providing the community members the opportunity to speak about their issues and concerns (Kapur, 2018). Other types of leadership provide instructional guidance,
**Table 1**

**Leadership Models**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leadership Models</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Weakness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Authoritative</td>
<td>The leadership model that dictates policies decides what goals are achieved and little to no input from others.</td>
<td>Maximizes commitment to organizations' goals and strategy.</td>
<td>Does not support the swift decision-making process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affiliative</td>
<td>The leadership model is sensitive and compassionate by character and based on pleasing their colleagues and ensuring satisfaction.</td>
<td>Value individuals and drive up flexibility.</td>
<td>Allows for poor performance and leaves people feeling rudderless during complex challenges.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusive</td>
<td>The leadership model leads and manages a group efficiently while respecting the uniqueness of members with empathy and bias-free way.</td>
<td>Values employee diversity and free bias in the decision-making process.</td>
<td>Not enough to research and look through bias to make decisions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic</td>
<td>The leadership model encourages creative participation by group members to solve problems and build consensus before taking action.</td>
<td>People's ideas and buy-ins are needed to build trust, commitment, and respect.</td>
<td>Endless meetings and not sufficient information or competency to make good decisions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relational</td>
<td>The leadership model leads with the whole person thinking, expressing emotion, and motivating.</td>
<td>Staying open during times of stress, inspiring, motivating, feeling of relational safety.</td>
<td>It should be used in conjunction with other leadership styles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Servant</td>
<td>The leadership model fosters emotional intelligence and stability, placing interest above others rather than our own.</td>
<td>Brings people together on critical themes, clear decision-making, and communication.</td>
<td>Leaders might feel &quot;weight&quot; on their shoulders due to the responsibility.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distributed</td>
<td>The leadership model encourages collaboration, inclusivity and distributes other multiple individuals.</td>
<td>Capacity building and attributes of collaboration and clear communication.</td>
<td>The specific experience, limited accountability, generates uncertainty.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
developing and implementing strategic school improvement plans, supporting, evaluating, and developing teacher quality and goal setting with accountability, strategic financial and human resource management, and collaborating with other schools.

Educational leadership can be categorized into several educational leadership models. In Table 1, Leadership Models, organizes leadership models addressed in the study as patterns of practice in education with their own strengths and weaknesses. Leadership models consist of leaders who apply influence, the purpose of the exercise of that influence, and its outcomes. (Kapur, 2018).

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter was beneficial because it establishes leadership models and competencies that educational leaders should possess in an educational setting and improving a school climate. Most of these patterns of practice are not enough during a crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic. At the same time, the limited literature contributes to the research question. Some patterns of practice emerging support educational leadership during a pandemic but are encouraged not to be used alone. The following chapter is on the methodology, which will explain the rationale, data collection, recruiting of participants, and data analysis of this study.
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to examine the decision-making process that school stakeholders engaged in when it came to determining the best "return to school" teaching model for students. The study was non-experimental since it lacked manipulating an independent variable (Jhangiani, Chiang, Cuttler, and Leighton, 2015). The study consisted of research questions that were broad, exploratory, and intended to describe the how. This chapter describes the study's research methodology, including a rationale, data collection, recruiting participants, data analysis, and concluding with a summary.

Rationale

To lead during a pandemic, leaders must possess competencies and leadership qualities to engage district stakeholders to make decisions that can determine the best "return to school" teaching model. The leadership models presented in this study explain qualities school leaders have exhibited in the past but not during a pandemic. For the first time, the complexity of this pandemic has left school leaders and district stakeholders looking for answers on how to engage and determine the best decision-making process.

The rational of this study was to answer how school stakeholders engaged in the decision-making process when it came to determining the best "return to school" teaching model for students. The study also identified leadership qualities exhibited by school leaders upon engaging stakeholders. The expected outcomes of the study were that district leaders showed more than one leadership style and highly engaged all district stakeholders in the decision-making process to determine the best "return to school" teaching model for students.
Data Collection

The study was mixed-method research using quantitative and qualitative research. A survey and a set of interview questions were used in the study to examine the decision-making process of district stakeholders engaged in when it came to determining the best "return to school" teaching model for students. Also, to identify those leadership qualities that school leaders exhibited upon engaging stakeholders in the decision-making process.

The survey consisted of 10 questions with a Likert scale, rating of 1- not important, 2- not so important, 3- somewhat important, 4- very important, 5- very important. Question number 5 in the survey was open-ended to allow the participant to fill in. The survey was administered to 12 individual participants through an electronic link by Survey Monkey. It was sent to school leaders, teachers, classifieds, and parents. Participants were asked if they held a leadership position in the district, followed by how they would rate their capacity to lead.

Additionally, participants were asked what they thought was the most important decision the district should make when reopening and believed they received sufficient input from all district stakeholders. In particular, question number 5 participants were asked to type in leadership qualities they felt were the most important in the decision-making process. Finally, for the last set of questions, participants were asked if they believed parent associations, teachers, and school board members' input was important for determining the best "return to school" teaching model for students.

There were two separate sets of interview questions. The first five questions were for school leaders like Superintendents, Assistant Superintendents, or School Board Members. The second set of five interview questions were for teachers, classified, and
parents. The interview questions asked participants what had been the most challenging
decision they had to make regarding safely reopening schools. The participants were also
asked to reflect on their initial thoughts about how they would continue to provide safety,
instruction, and meals. Next, the participants were questioned with what qualities they
believed were necessary to lead during a crisis. In the last two questions, participants
were asked if all decisions required all district stakeholders' input and if any protocols
were in place on receiving and giving information during a crisis.

**Recruiting Participants**

This study involved one school district in the surrounding counties, Los Angeles,
Orange, and San Bernardino. The study focused on different counties rather than districts
because every county reported different COVID-19 infection rates and have their own
Local Health Agencies and Education of Offices.

A Superintendent, teacher, classified, and parent leaders within each school
district were selected to be interviewed and surveyed. The study had 12 participants
evenly distributed across the three counties. One specific Superintendent had joined the
district after school closures, while the other two Superintendents experience was about
5-7 years in the position. Teachers, classified, and parent leaders varied in educational
backgrounds, years of experience, and professional development. The participants
received a flyer that described the study. They signed a consent form before having the
interview via zoom and followed by a survey link. Interviews ranged between 45
minutes to an hour. Table 2 describes the 12 participants.
**Table 2**

*Participants From Los Angeles, Orange, San Bernardino Counties*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Los Angeles County</th>
<th>Orange County</th>
<th>San Bernardino County</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Superintendents/Assistant</td>
<td>A -1</td>
<td>B -1</td>
<td>C -1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superintendents Participants</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Participant</td>
<td>A -2</td>
<td>B -2</td>
<td>C -2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classified Participant</td>
<td>A -3</td>
<td>B -3</td>
<td>C -3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Participant</td>
<td>A -4</td>
<td>B -4</td>
<td>C -4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Data Analysis**

The qualitative and quantitative data were analyzed by triangulating the themes from the survey evidence and interview/stakeholder comments. The data analysis illustrated themes of engagement/input, decisions about safely reopening, leadership qualities, and leadership models. Every district was compared with the same survey evidence and analyzed with the evidence from the stakeholder comments. The analyzed data showed that the districts that engaged several district stakeholders in the decision-making process could determine the best "return model to school' teaching model for students much quicker. School leaders that exhibited leadership qualities like problem-solving, communication, collaboration, and resiliency were valued and trusted by their community. Leadership models such as Authoritative did not support the needs of the district during a pandemic.
Summary

This chapter provided the rationale to examine the decision-making process that school stakeholders engaged in when determining the best "return to school" teaching model for the students. The study answered the research question that districts that engaged and valued the input of all district stakeholders since the beginning of school closures made a precise and quicker response to safely reopening schools. Leaders' leadership qualities allowed for a relational, servant, and distributed model.
CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH FINDINGS

The purpose of the study was to examine the decision-making process that school stakeholders engaged in when it came to determining the best "return to school" teaching model for students. In addition, the researcher identified those leadership qualities exhibited by school leaders upon engaging stakeholders in the decision-making process. The study involved one school district selected in each surrounding county, Los Angeles, Orange, and San Bernardino. Within each school district, one school was chosen to interview stakeholders and gather feedback to gain insight into the best leadership qualities/styles that were most effective in selecting the best learning model in safely reopening schools.

The findings presented in this chapter discuss the themes from the survey evidence and interview/stakeholder comments in engagement/input, decisions about reopening, leadership qualities, and leadership models of each district—the chapter ends with a summary of the significance of those findings.

Analysis

The selection of three schools to gain stakeholder feedback was chosen because each county follows different Local Health Agency recommendations and reported infection rates of COVID-19. Twelve district stakeholders were selected as participants, representing key groups in the decision-making process, such as superintendents, teachers, classified, and parent groups. The survey questions were analyzed using categorical data and Likert-scale ratings.

To better understand the data collection, the study illustrated four themes: engagement/input, decisions about reopening, leadership qualities, and leadership
models. The themes reflected from the evidence of the survey were compared and analyzed to the interview/stakeholder comments. It provided the study with the analysis of how district stakeholders were engaged in determining the best "return teaching" model for students and identifying the leadership qualities exhibited by school leaders in the decision-making process.

Results

The following three table presented the results from the survey evidence, the categorical data and the stakeholder comments of three themes. These three themes are engagement/input, decisions about reopening, and leadership qualities. The survey evidence is analyzed with stakeholder comments from that specific district. As shown in Table 3, the stakeholder comments do not reflect with the survey data. According to the survey results (Appendix C), 75% of the participants believed all decisions should have input from all stakeholders. Still, participants stated that not all decisions needed input from all district stakeholders. In addition, 25% of the participants strongly agreed that their input was valued compared to the 3% that disagreed. Participants in District A mentioned it was difficult to feel valued when the teacher's union sought answers, requested meetings, and wanted to participate in the decision-making process (Appendix C).

The next theme, decisions about reopening, two categories resulted in 36% of the participants stating that the most important decision in reopening schools was a teaching model (instruction) and "other." Stakeholder comments of District A reflected that the findings of reopening were geared to "other," like constructing a plan, negotiating
working conditions, and providing a fair and equitable work environment for their members (Appendix D).

Table 3

District A – Survey Evidence and Interview/Stakeholder Comments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District A</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Survey Evidence</th>
<th>Interview/Stakeholder Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Engagement/Input</td>
<td>75% of the participants believe all decisions should have input from all stakeholders.</td>
<td>A Superintendent participant stated that not all decisions need to have all stakeholder input, especially when distributing meals and access to technology.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>25% of the participants strongly agree while 3% disagree their input was valued.</td>
<td>A parent participant expressed that their input was not important for all decisions, but it would be a good idea, so the district heard the community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>A teacher participant mentioned it was difficult to feel valued when the union asked questions, requested meetings, and wanted to be involved in the decision-making process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Decisions about reopening</td>
<td>36% of the participants stated that the most important decision in reopening schools was teaching models (instruction)</td>
<td>A Superintendent participant stated that constructing a plan that will work for everyone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>36% of the participants stated that the most important decision in reopening schools was &quot;other.&quot;</td>
<td>A teacher participant expressed negotiating work conditions and safe return for the teacher and saving teaching positions the most challenging decisions during the pandemic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Leadership qualities</td>
<td>Problem Solver, Resilient, Communicator, Collaborator</td>
<td>A classified participant mentioned that providing our members is a fair and equitable work environment for their members.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The top four leadership qualities from the survey (Appendix D) were problem solver, resilient, communicator, and collaborator. District A participants expressed that resiliency and collaboration were essential to lead a district and indicated that transparency and emotional intelligence were necessary for the decision-making process.

Table 4 shows District B participants mentioned that their need to collaborate as quickly as possible with everyone in the schools and find solutions would benefit their community. Reflected that 75% of the participants believed all decisions should have input from stakeholders. A classified participant expressed that their input was valued, which corresponded with the survey data that 25% strongly agreed with their input was valued in the decision making process. District B participant’s comments also reflected the survey evidence that the Superintendent stated the most important decision about reopening was a teaching model while a teacher and classified participants expressed that the most challenging decisions about reopening was safety for staff and identifying which jobs were considered essential.

Leadership qualities for District B, were clearly mentioned by all participants as resulted in the survey as, problem solver, communication, collaborator, and also added the qualities of empowering and supportive. A classified participant had expressed that having emotional intelligence during this time was a leadership quality needed to lead during a pandemic.
### Table 4

**District B – Survey Evidence and Interview/Stakeholder Comments**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District B</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Survey Evidence</th>
<th>Interview/Stakeholder Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Engagement/Input</td>
<td>75% of the participants believe all decisions should have input from all stakeholders. 25% of the participants strongly agree while 3% disagree their input was valued</td>
<td>A Superintendent participant stated that we need to collaborate as quickly as possible with everyone in the schools. The more we could talk and look for solutions, the quicker we can support our community. We sent out information via the district website and held meetings via video. A teacher participant expressed that during the uncertainty of the pandemic, the district has made it possible to always include them in the decision-making process about reopening schools by setting up meetings. A classified participant mentioned that their input has been valued and believes it reflects great leadership by having meetings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Decisions about reopening</td>
<td>36% of the participants stated that the most important decision in reopening schools was teaching models (instruction) 36% of the participants stated that the most important decision in reopening schools was &quot;other.&quot;</td>
<td>A Superintendent participant stated instruction either be online or hybrid, and they must make sure they are servicing all of their students equally. A teacher participant expressed that safety for staff has been the most challenging decision. A classified participant mentioned that the most challenging decision was to identify which jobs are considered essential and justify which members must be on campus.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Leadership qualities</td>
<td>Problem Solver  Resilient  Communicator  Collaborator</td>
<td>A Superintendent participant stated communication, support, empowerment, and problem solver and communication with everyone, teachers, staff, and parents. A teacher participant expressed that an essential skill, or quality, is to be a problem solver. A good leader must recognize the problem and look at the bigger picture. A parent participant mentioned that communication and collaboration with many different stakeholders at the district are leadership qualities needed to lead during a pandemic.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In Table 5, District C participants proved that 75% of the participants believed all decisions should have input from all stakeholders. Along with 25% strongly agreed stakeholder input was valued because a parent participant expressed how the district set up a protocol and felt parent voice was valued. The classified participant mentioned that the district had done a great job valuing their input in the decision-making process.

District C participants stated that the most challenging decision about reopening was providing the best teaching model, safety, and fair working conditions, reflecting that 36% of the survey participants stated that the teaching model (instruction) was the most important decision along with "other."

Leadership qualities that resulted from the survey mentioned in the stakeholder comments, particularly a Superintendent participant who stated empathy, trust, and distributing of responsibilities were also needed qualities. A teacher participant added that transparency was essential, and a parent participant believed that support and honesty attributed to leadership qualities besides those reported in the survey. Overall, the stakeholder comments from District C support the evidence provided by the study in the three themes.
### Table 5

**District C – Survey Evidence and Interview/Stakeholder Comments**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District C</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Survey Evidence</th>
<th>Interview/Stakeholder Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Engagement/Input</td>
<td>75% of the participants believe all decisions should have input from all stakeholders.</td>
<td>A Superintendent participant stated we have protocols for almost every crisis, but not a pandemic. We sent out surveys, meeting invitations, and town halls via zoom to many district stakeholders. A parent participant expressed that the district has created a protocol that allows for parent input. Our voice matters. A classified participant mentioned that the district had done a great job valuing their input in the decision-making process. We have not agreed on things, but they have collaborated and worked well together for the better of the school community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Decisions about reopening</td>
<td>36% of the participants stated that the most important decision in reopening schools was teaching models (instruction).</td>
<td>A Superintendent participant stated that the most challenging decision to find the correct timing for students to return to campus, provide the best instructional models and safety for all on and off-campus. A teacher participant expressed the importance to continue teaching their students with the safety of their union members. A classified participant mentioned making sure working conditions are fair and safe for everyone returning to campus.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Leadership qualities</td>
<td>Problem Solver Resilient Communicator Collaborator</td>
<td>A Superintendent participant stated that communication, empathy, trust, and distributing responsibilities. We are experiencing this pandemic together. Being empathetic fosters trust and allows for action to take place swiftly. Distributing duties to different groups and trusting that they are doing the right thing is very important. A classified participant expressed that transparency, clear communication, and collaborations with many vital groups are essential during this pandemic. A parent participant mentioned that being a clear communicator, supportive, honest are leadership qualities of a leader.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In Table 6, Sliding Leadership Models Within All Three Districts, compares the survey results (Appendix E) of the type of leadership models used to make decisions on how to reopen schools and the stakeholder comments safely. According to the study results, 33.3% of the participants believed that decisions were made using the Authoritative Leadership model, 25% of the participants believed Democratic Leadership Model, and 16.7% of the participants believed in Affiliative and Distributed Leadership.

District A reflected that the decisions were made using the Authoritative Leadership model because participants stated that quick decisions about meals and technology were made without all-district stakeholder input. Classified and parent participants of District A mentioned that no protocols or proceeds had been exercised, and decisions about reopening schools were exercised during school board meetings during behind-closed-door sessions.

District B reflected that decisions were made using the Relational and Servant Leadership model. Participants mentioned that teachers and classified members had been included since the school closures happened and provided a sense of inclusiveness in the decision-making process. Clear communication was vital to keeping all of the district stakeholders informed.

District C reflected that decisions were made using the Relational and Distributed Leadership model because participants expressed that district leaders distributed responsibilities among different stakeholders, all teachers, classified, and parents were a part of the decision-making process, which allowed for everyone to collaborate and work well with each other.
### Table 6

**Sliding Leadership Models Within All Three Districts**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Districts</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Survey Evidence</th>
<th>Interview/Stakeholder Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Leadership Models</td>
<td>33.3% of the participants chose Authoritative leadership</td>
<td>A Superintendent participant stated that decisions about meals and technology were made quickly without asking for stakeholder input because those resources were urgent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>25% of the participants chose Democratic leadership</td>
<td>A classified member expressed that no protocols or procedure had been exercised during this pandemic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>16.7% of the participants chose Affiliative and Distributed leadership</td>
<td>A parent member mentioned that reopening schools were made at school board meetings behind closed doors. It was frustrating because decisions were not discussed, just told.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Leadership Models</td>
<td>33.3% of the participants chose Authoritative leadership</td>
<td>A Superintendent participant stated that inclusiveness is an important leadership style during a pandemic because we need the engagement and input from different stakeholders.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>25% of the participants chose Democratic leadership</td>
<td>A teacher participant expressed that the district has always included teachers in reopening schools.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>16.7% of the participants chose Affiliative and Distributed leadership</td>
<td>A classified member mentioned that several decisions were made at the district level before the pandemic. Still, since school closures, the district has included as many different stakeholders in the decision-making process. We all have a say in the outcome.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Leadership Models</td>
<td>33.3% of the participants chose Authoritative leadership</td>
<td>A Superintendent participant stated we sent out parent surveys and have been working diligently on a plan that will support our students receiving instructions and returning safely with the support of all district stakeholders.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>25% of the participants chose Democratic leadership</td>
<td>A teacher participant expressed that the district has included teachers, classified, and parents in the decision-making process. They have kept clear communication and transparency. They have distributed leadership and trusted their community in the process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>16.7% of the participants chose Affiliative and Distributed leadership</td>
<td>A classified member mentioned that the district had done a great job of involving as many district stakeholders in the decision-making process. The district has collaborated and worked well to better support the community.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter Summary

This chapter analyzed the survey evidence and interview/stakeholder comments that the researcher conducted involved stakeholders from one school in neighboring counties. The researcher surveyed and interviewed 12 evenly distributed participants from all stakeholder groups: Superintendents, teachers, classified, and parents. From their feedback, 75% of the participants believed all decisions should have input from stakeholders. It corresponds with District B, and C. 36% of participants stated that instruction and "other" were the most important decision about reopening schools reflects all Districts agreed in both areas. Leadership qualities per district were similar to problem solver, resilient, communicator, and collaborator. Still, in contrast, District B added inclusiveness while District C expressed that distribution of responsibilities is another leadership quality necessary to have during a pandemic. Lastly, leadership models used to make decisions during the decision-making process resulted in a 33.3% Authoritative leadership model that District A exhibited. In contrast, District B showed Relational and Servant and District C a Relational and Distributed leadership models.
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The COVID-19 pandemic has altered how educational leadership has responded and continues to respond to school closures. Of the school districts selected for the study, it is evident that they chose to begin the school with different learning models based on different approaches to the decisions making process. Through a survey and stakeholder interviews, the researcher identified leadership qualities and models that supported the involvement of school stakeholders in the decision-making process and styles that hindered that same process. Data results showed that leaders who possessed qualities such as problem-solving, resiliency, strong communication, and collaboration were the top four most important qualities to lead a district during a pandemic. Overall, the study suggested that a broad range of stakeholder input, a combination of leadership qualities, and a clear protocol was crucial for the decision-making process to be collaborative, equitable, and inclusive for all.

This chapter describes conclusions about the study and a discussion of the results relative to the literature review and theoretical framework. Also, implications for changes to practice and recommendations for future research with a concluding statement.

Conclusions

School districts have been working hard since school closures happened last March 2020. The researcher asked, “What is the decision-making process that school stakeholders engaged in when determining the best return teaching model?” Also, the researcher inquired which leadership qualities were exhibited by school leaders during the decision-making process?” In this study, the researcher found that districts that included and valued as many district stakeholders as possible safely reopened sooner.
The study showed evidence reflected in the survey and interview data of the findings.

A theme across all stakeholder groups was engagement and input. The importance of the districts collaborating with all district stakeholders regarding the decision-making process revealed that engaging them with surveys, meetings, and town halls, district stakeholders' input was used and valued. The districts made more straightforward decisions about the best "return to school" model. In contrast, districts that did not include all stakeholders and did not create clear protocols to engage all district stakeholders in the decision-making process took longer to choose which teaching model to implement at the start of the school year. By having a clear decision, districts returned much sooner and safer, while districts did not include all stakeholders that took longer to return or have not returned to campus at all.

Another theme across all stakeholder groups was the most important decision made about reopening schools. The districts that felt the most important decision was the teaching model where the districts that had more district stakeholder input, felt valued, and safely reopened. Otherwise, districts that felt the most important decision was to create a plan lacked the efficiency to engage all district stakeholders to decide the best "return to school" teaching model. Notably, teacher and classified stakeholders stated that the safety of their members was most important, but that did not affect the decision of the teaching model the districts chose.

The preferred leadership qualities exhibited by school leaders were those who were problem solvers. During a pandemic, problem-solving was a leadership quality that was highly valued, along with solid communication and collaboration skills and the ability to be resilient under challenging circumstances. Other leadership qualities were
akin to several districts that facilitated stakeholder engagement in the decision-making process, such as empowering, emotional intelligence, transparency, and empathy. To the district stakeholders in this study, an effective leader possessed various leadership qualities, and the most successful were able to adapt to the different situations and achieve their goals (Shultz, 2020).

Under ordinary circumstances, some districts might lead under the authoritative/traditional models. This leadership model dictates policies, decides what goals are achieved, and with little to no input from the district stakeholders. According to this study, authoritative leadership did not facilitate a swift and smooth decision-making process during a pandemic. The data and stakeholder input suggested that leaders who did not encourage broad stakeholder engagement or clear decision-making protocol took longer to determine the best "return to school" model for students.

During a pandemic, democratic, affiliative, and distributed leadership models reflected the survey. Still, in contrast, the stakeholder comments reflected that relational, servant, and distributed leadership models are best to lead during a pandemic. Participants identified problem-solving as an essential quality that reflects the democratic leadership model. The district stakeholders in the study stated that an effective leader must possess a combination of various "leadership qualities and models," and those that were most successful in engaging stakeholders in determining the best "return to school" teaching model was made quickly and efficiently.

In the study, the survey and interview data reflected the expressed need by stakeholders to flexibly utilize several qualities and models to lead and ensure total buy-in from stakeholders during a pandemic.
**Discussion**

Since March 2020, when surrounding schools closed their doors to in-person instruction, local education agencies introduced two relatively new teaching models as alternatives to the traditional in-person, remote learning, and hybrid instruction (asynchronous and synchronous). Districts B and C actively facilitated the decision-making process. The teaching model for implementing the safe reopening of schools created protocols to encourage active stakeholder engagement and input. In contrast, the leadership in District A in this study made decisions without the input of all district stakeholders. In terms of literature cited in this study, they led from an authoritative leadership style, which was the least desired and least effective when leading in a pandemic. 33.3% of the 12 participants surveyed were authoritative as the leadership model exhibited at their district. Teachers, classified, and parents disliked this leadership model because input was not valued. They sought answers and became frustrated when decisions were made at board meetings.

The discussions involving the most critical decisions regarding reopening schools, instruction, and student/employee safety, were the two of the most challenging topics. The involvement of multiple factors, health, safety, access to learning, student connectivity, and the importance of each stakeholder group having the ability to share their thoughts, ask questions, and express concerns were evidence of the complexity of these two topics.

There is no end date for the pandemic at this moment. The absolute importance of keeping the schools free from COVID-19 meant that the decision-making process was better facilitated by those who took a more flexible, relational, servant, and distributed
leadership approach. Rather than authoritative, because of the necessity of engaging more stakeholder voices and the creating and maintaining clear protocols, and thoughtful planning involved. Therefore, leaders who were open to change and flexibility were reflected in their leadership styles. District B and C actively sought engagement from all stakeholders and avoided an authoritarian approach to leading in a pandemic were more successful at stakeholder engagement, input, and buy-in that lead to determining the best "return to school" teaching model.

The data analysis revealed across three districts that more engagement and district stakeholder input about the decisions of teaching models and safely reopening showed evidence of exhibiting the kind of leadership qualities needed in a pandemic, above all problem solving effective communication, and collaboration. District B and C began the stakeholder engagement process at the start of the school closures. Those who participated in the interviews gave evidence of this in that they responded that they were most satisfied that their input was valued. Additionally, effective leaders must possess qualities of resiliency, empowerment of others, collaboration, and ability to problem-solve that reflect relational, servant, and distributed leadership styles. Competent leaders build trust through clear communication, focus on team oversell, have a sense of urgency, and create external partnerships (Fullan, 2020). District stakeholders believed district leaders should lead during a pandemic. Survey responses from 10 out of 12 participants and reported from the interviews expressed the need for leaders to possess the qualities of a strong communicator. It is important to note that both Districts B and C had school leaders that modeled relational, servant, and distributed leadership, fostered trust among district stakeholders, and contributed to a faster resolution of the decision-making process.
on how to open schools safely.

**Implications**

Educational leadership during a pandemic has been transformative. Leadership associated with a position or a role, keeping things on track, and being responsible for school’s performance was the norm. A new educational toolbox of leadership qualities and protocols have emerged from this study that supports districts to lead efficiently in future school closures. This toolbox consists of leadership styles that allow all the district stakeholders to give and receive input regarding how to open schools safely. From the moment school closures happen, all district stakeholder should be engaged through clear communication, meetings, and feedback to better support the community.

The authoritative or traditional educational leadership model has expectations, desire to achieve success, and is calculated and technical but the pandemic has proven otherwise. An effective leader must encompass the skills of a relational, servant, and distributive leader. These three models are continuous and overlap each other in many areas. As school districts are teaching students the 21 century skills, college career readiness, and offering Professional Learning Communities to administrators and teachers, school leaders should come together in a collaborative extensive network and support one another to master the leadership qualities such as problem solver, communicator, collaborator, and resiliency to lead a school district and push through a pandemic.
Recommendations for Future Research

This topic would benefit from future research, especially in the collaborative decision-making process. Research should focus on what decisions would necessitate the input of all stakeholders versus the decisions that a select few leaders can make. Another area that would benefit from the future study is creating valuable protocols needed as a structure for the practical input of all stakeholders. Lastly, it is necessary to prepare and teach future district leaders how to pivot through a crisis with awareness of using three essential leadership models, relational, servant, and distributed leadership models.

Concluding Statement

For the first time, a pandemic has closed schools for in-person instruction, requiring the need for new protocols and procedures to support the reopening of schools safely. The pandemic has been an immense change in education, not just negative but positive. It has given us the opportunity to explore the old traditional leadership models that no longer serve and to be gradually replaced with relational, servant, and distributed leadership. These leadership models are not new but are effective and essential to lead a school district during a crisis and in ordinary times. Schools and districts can be transformed where all input is valued and used and decisions are made in unison. The new educational tool box is here to stay.
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https://doi.org/10.1108/jpcc-05-2020-0019


https://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/he/hn/strongtogethertimeline.asp


APPENDIX A: SURVEY QUESTIONS

Educational Leadership Response during a Pandemic

1. Do you currently hold a leadership position in the District?
   - Yes
   - No

2. How would rate your capacity to lead?
   - Confident
   - Somewhat Confident
   - Not Confident

3. Which school closures, what is the most important decision you believe the district should make regarding school safety?
   - Instruction Delivery
   - Meals
   - Safety for Students, Parents, and District Personnel
   - Other

4. Do you believe all decisions about "reopening schools safely" should have the input of all District Stakeholders?
   - Yes
   - No

5. What leadership qualities do you feel are most important in making decisions about reopening safely?

6. How important is that Client Associations or Parent Input in "reopening" school plan?
   - Extremely Important
   - Very Important
   - Somewhat Important
   - Not at all Important

7. How important is the Teacher Input in the "reopening" school plan?
   - Extremely Important
   - Very Important
   - Somewhat Important
   - Not at all Important

8. How important is the School Board Input in the "reopening" school plan?
   - Extremely Important
   - Very Important
   - Somewhat Important
   - Not at all Important

   (Survey questions and options continued on the next page...)
APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Superintendents/Assistant/School Board
1. What has been the most challenging decision the district has had to make regarding reopening schools safely?

2. When school districts were asked to close, what were your initial thoughts about how the district will continue to provide safety, instruction, and meals?

3. With leadership in crisis in mind, what qualities do you believe are necessary to have to lead a school district during a pandemic?

4. Are there any decisions that can be made during the school closures that do not need input from all district leaders?

5. During this pandemic, is there a protocol in place to give and receive input from all district leaders?

Teacher/Union/Classified
1. As a district leader, is your input required in making decisions about reopening schools safely?

2. With leadership in crisis in mind, what qualities do you believe are necessary to have to lead a school district during a pandemic?

3. During this pandemic, is there a protocol in place to give and receive input from all different district leaders?

4. What has been the most challenging decision the union has had to make in regards to opening up schools safely?

5. While being involved in the decision-making process, do you feel the union's input was valued?
APPENDIX C: SURVEY RESULTS

Figure C1. All Participants Share Input

Figure C2. Participants Input was Valued in Decision-Making Process
APPENDIX D: SURVEY RESULTS

Figure D1. Important Decisions about Reopening Schools

Table D1

Leadership Qualities’’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leadership Qualities</th>
<th>Frequency, n (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Problem Solver</td>
<td>11 (91.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resilient</td>
<td>10 (83.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong Communicator</td>
<td>10 (83.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empowering</td>
<td>9 (75)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborator</td>
<td>9 (75)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transparency</td>
<td>7 (58.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Intelligence</td>
<td>6 (50)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empathy</td>
<td>6 (50)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accountable</td>
<td>5 (41.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honest</td>
<td>5 (41.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humility</td>
<td>4 (33.3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX E: SURVEY RESULTS

Figure E1. Leadership Models Used to Make Decisions