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Creating Inclusive Practices Through a Culture of Caring in School Leadership: A Principal's Perspective

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CREATING INCLUSIVE PRACTICES THROUGH

A CULTURE OF CARING IN SCHOOL

LEADERSHIP: A PRINCIPAL'S

PERSPECTIVE

by

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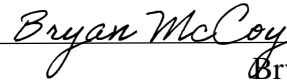We hereby recommend that the dissertation prepared by

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ABSTRACT

Elementary educational research and practice have relied heavily on academic success and achievement based on standardized test scores, sometimes to the exclusion of other vital aspects of education, preparing each student to reach their full potential mentally, physically, socially, and emotionally. This dissertation posits that the leaders of schools must establish a caring culture to create positive outcomes in teacher satisfaction, student attendance, and student performance. It further explains that we must look at the leadership to determine their qualities and characteristics for this to be possible. This dissertation presents the role a Culture of Caring plays in a diverse elementary school in a high-poverty, urban, suburban, and rural area in a southern state in the United States. It also describes the leadership knowledge, skills, dispositions, and critical attributes needed to create a positive climate and culture shift in a school. The school leader implemented a pilot program to explore the Culture of Care theory of practice that utilizes a social-emotional approach for school improvement to promote positive outcomes. The premise is that if the leadership of a school or organization intentionally models a Culture of Caring by showing genuine interest in individuals and their work, this will improve their academic performance over time and improve many aspects of their school, including teacher morale and student attendance.

A caring act, by definition, is a non-verbal or verbal gesture that displays a genuine interest in another person's social, emotional, mental, and physical well-being, simultaneously recognizing race, culture, and socio-economic status as part of one's identity. Creating a caring culture involves respecting, valuing, and embracing the person's culture with a nonjudgmental and value-based perspective. The Culture of Caring leadership model promotes caring across the school, then becomes contagious and spreads to the teachers and students, creating a more successful.

This retrospective autoethnography describes and brings meaning to school reform efforts within one school site, Sunrise Elementary School (pseudonym), located in a diverse and high-poverty area of a medium-sized town in the southern United States as described through the journal entries, agendas, interviews, and notes, and trials, of one school principal. This thesis describes the daily struggles of the principal and her leadership team to understand their roles at the school to ensure that all children within the school receive the best educational experience possible. This thesis also argues that one way of representing this complex network of school improvement efforts is to look at all decisions through a lens of caring.

APPROVAL FOR SCHOLARLY DISSEMINATION

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DEDICATION AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I dedicate this paper to my maternal grandparents, Doug and Louise Robison, who raised me and showed me what hard work and perseverance look like. They encouraged me, believed in me, and were very proud of me. They both passed away during this process but would have been very happy to see my finished work.

I want to extend a special acknowledgment to my husband, John Mainiero, who supported me fully in this endeavor. Furthermore, I dedicate this work to my family, who put up with me when I could not wash the dishes, take them to practice, or help them with their homework. There were times during this process when I could not be there for them like I wished I could. I would also like to acknowledge the various family members, friends, and neighbors who helped by taking my children places or helping out in other ways. It truly does take a village to raise children.

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As a novice principal of a large and diverse public school, I searched for a way to improve climate and culture. I had to help my students and teachers find solutions for interruptions to the learning environment by children who were fighting, struggling with inappropriate social norms, throwing tantrums, or having defiant behavioral outbursts in class. The school also struggled with low teacher morale, high teacher and student absences, negative relationships among staff, and academic declines. I hope this reflection on what I went through as a young principal will help other school leaders find solutions to the various issues plaguing our public schools.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Educators once talked seriously about producing 'better adults' encouraging the development of all aspects of a completely moral life (Noddings, 2017). Nel Noddings stated that incorporating caring is advised as both a goal of moral education and as an aim in an ethical approach to teaching. When every child lacks access to a safe and secure environment, there is a problem with educational equity and opportunity (Noddings, 2017). Noddings describes four components of a model for moral education: modeling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation. Her model requires teachers and students to spend more time together to establish trust. Her model and perspective of caring can be used to make recommendations on research for teaching practices (Noddings, 2017).

John Macmurray states, "The relation between the teacher and those who learn from him is one of the typical human relations that is fundamental." (Macmurray, p. 17, 1964). Louis and Murphy (2017) postulate that the leaders' role in caring is essential and that principal trust is directly related to teachers' perceptions of principal caring. Macmurray states that education must be a relation in which two human beings care for one another and help one another (Macmurray, 1964). According to him, this is the secret to successful schools.

To change educational outcomes, we must address Maslow's before Bloom's (McLeod, 2007). If we do not meet the basic needs of children: safety, food, love, water,

and emotional needs, then we will not be able to meet their needs educationally. They can only focus on the instruction if their basic needs are met.

<p align="center">**Problem**</p>

In his book, *Start with Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action*, Simon Sinek discusses how leadership is not about being in charge. He says that leadership is more about taking care of those in your charge (Sinek, 2019). Caring goes beyond a particular behavior or action provided on behalf of others; it is a central quality of human relationships. Caring also goes beyond feelings of concern and sentiment about others. It refers to the matter, manner, and motivation of personal and professional actions and interactions (Noddings, 2006).

In schools, caring is sometimes misdirected, such as caring about test scores, grades, accountability, or even procedures, more than caring about relationships or people (Chachage et al., 2019). When one considers what qualities, skills, knowledge, and disposition caring leaders possess, they may find the answer to having more successful schools. School leaders must be detectives and try to find out why problems exist before solutions can be effectively developed. Understanding leaders' knowledge, skills, dispositions, and motivations is a critical aspect of understanding and school problems.

One such problem in Louisiana is the number of children being sent to the Juvenile Justice System for violent acts or misdemeanors. In 2021, a Juvenile Justice system in a large Louisiana city reported that 304 school-aged children came to detention in their facility. Sixty-six of those students came back a second time for another offense. The leaders of this organization looked at the files of all sixty-six repeat offenders, asking staff to identify one pro-social adult (functional and an advocate for the child) in the life

of those children. Out of the sixty-six, not one had a person who they could list as an advocate for their well-being (see Appendix A). In this same area, during the 2020-21 school year, this parish handled a 300% increase in threat assessments (students who have threatened to harm themselves or harm others) from 329 in the prior year to 949. There was also an increase in violent crime of youths in the area detentions for murder jumped from 5 to 11 and gun charges in youths increased from 70 to 110 in 2021.

Current legislation continues to put caring and intentional socio-emotional learning for students on the back burner as if it is not essential to teach students to be "good" people before we teach them to be "smart" people (Reid, 2019). The idea that teaching and learning must be redirected in light of the current climate emergency is now widely acknowledged and supported (UNESCO & UNFCCC, 2016). A Nation at Risk (Gardner, 1983), The No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 (NCLB; Bush, 2001), Race to the Top (Obama, 2009) and subsequent accountability laws and policies have transformed education and educators to primarily focusing on test scores and standardization and forgetting about the child as a whole person (Howard, et. al, 2016). Standardized assessments are administered across large student populations to measure both student learning outcomes and the effectiveness of teachers and administrators, and they have been the sole basis for most state-level reporting on school performance frameworks (Polikoff, et al., 2014). This lack of focus on the whole child in current education policy priorities produces unintended consequences that increase loneliness, suicide, crime, and inequality (Anderson 2009; World Health Organization, 2004; Massey, 2019).

In the past, educators talked seriously about producing 'better adults' encouraging the development of all aspects of a completely moral life (Noddings, 2017). Yet, now there seems to be an overemphasis on quantifiable measures of performance indicators such as standardized test scores (Noddings, 2013). Teachers are held to time constraints such as pacing guides that force them to only focus on academics and further perpetuate the issue of putting students' mental health on the back burner. This focus only on academics creates an imbalance and frustration when the whole child's needs are not met, and they are being taught material at a pace that is above their level or given to them in a developmentally inappropriate way. Frequently, teachers and school leaders are not trained in the areas related to mental health and trauma, and they do not have the time or knowledge to address those needs (Ackoff et al., 2008; Shields, 2017).

One way to help build capacity with educators in this area is by emphasizing Maslow's Hierarchy in their pre-service coursework or during job embedded professional development. There are five levels in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. From the bottom of the pyramid upwards, the needs are physiological (food and clothing), safety (security), love and belonging (friendship), esteem, and self-actualization (Maslow, 1962). Bloom's Taxonomy is a framework for categorizing educational goals of knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation; this framework has been applied by generations of K-12 teachers and college instructors in their teaching (Keller & Willert, 2015). When students' primary care and emotional needs are unmet (Maslow's pyramid), teachers cannot effectively move students to reach educational goals and higher-order thinking (Harris, 2022; Maslow, 1943).

Improving school climate and culture is one-way school leaders can respond to the need. The *We Care Schools* initiative was developed in response to the above situation and as a path to putting Maslow's pyramid first in schools (see Appendix I). It has been developed to meet all students' social and emotional needs. *We Care Schools* is a framework for caring about the students first developed by one elementary school in Louisiana in partnership with Community Renewal International®. To begin, a school must be intentional about caring (McCarter, 2022). Rita Pierson, a former educator, explains how one of the things that we rarely discuss in education is the value and importance of human connection (Pierson, 2013). John Maxwell stated in his book on leadership that people do not care how much you know, until they know how much you care (Maxwell, 2002). A caring culture is both a strategy and an outcome. It provides a platform for adding new skills that grow the relational capacities of the school environment and the local community. A caring leadership team or administration's support can be associated with positive school student outcomes (Waerness, 1996). Caring leaders can contribute to a sense of being known and feelings of belonging and relational trust, among other aspects of social integration (Crosnoe, 2011; Scanlan & López, 2012).

Significance of the Problem

Caring school leadership is defined as loving, cultivating caring communities in schools, and developing contexts of caring beyond the school (Noddings, 2005). This type of caring is intentional and a primary focus of the leader. The school leadership must care about the relationships built between teachers, students, parents, community members, employees, and all other school stakeholders. In problematic situations, rules

and procedures must always be carefully reassessed, or even set aside, in favor of a direct meeting designed to create a caring relation (Noddings, 2005). In Nodding's model, caring must be intentional and take precedence over everything else (Noddings, 2017).

According to Smylie et al. (2016), if caring is to be made a priority in schools, it must be a priority of the profession itself; it must hold a prominent position in the norms and expectations for the profession's work and must be shown in the standards, policies, and procedures for school leader preparation, certification, ongoing professional development, and evaluation. Without the support of global leaders and the power players in education, developing caring school leadership will likely be difficult, particularly in this time of academic pressures and high-stakes accountability when opportunities for meaningful relationships in schools are so significant (Smylie et al., 2016).

Most educational leaders, who are in pursuit of higher quality education, have pursued a narrow focus on easily measurable phenomena (such as time on task, class size, reading fluency) and improving basic literacy and numeracy skills (Alexander, 2015). ore needs to be known about how to shift leaders' focus away from what is easily measured and increase their focus on broader aspects of educational development, including social justice, inclusive education, and pedagogical processes (Alexander, 2015). The notion of care and caring in schools, including its possible implications for academic success, needs to be addressed in comparative educational studies (Chachage et al., 2019). As early as 1943, when Maslow discussed his Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1943), educators focused on caring about children's basic needs and understood that caring about the child was essential.

Purpose

School culture is a complex construct "composed of the affective and cognitive perceptions regarding social interactions, relationships, safety, values, and beliefs held by students, teachers, administrators, and staff within a school" (Rudasill et al., 2017). Catherine Marshall describes caring as a career and demonstrates that administrators operating from an ethic of care have greater success than those who don't (Marshall et al., 1996). The purpose of the study was to describe the leadership journey of an elementary school principal whose school made significant academic improvement over a ten-year period and to describe how focusing on intentional relationship-building and caring influenced one leader's ability to create a more effective and successful school.

Research Questions

The initial research questions that guided this study were: How did the leaders of a school in need of improvement create change and make gains through implementing a culture of caring? What knowledge, skills, and dispositions did the leaders need to create change successfully? What patterns emerged from the practice of intentional caring had the most significant impact on student success?

Methodology

The current study was a qualitative, retrospective, auto-ethnographic case study. The case represented ten years in the life of an elementary school leader. The introspective and retrospective nature of autoethnography can significantly improve understanding of the relationship between the individual and the organization. Autoethnography's intensely intuitive nature enables the organizational researcher to

make that connection. The growing use of first-person narrative and a pleasing prose style in organizational research can also be beneficial. The intensely emotional and personal nature of autoethnography impacts the reader's sensemaking. Existing literature can be incorporated into the autoethnographic narrative. This methodology made sense as a structure of this study to document and explain past experiences (Keles, 2022).

Qualitative case study methodology enables researchers to explore complex phenomena deeply within some specific context. Stake characterized three main types of case study: intrinsic, instrumental, and collective (Stake, 1995). For this case study, an intrinsic method can be used to learn about a unique phenomenon: improving an elementary school by implementing a Culture of Caring. A collective method was also used as much of the documentation collected had to be found, sorted, coded, and synthesized for clarity.

Definition of Key Terms

School Culture: School culture is the personality of a school, the underlying norms and values that shape patterns of behavior, attitudes, and expectations between stakeholders in the school.

School Climate: School climate refers to the quality and character of school life. School climate consists of patterns of students, parents, and school personnel's experiences.

Social Emotional Learning (SEL): SEL is the process by which all young people and adults acquire and apply knowledge, skills, and attitudes that enable them to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals,

feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions (Payton et al., 2000).

Community Renewal® (CR): Community Renewal connects neighbors and residents to restore the foundation of safe and caring communities. CR builds hope and renews the spirit of cooperation in every segment of the community. CR focuses on three primary strategies — Renewal Team, Haven House, and Friendship House — to turn neighborhoods into safe havens of friendship and support (McCarter, 2022).

Culture of Caring: A Culture of Caring is when an intentional caring model is incorporated consistently to change the school's climate.

Response to Trauma: Trauma-informed teaching starts with understanding how trauma can impact learning and behavior. With this approach, educators consider what student behavior may be telling them. Furthermore, they reflect on their teaching practices to find ways to support students experiencing trauma.

Response to Intervention (RTI): Response to intervention, commonly referred to as RtI, focuses on "the practice of providing high-quality instruction and interventions that are matched to student need, monitoring progress frequently to make decisions about changes in instruction or goals, and applying student response data to important educational decisions."

Positive and Adverse Childhood Experiences (PACEs): "The science of PACEs refers to the research about the stunning effects of positive and adverse childhood experiences (PACEs) and how they work together to affect our lives and our organizations, systems, and communities.

Trust-Based Relational Intervention (TBRI®): is an attachment-based, trauma-informed intervention designed to meet vulnerable children's complex needs. TBRI® uses Empowering Principles to address physical needs, Connecting Principles for attachment needs, and Correcting Principles to disarm fear-based behaviors (Purvis et al., 2013).

Strategic Doing® (SD): Strategic Doing® teaches people how to form collaborations quickly, move them toward measurable outcomes and make adjustments along the way. In today's world, collaboration is essential to meet our complex challenges. Strategic Doing® enables leaders to design and guide new networks that generate innovative solutions. It is a new strategy discipline that is lean, agile, and fast—just what organizations, communities, and regions need to survive and thrive.

Coopetition: Coopetition is cooperation and competition combined. To win our school challenges, the participants have to cooperate to be able to compete. We called this "Coopetition."

We Care Schools: The *We Care Schools* initiative was developed in response to accountability and emphasized putting Maslow's hierarchy first in schools. *We Care Schools* is a framework for caring about the students first developed in partnership with Community Renewal International® and Kasie Mainiero. It has evolved to meet all students' social and emotional needs.

ACT No.353: In 2021, the Louisiana State Senate passed Act 353, stating that all school employees need at least one hour of ACES training a year and trauma-informed education (Louisiana State Department of Education, 2023).

Village Framework: A comprehensive relational community context comprising eight elements or sectors: Safety, Education, Health, Meaningful Work, Housing, Culture

of Caring, and Leadership and Relational Foundation (a community-wide network of caring and mutually enhancing relationships).

Renewal Team: Members of Community Renewal® who raise the visibility of caring people, grow awareness of the value of caring, connect caring people, and help mobilize caring people and their organizations to deepen their commitment to the renewal of the community.

Concentrated Disadvantage (CD): Description of challenged areas of cities determined from five Census variables: (1) Percent of individuals below the poverty line, (2) Percent of individuals on public assistance, (3) Percent female-headed households, (4) Percent unemployed, (5) Percent less than age 18.

Pathfinders: Those recognized for acts of caring that are above and beyond daily recognitions. These "pathfinders" move the *We Care Schools* initiative forward.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The purpose of the study was to describe the leadership journey of an elementary school principal whose school made significant academic improvement over a ten-year period and to describe how focusing on intentional relationship-building and caring influenced one leader's ability to create a more effective and successful school. Nel Noddings is an educational researcher and frequently cited author on caring in education. In her work she discusses how educators once took the goal of creating "better adults" seriously, promoting the growth of all facets of a wholly moral existence. Yet, there still seems to be an overemphasis on quantifiable measures of performance indicators such as standardized test scores (Noddings, 2006). Caring is suggested both as a moral orientation to teaching and as an aim of moral education. Nodding describes four components of a model for moral education: modeling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation. Her model requires teachers and students to spend more time together to establish trust. Her model and perspective of caring can be used to make recommendations on research for teaching practices (Noddings, 2006). The Culture of caring is the conceptual model that informed this study.

The Culture of Caring

Caring is a critical component of building a successful school climate. According to Noddings, "natural caring" is the condition that we, consciously or unconsciously, perceive as 'good,'" caring is a crucial component of school leadership. Our want to be in that special relationship and our desire to care about others are what motivate us to act morally. (Noddings, 2005). The definition of care is some action provided on behalf of another (Noddings, 2005).

It is very important for school leaders to be intentional about caring and realize that caring lies at the heart of effective schooling and good school leadership (Smylie et al., 2016). Smylie et al. (2016) report that educators frequently state that the pushing and pulling of curricular and instructional specifications, high-stakes testing, and educator evaluation often come at the expense of relationships with students and colleagues. Even though data, dashboards, and metrics may disaggregate information by group, they favor collective characterizations, depersonalization, and objectification, which can pull educators further away from meaningful personal relationships with students: school leadership should embody and cultivate caring to improve the organization (Smylie et al., 2016).

Values are deeply held beliefs held by members of an organization that they find worthwhile (Senge et al., 2000). These perspectives are one of the most important aspects of a school's culture, and the beliefs and values of the organization's members gradually illuminate the school's culture. What leaders value has the potential to shape how people think, feel, and act in a school. Similarly, belief statements become living documents within the school culture, integral to decision-making. Members of a school or

organization can determine where a problem fits within the organization's system of beliefs and then find solutions consistent with the culture's agreed-upon beliefs during the decision-making process and after the problem has been identified. Finally, our values and beliefs influence what we say and do. Values espoused and lived are essential components of organizational culture (Littrell, 2002).

A school's organizational culture has a widely shared sense of purpose and values (Peterson & Deal, 1998); values, visions, and a sense of purpose that unite an organization can assist each member in understanding and absorbing the mission and challenge of the entire organization. According to Saphier and King (1985), core values are reflected in community building, problem-solving abilities, and effective communication. These concepts were most recently explored with the development of the Professional Learning Community concept advocated by authors such as Peter Senge and Richard Dufour (DuFour, 2002; Senge et al., 2000).

A school's educational leaders set the tone for the school in terms of how the school's core values are communicated to its members. Traditionally, education organizations value "getting along" in well-defined chains of command and believe their leaders have all the answers they need to do their jobs effectively (Wagner et al., 2006). The school leaders must define, display, and reinforce the shared values that define the organization. (Smylie et al., 2016)

Behavior consistent with the organization's core values fosters trust among staff members and influences school culture (King & Blumer, 2000). The organization's core values can impact its overall culture, either positively or negatively.

Bandura contends that teachers work within a collective social system rather than in isolation and that this reciprocal relationship impacts individual and institutional development (Bandura, 2000). Because of the nature of this relationship, it should be clear how teacher efficacy, individually and collectively, can influence the type of success demonstrated by an institution. Smylie et al. (2016) found that caring is crucial from teachers to students and just as important from leaders to teachers. They argue that teachers benefit from organizational perspectives on caring and that this discussion needs to be more present in educational research and practice (Smylie et al., 2016).

According to Smylie et al. (2016), caring is at the heart of effective schooling and good school leadership (Smylie et al., 2016). Smylie also argues that caring leadership is both contextual and relational, influenced by contexts of "a person's proximal social relationships, broader web of caring relationships, organizational setting, and policy and institutional environments" (Smylie et al., 2016). Thus, how caring leadership can promote positive change and school improvement may vary depending on the relationships that educators have built within and beyond the school walls.

According to Noddings (2006) an ordinary sense of caring focuses on the teacher's behavior or character rather than the relationship and can be confused with actual caring, and teachers are sometimes given moral credit for caring when they work conscientiously, perhaps very hard, to help her students succeed. They appear to understand what their students require and acts according to their beliefs. These are assumed needs, not expressed needs, and these teachers are frequently remembered as saying, 'Someday you'll thank me for this!' Such teachers are referred to as 'virtue carers,' in contrast to relational carers,' because they do not establish caring relationships

or engage in 'caring-for,' as described in care ethics. As a result, their efforts to care frequently backfire, and the students suffer (Noddings, 2006). A Culture of Caring is only established if the relational needs are met. It can create a false sense of caring and a lack of felt safety when needs are not heard and acknowledged (Purvis et al., 2013).

Care ethics emphasizes the difference between assumed needs and expressed needs. From this perspective, it is essential to distinguish what the cared-for wants from what we think they should want. We must listen, not just 'tell' the child, assuming we know what the other needs. Martin Buber, also, in his positing of relation as ontologically fundamental and of dialogue as the basis of the relation in teaching, claims that 'The relation in education is one of pure dialogue' (Buber, 2003). Some of the problems with this part of caring in education could be that the teacher could be "overdoing" things for the child or thinking they know what is best for the child when it can be stifling and cause a child to regress (Noddings, 2006).

Research Pathways

The topics for this literature review will be referred to as research pathways. The three research pathways are (1) The role of the principal as a relational leader, (2) leadership knowledge skills and dispositions, and (3) the importance of community connections.

Literature Search Parameters

A comprehensive search of the literature was conducted around these pathways. The databases EBSOC, JSTOR, and Google Scholar were used for this purpose. The data parameter used to limit the research studies was published in peer-reviewed journals from 1990 to 2023. The studies were limited to English rather than by country of origin. The

studies were limited to scholarly peer-reviewed journals. All pertinent studies on the topic were reviewed. Through the analyses and evaluation of the research literature, the most significant studies that authors cited most frequently were used. This chapter presents these seminal articles' contexts, methodology, and outcomes to form a foundational understanding of the current research.

Theoretical Framework

While Culture of Caring (Noddings, 2020) was used as a conceptual model, Sensemaking Theory was used as the theoretical framework. The basic principles of Sensemaking Theory are related to how people respond to and make sense of information. Reinhorn (2017) states that making sense of the world is applying some form of theory. People use both deductive and inductive thinking as forms of sensemaking. Another form of sensemaking is transductive thinking, identifying similarities or differences to develop a new perspective using a familiar experience. Revising one's thinking using experiences to improve instruction leads to effective practice. Making sense of effective practice leads to further sensemaking and further changes to effective practices (Reinhorn et al., 2017).

Bertrand and Marsh (2015) examined data from six middle schools to learn how teachers made sense of assessment results, student work, and observations. Factors that contributed to their sensemaking included their perceptions of the causes of the outcomes. For example, how teachers perceive students with deficits factors into making sense of the data. Prior knowledge, beliefs, and values affect teachers' implementation of policies and responses to data (Bertrand & Marsh, 2015). This study used the theory of sensemaking to understand how an individual's belief system (individual cognition)

combined with factors in their environment (situated cognition) and requirements set forth by the district for evaluations (policy stimuli) affected the implementation of a teacher evaluation policy (Reinhorn et al., 2017).

Through a case study, Coburn (2001) used sensemaking and institutional theory to analyze how teachers and administrators implemented a new state reading policy in a California elementary school. Sensemaking theory seeks to explain how teachers, for example, make meaning of a new program through social interaction, shared understanding, and professional culture. Institutional theory helps to understand how the environment's norms, beliefs, and practices flow into schools and affect policy implementation. Coburn's research contributes to sensemaking theory in three ways: (1) it identifies critical sub-processes for teachers constructing policy ideas based on their pre-existing beliefs, (2) it highlights the patterns and outcomes of collective sensemaking through teachers' formal networks and, (3) it explores the connection between the actions of school leaders and teachers in the sensemaking process.

Coburn offers five recommendations for shaping policy implementation through intentional collective sensemaking. First, policies should encourage an informal collaborative culture in schools. Second, the policy can include in-facing, formal collaboration among school members. Third, collaboration around authentic activities directly related to the classroom will allow for productive reform. Fourth, engaging in diverse settings and conversations can help teachers learn from one another. Fifth, policymakers need to provide resources and professional development for teachers to understand the new materials so that they can implement them successfully (Coburn, 2001)

Coburn (2001) studied teachers' understanding of reading instruction. Using social processes of framing problems in public schools, the researchers examined the implementation of a reading policy in California schools and found that school personnel actively construct meaning based on their pre-existing beliefs and practices, leading to decisions and actions regarding policy implementation. This study sought to understand how the interactions between teachers and administrators influence the understanding of new policies and their implementation. The researchers found that a reciprocal relationship exists in which negotiations between interpretations by all participants are brought to the table. These interpretations are shaped and guided by participants' worldviews and differing beliefs. Those in authority can influence the sensemaking and framing of new policies and beliefs through effective leadership practices (Coburn, 2001).

Smylie et al. (2016) studied sensemaking to study policy effects on teachers and administrators when they receive new standards or policies and have to interpret them. Strategic planning for implementation does not deliberately invite collective sensemaking, but it comes from informal conversations that lead to a consensus of actions. When administrators are active and authoritative in mediating sensemaking among their teachers, teachers are more willing to engage with new policies. The study showed that when new standards or policies are framed in ways that permit collective sensemaking in schools, teachers are more willing to discuss and eventually approve implementation (Smylie et al., 2016)

Reinhorn (2017) used the theory of sensemaking to understand how an individual's belief system (individual cognition) combined with factors in their

environment (situated cognition) and requirements set forth by the district for evaluations (policy stimuli) affect the implementation of a teacher evaluation policy (Reinhorn et al., 2017). In sensemaking theory, organizational members make sense of unexpected events through action, selection, and interpretation (Weick, 1995). The sensemaking model by Weick (1995) explains how one can retrospectively make sense of past events and respond to future events. According to Weick, sensemaking is the process by which people give meaning to their collective experiences. It has been defined as the ongoing retrospective development of plausible images that rationalize what people are doing (Weick, 2005).

Intentional Relationship Building and Caring, Critical Attributes

Hargreaves (2021) studied the role of caring in a successful Tanzanian primary school. The school's leadership promoted the practice of caring, rooted in identifying and meeting needs. It was found to impact not only student academic success but also to have moral and organizational implications. This includes the need for teachers to be empowered with the ability and disposition to solve school problems.

According to Hargreaves (2021), over the past several decades, research and practice in comparative and international education have emphasized access and student academic outcomes. International bodies and government ministries have championed a specific focus on student academic achievement to promote economic development. More attention should be paid to the emotional contexts of learning, and this study contributes to the need for more research in that area.

Hargreaves (2021) emphasizes that caring for students is a form of emotional labor. The effort of caring can be positive or negative- it may demand that teachers

subjugate their true emotions in the interest of performativity. However, caring that flows from student to teacher (in response to teacher caring for students) significantly benefits teachers. Hargreaves suggests that "the emotional labor concept puts care into context. It takes care beyond being a personal choice or moral imperative to an act of work that can be supported, made difficult, or turned against the person exercising it depending on the context in which the work is performed" (Hargreaves, 2021).

Chachage et al. (2019) studied the behaviors and beliefs of school leaders and how these behaviors and beliefs foster a caring school environment. They employed a purposeful sampling strategy to select a school and school leader who were strong exemples of caring. Local municipal officials recommended it because of its reputation as the highest-performing public school in the district. The primary focus of this study was on the behaviors and beliefs of the school leader and how these behaviors and beliefs foster a caring school environment. This study draws on several sources of data. They conducted one long semi-structured interview with the school leader and several informal follow-up interviews. To the extent possible, they stated that interviews are self-contained narratives fully explicated within the interview context. They supplemented these interviews with several sessions of participant observation at the school. Sometimes these observations were followed by brief conversations with the school leader. The observations were part of the more extensive research study mentioned above and were carried out over four months in 2017.

The researchers found that when asked about the success of his school academically, one of the first aspects Mr. Mwakalinga (Chachage et al., 2019) mentions is caring. One key theme from the interview data is the connection between caring and

motivation, which impacts students and teachers differently. In considering the aspects of morality, purpose, and academic performance highlighted by Mwakalinga (Chachage et al., 2019), caring is seen to have many implications for school leadership. At an institutional level, the head teacher must monitor, inculcate and facilitate positive teacher and student relationships.

Anyon et al. (2018) studied non-punitive and non-exclusionary discipline strategies in schools with low out-of-school suspension rates. To learn more about the fundamental approaches to their school's success, interviews and focus groups were conducted with 198 educators from 33 low-spending schools in a large urban district. Data were analyzed using inductive and deductive methods to identify themes concerning effective approaches across schools. Relationship building was noted as a critical strategy in reducing exclusionary discipline outcomes and racial disparities in out-of-school suspension. Specific relationship-building strategies and the rationales behind these practices were identified, including home visits, greetings, morning meetings, advisory periods, increased adult visibility in and out of school, and positive contact with families (Anyon et al., 2018).

They found that children and adolescents who experience exclusionary school discipline are likelier to do poorly in school, disengage from educational environments, and have juvenile justice contact or be arrested (Anyon et al., 2018). Students with higher suspension rates tend to have weaker connections to school adults (Anyon, 2011). The racially disparate impact of these policies has been documented for decades. For example, the proportion of black students receiving an out-of-school suspension has risen 120 percent since 1975. In contrast, the proportion of white students receiving an

exclusionary discipline consequence has only grown 64 percent. Some argue that these racial disparities reflect differential perceptions of behavior by race at both classroom and administrative levels (Anyon et al., 2018).

The study used a mixed-methods sampling approach with quantitative data to identify a group of schools. The sample included 198 educators from 33 schools purposively selected based on achieving the district reform goal of having a suspension rate of 3 percent or lower for all students, and for black students in particular, and having at least ten black students.

Participants in this study were asked to speak to the strategies they felt were most critical in their school's ability to achieve a low suspension rate for all students, particularly black students. Throughout these conversations, one of the most common themes that emerged was the importance of relationship-building. Overwhelmingly, school leaders noted that strong relationships played a key role not only in the general climate of their building but also in their school's lower suspension rates. Participants acknowledged the importance of knowing about students' lives and understanding their triggers to pinpoint underlying explanations for behavior.

Crosnoe et al. (2004) investigated whether student-teacher relationships predicted two important student behaviors: academic achievement and disciplinary problems; whether structural, compositional, and climate-related school characteristics predicted these within-school intergenerational relationships; and how the behavioral and contextual correlates of student and teacher relationships varied by race and ethnicity. The primary goal of the study was to determine whether positive student-teacher relationships are related to academic achievement. It did this to investigate the

importance of social integration in the educational system. The researchers looked at data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, an ongoing national survey of American adolescents in grades 7-12 that began in 1994. The final sample included 132 schools. Nearly all of the students in these schools completed the "In School Survey" in the 1994-1995 school year, with approximately 90,000 students.

Positive student-teacher relationships were associated with better student outcomes across the board, even after controlling sociodemographic profiles and prior behaviors. Across all groups, students with more positive views of their teachers did better and had fewer problems in school, while those with more negative views did worse and had more significant problems (Crosnoe et al., 2004).

McIntyre-Miller and Green (2015) studied peace leadership which is a growing subfield in leadership studies, looks to build peace, both positive—that which focuses on new efforts at peace and system change, and harmful—that which focuses on challenging violence and aggression into our groups, communities, schools, organizations, and societies. In this study, school leaders discussed how the Integral Perspective of Peace Leadership (IPPL) elements related to school culture and system change. Second, specific examples such as character development, mindfulness, school-wide positive behavior supports, social-emotional learning, professional learning communities, home-school connection, systems thinking, and distributed leadership were examined to demonstrate how school leaders can engage in the work of creating positive, equitable school cultures with the help of consultants and an implementation team. The intersection of individual and collective capacity to challenge issues of violence and aggression and build positive, inclusive social systems and structures is defined as peace leadership (McIntyre-Miller, et

al., 2018). A space where personal work toward peace meets collective efforts at local and systemic change. While there are several emergent perspectives on peace leadership, this article focuses on McIntyre-Miller and Green's (2015) Integral Perspective of Peace Leadership (IPPL) for understanding peace leadership and its applicability to the life, culture, and systems of schools (McIntyre-Miller & Green, 2015).

Landry (2012) studied assistant principals' beliefs and perceptions about the factors required for a school to be considered a good school and how to describe the culture and climate of good schools. It demonstrates the need for administrators to understand better the role of the assistant principal and how they interact with the school community.

The research questions asked in this study were, "What are the perceptions of assistant principals regarding the characteristics of a good school? What are assistant principals' perceptions regarding how they describe the culture of a good school?" The methodology used was a combination of traditional survey and cognitive interviewing techniques. A mixed methods approach was used to combine the two types of research. The participants were given a standard survey to answer demographic questions (quantitative) and open-ended interview questions (qualitative).

The common theme in the responses categorized under a focus on student achievement was that student achievement drives the school's mission. According to the respondents, focusing on student achievement prepares the entire student population, not just specific campus demographics, for the next phase of life by setting high academic standards and focusing on sound teaching practices.

Many responses categorized a good school as one that functions collaboratively regarding professional development, collegiality, and collective teacher efficacy, such as in a Professional Learning Community. The common theme in these responses was that good schools show characteristics of a professional working environment where all stakeholders' voices are heard and held in high regard. Professional development is crucial, and the organization's members are integral to staff development. The decisions are made collaboratively, all for the betterment of the organization. Teachers learn from each other through trust, modeling, and mentoring (Landry, 2012).

Leadership Knowledge Skills and Dispositions

Smylie et al. (2016) studied the value of caring in schools and school leadership. They examined the concept of caring and how it works and introduced a model of caring school leadership that fits within this larger context. They described the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to be a caring leader. Smylie et al. (2016) list "Antecedents to Leader Caring" as aims, virtues, mindsets, and competencies. They list "Caring Leadership Traits" as leader caring, cultivating caring communities in schools, caring capacity among others, proximal social relationships, supporting organizations, conditions, developing caring contexts beyond school, webs of care, policy, and institutional environments. They list "Student Outcomes from Caring Leadership" as social integration, positive psychological states, tangible and instrumental benefits, capacity for caring, engagement, learning, and well-being (Smylie et al., 2016). Caring school leadership begins with the antecedents of leader caring. The leader's aims, virtues, mindsets, and competencies make up their capacity for caring.

These antecedents apply to the expression of caring leadership action and interaction throughout the school. They form the foundation of leader caring, cultivating caring communities in schools, and developing caring contexts beyond the school. These leader actions led to caring expressed in caring communities which promote students' social integration, particularly positive psychological states, tangible and instrumental benefits, and additional capacity for caring (Smylie et al., 2016).

Louis and Murphy (2017) sought to determine whether or not principals can influence organizational learning. The authors use a cultural perspective to address four questions: first, is principals' cognitive trust in teachers' professional capacities related to knowledge sharing/ organizational learning among teachers? Second, is principals' trust in teachers' professional capacities related to teachers' reports of being in a caring school setting? Third, is principal caring related to knowledge sharing/ organizational learning among teachers? Fourth, is principal trust crucial in school contexts with low-income students?

When the authors looked at student achievement, they found that the model supports principals' role in fostering equity and organizational learning. Teachers' perceptions of principal caring were directly related to principal trust, and organizational learning was indirectly related. Academic support for students had the most significant direct effect on organizational learning.

Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2015) investigated the connections between faculty trust in the principal, principal leadership behaviors, school climate, and student achievement. Data from 64 elementary, middle, and high schools in two school districts

formed the basis of the study (n=3,215 teachers), allowing for correlational and regression analyses of the variables.

According to the authors, faculty trust in the principal was related to perceptions of collegial and instructional leadership and school climate factors such as teacher professionalism, academic press, and community engagement. Trust, principal leadership behaviors, and school climate were also related to student achievement. The authors discovered that both composite variables, principal behaviors, and school climate, contributed significantly to explaining variance in student achievement, accounting for 75% of the variance.

According to the findings of this study, principals must foster and maintain trust to lead schools effectively. It is important to note that trust has both interpersonal and task-oriented dimensions. As a result, principals must be prepared to collaborate with teachers in consistently honest, open, and benevolent ways while also demonstrating sound knowledge and competent decision-making in the administration of academic programs. To be trusted by teachers, principals must demonstrate interpersonal and task-oriented behaviors, according to the findings. Furthermore, the strength of the relationships suggests that schools cannot foster student learning without trustworthy school leaders skilled at cultivating academic press, teacher professionalism, and community engagement in their schools (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015).

Walter et al. (2017) studied how hidden biases can perpetuate racism in organizations and affect the overall climate and culture. Even with a positive view on race by leaders, powerful hidden biases and blind spots persist among professionals and their organizations. She states that interpersonal and institutional cultural responsiveness

can improve community engagement and workplace culture and strengthen organizations. Using the social work profession as an example, this paper describes barriers to organizational and institutional change. They found that understanding the role of leadership is critical to addressing the complex structures contributing to institutional racism. Interactive leadership is integral to the success of any organization; it requires the leader to possess attributes that model strength of purpose, direction, and focus for the task at hand. Characteristics that help structure a sense of leadership, which must be a part of its substantive foundation, include measured decision-making, vision, empathetic understanding, capacity to listen and to hear, group creativity, cultural attunement, and the ability to promote confidence within the organization.

They found that leaders must assume that racism is part of the problem and recognize that individuals have conscious and unconscious bias: Leaders must openly and explicitly address the organization's intention to optimize cultural diversity and avoid the hazards of institutional bias and racism at all levels: Organizations should create a senior management position for a diversity officer: Organizational leaders in all professional fields should create and articulate distinct, functional, and inclusive strategies promoting equity and cultural diversity and: For organizations to combat unconscious bias in leadership, staff, and membership, current leaders must always be mindful of succession planning. Finally, they found that a dedicated examination of institutional blind spots, especially in leadership, is imperative and relates directly to the pathway of intentional relationship building and the role of the school leader in establishing a positive school climate and culture (Walter et al., 2017).

The Importance of Community Connections

Haines et al. (2015) explored how family-school and community-school partnerships function successfully in a setting. The purpose was to show that partnerships between communities and families are vital to ensure students' success and full participation (Haines et al., 2015). Implications of the study were that trust in a school partnership cannot be taken for granted, that when focusing on school-family and school partnerships, administrators should provide a positive, inviting, and inclusive school culture, and that this will provide opportunities for reciprocal partnerships and more involvement (Haines et al., 2015).

Cook et al. (2020) analyzed dialogues that offer an opportunity to foster collaborative relationships and decision-making among diverse school communities. The researchers took a group of people and explored how school-based race dialogues in several community groups, including educators in urban school settings, can promote a positive school climate and educational equality. The idea is that schools, parents, and community members who engage in race dialogues can promote educational justice over time. Participants described an increased sense of connection, trust, and greater awareness of cultural identities. They found that dialog facilitated social change by encouraging collaborative and participatory relationships among school community stakeholders. The dialogues helped increase commitment toward educational justice through the school community's ongoing and collaborative engagement. Dialogues created a venue for individuals to engage in courageous conversations about race and racism and define concrete steps to take action in their community (Cook et al., 2020).

Leistyna (2002) studied the relationship between a school and parental and community involvement and how that affects one school setting. They created a community volunteer group to partner with the schools to mitigate the situation by establishing a foundational SEL program. Leistyna found that the complexity of intralingual diversity was only partially understood. However, the overall outcome was that the community partnership needed to do more to create long-lasting and impactful change. Also, the community and parent involvement were still surface level, not creating the strong relationship needed to create real and lasting change (Leistyna, 2002).

Summary

Ronald Riggio stated, "We know what makes leaders effective. It is all about relationships (Riggio & Bass, 2014)." Multiple acts of caring form the "relational foundation. Through a growing pattern of these intentional acts, trust and creativity emerge" (Darling-Hammond, 2016). Robert Hall states, "participants within the system come to understand caring relationships are their most valuable and value-creating resource" (Hall, 2012). In her TED Talk, video Every Kid Needs a Champion, Rita Pierson states that kids do not learn from people they do not like (Pierson, 2013). Relationship building is essential to a culture of caring.

John Macmurray states that teaching is one of the foremost of personal relations and essential in education (Macmurray, 1964). Louis and Murphy (2017) discuss how the leaders' role in caring is essential and that principal trust is directly related to teachers' perceptions of principal caring. Teaching is a relational activity in which caring is an essential component (Chachage et al., 2019).

James MacGregor Burns pioneered the belief that effective leadership promotes positive change and permanently impacts individuals; he includes an ethical/moral component of transformational leadership in his book Leadership, published in 1978. According to Burns, authentic leadership aligns with a collective purpose, and influential leaders are judged by their ability to make social changes (Burns, 2010). He suggested that the role of the leader/follower [principal/teacher] is conceptually united and that the leadership process is a blend of conflict and power. According to Northouse, in the simplest terms, transformational leadership is the ability to get people to want to change, improve, and respond by being led (Northouse, 2001). This type of leadership involves assessing the motives of others, satisfying their needs, and valuing them.

Transformational leadership is the leader's ability to increase organizational members' commitment, capacity, and engagement in meeting goals (Avolio & Bass, 1998). The school's leadership is critical in establishing a positive climate and culture.

Smylie et al. (2016) discuss the traits and characteristics of caring leadership in the seminal work, "Caring School Leadership: A Multidisciplinary, Cross-Occupational Model" (Smylie et al., 2016). The capacity for caring leadership may only come naturally to some people who work with children or to all leaders.

Training in Relational Leadership, Trust-Based Relation Interventions (TBRI®), Adverse Childhood Trauma Experiences (ACES®), and Restorative Practices (RP) are just a few ways leaders can build on their ability to understand caring dispositions. When leaders are armed with this knowledge and these skills, they can respond holistically to students' needs (Purvis et al., 2013). Most of the external pressure on schools today directs educators to focus on academic scholarship, accountability, and technology of

best practices. Educators regularly state that the pressure to lead students to success with curricular and instructional specification, high-stakes testing, and educator evaluation comes increasingly at the cost of relationships with students and colleagues (Murphy & Torre, 2014).

The theory of change within Community Renewal's model states that within the community, we grow to our potential 'wholeness' through our positive relationships; we cannot grow wholeness alone (McCarter, 2022). Additionally, individuals caring alone are not slowing our societal decline; however, caring together contains the power to ever-renew the foundational system of positive relationships for a better society and world (McCarter, 2022). The power of the community is essential because it gives students a higher purpose and allows them to feel belonging. In his book, *How to Remake the World Neighborhood by Neighborhood*, McCarter states that we must come together in such a way that we can create a global society that has leaned in its maturity to grow better and better human beings contributing to the whole community because only by acting together as an entire global family in a consciously cooperative way can we secure the health of our planet (McCarter & Muldoon, 2022).

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This work aims to share the knowledge from one principal's perceived experiences with other educational leaders and researchers. This work shares what knowledge, skills, and dispositions it took for one principal to improve a school by decreasing suspensions and expulsions, increasing attendance, teacher morale and retention, and increasing state standardized test scores.

This study sought to determine the impact of the principal's focus on intentional caring in one elementary school setting and the ability to impact the institution as a leader in that capacity. The study investigated the effects of improving the climate and culture of a school to one of intentional caring. This chapter describes the methods used to investigate these questions are organized into the following sections: Methodology, Research Design, Participants, Validity, Procedures, and Limitations.

Methodology

This study was a qualitative, retrospective, auto-ethnographic case study. The case represented ten years in the life of an elementary school leader. The purpose is to help other educational leaders on their journey through sharing these experiences.

Autoethnography can make a valuable contribution to organizational research. The ethnographic method has long been used to study organizational culture.

The introspective and retrospective nature of autoethnography can significantly improve understanding of the relationship between the individual and the organization. Autoethnography's intensely intuitive nature enables the organizational researcher to make that connection. The growing use of first-person narrative and a pleasing prose style in organizational research can also be beneficial. The intensely emotional and personal nature of autoethnography impacts the reader's sensemaking. Existing literature can be incorporated into the autoethnographic narrative. This methodology made sense as a structure of this study to document and explain past experiences (Keles, 2022).

Keles (2022) suggests that an excellent autoethnography (a) creates a sense of transformation through a story of illumination, healing, understanding, and learning, (b) engages readers as a companion rather than passive audiences through commonalities and particularities, (c) goes beyond personal confessions by mindfully offering autobiographical and background information, (d) uses appropriate tools and sources and explains why using them makes sense, (e) denaturalizes social issues by making invisible power dynamics visible, and (f) embraces the subjectivity of memory and interpretation (Keles, 2022).

Autoethnography is a method that can explore both the human experience and the relational aspect of education not found in conventional research methods while revealing cultural and societal contexts of meaning. It can provide a valuable window into the lives of school personnel and educational leaders. This can be an essential tool to tell a story of work that has already been accomplished. Describing work that has already been successfully completed can be a useful tool for an educational leader who does not have experiences yet. Retrospective autoethnography has transformative potential that can be

matched to educational leadership goals. Principals who document their work in this way could benefit the novice leader. The lack of existing research through this method, could be due to the amount of time it takes to reflect and write about what a leader of a large school is doing, while they are doing it. This research, seen through a school leader's lens could also make the data more digestible and relatable.

Grounded theory argues that neither data nor theories are discovered but constructed through the researcher's past and present experiences. Most of the data collected in this study were directly related to the experiences of a former school leader. To highlight the phenomenon clearly, autoethnography was utilized (Charmaz, 1990).

Although quantitative data is essential, it may not tell the entire story of the situation. Context is sometimes needed, and that can come in the form of a qualitative method. Associating children with numbers can take away from the whole child and make the data less personal and more individualistic. Telling the stories that surround the data can emphasize the multi-dimensional way a person could be described. Using autoethnography as the study's method, there is a stronger ability to showcase the children, staff, and parents holistically, profoundly, and transparently. Qualitative research does more than just facilitate data collection. It provides an opportunity to comprehend the patterns and purposes of natural behaviors: Iterative and adaptable. The characteristics of users—the behaviors that influence the numbers—are the focus of qualitative study. The research is descriptive. The qualitative method is also arbitrary. Instead of emphasizing measurement, it concentrates on explaining an action. (Xu, et. al. 2012).

Witkin states this about autoethnography,

Not only does autoethnography represent a radical alternative, but it challenges

many sacrosanct or assumed presuppositions of conventional inquiry. Rather than

causality and effectiveness, autoethnography's goals are more aligned with

sensitization, conscientization, thick description, illumination, connection, and

social change. For example, autoethnography does not assume a realist version of

the world in which the "real" is discoverable. Instead, autoethnography focuses on

meaning generation within cultural and social contexts. There is no separation

between researcher and research participant, nor does inquiry follow strict

protocols. (Witkin, 2022)

Wikin's description of autoethnography validates the idea that scientific writing

alone was not a transparent enough medium and would also be very restrictive to this

work. The study had many facets and layers that could not be explained through only

quantitative means. Despite being a relatively new research methodology,

autoethnography has established itself as a reliable qualitative method of inquiry in

educational research (Denzin & Lincoln, 1995). Many scholars use this method to tell

their stories because it allows them to add their personalized style while drawing on their

own experiences to broaden their understanding of a societal phenomenon. They attempt

to uncover and express their emotions, thoughts, and beliefs by recalling, revisiting, and

recreating past experiences in order to contribute to, critique, or extend existing research

and theory (Allen et al., 2015). They simultaneously played the roles of researcher and

the researched (Keles, 2022).

Research Design

Grounded theory as the chosen method of interpretation for the data. It is not a theory but more of a method for processing and analyzing data. Constructivist grounded theory was the specific component that was used.

The first step in grounded theory is open coding, breaking down and coding textual data. Raw data excerpts are sorted and organized into groups based on attributes, and then those groups are organized in a structured manner to formulate a new theory. The constant comparative method was used for this study, which Glaser and Strauss developed and used in grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 2017). The data sets in this study were:

Data Sets Developed as a Principal

- News articles

- Podcast

- Upbeat survey

- Stories from journals, emails, letters, speeches, and notes

Data Sets Developed as a Researcher

- A Peer Interview

- Journals after being a principal

- Conversations with the five auditors of the work

- Graphics of the research that were designed throughout the process

Quantitative Data Sets as a Researcher

- State test scores

- Jcampus data (data system for attendance, suspensions, and expulsions)

- Educlimber (data collection system for academics)

After his point, the data was disaggregated into discrete parts and labeled as themes, for example, Theme 1 - Caring about Environment/building and Theme 2 - Caring about behavior / Kind Acts /Student well-being and safety. (See Table 1.1: "Coding Web").

Then axial coding was used to connect your codes, which was accomplished by creating pathways:

- Intentional relationship-building and caring, critical attributes

- Leadership knowledge skills and dispositions

- Building community connections

Selective coding was used after next. Here, the researcher chooses one central category that connects all of the codes from the analysis and captures the essence of the research. It was determined which pathways and themes contributed the most to the research's significance and placed on the next chart to disaggregate (Walker & Myrick, 2006). Pathways 1 and 4 were then combined into a single pathway of relational leadership, with a Culture of Caring as the overarching theme.

Finally, constructivist grounded theory was applied to the research. Cognitive and social constructivism are the two major types of the constructivist learning perspectives. Vygotsky developed the social constructivist view of learning, while Piaget developed the cognitive constructivist view. This was used because the constructivist paradigm seeks to understand a phenomenon under study through the experiences or perspectives of the participants using various data-collection agents (O'Driscoll, 2016). According to the constructivist theory, knowledge can only exist within the human mind and does not

have to correspond to real-world reality (Driscoll, 2002). Learners will constantly attempt to develop their mental model of the real world based on their perceptions. Graphic models were developed next, based on data that had been collected (Figure 3.1).

Figure 3.1

Coding Web
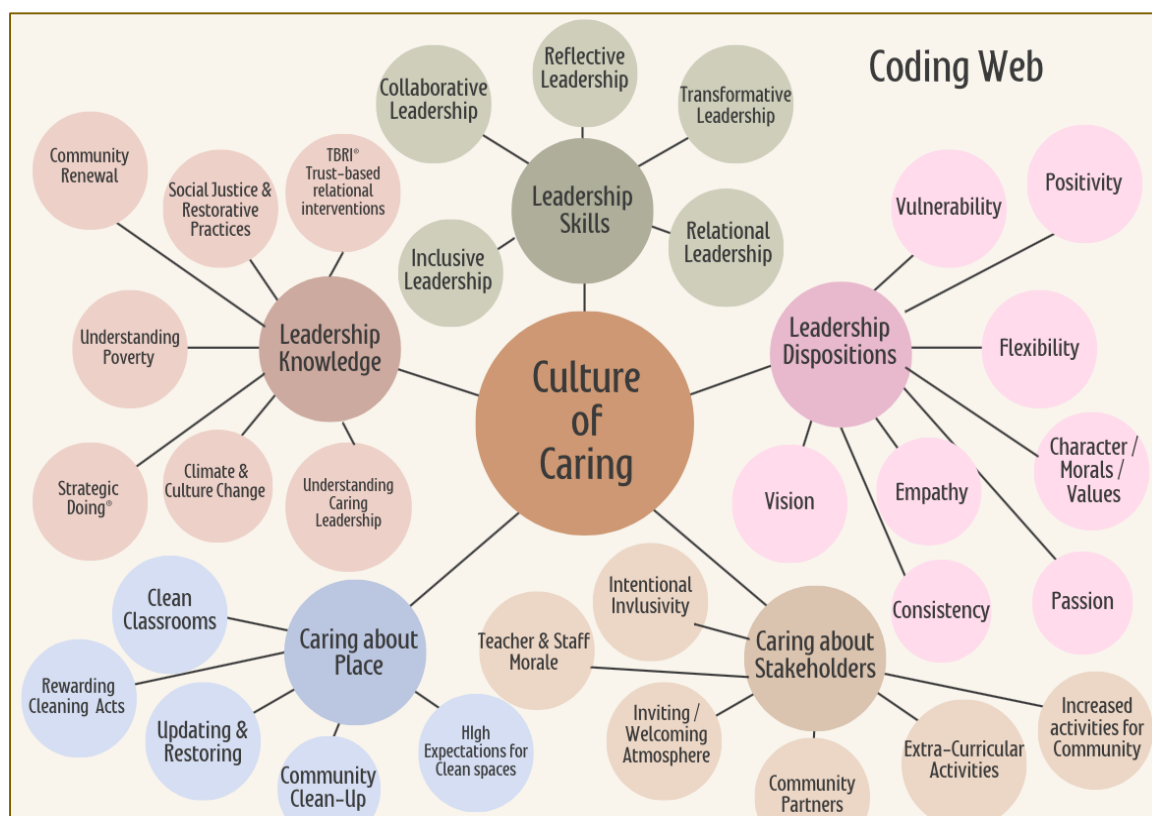
Interview notes, Zoom transcripts, meeting notes, journal notes, and videos were pulled together to help determine what pieces would go into the retrospective case study. Then, all the information was collected into two categories: critical incidents and non-critical incidents (see Appendix N for more coding and charting of data).

The next part of the research approach was to organize the data into meaningful categories. Several charts were created to sort and code the data. One chart, the "Four

Research Pathways Chart," showed how each pathway was represented in the research. Once pathways were identified, sorting and coding each occurrence could be conducted and then those could be categorized it into one of the pathways. The pathways became an organizational structure for charting the research. Color coding was also used to help label the pathways and see the patterns in the research. Another charting system used was the "Critical Incidents Chart," which took the information from the critical incidents and showed the connection between the research literature, the themes that emerged from the research, other studies that supported that incident, and the four pathways (see Appendix N).

The synthesis of many years of notes, interviews, and journals became the collection of data. Auditors were used (former co-workers) to validate if the instances from memories of the researcher were recorded correctly to the best of their knowledge. These notes, journals, statements, interviews, and incidents were added into the charts. The co-workers acted as auditors of the information, they gave feedback and signed a document stating that the stories were as close to accurate as they could remember. All of the data was collected into charts to create a graphic organizer to make sense of the data presented in Chapter 5. The stories were reexamined until the information was repetitive and it was determined that the same patterns of meaning could be found from the same few stories.

Assumptions

The study was based on four assumptions. First, it was assumed that the principal's leadership practice at Sunrise Elementary School during the ten years of study affected the school culture. It was also assumed that specific skills, knowledge, and

dispositions in leadership are needed to make that occur. Secondly, it was assumed that there was a relationship between and among changes in school culture and the impact on school attendance and the academic performance rates of students. Thirdly, it was assumed that documents and artifacts generated from the principal's reflections captured an authentic picture of leadership in the school.

Finally, it was assumed that using "We Care" as a change model and a protocol for intervention assisted in developing practices, processes, and procedures that improved the school. It can further be assumed that this intervention changed the knowledge and skills that the leadership possessed. This model identified practices, processes, and procedures that aided me in becoming an effective instructional leader, who created an empowerment structure, implemented proven instructional strategies, monitored participation, and ultimately increased student attendance rates, performance scores, and teacher morale.

Participants

The primary participant in this study is the principal as the researcher and author of this work. Many staff members, children, parents, and community members were involved in the school's transformation, but these participants were discussed through the principal's account and lens. The sole participant is the principal because only the principal's recollections, documentation, and evidence support the narrative. Sometimes, the people in the stories completed surveys or questionnaires that further explained or added to the research. The stories, events, journal writings, and documentation are based on the principal's observations; therefore, the principal is the foremost participant; the story is how the principal reacted and adjusted to the events that took place and the

people in the events. Any people or places discussed in the narrative were replaced with a pseudonym to protect anonymity.

Trustworthiness

Five school staff members were asked to serve as study auditors to evaluate authenticity. They were also asked to give feedback and write statements after reading the study.

These staff members were chosen because they had been employed at this school during the study period and worked closely with the principal during those years. Each auditor read the study and conversed with the principal to explain areas where the stories may have strayed or been embellished. They subsequently signed a document stating that what they read was accurate to the best of their knowledge. The signing was done to validate the study's trustworthiness and to show that the documented events were described and portrayed as correctly and clearly as possible.

Member checking is commonly regarded as a method for determining the validity of an account. When data, analytic categories, interpretations, and conclusions are tested with members of the groups from which the data was initially obtained, member checking is used. This can be done formally as well as informally, as opportunities for member checks may arise during normal observation and conversation. According to Lincoln and Guba (1986), this is the most important technique for establishing credibility. The benefit of member-checking is that it allows you to understand and assess what the participant intended to do with their actions. It also allows participants to correct errors and challenge what they perceive to be incorrect interpretations, to volunteer additional information, to get respondents on the record with reports, to summarize preliminary

findings, and to assess the adequacy of data and preliminary results, as well as to confirm specific aspects of the data.

According to Lincoln and Guba (1990), the credibility of a research study is critical in determining its worth. Trustworthiness involves establishing the following:

- Credibility - confidence in the 'truth' of the findings

- Transferability - showing that the findings have applicability in other contexts

- Dependability - showing that the findings are consistent and could be repeated

- Conformability - a degree of neutrality or the extent to which the respondents shape the findings of a study and not researcher bias, motivation, or interest.

All areas of trustworthiness were considered in the research design (Lincoln & Guba, 2016). A list of data sources was used to determine relevant information (see data in Table 3.1). I used quantitative data in the form of attendance rates, suspension and expulsion data, behavioral referral data, and statewide student performance scores. Qualitative data such as interviews, surveys, notes, and journals were also used. Many different types of data were used to synthesize the narrative.

Table 3.1

Sources of Data Table

Document	Description	Where it is located
Journal Entries	The researcher collected notes, journal entries, agendas, and policies that were used and sometimes referenced in the document.	Appendix A
Demographic Data	Data that shows the demographics of the school, pulled from JCampus	Appendix B
Parent Survey	Parents were given a survey using "Survey Monkey" in 2012, asking what they wanted in a school.	Appendix C
UpBeat Survey information	UpBeat Survey Results and Comparisons – This is teacher morale and Climate / Culture survey that was completed with our teachers (anonymously) through the district in 2020-22. This data gives information about the Climate and Culture of the school, teacher retention, and teacher morale.	Appendix D
News Article	News Article from "Voices" newspaper.	Appendix E
Test Scores	Louisiana Assessment Data that were referenced in the document. This is public information and can be accessed from the state website anytime. This information was used to show the interventions used positively influenced the school's climate and culture and the school's performance score.	Appendix F
Interview with Peer	The researcher had a peer conduct an interview with her about her experiences during the ten-year period of time. The researcher was asked very specific questions related to the work that was done at the school during the 10-year period.	Appendix G
My City Podcast	This was an interview the researcher did with a local podcast. These are the transcripts from that interview. In this interview, the researcher was asked questions specifically related to community connections and resources.	Appendix H
We Care Schools	Articles, artifacts, and documents collected from the *We Care Schools* initiative	Appendix I
Suspension/Expulsion Data	2008-2022 Referral data gathered from the JCampus system. This data was collected to show if	Appendix J

Document	Description	Where it is located
	an increase or decrease existed in suspension/expulsion data before and after the interventions were put into place.	
Attendance Data	Attendance Data reports from JCampus 2008-2022. This data was pulled specifically to determine if interventions implemented during the years were beneficial. The attendance data that was pulled: 10 or more absences or tardies (considered truant). Also, district data was pulled to compare with the data set of the school.	Appendix K
Auditor Reports	Five auditors reviewed the information in the study, commented, and signed a document stating that the information is true to the best of their knowledge. These auditors also had discussions with the researcher to help clarify information. This information was archived.	Sample in Appendix L Actual in Archive
Teacher Speech	This is a copy of the speech Mrs. T gave to the faculty	Appendix M
Graphics & Charts	Several graphics and charts were created during the process to explain the coding and information gleaned during the grounded theory processes.	Appendix N

Procedures

Connections to the research questions were continuously made through coding and using grounded theory. Every piece of the data went into one of the categories and connected back to a Culture of Caring. Table 3.2 and Table 3.3 show the broad research questions and the data chart once the information was connected to the research questions.

Table 3.2

Broad Research Questions Table

Broad Research Questions		
How did the leadership of a school in need of improvement create change and make gains through implementing a Culture of Caring?	What knowledge, skills, and dispositions did the primary leader need to create change successfully?	What patterns emerged from the practice of intentional caring that can be replicated that had the most significant impact on student success?
<u>Outcomes</u>	<u>Knowledge:</u>	<u>Suggested Activities</u>
• SPS increased 8.4 • Suspensions decreased • Teacher Morale Increased according to UPbeat survey gains of 10+ points in most categories • Increased attendance rate • Increased teacher retention • Expulsions decreased • Decreased fights at school • Decreased complaints from parents to the school board • Increased community support and funding	• Social justice • Restorative practices • Understanding poverty - Payne • Culture /climate change (Clark, Pierson, Covey) • Understanding Caring Leadershipi (Noddings, Smylie) • Community Renewal (McCarter) • Strategic Doing ® (Hall) • TBRI ® (Cross, Purvis) • Trauma-Informed Education (CASEL) Skills: • Collaborative Leadership • Transformative Leadership • Organizational Leadership • Caring Leadership Dispositions:	• Community Clean Up Day • Wildcat Walk (Bus trip) • Friendship House (Bus trip) • Collaborative learning and planning with teachers around poverty and diversity • Collaborative learning and planning with students for school improvement • "Caught Ya Caring" Cards • House System • Pathfinder Awards • Intentional recognition of caring daily or multiple times a day • Community support and involvement • Collaborative planning with community support

Broad Research Questions

- Listening
- Vulnerability
- Flexibility
- Empathy
- Positivity
- Patience
- Consistency
- Passionate
- Determined
- Perseverant
- Role-Model
- Relationship building and connecting

- Weekly meetings to recognize our work (admin+community)
- Positive office referrals
- Positive greetings
- Carpool Karaoke (Or some other fun way to welcome students daily)
- Checking in on children who are at risk - making sure they have an adult advocate
- Conflict Resolution Classes
- Leadership Classes
- Intentional proactive work in truancy
- Intentional proactive monitoring of hallways and trouble spots during the day, daily - visibility and active supervision
- Common acceptable language
- Monthly Challenges
- Community Service (Group opportunities)
- House Parties / Rewards
- TBRI® model for behavior

Table 3.3

Narrowing Questions Chart

	Narrowing Questions	
What themes can be generalized through the journal entries, agendas, and notes kept during the 10-year span of the principal's tenure at the school?	What meaningful information can be found in the interviews, surveys, and teacher questionnaires?	What can be learned through these documents about the process of improving a school's culture of caring? (4 Pathways)
• Theme 1 - Caring about Environment/building (Place)	• Noticing that the school was in bad shape- structure and aesthetics Building/caring about what the place looks like.	1. Intentional relationship building and caring critical attributes
• Theme 2 - Caring about behavior / Kind Acts /Student well-being and safety (People as Individuals)	• Noticing that kids were not nice to one another, fights / pushing down in hallway, etc. A lot of behavioral referrals.	2. Leadership knowledge skills and dispositions
• Theme 3 - Caring about Staff Morale / Teacher Retention /Teacher well-being (People as a Community)	• Noticing that teachers were unhappy, stressed, etc. Hearing frustrations of teachers, racial issues, wellness, staff surveys, and listening to staff complaints	3. Building community connections
	• Noticing that our school performance score, attendance, and suspension data was not where we wanted it to be and that we could do better • Noticing that I was putting too much on teachers and their work/life balance was suffering	4. The role of the school leader in establishing a positive school climate and culture

Limitations

This study only represents one PK-5 grade elementary school. Even though the school is large, with an average of 1,000 students yearly, the sample is small because it only represents one school. The school's population is diverse, with students from rural, urban, and suburban backgrounds and multiple ethnic backgrounds. However, there are still areas of extreme poverty in this region that were not represented as prominently as they would have been if the research had been conducted in a Title 1 school.

This study is also subjective, as the primary researcher was the principal. It is written through the lens of the school's leader at the time and is representative of only the principal's perceptions of what occurred.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Chapter 4 is organized as a chronological narrative organized by themes that I felt were essential parts of my leadership during the ten-year span of my time at SES. I initially structured the analysis using the 4C's from the Partnership for 21st Century Skills (Kaur, 2013) as primary themes. Through analysis, additional themes emerged: Caring, Community, Climate, Culture, and Behavior and Trauma. Critical incidents or inflection points are identified within each theme. Critical incidents marked episodes on my leadership journey when I developed new understandings about leadership and the work of transforming a school culture. Over this time period, there were many incidences that could account for changes made in leadership, but for this document's purposes, only the most important have been recounted. These stories of the incidents that took place help paint a picture of what occurred and how the knowledge, skills, or dispositions of the leader were altered or adjusted as a result of these incidents. I have chosen to call them stories because telling stories about our work and experiences as educators is a way that teachers and leaders come together through shared experiences. The stories are based on data generated at the time the incidents occurred. The stories have all been member checked for accuracy of both detail and meaning.

For each of the themes, I present a story that helps show both the need and the leadership response. I also explain how each story, and others like it, was a part of a

critical incident, whether collectively or individually, that changed my behaviors and shaped my leadership skills and decisions. Data were collected as journal entries, interviews, news articles, a recent peer interview, and quantitative data sources such as attendance records and standardized test scores. The data collected was disaggregated, analyzed and systematically coded until patterns emerged. The trustworthiness of the narrative is supported by including direct quotes from participants, and by referencing data sets contained in the appendices. The narrative is presented through the voice of the author of the study who is also the central actor within the case. The narrative is supported by archival data sets and by data generated within the context of the study. The narrative has been member-checked by a variety of stakeholders with first-hand knowledge of the case.

This study is retrospective documentation specific to ten years of the life of an administrator at one public neighborhood elementary school. This school, Sunrise Elementary (pseudonym), was built in 1967 in Louisiana. Over the ten years of 2012-2022, the school had an average enrollment of 1,000 students. Yearly, on average, a 10% special education population and 8-10% English as a Second Language population (see Appendix B for demographic information). It is a public school with no magnet school component in a district with six magnet school options for elementary students. Those magnet schools have been typically the school of choice for families that can test into those schools. The other neighborhood schools are considered 'less than" when compared to the magnets. The student population average at SES over that period was 46.3% White, 42.1% Black, 8.5% Asian or Middle Eastern, 2.7% Hispanic, .6% Hawaiian, and .8% Native American. The teachers and administration during the early 2010s were

primarily White, and the support staff (custodians, cafeteria workers, paraprofessionals, and clerks) were mostly Black and making lower salaries. In my opinion and observation, this caused racial tensions and issues among the staff and, at times, the children and the children's parents. The administration had one principal, two assistant principals, two instructional coordinators, and two counselors. The student-to-counselor ratio was 500 to 1. The school did not get a second assistant principal until 2019.

Neighborhoods had grown around the school faster than it could keep up and faster than the district could build more schools. Within a year after SES was built, temporary buildings were already placed on the grounds to compensate for the overcrowding. During desegregation, SES was the first predominantly White school to have a Black principal in the area. The school has a "melting pot" demographic; unlike any other school in this district, this one served urban, rural, and suburban communities.

In addition to these demographic issues, our city has been plagued for years with extreme violence, gang activity, and an increased high school dropout rate. In 2022, I attended the funerals of two former students, ages 13 and 16, who were killed by two unrelated gang-affiliated shooting incidents. As a school leader, I often feel responsible for these types of problems in our community and want to make changes as early as possible in the lives of these children. Incidents like this have affected me greatly and contributed to my decision-making differently. I wrote in my journal, "what can I do differently at my school to prevent this? How can I prevent some of this from happening to children" (see Appendix A for journal entries).

In 2012, after being in school administration for five years, I was working as a Master Teacher in a neighboring district where our team celebrated great academic

achievement success. Previously rated as an "F" school, the school where I worked had raised its School Performance Score (SPS) by 14 points in one year to become a "D" school. I felt like I was starting to understand what it took to move a school in academic decline forward (see Appendix F for School Performance Scores).

I wanted to make a difference, and I wanted to do it at my neighborhood school, SES. I had worked there as a kindergarten teacher 12 years prior. I lived just one mile away, and it was my children's district school. When I received a call from a former co-worker asking if I would be interested in returning to SES, I gladly accepted. Before I knew it, I was their new instructional coordinator, helping their teachers write Student Learning Targets.

My first week on the job was tough; SES was no longer the school I had known just 12 years prior. I was pushed down in the hallway by students. I had to break up a fight at recess, chase a child down a busy street, and watch a classroom so the teacher could cry in the bathroom about her frustration over student behaviors. I heard teachers and staff making rude and curt remarks to one another and their students. Parents voiced their frustrations and concerns to me frequently. They already felt their child was treated as second-class because they had not been accepted at a magnet school. No one seemed to want to be there.

I noticed cliques among teachers. In many instances, grade-level teachers were exclusive and stayed to themselves or in their halls. It was not uncommon for a 5th-grade teacher to not even recognize a preschool teacher who also taught at their same school. Everyone had their own opinions about the negative culture change—some blamed magnet schools for pulling higher-performing students, some blamed the changing

economy, some blamed the accountability system or the government, and some blamed the current administration.

I decided that it did not matter what had happened or why. In my opinion, only one thing mattered. We had to make it better. Within a few months, I was promoted to assistant principal, a job I started with over 700 written paper referrals for behavior on my desk to process. I was overwhelmed and wanted desperately to understand why teachers had so many discipline issues with students. Only half a year later, before I could barely wrap my mind around the role of assistant principal, I was promoted to principal. I was in over my head, and I knew it. Honestly, I was unsure I wanted the job because I knew how much work it would take to improve the school.

Nevertheless, I knew I cared for these people and this place which was my home, and I felt I was being called to do this work. I had no choice but to dig in and make it better.

During the summer of 2013, I walked into the school as the new principal with my assignment to move this school out of its negative academic trajectory. There had been many formal complaints to the district by this time, and there had even been a petition from the parents to the school board. I started by sending a survey home to the parents (see Appendix C). I knew that as a parent, I would want to have a voice with the administration, so I was going to make sure I asked them what they wanted. It was a summer day late in July when I was appointed. I remember walking the campus alone and being very sad about what I saw. The playground was in very bad shape. When I had taught there 12 years prior, I asked if we could get new playground equipment. This equipment had to be at least 40 years old back then. The same old equipment was still

there 12 years later, broken and in serious need of painting. I showed the head custodian a broken chain on one of the bridges on a piece of equipment. He said, "I have fixed this chain more times than I can count" (see Appendix A for journal entries)**.**

Then, there was graffiti, broken and vandalized awnings, and trash on the basketball court from neighborhood kids who hung out in the evenings. There were shell casings, used condoms, drug paraphernalia, and firecrackers on the playground. Trash cans were overflowing, and the grass was knee-high in some areas. The first step was to clean up the area, so I started cleaning and picking up trash. Before long, others were joining the process. Teachers brought their students to help clean, parents started bringing their kids out to clean, and people started painting their offices and classrooms. I stayed there late one evening to meet the neighborhood kids vandalizing the grounds. I played basketball with them for a while and told them I did not mind if they played as long as they cleaned up after themselves when they left. I worked on building relationships with them and told them that I cared a lot about the school because it was in our neighborhood and that they should care too. I had my custodian add a trash can near the basketball court. I noticed that they picked up the trash the next weekend. I noticed they did not add any other graffiti. I noticed an almost immediate change in the feeling of the school and the staff.

I took a step back to think about what had just happened, and all I could think about was caring. I showed that I cared about the people, places, and things that made up this school. After all, I had an investment; I wanted to see the school improve, and I wanted my children to attend. After that, I put into place many activities and initiatives centered around caring and building caring relationships. That is where I found the

change to occur. I sent out a survey asking the parents and students what they cared about in a school. I knew I wanted to know more about what they wanted because I would have wanted someone to ask me. When I had conversations with parents, their main complaints had been that there did not seem to be a way for anyone to hear their concerns or opinions. They answered that they wanted their school to be clean, safe, and inviting. They said they wanted after-school activities because most worked late and did not want their children home alone. They also wanted their children to have nice playgrounds and soccer fields they could play on at any time. I worked hard to fulfill these requests and show the parents I cared. I also brought my child to school there, taking her from a magnet school and showing the staff and parents that I believed in the school personally. I knew that actions speak louder than words, and if I was going to say that the school was great, I had to back that up with faith and trust in its teachers and staff (see Appendix G for transcripts of peer interviews).

I had some conversations with my administrators about how we could create a caring culture and what an important impact that could have. I discussed how frustrated I was at the way the campus looked and about many of the punitive punishments I was seeing for children, such as the taking away of their recess, not allowing them to speak at lunchtime in the cafeteria, having them stay in from enrichment if they did not have their homework, and even corporal punishment. These were issues that bothered me greatly and that I instinctively wanted to change, but I met great resistance and pushback from staff and the current administration.

Some of the main comments I received were, "this is the way it has always been done," or "children cannot learn to behave if they do not have strict consequences." I

struggled with getting the support and buy-in from others on my staff because I knew that I could not do this alone. I wrote in my journal, "It is so hard to go against other adults and what they believe is best for students. Some of these are my friends, and some are people I respect greatly and have known for most of my life. It is hard to make them mad or frustrate them, but I must remember to do what I think is best for kids and go with my instincts" (see Appendix A). The administrators were saints to put up with me; I would not follow the rules for suspending children because I did not believe it was best for students, but this made more work for my administrators. I felt this was very frustrating for them, especially when I had no better solutions or resources to bring to the table.

I then started researching strategies and found Discovery Education© and implemented the 4Cs of learning. This refers to the skills researched and finalized by the United States-based Partnership for 21st Century Skills (Kaur, 2013). This stated that all individuals must acquire and master the 4Cs skills in order to fully participate in today's global community (Kolk, 2011). The 4Cs mentioned are Creativity, Critical thinking, Communication and Collaboration (Singh, et al., 2021; Kolk, 2011) At SES we focused on the 4Cs of 21st century skills in instruction to help differentiate and meet individual learning needs. As a school, we added the 5th C, Caring to emphasize that this was the most important C and a top priority for our school. Eventually other themes emerged as important such as Climate, Culture, Community, and Behavior and Trauma.

I decided that we would not give up on any child and would find something that would address every child's needs. I made it priority to say that we would not have a "cookie-cutter" child or teach in only one way. We would be the school that gave the child what the child needed, every child, and we would change our way of teaching to fit

the individual. This was no easy task. We produced the motto, "Where there's something for everyone, and everyone is someone." This became our way of life, giving the individual student what they needed by changing the methods for teaching until we could find what worked for that child. The 5C's were an instrumental part of that plan. We stressed these areas in every part of our teaching and learning.

Theme: Collaboration

I made collaboration a priority by using Kagan Strategies (a built-in system for classroom climate and management) and started asking students to solve more real-world problems (Kagan et al., 2009). Collaboration meant not only having students collaborate with one another, but having real, meaningful collaboration between co-workers, and everyone on the campus. It also meant that parents were more engaged and felt more included. We collaborated with outside businesses too. We began allowing students to be more collaborative because I strongly believed in allowing children to talk and to be engaged in the learning process. I encouraged my staff to make sure our students knew that it was good to speak about problems they were having, so they could be heard. We began circle groups in the mornings where students could voice their concerns or talk about their lives meaningfully. This helped build relationships and connections between students and teachers.

Collaboration, according to Marinez-Moyano (2006), is the process by which two or more people or organizations work together to accomplish or achieve a goal. As a result, collaborating with others provides numerous advantages to both parties. Thus, teamwork entails the exchange of knowledge and information. According to Robert John Meehan (2018), the most valuable resource that all instructors have is each other. Our

evolution is restricted to our own perspectives if we do not collaborate. As a result, how collaboration is integrated among elementary school teachers is critical (Meehan, 2018).

We then started using collaborative strategies in our professional learning meetings. I wrote in my journal, "Having the teachers teach the instructional information to each other was the best idea ever." I noticed that they seemed more engaged when their peers were teaching material to them. We do not have master teachers, so it is very important that we have peer modeling and that we use teacher leaders to model the behavioral and instructional strategies we want to see. The teachers were more engaged and receptive when their peers taught professional learning. Collaboration for the teachers was just as important as it was for the students, and we started using the 4C model in our weekly teacher meetings.

There were many critical instances when it came to understanding the importance of collaboration but one that stood out was the importance of collaboration with the students to solve problems. I found it to be extremely beneficial to have the input and opinions of the children to help make decisions. This idea is partially due to my wanting or wishing someone had asked me my opinion when I was young. When I was a child, I always wanted to be a teacher. I wanted to help the teacher, and I wanted to solve school problems. I remember the feeling I got when I had those teachers and school leaders who allowed me to be part of the process. I was involved in the student council and was always a campus leader, which made my school experiences mean a lot. I remember feeling heard by the administration then, and I was asked my opinion about how to improve the schools on several occasions. I remember the sense of pride this gave me, and I wanted to give my students that same sense of ownership and pride. The sense of

pride had not happened in elementary school, and I remembered having many ideas about how to make the school a better place as a 5th grader, but no one had asked me.

Collaboration – A Story

As a school leader, I noticed many issues on the playground at recess time, and we still could not keep fights down or keep the recess area clean. I talked to the counselors and some colleagues, then decided to start meeting collaboratively with some of my students consistently. Due to this critical incident, I initiated "Lunch Buddies with The Principal," when a selected group of 5th-grade students ate lunch with me to discuss how we could improve the school. I asked them what we could do about the litter and the altercations at recess to get their opinion about what could be done. They said they would devise a plan and get back to me.

They met with Mr. B, my assistant principal at the time, and together they created a written formal plan called "The Recess Rangers." This team of children decided they would be in charge of influencing other students to pick up their trash, and if they saw trash on the ground, they would start picking it up. They also decided to patrol the playground, listen for potential words of harm, and report back to duty teachers if they thought a fight might occur. Patrolling solved two problems at once; it cleaned up the school and reduced fights. As a bonus, it also created an amazing group of student leaders. Victor, a fourth grader, (pseudonym) took charge of this group and became a strong leader. Before this time, he had struggled with peer relationships.

Victor was previously a socially atypical child who usually stayed to himself or talked mainly to adults. He devised the idea to have a "recess patrol" comprising students who could find out the problems, why, and who might want to fight and help stop them

by telling a teacher. We did not think this would work. We thought it would lead to more fights and bullying, but we agreed to try it. With the help of Community Renewal (who made the badges for our students), we created the Recess Rangers. The students had safety vests, badges, and clipboards and came out to recess with the task of basically eavesdropping on conversations and reporting them to administrators. By the second or third day, Victor had recruited at least ten people to be on his team, and within a few weeks, we had a major decrease in fights. Victor and his team were so busy recruiting people to be on patrol that most students had little time to get in trouble. When we had our awards ceremony and recognized Victor, most of the grade level was a Recess Ranger. Even the toughest students had given in to the patrol. By the end of the year, we had zero fights, which continued throughout their 5th-grade year. This continued to help the school and by keeping the school clean and deterred fights at recess for years afterwards.

Collaboration as a Critical Incident

This act had several positive repercussions; firstly, the students realized they could change things. They began coming to me or my assistant principal to share ideas or give me advice about making the school better. It also helped the teachers see that the children could solve a problem that we had not been able to solve. So many times, we are frustrated at what is going on with our students, but we do not think to ask the students. We learned a valuable lesson from this: to ask the students to help us solve problems. Lastly, we thought that "tattling" would create more fights and bullying, but the students had framed it in "safety" and talked about how they all wanted to feel safe, and all the kids could get behind that. It worked because of how they did it and framed it.

Through the theme of Collaboration, and the reflection on Victor's story, two critical incidents emerged: (1) The realization that listening to others, including children, can have a profound impact and help solve problems; and (2) that everyone's voice matters and needs to be heard, and that it is my responsibility to help make the school a more equitable environment conducive to that construct.

Theme: Critical Thinking

Critical Thinking, according to Richard Paul (2013), is a two-wave movement. The first is called a "critical analysis," defined as clear, rational thinking that includes critique. Critical thinking is a deliberate and focused activity (Paul, et. al. 2013. The active and skilled process of conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating information obtained by observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication is one way to discuss critical thinking. Successfully teaching critical thinking is more about asking the correct questions than it is about offering the appropriate answers (Paul, 2013). It focuses on how teachers may get pupils to think rather than telling them what to think. I realized quickly that I had to be very intentional about my actions as a leader, that everyone was watching, and that I would have to think more critically than ever before about what I was doing. I had to observe and reflect on what the school needed and help others see that need. I began to analyze and respond to issues using Strategic Doing© and other strategies related to critical thinking. I also began teaching my teachers to be critical thinkers and help the students utilize critical thinking strategies too.

Critical Thinking as a Critical Incident

This was first made clear to me through the critical incident of noticing that we needed to work together to keep the school clean. I wrote in my journal about the neglect of the building and the grounds (see Appendix A, Appendix G). The incident caused me to focus on a needed change in the environment. I realized I had to show that I cared about the building and that act was essential to the change. I knew I had to critically think about what needed to be done and then be intentional about what I was doing.

As a leader, my thought process was, "If not me, then who?" I knew that the success of my school would be built on what I modeled for others, and I began to work on doing everything I could to model that I cared about the school and the neighborhood. In the recent podcast interview with Jeffery Goodman, Shreveport-Bossier, "My City, My Community, My Home," I stated how I came in and saw a need to work together and get along and how to work on bridging some of those problems. I stated that the only way you can do that is through modeling as an adult, who has to be very intentional about speaking to children and showing them how much they care about them to make them feel worthy and valued (Goodman, 2022) (see Appendix H for transcripts). There is a picture of me wearing eye goggles, gloves, and a plastic apron that was taken when I was power-washing the bathroom. I spent all weekend working on the flower beds and bathrooms. I had to show intentionality regarding modeling the expectation that it was everyone's responsibility to care of the school. This modeling had some effect; teachers began cleaning their rooms and painting, but modeling alone did not change people's mindsets or work ethic; there was a long and consistent modeling of caring that had to take place and a lot of reflection and education that we needed to have before we saw the

real, lasting change to the climate and culture. The climate is perception-based, while culture is grounded in shared values and beliefs (Gruenert, 2008). In this sense, the climate is how people feel in the school, and culture is a deeper sense of how people act there.

Critical Thinking – A Story

I noticed on the school grounds that there was graffiti, broken and vandalized awnings, and trash on the basketball court from neighborhood kids who hung out in the evenings. There were shell casings, used condoms, drug paraphernalia, and firecrackers on the playground. Trash cans were overflowing, and the grass was knee-high in some areas outside. The first step was to clean up the area, so I started cleaning and picking up trash. Before long, others were joining the process. I very intentionally focused on caring about the school grounds and even hired outside lawn care agencies to help. Teachers brought their students to help clean, parents started bringing their kids out to clean, and teachers started painting their offices and classrooms.

I stayed there late one evening to meet the neighborhood kids who I thought may have been vandalizing the grounds. I played basketball with them for a while and told them I did not mind if they played as long as they cleaned up after themselves when they left. I worked on building relationships with them and told them that I cared a lot about the school because it was in our neighborhood and my kids go there and that they should care too. I frequented the basketball court after school on several occasions, letting them know I was not only watching, but that I cared about them and their needs too. I asked them what kind of sports drinks they liked and brought some up there. I listened when they told me the trash cans were behind the fenced-in area and that is why they did not

throw their trash away. I reflected on them and thought critically about what I needed to do to show them how to care about this place. I had my custodian add a trash can near the basketball court. I noticed that they picked up the trash the next weekend. I noticed they did not add any other graffiti. I added signs stating the neighborhood was welcome on the weekends if they followed the rules posted. I changed out the goals and updated the court stripes for them to play. I added lighting too, so that they could see and stay later. I noticed an almost immediate change in the feeling of the school and the staff and the neighborhood. I visited with those older children off and on throughout the years. They not only took care of the messes they made after that point, they also would not allow anyone else to do anything to the school. I overheard them saying to another group of kids, "do not mess with this school or the principal will come play basketball with us and ruin our game."

Through the theme of Critical thinking, I learned that being a detective, listening to others, and reflecting on problems before making decisions was a critical incident. Through the story of the basketball game, I realized that the voice of the community was important and that building relationships with all stakeholders is imperative.

Theme: Creativity

Individuals' creativity is defined as their ability to develop new ideas that contribute significantly to an intellectual domain. A creative teacher, according to Doppelt (2009), is one who supports reasonable risks and unforeseen situations while rewarding creative activity. In the teaching profession, creativity is defined as a teacher's ability to produce inventive methods to issue solving. According to Mary Lou Cooks

(2013), creativity is defined as innovating, experimenting, evolving, taking risks, breaking norms, making mistakes, and having fun.

One struggle we faced was understanding how our students learned best. I noticed that students were often frustrated when they had to sit for extended periods of time or were not allowed to have adequate time to move about or play. There were several critical instances in which I noticed that our students needed breaks, recess, movement and play and that when we allowed those things to happen, we made gains, we were less stressed, and students seemed happier and more receptive to instruction. Another critical incident involving creativity was when I listened to the teachers when they said they had too much on their plate with afterschool activities and we had to get creative about how we adjusted and continued to provide the students with extracurricular activities.

Creativity – A Story

Even though many SES teachers lived less than five miles from the school, they lived in middle-class to upper-middle-class areas on the southern side of the district. Many students who attended lived in a different part of the district that was socio-economically disadvantaged. A primarily White administration and teaching staff mixed with a primarily Black support staff also caused many racial tensions and relationship issues. I was interested in addressing these problems and frequently met with my security guard and a paraprofessional worker to discuss solutions. I had a creative idea-- to visit some of the local churches and spend time in the neighborhoods of our students. I had been to a few funerals but had never attended church services at these predominately Black churches. I made an intentional effort to go a few times and take note of what I saw.

Thinking outside of the box and witnessing the interactions in these churches was a critical incident that changed my leadership and influenced my decision-making. Looking at groups of students in their community and as a community uncovered the need to change our instructional strategies. One of the things I noticed was that loud and affirming verbal behavior is rewarded in the church, where congregates stand and say "Amen" when they want to acknowledge and agree with what is being said. Children and adults alike were commenting, walking around, leaving and coming back in the service, getting a drink or food, and coming back when they saw fit. It was encouraged for congregation members to stand, join in, sing, dance, or comment many times during the services. Members were encouraged to speak their minds and shout their testimonies or affirmations.

I felt this directly conflicted with what we asked our children at school. How could we expect our children to sit quietly for hours, speak only when spoken to or when a hand is raised, and have their most basic needs met (bathroom, water, food) when we decide it is time? I often pondered these questions when making future decisions and brought the knowledge when making behavioral and instructional decisions from that point forward. In my journal at this time, I discussed how conversations went with teachers struggling to teach traditionally. I explained these experiences to those teachers, and we had in-depth discussions that led to changes in their strategies. I felt as if we were onto something. I began looking for models of instruction that would help instructors teach the whole child and not try to keep the child in a cookie-cutter set of parameters for behavior.

This critical incident changed my decision making because it led me to seek out ways to emphasize a collaborative, more flexible structure for instruction that was more aligned with meeting the needs of the whole child. I had to be creative in finding time in our schedules to allow for breaks, more unstructured time, and I had to make recess mandatory. I allowed teachers to also be creative in adjusting their instruction when they saw that the children needed to move around.

Another incident in creativity was early in my administration, when I gave a survey to the families asking what they wanted in a school. Overwhelmingly, they stated that they wanted after-school activities (see Appendix C for Parent Survey Results). I thought this was a great idea that could help improve attendance and enrollment. At first, I tried adding as many organizations as possible and having the teachers and staff stay after school to run clubs and sports teams to have as much to choose from as they could each afternoon. I wanted to offer every possible opportunity for the children. We also had many teachers and staff who volunteered to do tutoring, teach dance classes, and everything from ukulele lessons to leading a crafting club. It quickly became overwhelming to our staff, and even though it was great for students, it was leading to burnout. So, I had to be creative. The clubs and after school organizations were a huge boost to enrollment, attendance, and the general climate of the school, I did not want to get rid of them. So, I thought of other ways that we could offer these services, without wearing out our staff.

I had the YMCA, CABOSA (the local soccer association, the VOA (Volunteers of America), Step Forward (a group of volunteers who would read to students), Wildcat Dads on Patrol (a group of dads who came to recess duty daily), Several Churches,

Minecraft Coding, associated with a local computer programming company, The Junior

League, United Way, Junior Achievement, Upward Basketball, Common Ground (a local

food bank/ homeless help center), and Bricks for Kids to create programs on the campus.

We also had parent volunteers and high schoolers who volunteered to do tutoring, teach

dance classes, and help with the running club. I was overwhelmed by the organization of

all these agencies and people on our campus, but it was worth it. Each group brought gifts

and additional support and added to the community outreach and involvement. It was a

creative decision that was not common in our area at the time and had huge benefits for

our families. When schools form partnerships with families that address their concerns

and value their contributions, they are more likely to maintain connections that strive to

improve student achievement. When families and communities band together to hold

underperforming schools responsible, student gains can be made (Henderson, 2002).

At this point, we also began different creative initiatives to help broaden career

path opportunities for students. We realized they might not see themselves as someone

who could be an artist, a computer programmer, or a scientist. We also added a leadership

component to our school and a Junior Achievement program for them to understand

career paths and leadership better.

Creativity as a Critical Incident

Through the theme of Creativity, I learned that having fun, thinking outside of the

box, and allowing children and staff the time to play was a critical incident. Through the

story of the visit to church, I realized that the the community we served had a structure

for learning that was in conflict with our current structure. I learned that I needed to be

creative and think of ways that we could mirror the church, so we could help our students

get everything they could from our instruction. Through the story of the after-school activities, I learned that I could be creative in using our community partners to help us meet our goals and create an after-school plan where all students had the opportunity to find creative outlets. I noticed through these experiences, and others, that creativity is important for leaders, students, and teachers.

Theme: Communication

As a leader, I knew that communication was important. However, I had no idea how important it would be for a staff of 130 and a student population of 1,000 and a parent/guardian population of over 2,000. Communication comes from the Latin term communicare, which means "to share." It is the process of communicating intended meanings from one entity or group to another using mutually understood signs and semiotic norms. According to the definition, communication is the expression of thoughts and ideas through oral, written, and nonverbal means. There is so much I learned about communication over the ten years of being a principal, but I will only share a few of the stories that led to changes that I made in communication.

I came to the school at a time when group texting and group texting apps were just beginning to gain popularity. We started by using "GroupMe" as a school wide tool for communication among the staff. Suddenly, everyone on the staff knew everything that was going on in "real time." When I arrived at the school, the intercom system did not work, so this had been a huge issue previously. Also, from the parent survey tool we had used at the beginning of the year, I realized that school to parent communication also seemed to be lacking. We found Class Dojo© to be a tool we could use with parents to inform them of what was happening in the classroom and with their child specifically.

This worked much better than notes that might get lost or trying to call parents at times when they might be at work or unavailable. Over the years, we eventually added more communication in the form of school news programs, Facebook and Instagram posts, and electronic newsletters.

I found, through the survey, (see Appendix C for survey results), that they had been very frustrated with the lack of communication, after-school activities, and the ability for their needs to be heard. They emphasized communication as a real problem citing incidences of calling or trying to make appointments to no avail when they had concerns. The parents complained about teacher rigidity and said their children did not want to attend school. The parents and teachers at the school were also very frustrated with adding another magnet school that again pulled more high-performing students away from our school. Some parents commented that they were frustrated at even having to be at the school because they felt their child "deserved" to be in a better school (aka magnet school). Previously engaged parents complained to the school board about the teachers and administration. They wanted the school to be where their children "wanted" to attend. They wanted communication and inclusivity that they did not feel that they had.

So we started using tools to get parents the information they needed quickly and efficiently. We also started working on being better communicators with each other. The language we used needed to be consistent and the expectation for the language we were using with children needed to be intentionally culturally responsive. We had professional development on disability etiquette, culturally and linguistically responsive teaching, and understanding poverty.

At this time, I believed I had to sacrifice my life/work balance for my school, and I mistakenly assumed that my teachers should too. I thought all teachers were not as passionate as I was about doing everything, we could to help these kids. I was wrong, it was not that they did not care, it was that they also cared about other things too --and they should. I am glad I listened to my administrators, teachers, and the surveys when they told me it was too much. After that, I spent much time working to repair these relationships. I reviewed in detail the teacher's UpBeat Surveys (surveys the district had sent teachers to take about the morale and climate of the school). I took these surveys to heart and tried to put much effort into changes that needed to be made based on these surveys (see Appendix D for UpBeat Survey Results).

At first, I was frustrated at this survey. I did not want the district to ask my teachers what they thought of me or use it against my staff or me. However, after looking at the results, I focused on the areas that needed improvement, which made a huge difference. Over two years, we had a more than 10-point increase in parent communication, professional development, autonomy, school safety and order, work/life balance, teacher voice and leadership, and cultural competence. I was so proud of these scores! The biggest gains we had were in work/life balance.

One of my administrators told me it was hard on my teachers that I texted and emailed all night and on the weekends. If I did not have the knowledge and skill set of a relational leader, I do not think I would have been able to hear this or do anything about it. At the time, I thought it did not matter, and they understood they could answer me whenever convenient. My administrator pointed out that they did not want to disappoint me, so many stopped whatever they were doing with their family to answer me, causing

frustration and tension that was unknown to me. I was so glad that this administrator

could tell me that what I was doing was wrong. When I changed the practice and started

thinking of them differently, it dramatically increased that score by over sixteen points,

the largest change we had on the survey (see Appendix D for UpBeat Survey Results).

      I had added too much to the plates of my team members. I often thought that I

could put more on them than I should. I quickly realized that it was bad for morale to

expect teachers to give their entire lives to the school or not make time for themselves or

their families. I also tried to streamline dates and times and make things more consistent

to help with planning. I also had to work on making meeting agendas and sticking to

those agendas. I struggled with time management and organization and saw how

important it was to be consistent and organized, or I would make the entire staff shut

down. I also learned from my mistakes by realizing people are not as flexible as I am,

most people do not like change, and most people do not like to be thrown things last

minute. As a leader, I had to work on thinking ahead, strategically planning things, and

not putting things out there without consulting my team. These were real struggles I

worked on and had to change.

Communication – A Story

      With caring at the center of all our initiatives, we started identifying the people

who cared about our school and community. But I needed a plan to communicate with

them and build relationships. Early on, I took a chance and decided to have a school

clean-up day before we started that first year. I knew I would never win the parents,

teachers, or students over if I did not even care about how the school looked. However,

with school only two weeks away, I needed help. Parents, grandparents, students, and

employees showed up and volunteered to help clean on Saturday and Sunday. They came, helped sweep and mop, and were so kind and excited to volunteer. In addition to cleaning, we started building important relationships. At the time, I was unfamiliar with Middle Eastern culture, although many families in our school were from the Middle East. I noticed one family using an *Ashakta* hand-made mop. I saw the very specific, efficient way that they cleaned, and I asked questions about their culture. One mother, "K," shared with me that she felt so welcome and was amazed to be personally welcomed by the principal. She expressed that she had difficulty feeling welcome anywhere in the city. From that experience, she ultimately became one of the most vital parent volunteers, recruiting many families from their culture over the years. Another mother, "R," also talked about how welcome she felt that day. She brought several different cultures together and made people from all walks of life feel included.

"R" stated in my interview with her,

We felt like the school was family; it did not matter who you were or where you came from, everyone felt at home. We have a saying in Arabic, 'you cannot clap with one hand,' which was exactly how it was there. Everyone was helping each other all the time. From moving away from my family, even though the school was supposed to be for my kids, it helped me, too. It made me feel that I was not alone when I had to be so far from home. My closest people still to this day are those people who I met at that school. You made it a home away from home for us.

Developing an inclusive culture where communication was key was very important because the parent survey mentioned that the PTA was previously considered

somewhat exclusive. Some parents from other cultures had felt intimidated about joining. It was not that our parents did not care; they were not being invited to be part of the solution. This was a critical incident in changing the climate and culture to one where everyone had a stake in caring about the school. From that moment forward, we had a very inclusive, active, and engaged PTA.

The PTA president, "M", stated,

It was our school family; we realized really quickly that sometimes all it takes for someone to be at ease and feel welcome is for someone to have a conversation with them and take a little interest in them. I just loved how you made everyone feel so included. It was very intentional and thoughtful. We had come from a school where I did not feel like my daughter, who had special medical needs, was very welcome; in fact, I did not even feel safe when we left, which was why we left. I thought we would have to find a private school to take care of us. How lucky we were to find a public school that cared so much. It turned out to also be a great place for my son. I just felt like you made it a point to make it something for everyone. I wouldn't trade the relationships we made there for the world.

Communication as a Critical Incident

One critical incident in communication was that everyone's voice is important, even if they do not speak your language. We had a diverse population and I felt that it was important to communicate with them, even if there were communication barriers. We worked to find translators at times, used translation apps, or even worked with students to serve as translators with parents. It seemed to me that the parents had not felt welcome or felt that they had been communicated with often and this left them with a sense of

exclusion. We worked hard to make parents all feel welcome and part of what we were doing.

In addition to listening to parents, I also wanted to make sure they felt seen. I wanted to make sure we communicated that they were part of our big family and that their voices and opinions mattered. I never dreamed that personally communicating this to them would lead to building extremely important relationships. We subsequently had many multicultural events at the request of our diverse parents who wanted to show their culture to others. We had a multicultural feast day, a Christmas around the world celebration, and a market day, where vendors could distribute information and free samples from their businesses. We had a career fair too, and our parents were a significant part of the representation.

Through the critical incident of Communication, I learned that having background knowledge was crucial. Through the story of the teachers' frustration about forms of communication, I realized that communication needed to be more often, more efficient, and more concise. I learned that I needed to be a better communicator when it comes to listening to all the people and making sure they felt heard. Through the stories from our Middle Eastern families, I realize that families who do not speak the language still need to be heard. I also learned that the words we use are important and need to be intentional and consistent throughout the school. I noticed through these experiences, and others, that communication is important for all stakeholders.

Theme: Caring

Around this time, we also found a structure for intentional caring through Community Renewal International®'s model. Through Community Renewal International®, I learned about Relational Leadership. This model encourages leadership that grows relational capacity, which is the ability to lead with positive emotion, creating better outcomes. Relational leaders continually ask others their opinion, listen to others, and consider suggestions, provide forums for open and honest discussion, without fear of repercussion, seek feedback, and pursue more participative decision-making" (Clarke, 2018). Leadership is an influence relationship between leaders and followers who intend real changes that reflect their mutual purposes (Rost, 1991). In his book, Ed Morrison describes 10 leadership skills for guiding complex collaborations within loosely joined open networks. These skills are useful in (1) seeding and growing a relational leadership network, (2) in growing wholeness through relationships, and (3) in emerging innovations from a network of caring (Morrison et al., 2019). This concept was directly in line with what I believed to be true of good leadership; therefore, it was a natural model for me to follow. I sought to learn more about relational leadership to improve and grow in my abilities. Subsequently, I also found that modeling was Nel Noddings' first component in building a culture of caring. Through this modeling, from the teachers to the staff, the bigger and better change would continue to occur (Noddings, 2006).

We added our 5th C to the 4Cs: Caring. The model has since become the 5C model with an added component of "character or citizenship," but our addition came before this official change occurred in the literature (Kolk, 2011). Quickly, caring

became our number one "C," and we intentionally focused on weaving caring through everything else from that point forward.

The Community Renewal Initiative: *We Care Schools*

The "We Care" initiative was our overall PBIS (Positive Behavior Intervention and Support Plan) that was a part of every day. The focus was to keep caring at the forefront of everything we did and make it the most constant and stable part of our environment. Every morning on the intercom, I read a We Care card highlighting what caring acts students or staff had been caught doing recently. The "caught you caring" game was something we used daily to emphasize that caring was the most important thing we could do. The game has two benefits: it increases serotonin levels for the person "caught" caring and for the person who notices the caring act. It makes people feel happier and can help the school's overall climate and culture. We Care also has "Pathfinder" awards when students or staff do something extraordinary to go out of their way to move the program forward. We also had a celebration or "house parties" to keep the incentives meaningful. All these components took time to manage and plan, and we had to keep a balance. These tasks also took time to organize and plan. Our administrators had much extra work to do, and it could be challenging to get it all done.

Caring as a Critical Incident

One critical incident was the realization that intentional caring is what my school needed more than anything else. I, therefore, worked to create the *We Care Schools* initiative with Community Renewal International® (see Appendix I for *We Care Schools* Artifacts). *We Care Schools* is a public school system pilot initiative (the "Pilot") that explores and tests the Community Renewal (CR) model within a school community. CR

provides principles and practices for growing and nurturing a school culture of caring. This culture provides the foundation for improving both educational and community outcomes. The CR model focuses on what everyone shares in common within a community: a capacity to care. By intentionally prioritizing and celebrating caring acts, the CR model develops, aligns, and connects a shared capacity to care across all lines of difference (see Appendix I).

The Pilot is designed to create a school-wide network, or system, of caring. Participants within the system understand that caring relationships are their most valuable and value-creating resource (see Appendix I). Multiple acts of caring form the "relational foundation." Through a growing pattern of these intentional acts, trust and creativity emerge.

The theory of change within Community Renewal's model states, "Within the community, we grow to our potential 'wholeness' through our positive relationships; we cannot grow wholeness alone. Additionally, individuals caring alone are not slowing our societal decline; however, caring together contains the power to ever-renew the foundational system of positive relationships for a better society and world" (see Appendix I)**.**

Within the pilot, SES's educators, students, parents, and school partners are encouraged to co-create pathfinding initiatives (learning-doing groups/communities) that clarify unique characteristics of a foundational caring culture.

The protocol for developing caring relationships within the Pilot is based upon Strategic Doing® (SD), a discipline for guiding loosely joined open networks in complex collaborations. SD is an open-source discipline distributed through an international

network of colleges and universities guided by the Strategic Doing Institute (see Appendix I). This discipline can be used to increase outcomes of 'learning-doing' groups. SD has been incubated at the Purdue University Agile Strategy Lab, a collaborating partner with the CR Institute.

My guiding principle for the program was clear. We will improve educational and community outcomes by intentionally establishing a culture of caring as the foundational priority from which learning and teaching emerge or grow. Alongside Community Renewal International®, we created We Care cards that staff and students use to identify the caring acts of their peers. This seemingly small gesture was intentionally structured to be both accessible and impactful. We also created a "house" system fostering pride and belonging among our student body, teachers, and staff. By putting the act of caring at the center of our school culture, we have created a climate of compassion and understanding. Adding "Pathfinder Awards" included staff and teachers in intentionally recognizing caring acts (see Appendix I).

The "We Care" way became how we did everything at school. It was our underlying basis for all decisions and became the foundation on which we built everything. The We Care Way was the glue that held everything together and was the overarching rule we followed above all rules. It established consistency and held us accountable for what I wanted us to be accountable for more than anything – caring about students over everything else.

Through "We Care," we met every week, rain or shine, to discuss what we had done and what worked and did not work. We celebrated wins together and cried at losses. These weekly conversations were the program's central, most important part. The

"Sharing the Caring" act caused us to do more caring acts and created a snowball effect. It seemed like we suddenly had more to share every time we shared a caring act. The initiative's core is recognizing those caring acts in others to create more caring acts and is how we changed the school and how we could change society for the better as a whole.

The components of the We Care initiative are: Recognizing Caring Acts, Creating Inclusive Structures, Recognizing Pathfinders, Strategic Doing [©], and Collaborative Leadership. Through these five structures, we created our program to meet the needs of our school. These five statements help our staff and students understand the initiative.

1. Everyone is Part of a Bigger Picture. (How service for others makes us better and happier!)

2. If Not You, Then Who? (Everyone is responsible for caring, picking up trash, and recycling)

3. Its "US," not "THEM" (We are all connected, even though we are different-working to cross lines of difference)

4. Focus on Now to Move to What is Next (If we consistently celebrate what we are doing, we are more likely to do it again and do it in a bigger and better way)

5. Intentional Caring Can Change the World (We can all care and change the world by doing it.)

Community Renewal is rooted in relational leadership. Leadership is an influence relationship between leaders and followers who intend real changes that reflect their mutual purposes.

1. The relationship is based on influence. (a). The influence relationship is multidirectional. (b). The influence behaviors are noncoercive.

2. Leaders and followers are the people in this relationship. (a). The followers are active. (b). There must be more than one follower, typically more than one leader, in the relationship. (c). The relationship is inherently unequal because the influence patterns are unequal.

3. Leaders and followers intend real changes. (a). Intend means that the leaders and the followers purposefully desire certain changes. (b). Real means that the changes the leaders and followers intend are most substantive and transforming. (c). Leaders and followers do not have to produce changes for leadership to occur. They intend changes in the present; the changes take place in the future, if they occur at all. (d). Leaders and followers intend several changes at once.

4. Leaders and followers develop mutual purposes. (a). The mutuality of these purposes is forged in the noncoercive influence relationships. (b). Leaders and followers develop purposes, not goals. (c). The intended changes reflect, not realize, their purposes. (d). Mutual purposes become common purposes.

A common occurrence in the school after the *We Care* initiative began was that we would point out acts of caring daily. Not only would the school be clean because of all the children and employees picking up trash, but we would also hear people saying, "Is that the 'We Care' way?" This expression meant, "Is that how we will talk to each other?" It was a common phrase after we established a common language of caring.

When we played the "Caught Ya' Caring" game and recognized the acts of kindness, it would lead to more people doing kind acts, or it would lead to us *noticing* more acts of caring. This modeling of caring also transferred to the community, neighborhoods, and parents of the students. For instance, we will call one student Landry (seven years old), who was in the grocery store with her mother and saw someone who dropped some trash on the ground and left it there. She walked up to this person and said, "That's not the 'We Care Way,' that is not how we should treat our planet. I can help and show you, if you'd like!" She went ahead and picked up the trash and took it to the trashcan. Another story was of a class that stopped to let another class pass through when they were in a hurry to get somewhere in a congested area of the school. One of the children asked, "Why are you allowing this group to go by in front of us?" The teacher stated, "I am showing compassion because I see this other teacher is in a hurry. I am being kind and allowing her to go first. Later on, that child's mother called and said to the teacher, "I need you to stop teaching compassion because my child thinks we should let everyone in front of us in carpool!" The transference of kindness and caring through children into the community could be something that could change how we all interact with one another (see Appendix I for more *We Care Schools* Artifacts).

A Culture of Caring

There are too many caring stories in my journal to list them all here. But I want to highlight one story specific to caring that stood out from my journal entries so that it can be understood just how different this school was after establishing a caring culture. Every day we read "Caught You Caring" cards over the intercom to reiterate that caring was important and start the day off on the right foot because we knew that acknowledging a

caring act would make more caring acts likely to be noticed. This change was one of the small but mighty important acts we performed daily. However, there were some much larger acknowledgments of caring that we called Pathfinder awards. These went to larger acts of caring determined to move the program forward significantly. These acts were things that, to me, set us apart from other schools and other initiatives. Here is one of those stories.

Culture of Caring – A Story

I was in the workroom and noticed that a teacher who was not usually on her break was getting coffee there. I casually asked how she was doing and subtly asked how she was on a break at this time (me, being concerned the children were left unsupervised). She said, "I am on my French Break." She said this as if I was supposed to know what that was. I inquired more. "What is a French Break?" She said it was the break the French teacher gave her every day. I discovered that our French teacher had volunteered to give teachers breaks daily. She said she noticed that she had extra time in her schedule and wanted to be sure to help the others out because it was unfair that she had extra break time.

I have been in education for a long time and have never heard of a teacher giving up her breaks for others. She had been doing it for almost a year! The best part was that the teachers thought this was her schedule and that the administration had given her this as a daily task. They did not even know she used her break to give them theirs. When I told the story during the awards program, the teachers did not have a dry eye. They did not know she had been doing it because she cared about them. What a great story of self-sacrifice and empathy. This example leads to teachers being more caring about one

another. They still talk about it years later as an act of caring they use when they hear one another complaining about anything. When we talk about the "We Care Way," this is what we mean.

The We Care moments we had as a school helped me see that recognizing caring acts leads to more caring acts. It helped me see that caring about the place and the people in the system is an important part of what we need to do to improve schools.

Theme: School Climate and Culture

Although there is no clear definition, school climate is commonly defined as the "quality and character of school life" (Peterson & Deal, 1998). The school climate encompasses the experiences of individuals in the school, including learning and building relationships, while also capturing the collective beliefs and attitudes within a school. School climate is more than one individual's experience; rather, it is an overarching experience or "feel" of the school. On the other hand, school culture is defined as the shared values, rules, belief patterns, teaching and learning approaches, behaviors, and relationships among or across the individuals in a school. Culture encompasses a school's norms, unwritten rules, traditions, and expectations. These may influence how people dress and interact with each other (Deal & Peterson, 2016). Culture is more deeply ingrained in a school and may only be altered over a longer period through a systematic change in a school's climate (Gruenert, 2008).

Students spend a significant amount of time in school. Therefore, students' feelings about their school experience can greatly impact their daily lives. Students need to feel safe at school and feel comfortable that they are part of a supportive environment. A persistent positive school climate has been linked to positive student development,

learning, academic achievement, effective risk prevention and health promotion, high graduation rates, low dropout rates, and teacher retention (Peterson & Deal, 1998). A positive school climate should be a priority because learning in a safe, engaged, and responsive environment sets the foundation for positive academic, social, and emotional success. (Deal & Peterson, 2016).

Although school climate enhancement is not a simple or quick task, it is crucial to school improvement and can profoundly affect student well-being and academic success (Wang & Degol, 2016). The positive benefits affect students, staff, families, and the local community. Benefits range from improved academic achievement, personal and mental health, and relationships; as well as reduced bullying, victimization, suspension, dropout, and teacher turnover.

I had noticed a problem with the school climate. There were a lot of negative discussions and frustrations. Sometimes the children got into fights. Sometimes the staff were not very nice to one another or to the students. This problem led me to seek out ways to bring people together. I decided to start a house model. My knowledge set included books I had read by Ron Clark (Clark, 2019) and Ruby Payne (Payne, 1998, 2013). I longed to visit the Ron Clark Academy, a middle school created by a ground-breaking teacher in Atlanta, Georgia. This school has an inclusive and high-achieving culture in an inner-city environment. I had recently also read the Harry Potter novels, which had a house system that we could use to motivate students and encourage a sense of belonging. I knew of the Steven Covey model, "The Leader in Me" (Covey, 2011), and I knew that I liked some of those components but wanted something more focused on service and acts of kindness towards others. As a child, I had always had experiences of

volunteering due to my mother being an active part of her church and community. In high school and college, I actively participated in many volunteer projects such as Habitat for Humanity and homeless shelter services. I was a part of the Church Careers program at my college. That experience profoundly impacted me because it taught me that I was part of the bigger picture and everyone's obligation to help the world and humanity. I also participated in a volunteer program that taught adults how to read. These service projects were part of my identity and something I had always had as a part of my life. I thought long and hard about how volunteering to help the bigger community affected me as a child and young adult and how I wanted to instill this sense of community awareness in other children.

I read about how an effective school climate and culture also leads to better academic achievement and attendance and reduces unwanted behavior (Hernández-Crespo et al., 2020). At this time, I also started thinking about our demographics and how unique they were. And that it might be possible to reform our school in another way. I read many articles and books about how to change the school climate and culture effectively and then began to get to work.

Also, our city has been plagued for years with extreme violence, gang activity, and an increased high school dropout rate. As a school leader, I often feel responsible for these types of problems in our community and want to make changes as early as possible in the lives of these children. In 2022, I attended the funerals of two former students, ages 13 and 16, who were killed by two unrelated gang-affiliated shooting incidents. Incidents like this have affected me greatly and contributed to my decision-making differently. I wrote in my journal, "What can I do differently at my school to prevent this? How can I

prevent some of this from happening to children" (see Appendix A for journal entries)? I really felt in my gut that giving students a house to belong to might just make them feel the sense of family and belonging that they are looking for, which I hoped would lead to them not looking for that in a gang.

We started with adding a house system to emphasize character and unity. My goal of adding a house system was to give everyone in the school a sense of belonging and inclusivity while teaching character traits. We had the students and teachers help us develop the house designs for the crests and the names. We used languages represented in the school population, such as Spanish, Italian, Swahili, Arabic, and French; we had eight houses. It was extremely helpful for inclusivity and belonging. Students began talking about how they were in the house of Thieb (Caring in Arabic) or the house of Paz (Peace in Spanish), for example. They designed t-shirts and decorated their classrooms with house colors. We started with simple house challenges based on attendance, points for reading the most books, points for going to a 5K run for a cause or doing a service project. They had a monthly service project at a local place called Common Ground that was part of our attendance zone. Then we started recognizing children and giving them house points based on the character qualities of their houses (love, peace, kindness, caring, mercy, compassion). We did not know this would evolve, but it did, organically. Suddenly, teachers, students, and employees were becoming intentionally aware of acts of compassion, mercy, kindness, and caring and taking on the traits of their houses. Our house challenges started to evolve, emphasizing more points for recognizing character traits we wanted to see, and led to an internalized motivation and shift in the culture of the staff and student population.

By 2018, we were slowly seeing some real progress in behavioral and academic data. By 2022, we had double-digit gains in academic achievement in math and an overall gain of 8.2 for our school performance score. We also saw major decreases in suspensions (less than 6) and expulsions (zero).

School Climate and Culture – A Story

The campus is very large and when I first started there, I noticed a lot of logistical issues. Classes were traveling from one point to another in what they thought was the quickest way possible, but often this resulted in traffic jams of classes all trying to get through the same door. This caused a lot of frustration among staff who were trying to get their students to lunch or enrichment classes. Early on, I would hear teachers loudly stating that they needed another class to move or asking if they could please hurry, so they would not make them late.

After we began the We Care initiative, emphasizing a culture of caring, this issue was one that really changed from the ideas of the staff and students and their ability to see past their own needs. There were meetings held to work on compromises and directional maps. There were times listed that were going to be high traffic times, so that you could avoid those areas at certain times if possible, and the students even helped place tape and stickers on the ground, and signs on the doorways to help with traffic flow. These types of changes helped with the overall feeling people had when they were walking in the hallways.

One day, after we had initiated the We Care house system, I saw a situation occur at very high traffic entryway. I watched it unfold. One class backed up to let another class pass by them through the door, even though this other class was not following the

directional signs or the new procedure. One of the students in the waiting class asked her teacher why they backed up to let the other class through when they were not doing it the right way. The teacher looked at them and said, "What House are we in?" The student said, "The House of Compassion." The teacher went on to ask the child what that meant, and the child stated that it meant we were supposed to help others in need and be kind and understanding. The teacher who stopped and backed her class up had seen the look in the other teachers' eye. The other teacher was incredibly stressed and was late to wherever she was going. The teacher showing compassion really impressed me, and her actions impacted her students.

School Climate and Culture as a Critical Incident

Showing compassion is just one of the components of the house system, but the intentional emphasis on those components seemed to me to have a strong effect on the school climate and culture. Now, when you walk into the school, you get a feeling of peace and happiness. Teacher retention is high, the last year that I was in the principal role at the school, only one teacher on staff left, and that was for retirement. Teachers want to be at this school because of the climate and culture. The work environment is one of caring and clam. Climate and culture is a feeling you get when you walk into the school. This feeling of genuine caring gives the school a welcoming and inviting atmosphere. The Climate and culture was a critical incident, in my opinion, because my teachers, staff, students, and families felt safe, cared for, welcomed, and included due to the environment we had created.

School Climate and Culture: Rethinking Behavior and Trauma

The biggest challenge I faced was in convincing my administration team that we needed to shift from punitive to restorative practices in discipline. I often had an uphill battle with assistant principals of discipline. I had four different assistant principals within six years, which caused our school to lack consistency in discipline and behavior. The simple truth is that sending a challenging child home is much easier than doing all the work it takes to build relationships. Moreover, it is not their fault; school administrators have so much on their plates that they overflow. Most of my administrative team worked after hours and even on weekends to do everything they were tasked to do before dealing with challenging students. It was very difficult to look at already overworked and underpaid employees and tell them I was putting more on their plate, by having them work with a dysregulated child, often taking precedence over everything else. I second-guessed myself more than once. The staff knew that I did not agree with the disciplinary procedures, which caused many problems in our team's ability to work together effectively. This discord was not their fault; they were trying to follow the rules already in place. I was the one going against the established rules; I was the one questioning everything. When the disciplinary matrix stated we were to suspend a child, I questioned it. Always. Had we done everything we could do to support this child? Had we made every effort? Had we put enough interventions in place? Once I made the statement, "We are not going to send them home, so let's think of something else" everything changed. We were finally on the same page, and everyone knew we had to think outside the box and share the responsibility of trying to keep the child in school (see Appendix A).

Typically, people do not like having their authority constantly questioned, and I cannot blame them. Instead, we were flying blind, trying different approaches, unsure if they would work. This uncertainty caused my disciplinarians to be constantly frustrated with my leadership. I did not mind being vulnerable and trying new things. I was still learning and growing in this area, but they wanted a leader who knew the answers to our challenges. The problem was that I unintentionally forced them to be vulnerable when sometimes they were unprepared for that or did not want to be put in that position. If I could do it over, I would ensure everyone on the team had the proper training to shift their mindset around discipline from punitive to restorative. I would make sure everyone on the team realized that our end goal was not going to be about doing everything we could not get rid of a child but instead, everything we could do to build up that child. If I could do it over, I would be sure to have people on my team who understood restorative practices, ACES (adverse childhood experiences) trust-based relational interventions (TBRI®), and how to de-escalate behavior (including myself) from the very beginning.

I found (through personal questioning) that teachers were frustrated at the lack of support they felt they were getting, and that was why they were writing so many behavioral referrals. They felt like the children were disrespectful, and when they called home, no one would do anything to help them. They also felt that no "good punishments" meant anything to the children. I worked hard to listen to teachers' requests and show them that I cared while feeling the opposite – that there were too many punishments and not enough good relationships being built with students. I felt like relationship-building, and the connection they were not making was truly the root of the problem, not that they were not punishing enough. I started with modeling, showing them how I thought the

school and the people within the school should be treated. Nevertheless, showing them that there was a different way, one which was not in their comfort zone, was a very difficult and long road.

Dealing with behavioral issues was not my strength, and I worked hard to understand what I could do. Realizing that I had to work on my knowledge and skill set in this area was another critical incident that led to change at the school. I consulted other principals, administrators, leaders, directors, and the special education department. I found that we had limited funding, and restricted access to the resources needed to isolate and address behavioral issues, and not enough staffing to address problems. I spent most of my days dealing with behavioral issues and became very frustrated. We had students having major mental breakdowns, and none of us had the right knowledge or skill sets to handle these outbursts in a way that I thought was beneficial. I was also having a huge internal battle with myself at this time. After one particularly rough day at school, I wrote in my journal, "I do not know what to do or how to handle these children with extreme issues. They need to be taught how to behave, and nothing we do in the way of punishment is teaching them anything." I did not feel good about our discipline system and our options. "I am just second guessing every decision I make in discipline; I do not feel that it is right– what we are doing" (see Appendix A for journal entries). This discontent was a direct response to my internal disposition that I already had as a former kindergarten teacher. I was a person who was very nurturing and loving when it came to children and their emotional needs. I thought children needed to be taught how to behave, just as we teach them reading, writing, or math. This belief came from having taught

kindergarten and preschool, where children do not come to school knowing about behavioral expectations, and teachers must teach those ideas.

I realized that once students started getting older, teachers started expecting them to know how to act or behave, giving them little direction or grace in this area. I realized quickly, as an administrator, that my response to behavior was not typical and that most administrators believed we should use punitive discipline to get results. I disagreed with this and had difficulty going against the set norms of the period that were very punitive and unforgiving. The previous culture and the culture in most schools was to eliminate the problem (through suspensions or expulsions), so we could move on and get back to work. I also noticed that when I saw teachers or staff getting frustrated with children, they often raised their voices and got angry. They would have power struggles with children to the point that they would become highly escalated. I would worry about the teachers and how that could not benefit their health. I knew that we had to do something different and that using the traditional methods of responding to behavior was not working.

My gut reaction to "getting rid of the problem" (aka the student) through suspension or expulsion felt wrong. Trying to expel a child went against everything I felt was right because I felt that we should make advocating for the child our top priority. I became relentless in trying to find alternative solutions to suspension or expulsion. However, my other gut reaction was to help the teachers, and I could see that they could not teach when they had a severe discipline issue in their classrooms. This was another critical incident that affected my leadership. As a child, I remember when our whole class was punished for a few individuals' behaviors, which made me furious and always stuck

with me. As an administrator, I disliked seeing teachers do this to children. I also saw little or no point in teachers who had to have power struggles with children about inconsistent rules. Also, I was dealing with a discipline matrix that left little room for interpretation. For instance, the parish discipline matrix stated that a child who brought a weapon to school was to be suspended, end of discussion. It did not account for malice, intent, or ill will. I wanted to find out the "why" behind the behaviors of children and work on addressing them, but I did not know how at the time.

Students with mental health issues were another challenge. We would have students take off running down the street, throw a chair, hit another student, fall on the floor, kick and wail, take off their clothes, and bite people, among many other things. We did not know how to deal with these extreme behaviors and were ill-equipped with the proper tools to handle these situations. Proper coping mechanisms were not taught to pre-service teachers. We had little to no training in dealing with students acting out with extreme behaviors. At the time, we did not know what was causing the actions; I just knew that no one would be able to learn if a student was in the classroom acting out in those ways. For the first several years in administration, I had students in my office whom I did not know how to handle. I would let them come there, to keep them out of the classroom so that the other students could learn, and the teacher could have a break from them, but I knew that was placating this problem, and it was not getting to the root cause, and it was not a long-term solution. I kept saying to myself that I had to find a solution and a better way. I would tell the teachers to be as patient as they could. I would say, "What if this were your child?" These empathetic tools helped, but teachers can only handle so much before they break. We had some strong teachers who would try to be as

patient as possible, but when it came to the other students being unable to learn, we were all frustrated. I knew we had to look at behavior differently. Over the years, there were so many issues and stories, but four still stand out to me as providing an overall scope of the situation we faced.

Rethinking Behavior and Trauma – A Story

A second-grade student brought razor blades to school. The boy handed out these razor blades to all his friends, who had them in their pockets on the playground. Of course, they cut themselves, and the next thing we knew, we had a dozen or so crying 8-year-olds coming to us, asking for Band-Aids. After investigating, I found that the student obtained the razor blades from a box in his father's garage (his father was a house painter). He knew this was important to his dad's work; they looked bright orange and interesting. He did not know they would cut someone, and his actions had no malicious intent. However, the district guidelines at the time were zero tolerance for weapons, knives, and razor blades.

The punishment for bringing these items to school (especially since they hurt someone) was expulsion. According to the district guidelines, it was the only option. I was still the assistant principal then and still learning, so I asked if there was any other possible choice because I did not think this student needed to be expelled from school at this early age for something he did not even understand. The child was a straight-A student who had never had any disciplinary incidents. However, I was told there was no other choice, and this was the only option because of zero tolerance. I was sick. I could not sleep. I knew in my heart that this was wrong and that this child just needed to learn what he could and could not bring to school. His parents were furious (as they should

have been), but my colleagues told me I did the right thing. They kept reminding me about the other families (the families of the students who had been cut), and something worse than minor cuts could have happened. While I do understand that logic, nothing could stop me from feeling like I had made a huge mistake and that this was not what we should be doing with elementary students. I had an internal struggle that ate away at me. All I could think of was, where would that child go from here? Will he ever feel like he can make up for what happened? From that experience and that point forward, I knew I would do things differently in discipline if I became the principal and had an opportunity to change something, but I had no idea what to do. This story was a catalyst for me to change. I was so uncomfortable with the decision I had made, that I knew I would have to do something differently next time a situation like this one arose.

Rethinking Behavior – A Story

Trey was a child who would run. He would run as fast as possible to escape whatever was stressing him. The team agreed to expel him, but I knew something was wrong. Why would a child keep running away? Over and over again, we would run after him, and after we calmed him down, we could get him back to work again. It was a hard case, and we had to create a safety plan for him so that he knew the safe places he could go when he needed to run. Once we did this, the running frequency changed, and he stopped running altogether when he was in 5th grade. Trey was a brilliant child that everyone wanted to expel at the time because it was just too much for the adults, but he needed a good solid plan. We devised a check-in and check-out mentor for him; with one of the coaches. This coach allowed him to run and actually ran around the track with him several times during the day. He started showing signs of improvement. He had other

times when he could calm down and meditate in a safe place in the classroom when he needed a break. He was able to go on and be successful in the classroom, all he needed was a break to run or calm down, then he could get back to work.

The trajectory of Trey's life could have been very different. If his teachers did not allow him to have a break, he could have turned violent or become a threat to himself or others. Now he knows how to regulate himself and can ask for this break by using words that help him get what he needs. Thankfully, he has teachers who understand this proactive approach and allow him to have the break so that he can get back to work.

JJ came to school every day with his sisters. The family was on our radar immediately as the children were often dirty, frequently had lice, did not have uniforms, and were often hungry. JJ would not go to class. He often stood in the hall and would wait outside the door. We would have to coax him in slowly and try everything to get him to go to class. He did not have any adults at home that he could trust, and we could tell almost immediately that he had suffered much trauma in his young life. We worked hard to build relationships with him, which took much work. Year after year, he had teachers that took the extra time with him to build those trusting relationships, and he slowly got better. On the first day of 4th grade, his teacher realized he did not trust her, so she went to his 3rd-grade teacher, and they worked out a plan to have him come there first, get comfortable, and then go to his new class. He did this for several weeks until he could finally go to his new class comfortably. Just a little out-of-the-box thinking worked. This took a little effort on the teachers' part but did not hinder the learning process.

When JJ went to 5th grade, he was doing very well initially, but something strange happened. One day he came in and just exploded emotionally. He threw a desk

over, ran to the hallway, and cursed at everyone on the way out. He even ran into the

teacher on the way out, almost knocking her to the ground. We were stunned by this

behavior because JJ seemed to find solace in school at this point; we had become his

trusting adult and safe place. After talking with him and listening, we found that his

father had been arrested the night before, and when he saw the Student Resources Officer

(SRO) in his classroom doorway, he was triggered. He thought the SRO was there to take

him to jail, too. Instead of suspending or expelling him from school, everyone knew and

understood and could work with JJ and allow him to apologize. However, everyone in the

situation understood that he was dealing with something very difficult and that, as adults,

we would even have difficulty handling that level of trauma. Because the teachers and the

staff had worked to build a relationship with JJ, we all knew him, cared about him, and

wanted to see him succeed. We gave him the extra love and support he needed and did

not give up on him. That kind of caring made a difference with challenging children,

becoming a standard of care at the school.

Story after story like this happened, over and over, year after year. Students who

did not fit the normal school mold and had non-conforming issues that prevented them

from success at other places would come to our school and have success. It took much

effort to keep these children in school and work with their families, teachers, and the

administration to determine what could help them succeed. I knew it was worth it, but I

did not know if it was sustainable. My staff was worn out and struggling to do this extra

work. If we were to help each child, we would need more resources. Since we would not

be able to add any extra staff in the traditional way (there was a formula for how many

staff members we could be allotted), I knew I would have to think of alternate ways to get support for my team.

The teachers were trying their hardest to do the only things they knew how to do. They had much training to change their mindsets and view behavior differently. Administrators had to as well, and some still struggle. Changing the mindsets of 130 adults is no easy task. Many times, educators punish the way they have been punished. Many times, they look at the behavior instead of looking at the child. Many times, their trauma can prevent them from properly helping a child. Our job as administrators was to be the detectives and find out the why behind the behavior and look at that instead of blaming the child. The shift was a process that took years. It is not quick or easy, and each case is specific and individualized. It is something that has to be constantly reinforced and reassessed.

Staffing was a significant problem. We had two school counselors on a campus of 1,000 students. Those counselors had much work to do in addition to counseling. We also had a behavior intervention specialist that we shared with five other schools. We had an instructional specialist that we shared with three other schools. We had an autism specialist that we shared with 13 other schools. None of these individuals or our administrators could spend all day, or even half of a day, attending to one student; however, that was often what had to happen because students with serious behavior problems were demanding all-day intervention. Then the mountain of paperwork and documentation had to follow each event, which became an extreme problem in efficiency, and our staff could not get their work done or focus on instruction due to the

major behavioral issues we were dealing with daily. Out of everything, this recurring issue was the most critical and the hardest to handle over the years.

Rethinking Behavior as a Critical Incident

Keeping a child from expulsion can change that child's life forever. I felt in my heart that keeping kids at school could change the trajectory of their path in life. Even though we could not take home every child from a hard place, we knew the importance of trying to give them love and care, at least while they were at school. We knew that one advocate for the child could change the child's life and outcomes. We knew that caring for each child mattered. Our culture of caring contributed to why we stopped expelling and suspending children. It is a powerful example of how caring can change a child's life.

After becoming principal, I often thought about the story of the little boy with the razor blades, the children who ran, the ones who hid in their hoodies, JJ and his sisters, and many other similar stories. Those children were always there in my mind. They were my driving forces as I wanted to change how we dealt with behavior issues. I had asked for help from everyone I could think of and got little to no answers, so I started asking outside agencies for help. Also on my mind was our staff and how that staff also needed to have some emotional needs met that I was not equipped with giving. About this time, I first met with the Volunteers for Youth Justice, a volunteer agency whose primary function is to keep children out of the juvenile court system.

In 2021, we got a grant for help from outside services. Volunteers for Youth Justice (VYJ) is a local nonprofit organization whose mission is to provide community care for children, youth, and families in crisis. VYJ partnered with Sunrise Elementary, through grant funding to launch the first-ever Trauma Responsive School Resource

Center, including a Calming Studio. In this sensory-rich room, children can learn regulation through playful engagement. The Trauma Response Team has five components: Truancy (TASC), Family in Need of Services (FINS), Trust-Based Relational Intervention (TBRI®), Mentoring and Leadership Program, and Conflict Resolution (CR) Program. The program saw impressive results, with reductions in suspensions and expulsions, improved teacher retention and satisfaction, and improved standardized test scores.

Among the five components, children can be identified and referred to before a crisis occurs, as well as staff on hand to meet the child's immediate needs. In addition, the VYJ team, in recognizing a "need behind the behavior," supports the staff. Simultaneously, the team works with TBRI® the staff, holding listening sessions for teachers and offering the calming studio to adults and students. With TBRI® strategies in place, everyone is equipped to work towards empowering the child, helping with regulation tools to help the child remain developmentally on track, both emotionally and with their educational journey.

When Volunteers for Youth Justice were able to get involved in 2021, we added a calming studio, a crisis response team, and a plan for working with students in trauma. A behavioral change occurred when all these things came together (see Appendix J). The VYJ also started nurturing groups with our students. Student and staff wellness became important, and we started seeing people feeling better and expressing themselves in happier, more relaxed, and more appropriate ways.

Volunteers for Youth Justice (VYJ), a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that has served Northwest Louisiana since 1981, joined University Elementary School, a public

school of 1,000 students, to develop a Trauma Responsive School Resource Center Program by establishing new Resource Center located in Caddo Parish, Louisiana. This Resource Center's goals were to reduce and prevent school violence, address disruptive behaviors in the students, aid parents in learning better parenting skills and access needed social services, and improve morale throughout each elementary school served.

In 2021, this new initiative added human resources to the school (something we could not get from the school district due to the staffing formula) in the form of a School-Based Trust-Based Relational Intervention® (TBRI®) Facilitator, a School-Based Truancy Officer, Conflict Resolution and other SEL classes, and an on-call Family in Need of Services (FINS) Officer, which will allow attendance, tardiness, and academic/behavior issues to be addressed daily, in a preventative way, instead of waiting until an issue is out of control. Adding these resources was a game changer.

The TBRI® component allowed VYJ's staff to assist in de-escalating trauma-related behavior while freeing up the teachers to continue teaching the class without disruption or minimal disruption. The Truancy Officer at the school provided early identification and assessment of truant children and promptly delivered coordinated interventions to prevent continued unexcused school absences. VYJ's Conflict Resolution Program taught students how to resolve conflicts without violence, healthy self-esteem, and communication skills, among other life skills. VYJ's Leadership Academy is an intensive program that includes field trips, community service, and sponsoring events to foster leadership skills. Younger students participate in age-appropriate Reading and Nurture Groups to learn proactive empowering strategies and experience playful

engagement. FINS Officers handle more serious cases of ungovernable and runaway behavior in students.

Students and their families received services and intensive case management from VYJ and a multidisciplinary team of agencies and service providers. This network of service providers addressed the governmental and legal aspects of operating school programs and students and their families' health and social service needs. VYJ coordinated with the school administration team to garner input, activities, and procedures. The entire team convened in regular meetings with the parents and students at each school.

Each School-Based TBRI® Facilitator tracked and managed TBRI® case-related notes in the database and created and compiled TBRI® program data for grant and community partner reporting. During the school year, each TBRI® Facilitator worked with other VYJ and school staff to provide a TBRI® atmosphere for students in crisis within the school setting; provide as-needed TBRI® interventions when requested by teachers and staff to provide immediate behavioral regulation skills; engaged with students in the on-campus Calming Studio with sensory-rich and empowering activities; worked with the PC to coordinate and facilitate TBRI® training and activities; and attended school-based strategy meetings for each school year with the school administration and other VYJ staff members, among other duties.

So now we had the Climate and Culture component, *We Care Schools* + the intervention (TBRI®). This combination proved the magical key that turned the lock on improving the school and creating real change.

Theme: Community

From my perspective and experience, I knew a massive problem with student and teacher relationships needed to be mended, but how? I knew our teachers did not understand our students or their community. I did not feel like our teachers were connecting with our students. I noticed that students and staff wanted to be seen as individuals. The school's racial and demographic tensions and inequalities were apparent to me. The way staff interacted with each other and with the parents and students could be off-putting at times, in my opinion. I knew in my gut something had to be done about these issues. I believed in customer service and that improving how we addressed parents and students and the language we should be using with them was a key component in showing a caring culture.

In Nel Noddings' (2006) model for moral education, the second component is dialogue. Unintentionally, this was one of the subsequent processes I started focusing on organically. I had one-on-one meetings with teachers, small group meetings with teachers, and sent out surveys. I knew I had to "get in the heads" of the teachers and try to understand their mental state. When I listened to teachers, they said, "These kids are not the same; they do not want to be taught, and they will not listen." When I asked one teacher why her class was standing on the fence instead of playing at recess, she told me, "They will not follow directions and are so defiant and disrespectful, unlike the kids we used to have." I asked one teacher why she did not take her students out to recess, and she said, "We have too much to learn, and the kids are too far behind already. We don't have time for that." Another said, "I just don't understand these students, it's like they

have no home training, and when we call home, their parents don't do anything" (see Appendix A).

In my previous assignment, the leadership had taken us on a bus trip to our students' neighborhoods. The school's principal (it was a "turnaround school" and had almost an entirely new staff who did not live in the area) knew that the staff was not aware of the living conditions and poverty of the students. She made us aware by taking us to where the kids lived, and it changed the way I looked at those children. I knew this activity was essential because I had been part of that experience. I knew how powerful it was for me, and I expected it would be for this team of teachers, too. Little did I know that it would not be well-received at first.

Several teachers did not want to go and even reported me for putting them in danger. I went to my pastor for advice and had to do some soul-searching to ensure I was doing the right thing. I was very worried and afraid that I was making a mistake, but I pushed through. I could not have done this without support from my direct supervisor, my peers, whom I asked for advice, my family, and my pastor. It took my entire support system to give me the courage to get this done. I just knew that if the staff could walk in the shoes of the students and parents for even a moment, it would give them more empathy and understanding. I made sure I planned this out well and that we had security. I know that noticing and responding to this critical incident changed the school's culture. I knew we needed to focus on what we all had in common instead of what was different, and I had to look for ways to make that happen. Fortunately, my previous position at a Title I school gave me the skill sets and knowledge to know that we needed our teachers

to interact with our students where they lived. I knew that seeing where our children came from could be impactful.

Community – A Story

To do this, we took the bus trip to a predominantly poor neighborhood with a high crime rate in our district to work on student-teacher relationships. At the time, around 400 of our students came from this area. Some staff members refused to go for fear of their safety. One teacher told me, "I will not risk my life for this school; I hope you understand." I did not force her, or anyone, to go that did not want to, and it made me almost think that I was not doing the right thing then. After this teacher made that statement, I had to rethink my idea. I called every principal to ask their opinion and see if I was putting my teachers in danger. They all said I should do it, but several also said that they would not do it. They called me "crazy" and said, "Why would you want to do that?" The attitude concerned me even more, and when I went to my pastor and got down to pray about what I was doing. I was very concerned about making the wrong decision, but I kept being led to do it.

Even though I had been on a similar bus trip before, and it profoundly impacted me, I was not sure this would have the same effect on this group. However, I kept pushing, and those who went on the trip were very happy that they did. The kids were so excited to see their teachers on a day we were not at school. We met grandparents and great-grandparents on porches and in yards and discovered that many of them were the primary caregivers to some of our children. We played basketball in the street with some students. Teachers saw that there were family members who cared about these children.

We gave the children treat bags. We also saw the poor living conditions of some of our children.

Some had holes in the floor where you could see the dirt ground below. Some older children (4th or 5th grade) were the primary caregiver in their homes. Some did not have air conditioning, and it can get well over 100 degrees in Louisiana. One student had a mattress on the closet floor and was proud to show me that he had his own "bedroom." Trash was an entire problem of its own. Trash did not seem to be removed, and food waste was often on the floors or in the yard, beckoning to creatures of all kinds. Most of their living arrangements were unlike anything my teachers had ever seen, and many rode the bus home silently or quietly crying. It was hard to see the emotional reaction of the staff, but it was also essential that they did.

Community as a Critical Incident

From that point forward, the culture shifted, and I saw more incidents of empathy and caring toward the students and the families. Something else happened on these bus rides other than the quiet revelations that our students came from places much harder than we could imagine. The teachers and staff members started building stronger relationships with one another. They were not on the bus by grade level or in their typical cliques. They had been intentionally sorted into different groups, one of the best things to have happened. One fourth-grade teacher bonded with a preschool teacher about their divorce, and they were both crying when they arrived back at the school. They had never said more than hello to each other in the hallway, but forcing the groups to leave their cliques did something special. It built new relationships. When we returned from that first bus trip, we had a huge meeting where we talked about what we had seen and what it meant,

and we did some intentional work on understanding poverty. The conversations between staff members at this time were important. They talked about how they realized they taught different students in families that shared living spaces. They started bonding over their experiences teaching this student from this family or this one from this other family. Through those conversations, they started thinking more about the whole child and how they could help each other see how to reach certain students. We started a tradition of taking the staff on these trips every year, and I made sure I was intentional about our grouping to continue building new relationships among staff.

Seeing Results

When I left the role as principal in 2022, I had little to no behavioral referrals in my office daily. The structure of my day had completely changed. We still had a few cases here and there. However, daily, there were zero fights at recess, very few hallway confrontations, and few disciplinary actions that had to be taken by my administration (see Appendix J). When I left, teachers had begun to receive TBRI® training which gave them the tools they needed to understand how to work with students before negative behaviors got out of control—also, having the school-based resource team on site allowed for my administration to do the work they were assigned and freed them from always having students in their offices. When "We Care" was combined with the School Based Resource Team, it was a winning combination that solved most disciplinary or behavioral issues. There were still hard cases, but the cases could be managed and handled without severe disruption to the learning environment. I knew then that what we had created was unique. It took having the correct resources and training to make this work. I just had to see if it was sustainable. We have piloted "We Care" in several

schools and other districts. We also received a grant to start new pilots for the School-Based Resource Teams in January 2023. Through these processes, I hope to continue my research and show that adding these initiatives and programs to schools will create positive change.

The grants we received are funded by the OJJDP (Office of Juvenile Justice Department) and the LADOE (Louisiana State Department of Education, 2023). Our district is working to become more "Trauma-Informed," meaning that our staff will learn to utilize language that supports safety, choice, collaboration, trustworthiness, and empowerment in children. Our staff will also apply new knowledge of trauma and resilience in their classrooms. We will value a trauma-informed lens and identify more appropriate ways to interact with children from hard places or who have suffered trauma, and will also put support into place to help our adults on campus learn how to regulate any trauma they may have suffered.

The most important part of this reflection in my opinion is the reduction of Out of School suspensions from an average of 78-42 per year to a range of 5-8 per year (see Appendix J). Also, decreasing expulsions to zero is important because even one child getting expelled from school is too much. Also, the number of major infractions, in general, went down. Between 2017-2020, the average was 90 infractions; after *We Care Schools* and TBRI® implementation, the average was 45, reducing infractions by almost half. We also increased state academic test scores and our overall gain of +8.4 points on the school performance score in the 2021-2022 school year (see Appendix J for data).

I do believe that many variables led to our new success in 2021-22. We added the crisis response team and became more proficient and consistent in the "*We Care Schools*"

model. We were able to add staff and resources, and we had the opportunity to get many of our staff trained. By this time, our staff had (adverse childhood experiences or (ACES) training, de-escalation training, multicultural awareness, understanding poverty training, and resiliency training, and we started using TBRI® strategies school-wide. I want to replicate this model in many schools to see if the model will get the same results.

Summary

When I began at Sunrise Elementary School (SES) in the Assistant Principal capacity, I lost countless hours of sleep trying to navigate a system that felt wrong on every level. With over 1,000 students and a 500:1 student-counselor ratio, issues were dealt with through knee-jerk reactions, corporal punishment, whole-class punishment, and too many referrals and suspensions. It did not feel right to me. Where some of my frustrated and overworked colleagues saw bad behavior and problem children, I saw trauma, inequity, and a system failing the children it was supposed to serve. The issues were not the fault of anyone; it was standard protocol and still is in places. In some instances, it was a lack of education in adults; in some cases, it was just a lack of time. It took me, coming in from the outside, with a different perspective– a background in my childhood trauma plus experience as a kindergarten and preschool teacher– to change how disciplining young children should look at this school. I had to help it get from punitive to restorative. I knew we needed a new approach that fits us and would be based more on a proactive approach. I knew I was not equipped and had to look to others for help.

I could not sit by as a leader and watch these kids fall through the cracks. Instead, I intentionally sought out another model by which we could frame our conversations.

During that search, I found Community Renewal International®, a non-profit with a similar impact on a wider city level. We quickly realized we were making parallel efforts, and joining forces was a natural fit. Through our community partnership, we created *We Care Schools*, a program to change our school's climate and culture. I used Strategic Doing® to help make that happen. Then I found the VYJ and we added the TBRI® model and Crisis Response Team. By connecting these community resources with the SES stakeholders, I led the way to a brighter future for everyone involved. Through planning, workshops, and a pilot launch, a pathway for a better school was revealed, and a model school was created. I hope to replicate this model in other schools and see if it will get similar results.

In 2006 Nel Noddings stated that we must understand that the school, like the family, is a multipurpose institution. It cannot concentrate only on academic goals any more than a family can restrict its responsibilities to feeding and housing children. The single-purpose view of school is morally mistaken; it is practically and technically wrong because school cannot accomplish their academic goals without attending to the fundamental needs of students for continuity and care. (Noddings, 2006, 2017). During my 14 years in educational leadership positions, I frequently stated and heard comments about making decisions based on "what is best for children." I often wondered about this easily made, offhanded comment because many educators' statements did not match their actions regarding this common phrase. I often led by instinct and intuition. I reacted quickly and swiftly to most decisions that needed to be made, which was one of the main reasons I could successfully lead a large school. I did not realize, until this reflection, that my "gut" was the product of years of knowledge, skills, and dispositions that my previous

experiences had shaped. I was told that my decision-making was "different" or "unique" compared to other leaders. Unlike the other educators surrounding me, I refused to make test scores our number one priority. I also was atypical in my approach to discipline and looked at discipline very differently than the commonplace, punitive way. Even though our directive above everything was clear --raise test scores and minimize distractions to learning- I intended to make my top priority creating a school where children would become better people. I knew inherently that test scores were not the most important thing, even though everyone tried to make us think they were. I worked hard to keep what was important as the focus. The purpose of school, in my opinion, was to make better citizens and create humans capable of making good decisions and who could be successful contributors to the larger community.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The purpose of the study was to describe the leadership journey of an elementary school principal whose school made significant academic improvement over a ten-year period. It describes how focusing on intentional relationship-building and caring influenced one leader's ability to create a more effective and successful school.

The initial research questions that guided this study were: How did the leaders of a school in need of improvement create change and make gains through implementing a culture of caring? What knowledge, skills, and dispositions did the leaders need to create change successfully? What patterns emerged from the practice of intentional caring had the most significant impact on student success?

RQ1: How did the leadership of a school in need of improvement create change and make gains through implementing a Culture of Caring?

After a Culture of Caring was established, we saw a change occur. Three important factors were shown that the leader had to have for this to happen. The leader had to have knowledge, skills, and dispositions. The leader had to be *knowledgeable* of research in the areas of Understanding Poverty, (Payne, 2013), Strategic Doing, Hall and Morrison, 2012), The 4C's from The Partnership for 21st Century Skills, Caring in Schools, (Nel Noddings 2006, 2012, 2017; Kaur, 2013), The Leader in Me, (Covey, 2008), TBRI® (Purvis et al., 2013), Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1943), and

Community Renewal (McCarter, 2022) and more. Armed with this information, the leader could make decisions leading more closely to a Culture of Caring. For *dispositions*, the leader had to work on having empathy, flexibility, positivity, vulnerability, authenticity, and vision among other traits (see Figure 5.1). In the area of vulnerability and authenticity the works of Brené Brown and Rob Goffee contributed to the leader's dispositions. In the category of skills, the leader needed to possess the ability to lead reflectively (Castelli, 2016; Densten, 2001; Goffee, 2005; O'Sullivan 2010), lead collaboratively, use indirect leadership and modeling, (Gardner, 2011), and lead relationally (Mayer, et al., 1990). For the leader to make gains, they had to use those knowledge, skills, and dispositions presented, consistently.

RQ2: What knowledge, skills, and dispositions did the primary leader need to create change successfully?

The leadership had to have background knowledge in social justice, restorative practices, trauma-informed education, understanding poverty, culture and climate change, Strategic Doing ®, and Trust-based Relational Interventions (TBRI®). The leadership had to display collaborative, transformative, and organizational leadership skills. They also had to possess empathy, listening, vulnerability, positivity, patience, and flexibility. Consistency, compassion, perseverance, and relationship building were other traits that must be present in the leadership to create a Culture of Care. Finally, modeling was one of the most important components. The acceptable and appropriate language had to be modeled at all times for staff and students, and this had to be consistent with the school's leadership for it to work. As seen in Figure 5.1, three factors emerged to create the required leadership traits for a caring leader.

Lopez discusses how choosing vulnerability is being transparent and open to emotional exposure in relationships with others. Martin Luther King Jr., Nelson Mandela, Ghandhi, and Mother Teresa, for example, all leaned into their own vulnerabilities in order to connect with those they led. Instead of avoiding emotional exposure, they used it to connect with their audience (Lopez, 2018). Bunker noted that providing successful leadership in a system increasingly demands that executives can (1) understand the varied and complex impact that transition, trauma, or other outside factors have on people and (2) provide authentic leadership that will facilitate the healing and revitalization process. It is concluded that the capacity to assess and accept one's own personal vulnerability and emotional response, coupled with the willingness and ability to model healthy coping and regulatory behaviors, can serve as powerful leadership tools that could greatly enhance the workplace (Bunker, 1997).

Figure 5.1 describes these three factors and what was needed for the leader to have in order to create a Culture of Caring and make change:

Figure 5.1

Three Factors of Care in Leadership Diagram

Dispositions Citations:
(Goffee, 2005)
(Lopez, 2018)
(Bunker, 1997)
(Sutikno, 2007)
(Brown, 2012)
(Duignan, 1997)

Skills Citations:
(Densten, 2001)
(Casteli, 2016)
(Sullivan, 2010)
(Reardon, 2019)
(Gardner, 2011)
(Mayer and Peter Salovey, 1990)

THREE FACTORS MAKE A CULTURE OF CARE IN LEADERSHIP

These three factors are important in creating a leader who can lead a school into building a culture of care.

Knowledge Citations:
(McCarter, 2022)
(Maslow, 1943)
(Payne, 2013)
(Pierson, 2013)
(Covey, 2008)
(Clark, 2015, 2019)
(Noddings, 2006, 2012)
(Smylie, et. al 2016)
(Purvis, 2013)
(Hall, 2012)
(CASEL, 2023)
(The Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2008)

Dispositions
- Vulnerability
- Flexibility
- Empathy
- Character
- Passion
- Positivity
- Patience
- Consistency
- Integrity
- Trust
- Vision
- Authenticity

Knowledge
- Community Renewal Lens
- Restorative practices / Social Justice
- Understanding poverty - (Payne)
- Culture /climate change (Clark, Pierson, Covey)
- Understanding Caring Leadership (Noddings, Smylie)
- Strategic Doing ® (Hall)
- TBRI ® (Cross, Purvis)
- Trauma-Informed Lens (CASEL)

CARING LEADER

Skills
- Reflective
- Inclusive
- Model /Example
- Creative
- Communicator
- Motivator
- Coaching
- Emotional Intelligence
- Collaborative
- Transformative
- Organizational
- Caring
- Active Listening
- Relational
- Collective Leadership

RQ3: What patterns emerged from the practice of intentional caring had the most significant impact on student success?

The patterns that emerged were a series of activities, interventions, and intentional actions centered around caring. These suggestions can happen in phases, as these actions did not originally occur at once but evolved. A school could also put into place other similar activities; these are only suggestions. Some of the patterns were recognizing intentional caring acts, creating a welcoming environment for students when they walk into the building, the focus away from the self and to service for others, and intentional proactive monitoring and relationship building activities.

As seen in Figure 5.2, it shows how the leadership traits and suggestions for actions in implementation eventually lead to desired outcomes.

Figure 5.2

Creating a Culture of Caring Suggestions for Implementation Chart
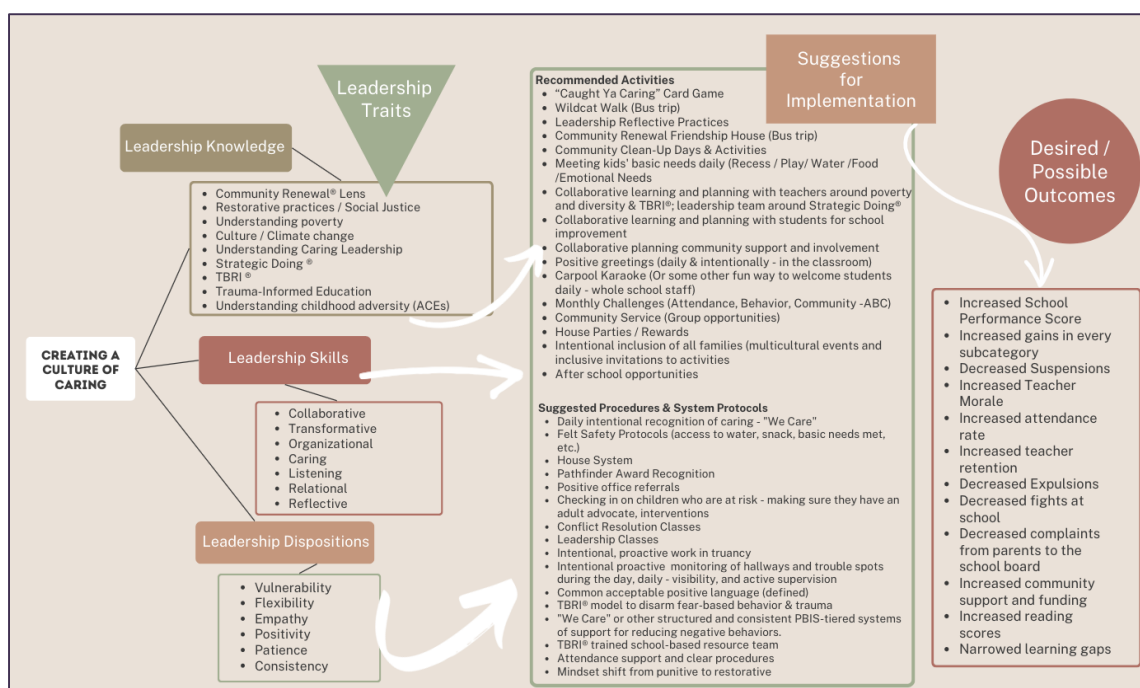
RQ4: What patterns emerged from the practice of intentional caring that can be replicated that had the most significant impact on student success?

Figure 5.3 shows some of the themes that emerged throughout to replicate this process. The themes began with the 4C's from The Partnership for 21st Century Skills: Collaboration, Communication, Critical Thinking, and Creativity (Kaur, 2013) and then extended to the addition of four additional themes: Caring, Climate and Culture, and Community. The chart shows how each theme has a story and a critical incident that explains it. Many incidents and stories were left out due to duplication of meaning.
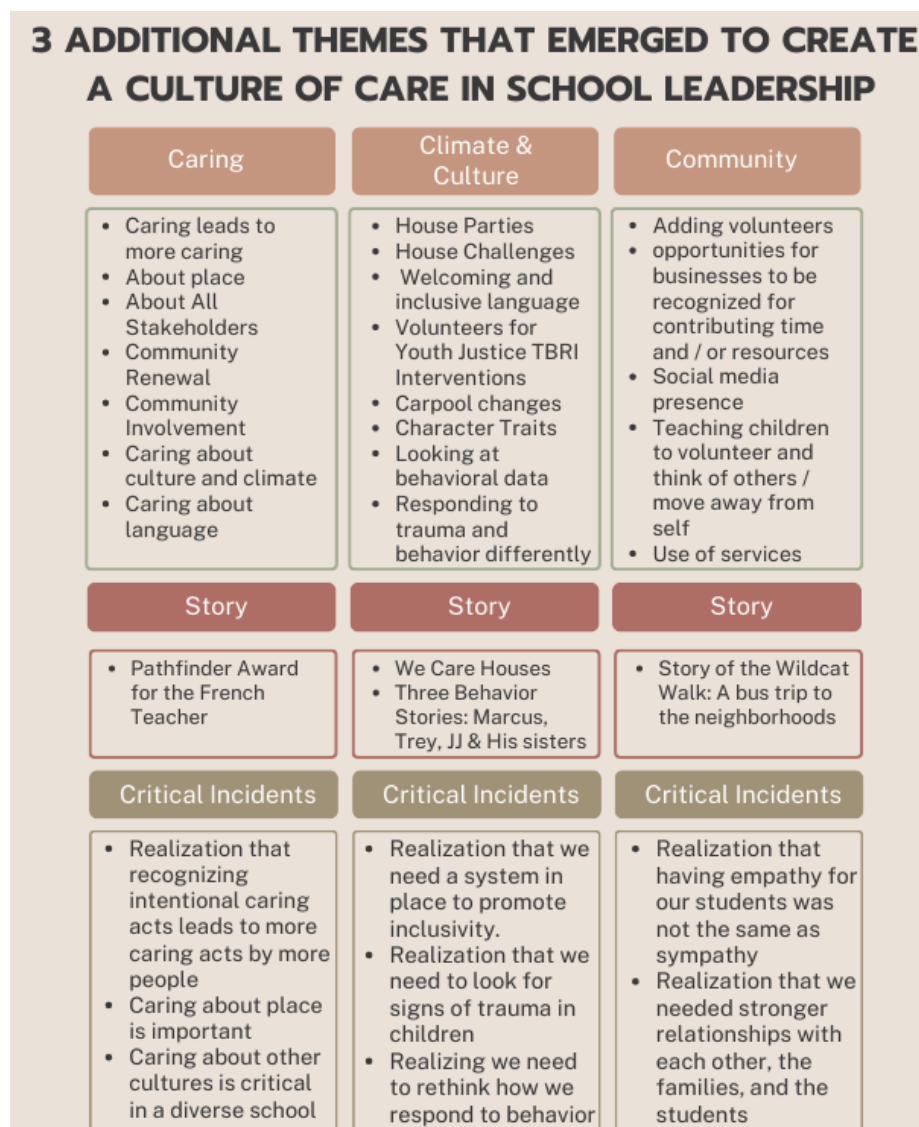
Figure 5.3

Themes that Emerged from the Research

THEMES THAT EMERGED FROM THE 4C'S

Collaboration	Communication	Critical Thinking	Creativity
• Lunch Buddies with the Principal • Face to Face Collaborative meetings led by peers • Discovery Education Training • Kagan Training • Expectation for collaboration in classrooms • Parent collaboration opportunities	• GroupMe • Listening Groups with Teachers • Nurture Groups with Students • Class Dojo • Facebook & Instagram • Newsletter • Katz News Program • SEL groups (divorce, conflict resolution, emotional issues, etc.)	• Using Strategic Doing© to make decisions • Intentionality • Consistency • Being a detective • Thinking before acting • Planning actions • looking ahead • being reflective • being able to criticize and adjust work	• Discovery Education Program • Thinking outside the box with outside resources for extracurriculars • adding playground equipment and additional areas • adding STEAM lab and more hands on activities • autonomy in activities
Story	**Story**	**Story**	**Story**
• Victor's story of principal and AP collaboration about recess	• Multicultural story of how parents wanted to have better communication	• Playing ball with the kids to intentionally build relationships	• Adjusting instruction to allow students more movement in classrooms
Critical Incidents	**Critical Incidents**	**Critical Incidents**	**Critical Incidents**
• Realization that listening to others (including children) can help solve problems • Realization that all voices need to be heard	• Realization that listening to others (including others who do not speak English) is important • Realization that the words we use need to be culturally responsive	• Realization that listening to others (including children) can help solve problems • Realization that all voices need to be heard	• Realization that we need to adjust instruction for students' developmental and / or cultural needs • and that there could be other factors involved with student behavior

These activities and procedures were only some of what stood out as essential actions to create the Culture of Caring. Any school can replicate these activities to contribute to culture change. A major finding in this study is that just replicating the activities will not produce a Culture of Caring. As Figure 5.4 shows, additional caring themes emerged as the data were analyzed.

Figure 5.4

Additional Themes that Emerged from the Research

3 ADDITIONAL THEMES THAT EMERGED TO CREATE A CULTURE OF CARE IN SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

Caring	Climate & Culture	Community
• Caring leads to more caring • About place • About All Stakeholders • Community Renewal • Community Involvement • Caring about culture and climate • Caring about language	• House Parties • House Challenges • Welcoming and inclusive language • Volunteers for Youth Justice TBRI Interventions • Carpool changes • Character Traits • Looking at behavioral data • Responding to trauma and behavior differently	• Adding volunteers • opportunities for businesses to be recognized for contributing time and / or resources • Social media presence • Teaching children to volunteer and think of others / move away from self • Use of services
Story	**Story**	**Story**
• Pathfinder Award for the French Teacher	• We Care Houses • Three Behavior Stories: Marcus, Trey, JJ & His sisters	• Story of the Wildcat Walk: A bus trip to the neighborhoods
Critical Incidents	**Critical Incidents**	**Critical Incidents**
• Realization that recognizing intentional caring acts leads to more caring acts by more people • Caring about place is important • Caring about other cultures is critical in a diverse school	• Realization that we need a system in place to promote inclusivity. • Realization that we need to look for signs of trauma in children • Realizing we need to rethink how we respond to behavior	• Realization that having empathy for our students was not the same as sympathy • Realization that we needed stronger relationships with each other, the families, and the students

A school that has a Culture of Caring has to have leadership that emphasizes these components: collaboration, communication, critical thinking, creativity, caring, climate and culture, and community, all of which must come together to create this type of environment.

If a school possesses these critical attributes, it could have the *Culture of Caring*

needed to improve the school and lead it to a positive growth trajectory. For SES, the

positive outcomes are shown in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1

SES Outcomes after Implementation

Outcome 1	Increased State Test Scores (8.4 SPS points, see Appendix F)
Outcome 2	Narrowed Learning Gaps by showing an increase in every subcategory (State Test Scores, see Appendix F)
Outcome 3	Decreased student suspensions for behavior (see Appendix J - JCampus)
Outcome 4	Increased Attendance Rates for students (see Appendix K, JCampus)
Outcome 5	Decreased Fights at School (see Appendix J, JCampus)
Outcome 6	Increased Teacher Morale and Retention (see Appendix D, UpBeat Survey)

Summary

"The courage to be vulnerable is not about winning or losing; it's about the

courage to show up when you cannot predict or control the outcome" (Brown, 2015).

Vulnerability is a disposition that is often discussed in leadership. Brené Brown (2015) is

one of the many researchers and speakers who discuss how vulnerability plays a part in

leadership. Through this work, I found many paths in which the leader had to be

vulnerable.

Another article suggests incorporating critical reflective practices in a leadership

development program. The researchers used a constructivist approach to show that

reflective processes encourage generating multiple perspectives that challenge teachers

and future leaders to excel in complex and uncertain environments. Consequently,

leadership development and good teaching practices depend on reflection in action.

Reflection in leadership is another piece in the Culture of Caring model (Bedingfield, 2011).

School-community partnerships are a key component. Research from CASEL states that school-family partnerships are crucial. Their researchers explain that school success begins with school-family partnerships. They discuss that building authentic school-family partnerships through the lens of social-emotional learning can help the field imagine new, more expansive, and equitable approaches to wellness to ensure that all children, adolescents, and adults feel safe, supported, and seen so that they can thrive (Payton et al., 2000).

"The world today is crying out for a miracle. I believe with my whole heart that all of us working together in community renewal are a miracle" (McCarter, 2022). "*We Care Schools*" implies that it could improve the world, one school at a time. Suppose public schools focus on creating better people, helping children become problem solvers who can work together, and creating humans who care about one another and our world. In that case, we can and will see a positive change (see Appendix I).

Implications for Family-School Partnerships

Collaborative family-school-community partnerships have been linked to improved/more equitable student outcomes and have been found to help maximize academic and social outcomes (Bryan, 2005). We can infer from this case study that strong family-school partnerships aided the schools in creating a more stable environment. The presence of community support and resources improved the school's climate and culture, increased teacher and staff morale, and promoted a sense of

community. Teacher retention increased, attendance increased, test scores increased, and suspensions and expulsions decreased over the years covered by this study.

Collaboration between schools and community organizations can help to improve schools, overcome social and economic barriers, and meet the growing demands of local, state, and federal accountability policies (Cummings & Olson, 2019). Partnerships among school personnel, families, and community members are critical to ensuring the success of all students in inclusive schools (Bryan & Henry, 2012; Haines et al., 2015). Success can be achieved when themes emerge, including a positive, inviting, and inclusive school culture; strong administrative leadership driven by a clear vision of inclusion; characteristics of trusting partnerships; and opportunities for reciprocal partnerships and involvement.

Implications and Recommendations for Leadership Training Programs

Considering how school leaders can develop their capacity for caring school leadership is critical. School leadership development programs can be extremely beneficial in this regard. They can modify their program to include caring as a component of their leadership development. To learn about and comprehend the people in their organization and their needs, conditions, and concerns; new leaders can experiment with asking questions that will add to their knowledge base and improve relational skills. They can look into racial and sociocultural issues that affect others, as well as human development and the effectiveness of specific methods for caring leadership.

A school leader can also practice continuous self-reflection and learn about oneself, personal and occupational identities, assumptions and biases, and interactive behavior. Caring must be reflected in the standards, policies, and procedures for school

leader preparation, certification, and evaluation in order to shift the profession's expectations. Individuals in leadership development or assistant principals should also visit schools to see examples of caring in action. They must see what it looks like in order to recreate it. Finally, school leaders must recognize boundaries and engage in wellness opportunities for themselves in order to effectively care at the level required in school leadership.

## Implications and Recommendations for School Leaders

From this research, school leaders should consider building caring relationships with all stakeholders, working with outside agencies and community partnerships, allowing staff and all stakeholders to voice concerns and be invited into the school to help with issues, and fostering school communities. In addition, school leaders should be concerned with staff morale and teacher complaints and address these instead of ignoring these issues. Student behavioral issues must be constantly and intentionally addressed to keep everyone safe and allow students to remain at school. Being sure we address individual concerns is important and should be done promptly. We are not practicing caring leadership when we dismiss children, staff, or parents. Everyone has a right to have their voice heard; we, as leaders, have to be willing to take the time to listen.

In summary, this caring school leadership model starts with the leaders' knowledge, skills, and dispositions that are foundational for being a caring leader. The next two components are intentional relationship building and fostering community connections. The preconditions to create positive change exist when these three pieces are together. When these preconditions apply to the manifestation of caring leadership action, there will be caring interaction throughout the school. These components serve as

the foundation for cultivating caring communities in schools and developing caring contexts inside and outside the school. Such leader actions result in a full range of outcomes in which leader caring and caring expressed in caring communities promote students' social integration, specific positive psychological states, tangible and instrumental benefits, and increased capacity for caring beyond the school walls. These outcomes promote student engagement, which promotes socio-emotional and academic learning and overall well-being.

All stakeholders in this school should be aware of this approach now and should endorse it to others. At this time, the people in this school witnessed the impact and should care about why having this type of relational leadership in schools is important.

Figure 5.5 shows the flowchart of what can happen when the three components of caring leadership come together. If we are intentional about creating caring schools, we will not only improve school outcomes but will also improve community outcomes.

Figure 5.5

Caring School Leadership Flowchart
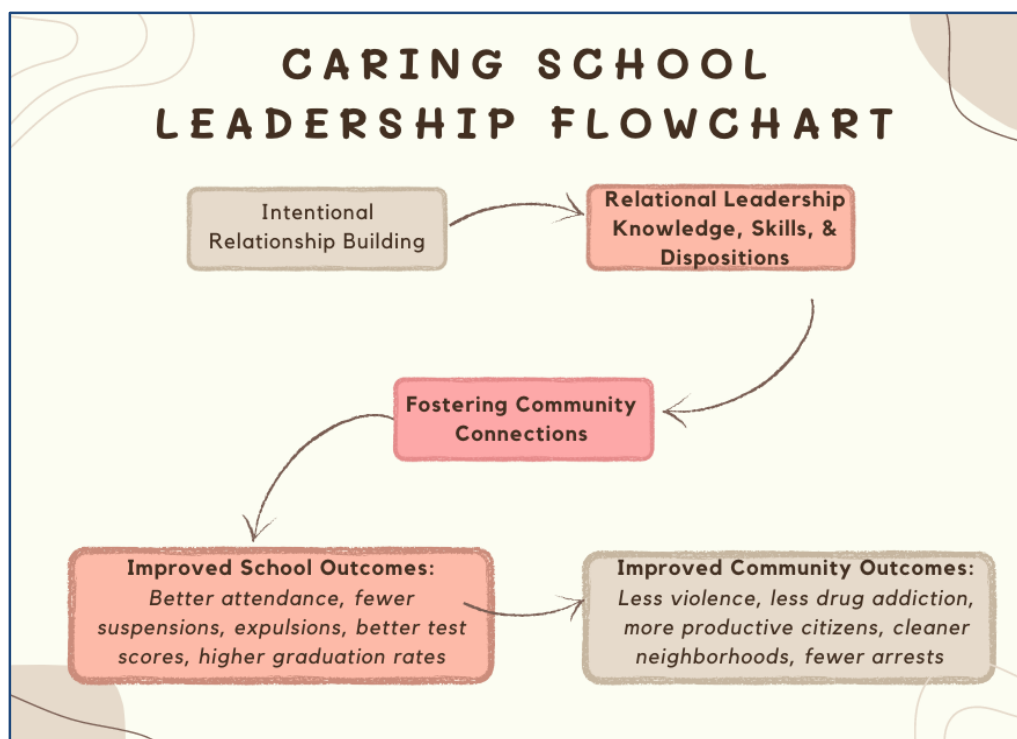
The following recommendations for future research could be extensive. First, a quantitative study directly correlating suspension and expulsion rates with initiating a Culture of Caring could be conducted. Another future study could be a survey of teacher retention in *We Care Schools* versus non-*We Care Schools*. The Upbeat survey, referenced in the index of this study, could be used for pre- and post-school year data to determine teacher job satisfaction and commitment to the organization. A quantitative study could be used to determine if standardized test scores and high stakes accountability measures are improved after implementing the 4Cs and becoming a We Care School. A study to develop the guidelines for implementation of the program could be conducted. A study could be conducted emphasizing the behavioral interventions used

and the effectiveness of the TBRI® team. A quantitative study of attendance rates in *We Care Schools* could be analyzed and used to show correlations between actions at the schools and school attendance. Additionally, a qualitative study could be conducted with the teachers and families of the *We Care Schools*, asking about perceptions and satisfaction of the school experience.

Conclusion

The conclusion to this work is documentation of a speech that one teacher wrote and delivered to the staff in 2018. It is a document that summarizes what creating a culture of caring looks like in action and some of the steps it took for us to go through to get there. It was a speech that encouraged the staff to take action, it inspired and encouraged the teachers. This was delivered at a time when we were trying to get buy-in for the diverse cultural house idea. Mrs. T., the teacher who wrote and delivered this speech was one of the toughest and most traditional teachers that we had, in my opinion. This made her the perfect person to deliver this message. She stood up in front of the staff and said this speech:

Increasingly, we as a people (nationwide) are becoming more and more disconnected. Really disconnected. I believe that the opportunity exists to BEGIN to change that in our tiny bit of the world by using this HOUSES idea. My initial reaction was, "Sounds like a great idea, but… how much time is it going to take, how much more do I have to do than I'm already doing, and is it REALLY going to make a difference? After all, we've done all sorts of cute ideas…but..."

I had the opportunity to listen to them explain the program and the ideology behind it, and it spoke to me. I listened to the plan that was presented

and had the opportunity to ask those questions that I had…probably the very same questions that many of you have. All of you that know me, know that I am quick to discard anything that I feel is a waste of time…that precious commodity that we have not enough of! I am convinced that this program has the potential to touch the lives of the children that we teach in a very positive way and that the changes that happen here WILL be taken into the homes of our kids, potentially even in some small way, changing homes in our community. The ripple effect is real and can happen here.

Each classroom has been assigned to a house, as have all other staff members on campus. Each house has a logo, a color, and a name in a translation. I was assigned the House of Rehema, Swahili for Mercy. I don't believe this was by accident since God spent the summer teaching me about mercy…and there were some TOUGH lessons! Then Mrs. B. sent me a picture of the logos she had designed. Topping the Mercy House shield was a ZEBRA. Now y'all know I love me some horses…and as far as I'm concerned, a zebra qualifies. The more I thought about zebras, the more I realized that they were perfect to represent my house and that I could use them to teach a lesson about caring.

I am CONVINCED that each animal represented on the various shields presents the opportunity for a lesson on caring and/or personal and communal growth. For instance, my precious partner Mrs. R is the house of Bonheur, the house of happiness. What an opportunity to examine with children what the word happiness REALLY means. The animal represented on that shield is the bee.

What an opportunity to teach work ethic, and how dependent we as humans are on what the bee does, for our survival …just like we are dependent on each other!

Twenty + years ago, when I started this adventure in the classroom, families were still for the most part, intact. It wasn't the school's job to teach caring or acceptance or how to interact with people different than we are. Today, that is no longer the truth. Whether we like it or not, it IS our job and if we can see that as an OPPORTUNITY and not a BURDEN, we can change our little piece of the world. Our faculty and staff enjoy a reputation of caring about children, and about each other. We all have that capacity for caring…it's one of the qualities that makes us good educators.

Part of my journey this summer had to do with "wholeness"; the body, mind, and spirit that makes us individuals. Perhaps it is by greater design that each of us has unique qualities that fit like puzzle pieces into the WHOLE of a classroom, a school…or even a community and allow that entity to function at its finest. BUT, in order for this to happen and be effective and magical, it is going to take a commitment and buy-in from every person who walks our halls. What we do isn't really any different than we've done in the past, it's just much more clearly defined, both in rationale and in implementation. With a bit of thought and a bit of conversation and sharing of ideas, we can give our students some concrete life lessons, recognize and reward their caring actions, and maybe, just maybe inspire a dream that carries on. (Turner, C., 2018; see Appendix M)

It was amazing what Mrs. T did that day. She stood in front of the staff as a leader of her peers and showed them that it was okay to take this leap of faith. She told them

that it was not only okay but an important thing for us to do. She was a very seasoned

teacher, close to retirement; she was one of those people who always questioned

everything we did. At this moment, she completely saw the value and importance of

relationships and caring, and she led the whole school down this road to the Culture of

Caring. Had it not been for her, I do not know if some of the more seasoned teachers

would have been on board. I had worked hard at building a relationship with her; at this

critical moment of importance, she acknowledged the relationship and spoke about

relativity. The best thing I could have done that day was to have her speak. When the

teachers heard it coming from another teacher they respected, they all listened.

Collective leadership is necessary to support system change, with everyone

responsible for the organization's success. Collective leadership cultures focus on

continual learning and high levels of dialogue to develop a shared understanding of the

issues, problems, and potential solutions. The focus on delivering measurable outcomes

in schools has neglected the importance of human relationships and minimized the

importance of how people are treated. Punitive cultures dominated by hierarchy create

impoverished school environments less likely to achieve high-quality outcomes.

Renewed attention to relational dynamics can provide a valuable understanding of how to

change cultures, even where policy and regulatory frameworks seem counterproductive

(Patterson et al., 2000).

The teachers could make sense of the idea of the houses because one of their own

explained the importance to them and helped them see how it could be done. She also

explained why it needed to be done. When we look at this through the lens of

sensemaking, it helps to see that the teachers needed one of their own to explain it to

them and for them to be able to accept it. When leadership puts something on the staff, it is sometimes misunderstood or can even make a good idea come across as bad. Here, we see a teacher who has helped make sense of a new initiative for the teachers, and therefore, they are more likely to go along with it.

The Big Standardized Test has been the bedrock of recent accountability regimes, from No Child Left Behind to Common Core. And that foundation has begun to crack and crumble. It has had no outcomes in teacher evaluation. It has resulted in no improvement in student test scores (Greene, 2022). It is time for real change.

We must conclude that school leaders function in a real reality fraught with pressures, paradoxes, and ethical quandaries. This is often a world of standards, evaluation, accountability for performance outcomes, and unrealistic expectations (Duignan, 2014). A Culture of Caring leadership could be the solution to the problems in public schools, if only we allow it to be the priority.

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APPENDIX A

JOURNAL ENTRIES

Oct 7, 2014

Today I'm at the end of my rope. There is a student under my desk. He is banging on the metal part & yelling obscenities, cussing etc. He is half dressed & wildly mocking anyone who enters the room. He is four years old & I don't understand how anyone so small could cause so much trouble but he has us all stocked up. I have no earthly idea what to do with him. He has already thrown all the papers off my desk & my secretaries & is currently running around in circles. His poor teacher, he seriously bit her & she's crying. She doesn't know how to teach the other kids or this child when he is in the class. I really want to throw my hands in the air & give up. How is this supposed to be what we are doing. How am I supposed to lead a school with all of this going on. It has completely taken my whole day. How am I supposed to go to my next meeting? I'm not equipped to deal with this. I did not go to school to be a mental health care professional, nor do I want to be.

Thurs. Feb. 12, 2015

I am so done! I have one teacher about to quit, several others who are mad as heck because I will not allow the to use recess as a punishment anymore. I'm so tired of seeing kids starting on the fenceline + then teachers sending them to the office later because they won't behave. What the hell? I wouldn't be able to behave either if I wasn't even allowed to move around!

Some of my admin seems to be turning on me too. I am drowning under evaluation deadlines media problems, lack of resources + funding. A 500 to 1 student counselor ratio - seriously?? How are we supposed to meet the needs of all children??

Constantly putting out fires is annoying. I can't even take a breath before I have to fix something else. Lets not how I saw the job going.

On top of everything else there's a leak in first grade hall. All their books got wet + they want to know who is paying for that! How can I be a leader when there's no time to lead?

Note: This appendix is only piece of the information, the rest of this appendix has been archived, you may request to view archived documents.

APPENDIX B

DEMOGRAPHICS

Demographics

Gender Count by Grade r>Male: 560 Female: 525

Ethnic Count

46.3%

42%

- ○ 0 White
- ○ 1 Black
- ○ 2 Hispanic
- ○ 3 Asian
- ○ 4 Native American/Alaskan Native
- ○ 5 Hawaiian/Pacific Islander

Note: This appendix is only piece of the information, the rest of this appendix has been archived, you may request to view archived documents.
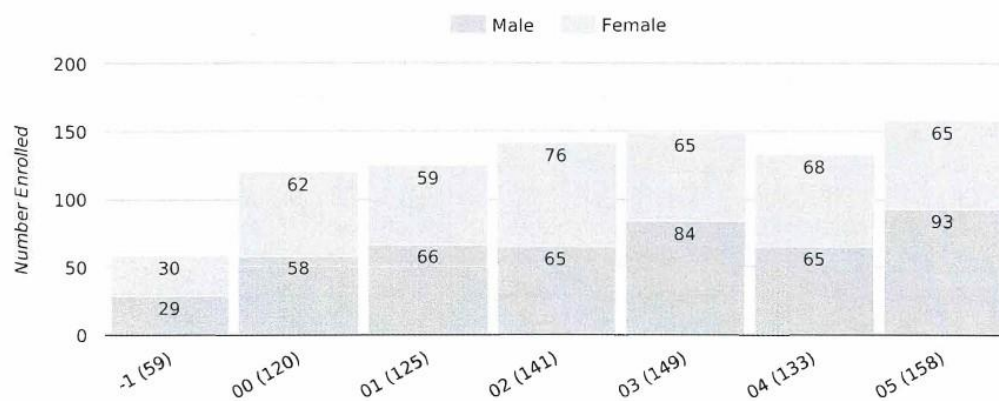
APPENDIX C

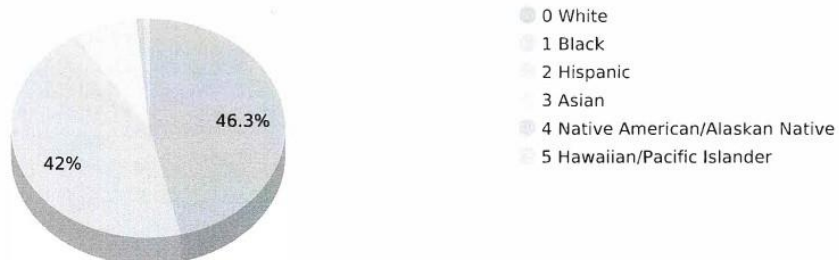**PARENT SURVEY**

Parent Survey

Please fill this out with your top 3 answers

1. Email *

_____

2. Please choose your number 1 concern with the school

Mark only one oval.

- ⬭ Communication
- ⬭ Bullying
- ⬭ Asthetics (How the campus looks)
- ⬭ Carpool
- ⬭ Offerings (After-School)
- ⬭ Offerings (During-School)
- ⬭ Other

3. Please choose your number 2 concern with the school

Mark only one oval.

- ⬭ Communication
- ⬭ Bullying
- ⬭ Asthetics (How the campus looks)
- ⬭ Carpool
- ⬭ Offerings (After-School)
- ⬭ Offerings (During-School)
- ⬭ Other

4. Please choose your number 3 concern with the school

Mark only one oval.

- ⬭ Communication
- ⬭ Bullying
- ⬭ Asthetics (How the campus looks)
- ⬭ Carpool
- ⬭ Offerings (After-School)
- ⬭ Offerings (During-School)
- ⬭ Other

Number 1 Concern	Communication 83%
Number 2 Concern	Carpool 10%
Number 3 Concern	Offerings / Extra Curricular 6%
Other Concerns	Bullying, inclusivity, diversity, racism 1%
Reporting - 63%	

Note: This appendix is only piece of the information, the rest of this appendix has been archived, you may request to view archived documents.

APPENDIX D

TEACHER SURVEY

U
UPBEAT   UPBEAT DATA REPORT

*SES ELEMENTARY Fall 2020 Compared against

Caddo Parish Public Schools, Fall 2022

FACULTY + FALL 2022

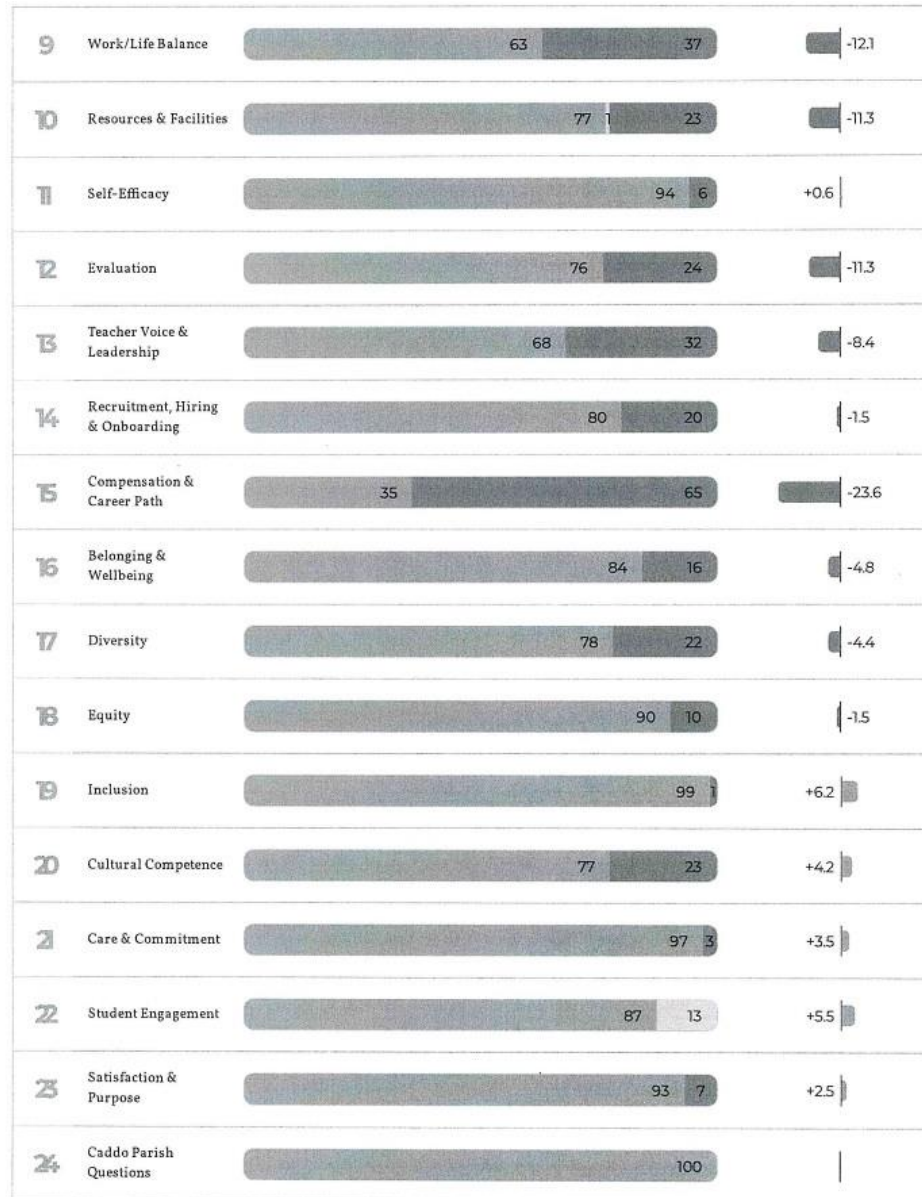TOTAL QUESTIONS 80 ⓘ   COMPLETIONS 47   PARTICIPATION 79%

NO FILTERS SELECTED

CONSIDERATION	AVERAGE ENGAGEMENT SCORE ⓘ	**PUBLIC SCHOOLS FALL 2022
School Results	68	-4.7

Results by Question Category   ☐ % Positive   ☐ % Neutral   ■ % Negative

	CATEGORY	CATEGORY SUMMARY ⓘ		COMPARISON ⓘ
1	Parent/Teacher Communication	92	8	+6.3
2	Professional Development	67	33	-11.3
3	Autonomy	65	35	-13.7
4	Principal/Teacher Trust	89	11	0
5	Instructional Leadership	95	5	+2.9
6	School Safety & Order	90	9	+5.9
7	Appreciation	70	30	-14.9
8	Collaboration	91	9	+1.7

#	Category			Change
9	Work/Life Balance	63	37	-12.1
10	Resources & Facilities	77	1	23	-11.3
11	Self-Efficacy	94	6	+0.6
12	Evaluation	76	24	-11.3
13	Teacher Voice & Leadership	68	32	-8.4
14	Recruitment, Hiring & Onboarding	80	20	-1.5
15	Compensation & Career Path	35	65	-23.6
16	Belonging & Wellbeing	84	16	-4.8
17	Diversity	78	22	-4.4
18	Equity	90	10	-1.5
19	Inclusion	99	1	+6.2
20	Cultural Competence	77	23	+4.2
21	Care & Commitment	97	3	+3.5
22	Student Engagement	87	13	+5.5
23	Satisfaction & Purpose	93	7	+2.5
24	Caddo Parish Questions	100		

Note: This appendix is only piece of the information, the rest of this appendix has been archived, you may request to view archived documents.

APPENDIX E

NEWSPAPER ARTICLE

Newspaper Articles

BRIDGE AWARD WINNER KASIE MAINIERO: CHANGE BEGINS IN OUR YOUNGEST CITIZENS

When Principal Kasie Mainiero put caring into the curriculum at University Elementary School this fall, she let her staff and students know that education is about more than quizzes and tests.

As head of the first We Care School in Shreveport, Kasie and her team have created numerous ways to emphasize kindness and caring on a campus of some 1,100 students. The goal is for students to make a giving, selfless attitude part of their daily lifestyle now and in the future.

Because of her own commitment to her school and community, Community Renewal awarded Kasie the 2018 Bridge Award at the annual Cornerstone Luncheon in November. Kasie received the award from Community Renewal's Ro White and Mike Leonard, and then delivered a powerful keynote address to a full banquet room at East Ridge Country Club.

"I am so honored to be receiving this award and I want to recognize the Community Renewal team for seeing what I do and recognizing the importance of that work," she said.

Kasie was introduced to Community Renewal by friend Mary Richter, who realized we were all speaking the same language and

> "We can change this community. We just have to reach them when they are really young."
> - Principal Kasie Mainiero, 2018 Bridge Award Winner

reaching for many of the same goals, but in different places.

"We are all trying to teach children early on to care about each other and break down the walls and start really making a go of it. You are trying to do the same thing with the whole community and I am doing it on a smaller scale with kids," she said.

Kasie told how her parents died when she was very young and she was raised by her grandparents. They taught her to have a strong faith in God and a strong desire to help those around her. And that's something she wants to pass on to the students in her school.

"Our kids come from many different backgrounds with varied difficulty, and if their village is broken, we have to be their village. That's where the idea of a We Care School came from. A lot of students are broken inside and no one even knows it," she said.

"Our teachers have become much more caring and compassionate toward one another and the kids are seeing that model of caring and compassion. Our counselors have been there from the beginning and they have seen the transformation in the staff and the children. In the first year I was there we had 798 pupils enrolled and 563 formal write-ups for discipline. By 2017, we had 1,049 students and only 21 discipline write-ups.

"And now our attendance rate is soaring because our kids want to be there. I want everyone to know that we can change the community. We just have to reach them when they are really young. We live in such a divided world and my hope is to combat that by instilling love and compassion in the hearts of our youngest citizens."

SMALL ACTS OF CARING HAVE BIG IMPACT
SEE PAGE 3

YOUNG PARTNER FINDS PEARLS
SEE PAGE 9

SCHOOL TAKES CARING INTO THE CLASSROOM
SEE PAGES 6 & 7

COMMUNITY BUILDERS ARE KEY TO NATIONAL RECOVERY
SEE PAGE 8

WWW.COMMUNITYRENEWAL.US

VOICES
The Times | shreveporttimes.com

MAINIERO'S MISSION
New University principal adding classes, activities

Kasie Mainiero is the new University Elementary principal.

New school is answer to growing community

APPENDIX F

SCHOOL PERFORMANCE SCORE DATA

***SES Elementary School
*** Parish

2020-2021

A NOTE ON 2020-2021 REPORT CARDS

COVID-19 resulted in statewide disruptions to education in Louisiana in 2020-2021. Given this, federal requirements to produce school and school system letter grades were waived. As a result, no school performance scores or letter grades were produced. This report card therefore shows 2018-2019 performance scores and letter grades, as these are the most current results available.

OVERALL PERFORMANCE SCORES (FROM 2018-2019)	
WHAT IS THIS SCHOOL'S OVERALL LETTER GRADE?	HOW IS THIS OVERALL LETTER GRADE SCORED?
2018 -2019 LETTER GRADE	2018-2019 SCHOOL PERFORMANCE SCORE
C	64.3

The school performance score summarizes how well a school is preparing all of its students for the next level of study. For elementary schools, this score is based on students' mastery of key content for their grade level, their growth from the prior year, and their successful transition into 9th grade for schools with 8th grade students. For high schools, this score also measures graduation rates and how well schools are preparing students for college and a career. Schools that are K-2 configurations have accountability data based on a paired school, designated by its district.

TOP GAINS HONOREE?	N/A
EQUITY HONOREE?	N/A
COMPREHENSIVE INTERVENTION REQUIRED (CIR)?	N/A

PERFORMANCE SCORE COMPONENTS (FROM 2018-2019)

HOW IS THIS SCHOOL PERFORMING ON PERFORMANCE SCORE METRICS

STUDENT PERFORMANCE Measures how well students are mastering key skills and	SCORE	LETTER GRADE
Assessment Index	60.3	C
ACT Index		
Graduation Index		
Strength of Diploma		
STUDENT PROGRESS Measures how well students are progressing towards mastering the key skills they need to be successful in the next level of study.	76.1	B

Note: This appendix is only piece of the information, the rest of this appendix has been archived, you may request to view archived documents.

APPENDIX G

PEER INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

```
WEBVTT

00:00:00.000 --> 00:00:00.000
Okay, we're going to touch your court ready 1 2 3 here.

00:00:00.000 --> 00:00:06.000
We go record to the Cloud. This meeting is being recorded.

00:00:06.000 --> 00:00:13.000
Got it. Alright, Hi, Miss Maneric, hi miss denise how are you?

00:00:13.000 --> 00:00:20.000
I'm glad i'm gonna ask you some questions about your time at
university.

00:00:20.000 --> 00:00:28.000
Okay, did you tell me, could you tell me about how the culture you
established at your school is different, or you make?

00:00:28.000 --> 00:00:33.000
How do you think it got that way? And what are some things that you
did to change the culture?

00:00:33.000 --> 00:00:43.000
What did you do to start? Okay? Well, to start off I really honestly
didn't know what I was doing at the beginning.

00:00:43.000 --> 00:00:48.000
I just knew it needed to change I had been the Ap.

00:00:48.000 --> 00:00:52.000
There for a almost a year, not a whole year before.

00:00:52.000 --> 00:00:58.000
And we had had over 700 behavioral referrals written on students.

00:00:58.000 --> 00:01:02.000
The teachers were really unhappy. The morale was really bad.

00:01:02.000 --> 00:01:16.000
It was really down. there were kids fighting every day. I just knew
something needed to change, and the first day I was in a new position
was like a late in the summer cause day, and like in the end of July.

00:01:16.000 --> 00:01:23.000
I think it had maybe 2 or 3 weeks to get started like before just
school was gonna start.

00:01:23.000 --> 00:01:30.000
And I just remember walking down the hall and walking through the
```

school, and just thinking everything looks like nobody cares about it.

00:01:30.000 --> 00:01:34.000
Everything looks like nobody's taken care of this building and I was all of myself.

00:01:34.000 --> 00:01:47.000
It was just like, you know, one of these random days when I came there in July, or whatever, and I just started pulling weeds and picking up trash and picking up.

00:01:47.000 --> 00:01:53.000
You know. jump that I found, and and kind of clean it up and

00:01:53.000 --> 00:01:59.000
Then I I asked the district to give me some paint, and I started painting my office.

00:01:59.000 --> 00:02:05.000
I started painting some other, the hallway, and some different places that, like the paint, was chipped, or whatever on the doors, and things like that.

00:02:05.000 --> 00:02:10.000
And teachers started coming up there, and they were just noticing what I was doing.

00:02:10.000 --> 00:02:22.000
And then this talk erupted I didn't really realize that anything that I was doing was I guess atypical or abnormal, or just whatever it was, just my gut instinct, and really I did it out of not

00:02:22.000 --> 00:02:27.000
really knowing what else to do at the moment, and I just was like trying to process everything.

00:02:27.000 --> 00:02:41.000
The fact that I had this new job, and so you know I started doing these things that I just would have done you know to my house if it didn't look good, or to whatever and Little do I know that that was kind of the model of caring that

00:02:41.000 --> 00:02:43.000
I was establishing with the school, and they started talking about it.

00:02:43.000 --> 00:02:48.000
They started coming up there. The teacher started coming up there and painting their rooms.

00:02:48.000 --> 00:02:52.000

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APPENDIX H

PODCAST TRANSCRIPT

This is an expert, please see this link for more details on the podcast:

https://jgoodmank.podbean.com/e/episode-10-kasie-mainiero-shreveport-bossier-my-city-my-community-my-home/

< ALL EPISODES

Saturday Jul 23, 2022

Episode 10 Kasie Mainiero - "Shreveport-Bossier: My City, My Community, My Home"

♡ Likes   ⬇ Download 9   ⬍ Share

Kasie Mainiero, Principal of ▮▮▮▮▮ Elementary School, sits down with Jeffrey Goodman, Director of Marketing and Development with the YMCA of Northwest Louisiana, to answer the following questions:

Kasie Mainiero, Principal of ▮▮▮▮▮ Elementary School, sits down with Jeffrey Goodman, Director of Marketing and Development with the YMCA of Northwest Louisiana, to answer the following questions:

0:32 1. Kasie, if I'm not mistaken you have worked in ▮▮▮▮▮ schools for 24 years. Talk to me about some of the positive changes you have seen take place in ▮▮▮▮▮ish schools during your career so far?

4:22 2. What are some of the biggest challenges you face as the principal at ▮▮▮▮▮?

6:12 3. You once said:

"I truly believe students cannot reach academic goals without having their basic needs like love and safety met first. We have to help them deal with the stress, pressures and trauma to build a positive relationship with them before we're able to get them where they need to be. This is what elementary school should be about. Building trusting relationships with children, showing them that school can be a positive place where they can learn and grow."

Talk to me if you could a little about the quote above.

20:58 4. ▮▮▮▮▮ has formed a We Care partnership with Community Renewal. Can you speak a little about this program and what it is?

APPENDIX I

WE CARE SCHOOLS ARTIFACTS

We Care Schools

We Care Schools create a culture of caring as both a starting strategy and destination outcome. **Strategy**: Adjust education system design to prioritize a school and community culture of caring. **Outcome**: The culture of caring is a platform environment or ecosystem that aligns and continually grows with individual and collective gains in relational capacities, knowledge, and skills. This is the foundational soil for growing *ever-renewing community* as a whole system of relationships.

We Care Schools engage teachers, students, parents, staff, and partners in creating pathways to a unique to each school culture of caring as the foundation for learning and community.

The Back Story... We Care Schools (WCS) enhance the learning environment by adapting principles and practices of Community Renewal International's (CR) *Relational Foundation model*. WCS began in the 2018-19 school year as a collaborative initiative between (*SES) and CR Institute. SES is an 1,100-student public school designed for 400. It is a neighborhood school serving 13 neighborhoods that include the wealthiest and poorest, making SES the most socio-economically and culturally diverse school in the _____ Parish system. SES receives no Title 1 funding to support those qualifying students that number more than many Title 1 schools. Administrators and educators face mind-boggling challenges every day. After 5 years of prioritizing a culture of caring, positive outcomes are inspiring other schools to join the experiment. A community of practice formed during 2021 to better understand and develop the powers of caring together. Our belief is that each school's culture will be unique to the relationships in their school community. We anticipate each school that joins will discover new thinking and doing to grow the body of knowledge.

The Big Picture... Community Renewal sees the fundamental cause for symptoms of societal decline is *relational disconnection*. The solution CR actualized in 1994 and continues to develop is *relational connection*. Seeing cities and society as a whole system of relationships, CR connects willing people, across all lines of difference, to prioritize what everyone shares, a capacity to care. Prioritizing caring allows diversity to become a creative asset in overcoming mindsets that blind us to larger truths and realities. A network of caring people become a new citywide asset CR calls the *Relational Foundation**. Resources embedded in that caring network exponentially grow individual and collective capacities to respond to needs, opportunities, and learning that strengthens community as an adaptive whole. CR applies and scales *rules of positive relationships** citywide, opening pathways to *Ever-Renewing Community**.

Why it matters: School challenges with behavior, attendance, teacher retention, failing schools, test scores, and students falling through system cracks are all symptoms that share a fundamental cause, *relational disconnection*. Currently education system design can be described as a "cradle to career pipeline" with no intentional outcomes for community. Success in the current competitive system contributes to producing lonely people attached to a job and detached from family and community. WCS adjust the system design by prioritizing a culture of caring as the soil from which *Whole Persons** grow and the foundation upon which to build community wholeness (CR *Village Framework**). Educators might reflect on addressing Maslow's (hierarchy of needs) before Bloom's (taxonomy for teaching and learning).

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APPENDIX J

SUSPENSION/EXPULSION DOCUMENTATION

Using Jcampus / Educlimber to retrieve data -

Historical Behavioral Data

Year	Total Major Infractions List	OSS	Referrals (Discipline Audit) Aug. 1 (year) - May 28 (year)	# of students with 1+OSS days (CAP)	Expulsions
17-18	88	51	276	34	4
18-19	78	78	287	26	2
19-20*	103 (less school days due to COVID, but more infractions)	42	461	5 (out of school March-May due to Covid)	4
20-21**	38	6	162	6	0
21-22***	53	8	257 (due to asking them to refer to VYJ)	5	0

Prior to 13-14 there were 700+ behavioral referrals written on paper
*Covid (Out of school for April/May - the months that we see a trend in the most suspensions)
** Became Trauma Aware, had ACES training
***Implemented TBRI pilot, crisis team

+8.2 increase in SPS (2021)

Attendance (truancy) 15% District average 45%

Updated Data – pulled 9/29/2022

Using Jcampus / Educlimber to retrieve data -

SES Historical Behavioral Data

Year	Total Major Infractions List	OSS	Referrals (Discipline Audit) Aug. 1 (year) - May 28 (year)	# of students with 1+OSS days (CAP)	Expulsions
09-10	776 (paper referrals)	98	173 (entered in system)	59	0
17-18	88	51	276	34	4
18-19	78	78	287	26	2

19-20 *	103 (less school days due to COVID, but more infractions)	42	461	5 (out of school March-May due to Covid)	4
20-21 **	38	6	162	6	0
21-22 ***	53	8	257 (due to asking hem to refer to VYJ)	5	0

9-10 is prior to my first year I was employed at UES in administration

17-18 is the year we really began to document everything in JCampus, prior to that year, we did a lot of referrals on paper, not in the computer.

*Covid (Out of school for April/May - the months that we see a trend in the most suspensions)
** Became Trauma Aware, had ACES training
***Implemented TBRI pilot, crisis team

2009-10
34 fights
42 injury to others
18 willful disobiedence

District Data: OSS

pulled 2022

Highest % OSS	Middle	K-8	Elementary
	School A 12.5%	School C 11.8%(E) 31.3% (M)	School F 8.5%
	School B 12.4%	School D 6.1% 16.3% (M)	School H 6%
		School E 3.3% (E) 14.4% (M)	School I 5.5%
			School J 4.9%

SES 0.6%

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APPENDIX K

ATTENDANCE DATA

Excessive Abs by Factor

Sch	School Name	2=	3+	3=	5+	5=	6+	6=	7=	8+	8=	9+	9=	10+	10=	12=	13+	13=	14+	14=	15+	15=
066	University Elementary School	127	205	115	77	77	74	74	58	49	49	35	35	55	31	23	10	10	14	14	44	15
	TOTAL:	127	205	115	77	77	74	74	58	49	49	35	35	55	31	23	10	10	14	14	44	15

Year: 2122 District:009

03/06/2023 11:28 AM

atExcessAbsCount 09.29.2021

Excessive Abs by Factor

Sch	School Name	2=	3+	3=	5+	5=	6+	6=	7=	8+	8=	9+	9=	10+	10=	12=	13+	13=	14+	14=	15+	15=
066	University Elementary School	52	115	59	56	56	65	65	58	54	54	53	53	96	48	27	30	30	17	17	93	29
	TOTAL:	52	115	59	56	56	65	65	58	54	54	53	53	96	48	27	30	30	17	17	93	29

Cut excessive absences in half!

Schools: 066

Grades:

Page 1

Rows: 2

EDGear - Software that Empower Educators

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APPENDIX L

SAMPLE AUDITOR STATEMENT

_____ _, verify that the information stated in the dissertation written by Kasie Mainiero in January 2023 is correct to the best of my knowledge.

I was employed by the *** District and was a member of Kasie Mainiero's team at ***SES Elementary from _2011_to _2021_.

Signature & Date:

___   ___1/27/23

APPENDIX M

TEACHER SPEECH

(Key phrase: Building a culture of caring.) Increasingly, we as a people (nationwide) are becoming more and more disconnected. (Relational disconnect). I believe that the opportunity exists to BEGIN to change that in our tiny bit of the world by using this HOUSES idea. My initial reaction was, "Sounds like a great idea, but... how much time is it going to take, how much more do I have to do than I'm already doing, and is it REALLY going to make a difference? After all, we've done all sorts of cute ideas..."

I had the opportunity to listen to Mr. Mitchell explain the program and the ideology behind it, and it spoke to me. I listened to the plan that was presented and had the opportunity to ask those questions that I had...probably the very same questions that many of you have. All of you that know me, know that I am quick to discard anything that I feel is a waste of time...that precious commodity that we have not enough of! I am convinced that this program has the potential to touch the lives of the children that we teach in a very positive way and that the changes that happen here WILL be taken into the homes of our kids, potentially even in some small way, changing homes in our community. The ripple effect is real and can happen here.

Each classroom has been assigned to a house, as have all other staff members on campus. Each house has a logo, a color, and a name in a translation. I was assigned the House of Rehema, Swahili for Mercy. I don't believe this was by accident since God spent the summer teaching me about mercy...and there were some TOUGH lessons! Then Beth Pierce sent me a picture of the logos she had designed. Topping the Mercy House shield was a ZEBRA. Now y'all know I love me some horses...and as far as I'm concerned a zebra qualifies. The more I thought about

zebras, the more I realized that they were a perfect to represent my house and that I could use them to teach a lesson on caring.

(Read sheet).

I am CONVINCED that each animal represented on the various shields presents the opportunity for a lesson on caring and/or personal and communal growth. For instance, my precious partner Rives is the house of Bonheur, the house of happiness. What an opportunity to examine with children what the word happiness REALLY means. The animal represented on that shield is the bee. What an opportunity to teach work ethic, and how dependent we as humans are on what the bee does, for our survival …just like we are dependent on each other!

Twenty + years ago, when I started this adventure in the classroom, families were still for the most part, intact. It wasn't the school's job to teach caring or acceptance or how to interact with people different than we are. Today, that is no longer the truth. Whether we like it or not, it IS our job and if we can see that as an OPPORTUNITY and not a BURDEN, we can change our little piece of the world. Our faculty and staff enjoy a reputation of caring about children, and about each other. We all have that capacity for caring…it's one of the qualities that makes us good educators.

Part of my journey this summer had to do with "wholeness" ; the body, mind, and spirit that makes us individuals. Perhaps it is by greater design that each of us has unique qualities that fit like puzzle pieces into the WHOLE of a classroom, a school…or even a community and allow that entity to function at its finest. BUT, in order for this to happen and be effective and magical, it is going to take a commitment and buy-in from every person who walks our halls. What we do isn't really any different than we've done in the past, it's just much more clearly defined, both in rationale and in implementation. With a bit of thought and a bit of conversation and sharing of ideas, we can give our students some concrete life lessons, recognize and reward their caring actions, and maybe, just maybe inspire a dream that carries on.

APPENDIX N

CODING AND CHARTS

I was brought into this position to make chage. The school had been going down academically and enrollment was down. There had been a lot of parent complaints and problems.

Theme 1 - Caring about Enviorment / building

1. Noticing that the school looked run down - structure and asthetics
    Building / asthtics, look, caring about what the place looks like

Modeling what i want to see through caring acts of:
- Getting a yard crew to come help
- Getting volunteers to come help
- Helping myself - painting, cleaning, etc. on weekends and summer
- Modeling picking up trash, etc.
- Story of kids on playground after school
- Story of painting my office, others jumping on board
- Local artist, having him come paint murals - kids getting to ask him questions while he painted
- Getting donations to help with playground equipment etc.

Theme 2 - Caring about behavior / Kind Acts /Student well-being and safety

2. Noticing that kids were not nice to one another fights / pushing down in hallway, etc. A lot of behavioral referrals.

What I noticed / and survey results
- Kids were not getting recess - were not being allowed to go outside for that outlet they needed
- Kids were not being TAUGHT how to be nice to one another, this was not an emphasis
- Kids were not being expected to work together in class. Had many isolated activities and expectations of working independently or "sitting and getting" information
- Kids were not taught expectations of playground rules and games, would just have things taken away when they did not do it correctly
- Parents were complaining a lot to the district about problems their children were having with bullying, hate violence, fighting or threats of fighting, and racial issues.
- There was a disconnect between teachers and students understanding of each other and with the parents and families of the students
- Poor teacher / student relationships - teachers mostly upper middle class, student mostly poverty level or below
- Poor teacher / student relationships racially - teachers mostly white, students mostly black or of another ethnicity
- Parents wanted more activities for their children after school and complained about that
- Parents complained about not feeling welcome at the school
- Parents complained about teacher/student relationships and bullying by staff
- Kids feeling isolated, not having a sense of inclusion or belonging

+ Inviting parents of different cultures - being intentional about it
Inclusivity

185

The four research pathways are (1) intentional relationship building and caring critical attributes, (2) leadership knowledge skills and dispositions, (3) the importance of community connections (4) the role of the school leader in establishing a positive school climate and culture.

5 big Themes

Building and grounds
Attendance / Truancy
Behavior
Academics
Parent /Community Involvement

Interviewer	Principal	Description / Theme	Research Questions / pathway or pattern
Okay, did you tell me, could you tell me about how the culture you established at your school is different, or how did you make it different? How do you think it got that way? And what are some things that you did to change the culture?	I just knew it needed to change -I had been the AP. (assistant principal) 00:00:48.000 --> 00:00:52.000 There for a almost a year, not a whole year before. 00:00:52.000 --> 00:00:58.000 And we had had over 700 behavioral referrals written on students. 00:00:58.000 --> 00:01:02.000 The teachers were really unhappy. The morale was really bad. 00:01:02.000 --> 00:01:16.000 It was really down. there were kids fighting every day. They were pushing people down in the hallway. I just knew something needed to change, and the first day I was in a new position was like a late in the summer cause day, and like in the end of July. 00:01:16.000 --> 00:01:23.000 I think it had maybe 2 or 3 weeks to get started like before just school was gonna start.	Noticing that the school looked run down - structure and asthetics Building / asthtics, look, caring about what the place looks like Caring about school environment	How does the key role of the principal as a detective impact or influence culture in a school setting? (2) leadership knowledge skills and dispositions,

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APPENDIX O

ARCHIVE NOTE

Archive Note

Other documents and artifacts can be accessed by request. All of the Appendices are only pieces of the documents and artifacts collected for this work. Everything was not included to keep the document at a reasonable length and to keep from overwhelming the reader. If it is necessary to see all of the information from a section, that can be accessed in the archive by request.

The auditor's reports are also kept in the archive for purposes of anonymity of the auditors.

APPENDIX P

HUMAN USE APPROVAL LETTER

Office of Research and Partnerships

MEMORANDUM

TO: Kasie Mainiero

FROM: Dr. Walter Buboltz, Professor
buboltz@latech.edu

SUBJECT: Human Use Committee - Review DECISION

DATE: April 11, 2023

In order to facilitate your project, an **EXPEDITED REVIEW** has been completed for your proposed study:

HUC No.: 23-177

TITLE: Creating Inclusive Practices Through a Culture of Caring in School Leadership: A Principal's Perspective

HUC DECISION: **EXEMPT FROM FULL REVIEW**

According to the Code of Federal Regulations Title 45 Part 46, your research protocol is determined to be exempt from full review under the following exemption category(s):
It has been determined that your study meets the requirements for exemption **45 CFR §46.104(d) (2) (i):**

(2) Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), **survey procedures,** interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) **if at least one of the following criteria is met:**

(i) The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects;

Additional comments from Reviewer:
The research described is completely innocuous and does NOT involve testing human subjects. The PI will be constructing a retrospective analysis of her professional career. Names of all real people with be changed to pseudonyms, thereby protecting their identities. I recommend this for immediate approval.

Thank you for submitting your Human Use Proposal to Louisiana Tech's Institutional Review Board.